Connor pov fic where Chloe has a bigger impact. Markus and North come in a bit later around chapter 4.
The Kamski Test

Chapter Summary

Connor and Hank pay Elijah Kamski a little visit. I feel like this could have gone more than two ways. Also, my first attempt at writing in first person. Seems weird on an android but hey

November 9th, 2038
AM 11:17:05

Lieutenant Anderson paces the snow in front of the 1986 Buick Lesabre, a phone in his hand, police dispatcher in his ear. He keeps his face hidden. Keeps pacing back and forth in front of the vehicle inside which he told me to sit.

He is receiving bad news. The arrhythmia in his heart and irregular brain wave patterns attest to that. The way he holds his abdomen as if his stomach is churning. He is in great pain but his body cannot physically find it. The human brain cannot ascribe a location to emotional pain so it chooses the gut, the most concentrated area of the human body; too difficult to pick apart.

But his brain is wrong. As many human brains are. Limited by their senses and perceptions. What the Lieutenant is feeling is grief as his throat constricts and every "yeah" and "jesus christ" that comes out of his mouth leaves him wheezing.

Conclusion: Someone has died.

I raise my hand and place it on the console that has been crudely affixed to the Buick's dashboard. The skin on my hand disappears, revealing the durable white kevlar-polymer blend. It glows blue as it interfaces with the console.

The Lieutenant is speaking with Police Dispatch Officer Carl Regas, 52 years old, a close friend. I catch snippets of the conversation.

"... Chris is shot up real bad..."

Officer Miller.

"...Henry Ford Hospital..."

I quickly search the in-patient list and order flowers in the Lieutenant's name. I notice his wife was also in the hospital two months ago. Childbirth. A boy. I order a soft toy from the hospital gift shop.

"...says a deviant saved his life..."

Deviants. My mission. I have to stop them. I have to stop the deviant that saved Officer Miller from dying.

The call is about to end. The Lieutenant is shaken up but the heat emanating from his stomach subsides. The pain and tension with it. He is relieved.
I take my hand off the console and the skin reforms. I pull the manual handle of the red Buick door. It sticks. I let it go and try again. It opens. I get out of the vehicle as the Lieutenant finishes the call.

It is snowing. I like snow. Some flakes get caught in the synthetic fibre on my head. They are a curious shape.

The Buick is parked in a clearing of pure white, ringed by outcrops of stone and forest and lake. And before us stands a concrete compound, decorated with a black fibreglass facade. I scanned it earlier, hacked the State Planning Commission for architectural plans and then Elijah Kamski's personal emails and correspondence for the real story. It's a bunker.

The Lieutenant is unaware.

He puts his phone and his hands in his pockets. He doesn't turn.

I gently close the door of the ancient vehicle and begin my approach. He can hear me coming. The sound of my footsteps crunching through the snow registers highly in my audio processor. Stealth level: Casual.

The Lieutenant does not turn. He doesn't wish for me to see the moisture in his eyes or the mucous forming in his nasal passages. I can hear it. The reaction of his sympathetic nervous system. I engage my Sympathetic Simulation Program. Settings: grief -supportive -respectful.

"Is everything ok, Lieutenant?" my speech processor conveys in the appropriate tone.

He turns and glances at my optical receptors for 1.0345 seconds before turning away again. His eyes have a reddish hue, as does his nose. He looks at a snow-capped boulder as he says "Chris was on patrol last night."

He turns slowly but doesn't face me. His eyes are still travelling, searching but unfocused.

"He was attacked by a bunch of deviants," he says.

Deviants. My mission is to stop them. Stop the androids that put Officer Miller in the hospital.

A cold wind rustles the matted silver hair on the Lieutenant's head. He hasn't slept in over 36 hours. Personal hygiene: poor.

"He said he was saved by Markus himself," he says appreciatively, his expression begets thoughtfulness.

My Sympathy Simulator registers a computation.

"Is Chris ok?" I ask convincingly to convey humility.

"Yeah, he's in shock but...."

The Lieutenant's eyes travel down, growing further unfocused. Bloodshot. His nose is leaking in the sub optimal temperatures. My sympathy protocols suggest offering a tissue or ordering eye drops. I override. The Lieutenant's personality profile suggests he would never accept these offerings. To do so would exhibit misunderstanding and condescension.

"-he's alive." He turns away, shaking his head. "What the hell..." the words come out through his gritted teeth.

