

CYBERIZATION

CHAPTER 15

A DECISION MADE

Wandering through the city's underbelly, I was lost in the colossal shadows of the structures above. The place was a labyrinth, a city sunken into its own underworld, yet it pulsed with an odd sort of life. Blanketed in never-ending darkness and a rain that didn't know when to quit, there was something about it that just drew you in. The snow from the nuclear winter above never stood a chance down here—it morphed into a drizzle before it even hit the ground, weaving through the stacked-up civilization, making the air cold and ghostly.

But man, there was something beautiful about it, too. Neon lights didn't just shine; they fought the darkness, flickering on with a sort of 'you can't take me down' vibe. And the holograms put on a show, twirling and gliding between spaces, painting the ever-present puddles with bursts of color that the rain couldn't wash away.

I didn't have a reason for being out, not really. Just got the itch to walk, to see what there was to see. No plan, no place to be. Just me and the rain-soaked city keeping each other company. But in the back of my mind, I entertained the thought of stumbling into some cozy bar. Not that I had a particular one in mind. It was more the idea of it—the buzz of conversation, the clink of glasses, maybe even a decent drink to take the edge off the chill.

I considered returning to the bar I'd visited earlier, but the idea quickly lost its appeal. The last thing I needed was another run-in with my so-called handler.

So, I walked, the city's humming and mine in a weird kind of sync, both of us just alive in the night.

As I delved further into the city's heart, the sounds of kids playing became a melody threading through the grim backstreets. They were chasing each other around corners and dirty streets, their laughter a brief escape from the constant drone of flying traffic above. Amidst all the urban noise, their joy felt strangely out of place, yet so pure.

But watching them closer, a frown appeared upon my face. These kids, they weren't untouched by the harsh world we were living in. It was there, in the mechanical limbs where flesh and bone should've been, in the unnatural glow of their eyes, and who knows what hidden tech pulsed under their skin. It was a tough scene—innocence wrapped up with the stark, unforgiving edges of tech.

It hit hard, seeing the kids like that. Their laughter still had this innocence, even though they paid the highest price—their very humanity chipped away. It's weird; in our world, we're not short on stuff like metals. The solar system's been picked over more times than anyone could count, leaving

us with more ores than we know what to do with. But the simple things? Warmth, a good meal, the touch of actual flesh? That's the stuff we're scraping the barrel for.

Then, out of nowhere, this wave of sheer panic and sorrow crashed into me. It was like the city's usual buzz just split open, spilling out all this raw emotion. Up ahead, a scene straight out of a nightmare was unfolding. A building was spitting out its people like they were nothing. And there, in the harsh glow of the streetlights, was a family, their world crumbling right there on the pavement. The ones herding them out? Robotic cops. Identical faces, not a shred of anything human behind those eyes—if they even had eyes. They moved in sync, like some creepy dance troupe you never wanted to see.

I couldn't move, just stood there watching this play out. The kids were crying, tears cutting through the grime on their faces, and the adults—they had this look. It wasn't just what you could see; it was more about what you couldn't. Like their very sense of security had been ripped away, leaving these jagged edges that nobody could fix. The pain was so thick you could almost touch it, filling up the air until it felt like we were all drowning in it. And that's when I noticed we weren't alone. A crowd was forming, the kind of storm you could feel about to break.

The crowd around me wasn't just a bunch of bystanders; they were a whirlwind of pent-up feelings, a living, breathing storm. They hurled everything they had at the emotionless enforcers—words charged with the sting of powerlessness and seething anger. And those robots? They just kept going, unfazed, their every motion precise, their grip steady as if nothing human could shake them.

The space filled up with shouts and piercing screams, a messy kind of music painting its own stark picture. What I was witnessing was a forced eviction, something not unusual in our packed, broken world. The excuses given were paper-thin, almost a joke, but it always came down to one thing: not being useful enough. And that was all it took to rip people from their homes, sending them to float around Jupiter on the ARKs. There, separated from their bodies, their brains were supposed to keep living in digital worlds. A poor trade-off for the real world they had to leave behind, if you ask me.

I couldn't stand the cruelty of it, this systematic purging. It reeked of desperation, a government at its wits' end, trapped in a solar system that had turned into more of a cage than a home for humans. But then, staring our survival in the face, could I really blame them? That question left a sour taste in my mechanical throat.

In the eye of the storm, there I was, alone, wrestling with the enormity of the choice I had to make. Two options were laid out before me, both as lethal as the other: take out the alien delegation and set the stage for war, or target those opposing the aliens' demand—that we sever our ties with the very technology, the AI, that had become as crucial to us as the air we breathe. Each road was knotted with outcomes, hidden in the fog of what-ifs.

Electricity crackled through the network fused with my brain, not from fear, but from the crushing gravity of the decision forced upon me. Here I was, memory wiped clean, standing in a world skirting the edges of mayhem. The cries around me twined into a ghostly chorus, amplifying the

turmoil inside. Every wail, each desperate scream, echoed in my skull, a constant reminder of the ripples my actions were about to send forth.

But then, in the heart of the chaos, something razor-sharp clicked. My decision, clear and raw, sliced through the pandemonium of the world I found myself in. Our dance with technology wasn't some extra part of us—it was our lifeline. This deep integration was carved into every fiber of our being, woven into our cyber-enhancements, humming in our minds, reflected in the eyes of our kids who'd never known a world without this intricate interplay between flesh and tech.

No, backing down wasn't in the cards. The realization hit with unwavering certainty, a lightning bolt of clarity in the tempest of doubt. To protect our survival, to safeguard what we'd evolved into, we had to face the uproar head-on. War wasn't just another option; it was necessary, the furnace in which our destiny would be shaped.

But even in my newfound resolve, a persistent question dug its claws in, demanding to be noticed. Why was I, a blank slate with no memories of my own, chosen to shoulder this colossal burden? Why place the weight of humanity's future on someone who couldn't even recall her own humanity?

The enormity of the looming war was a crushing presence, its shadow a ghost I could almost touch. Yet, in this encroaching darkness, a flicker of understanding sparked: maybe it was precisely my absence of memories, of entrenched biases and old wounds, that made me the ideal judge. Unbound by past loyalties or hurts, I was a picture of impartiality, an untouched canvas ready for humanity's next chapter to be painted.

My synthetic heart found a steady rhythm, resolve solidifying with its every determined beat. War was coming, an inferno of metal and fury, and I—memoryless but overflowing with resolve—would be its harbinger.

I distanced myself from the bleak scene and the swelling crowd that had rallied around the family, the air crackling with the onset of potential chaos. Instead, I drifted further into the city, only to stumble upon similar scenes of despair more times than I cared to count. It was a landscape of sorrow and stark reality, yet a thought lingered: if we entered this war with the aliens, maybe we'd emerge victorious, or at the very least, find a bitter solution to our overcrowding crisis. Ugh, that was a terrible way to think. No, victory wasn't just a desirable outcome; it was essential for our survival.

What I needed was a plan, a detailed strategy for how I'd pull off such an audacious task. The "where" was also crucial, but if the alien delegation was meeting at the lunar sanctuary they referred to as a "zoo," it seemed almost poetically fitting for it to be the stage for this pivotal act.

A wry smile tugged at the corners of my mouth, even as a trace of sadness clung to my heart. I steered my path homeward, back to Viri, with the hope that my AI companion might shed some light on the murky path ahead. I realized I should maybe question her counsel more, but there was an inexplicable trust there—maybe a glitch in my own circuitry, or perhaps in my freezer burnt brain, or maybe, something more profound.

Resolution solidified within me, crystallizing into a fierce determination.

"I'm going to obliterate that delegation," I declared to the shadows, the smile on my lips steadfast, a stark contrast to the storm brewing in my soul.