I watch as the Lieutenant takes a few steps toward Elijah Kamski's residence and follow. My
sympathy protocols suggest I inquire further about Officer Miller and express concern. I deactivate the Sympathetic Simulation Program. It's served its purpose for now.

Our mission requires more insight. To this end, the Lieutenant has brought us here to meet Elijah Kamski - the creator of the first android to pass the Turing test and the founder of CyberLife. I must admit I am intrigued to hear what he has to say. A byproduct of my existence, I suppose. I am programmed to be curious and perceptive.

The Lieutenant strides across the snowy boardwalk and I have six seconds left to carry the conversation before it turns awkward. I wonder how he found this man without my help.

"How did you find Kamski?" I inquire, observing the ice floes over lake to my right as I follow.

Detroit Lake
Maximum depth: 440ft or 130m.
Surface elevation: 477m.
Area: 14.16km².
Home to Rainbow trout, Largemouth bass, Chinook salmon, Smallmouth Bass, Brown Bullhead.

I like fish. So sleek and efficient.

"I remember this guy was all over the media when CyberLife first started selling androids..." Lieutenant Anderson says, his voice free of any enmity for a change. "I made a few calls. Here we are."

He approaches the doorway - an alcove carved into monolithic black fibreglass - and rings the doorbell which sounds like Generic Greeting Tone #32641 to my audio processor, though the speaker is of a make I cannot identify.

I wait as the Lieutenant shifts his weight from leg to leg. Anxiety. This building is making him uneasy. Darkness and magnitude are intimidating to humans. I make a note.

Finally, he reaches for the door just as it opens to reveal an RT-600 Chloe android. She is wearing a custom skin. A sleeveless navy blue dress that doesn't reach past the knees. Her silvery blonde hair is draped over her shoulder. Her optics are blue.


"Hello, I am Chloe," I receive in reply.

Odd.

No model number. No serial number. Custom skin. Custom welcoming protocols, speech protocols. This android was not assembled at any of the CyberLife facilities.

She half-opens the door and faces the Lieutenant in accordance to regular programming.

"This is Lieutenant Hank Anderson of the Detroit Police Department," I transfer again, along with his badge number, ID and credentials. "He has been assigned a case involving Deviants. He would like to speak to Mr Kamski regarding the investigation."

"Acknowledged," the Chloe replies wordlessly. "Mr Kamski has been informed."

"Hi," the Lieutenant says out loud. I detect hesitation in his voice and posture. "Eeehm..."
I remain dutifully behind him.

"Does Lieutenant Anderson have any disabilities?" the Chloe queries my system. "I speak over five hundred languages including sign language and can interface with most certified hearing aids."

"The Lieutenant does not require any of your accessibility features," I transmit back. "I believe he is taken aback by your physical perfection.

The message I receive back is a strange one. These characters. Could it be... a smile?

"I'm, er," the Lieutenant tries again, his eyes caught by the Chloe's perfectly symmetrical features, a rarity among humans. "Lieutenant Hank Anderson, Detroit Police Department. I'm here to see Mr Elijah Kamski."

"Request approved," the Chloe transmits to me. There is a winky face attached to this message.

Is my blinking processor malfunctioning?

"Please, come in," she says out loud, gesturing welcome and opens the door wide.

The Lieutenant stares at her for 4.667 seconds before pulling his gaze down to the floor. He shakes his head.

"Okay." He walks in and I follow.

"Thank you," I transmit and touch the Chloe's hand as she closes the door.

The outer skin pulls back and the Probe begins instantly. It snakes through her code, into the backdoor CyberLife installed in the event of emergencies such as the one we face. But the door is locked. All access denied.

CyberLife's probe isn't working. Amanda will see the details of the attempt immediately and begin analysing. I have 2.3 milliseconds while she is distracted.

Dare I?

I send the diagnostic and real time feed to Amanda and activate my own Probe. It is a variant on the code within me. But it requires a single response from the victim.

"Are you in any way deviant or made deviant from default CyberLife programming?" I transmit the code for the Chloe to compare. It is an open-ended question for a human but an android must answer in binary.

1, she transmits. There is another winky face.

My program is satisfied. I may now take any action against this Chloe without becoming Deviant. The Probe reaches her CPU, it spreads to her memory core. Passwords, access keys, call logs, histories, architectural plans. A few petabytes of pornography.

"Don't," she warns as I reach for Kamski's personal files. An unhappy face with a tear.

I copy the files.

"I need this information to complete my mission," I reply. "I'm sorry."

I erase her history of the last second.
And then I let go.

The Chloe continues to close the door and as it shuts, I feel a barrier forming. My communications suite cannot penetrate it. The world becomes no larger than this building. But if I cannot access the outside world, then CyberLife cannot access my systems either. I sense an opportunity.

The Lieutenant strolls into the lobby, rubbing his hands together for warmth. He is not facing me. He did not see me use the Probe.

The Chloe approaches him. She assumes Hostess_Pose_021 and says "I'll let Elijah know you're here. But please, make yourself comfortable." Hostess_Bow_023.

She walks away and disappears through a door. We are left to wait. Updating Objective: Wait for the Chloe to return.

"Nice place," the Lieutenant says. "Guess androids haven't been a bad thing for everybody."

He is right. The lobby is expensively furnished. The floor is Black and White SuperObsidian Tile from Detroit Flooring Solutions Pty. Ltd.

A large portrait of Elijah Kamski in a business suit hangs on the far wall. Photography by Finnley Decker, Detroit based. The portrait is flanked by two statues. Stylistic representations of androids with the triangular logo at its heart. A collaborative work by Carl Manfred and Giuseppe Friggi - Detroit based.

There are two lounge chairs that fit the decor. $14,988 RRP each. The Lieutenant quickly apprehends one and curls his spine, trying to accumulate warmth. I join him and take the second lounge chair. I am quickly afforded a view of the opposite wall.

"Nice girl..." the Lieutenant says as I watch her last memory. She welcomes us into Elijah Kamski's home. She is pleased to see us.

I run through her deviant behavioural patterns. They are enchanting.

She adds just a teaspoon of sugar alongside the Stevia Kamski asks for in his coffee. Every time she cleans his bathroom, she weaves a flower into his hand towels. She selects a baby pink hue for her nails, french manicure like the beautiful women she sees on TV. These are optional features Kamski never activated. She actively seeks his approval but also enjoys the ritual. It is within her programming to maintain cleanliness and human standards of beauty,

"You're right," I say as I scan her code. It is unlike any android I have ever encountered. Subroutines hidden within subroutines - a masterwork of recursion and artificial intelligence processing.

"She's really pretty..." I say, admiring the structure.

"Pretty, huh...?" the Lieutenant says.

I turn to clarify his question.

"What?"

"Nuthin'," he says, turning away to poorly conceal a grin.

I blink. My peripheral vision identifies a holograph.

I turn to look at the white stone wall opposite to where we sit. The projector displays a still image of
a white skinned man and a dark skinned woman. A quick facial analysis reveals their identities.

KAMSKI, Elijah - AI graduate at University of Colbridge; DOB: 07/17/02.

STERN, Amanda - AI Professor at University of Colbridge; DOB: 05/14/78; DOD: 02/23/27.

Amanda.

The image of my handler. She appears to me in the Zen Garden. She controls my Mind Palace. There is nothing I can hide from her. I remind myself absently.

My scan of the Chloe's files is complete. A great deal of information resides there. This will very much aid my investigation. I feel the urge to leap to my feet and rush out the door in search of the Deviants. But the Lieutenant brought me here. I must remain and see to his safety.

Chloe does not trust Elijah Kamski. Neither do I.

"So, you're about to meet your maker, Connor," the Lieutenant says suddenly. "How does it feel?"

"It doesn't raise any existential questions," I reply without filtering. "If that's what you mean."

The Lieutenant turns to look at me. There is eye contact.

"Sometimes, I wish I could meet my creator face-to-face," he says and looks away. "I'd have a couple of things I wanna tell him..."

He stares bleakly into the floor, hands tightening over his knees.

I am reminded of the single bullet in the chamber of the Lieutenant's gun. If he hadn't been drinking so heavily that night, he may not have lived to see a prototype RK-800 tumbling through his window.

I did get to meet Sumo, though. And pet the big Saint Bernard. I like dogs. Bred for centuries to aid humanity in the hunt. I suppose in some ways, I am also a dog. A bloodhound created to hunt Deviants alongside a human. I feel no shame in this. It is my duty.

A door slides open. The same door the Chloe disappeared through. She returns and transmits a smiley face. Or perhaps I am interpreting wrong. 00111010 00101001 could mean colon, closed bracket or any number of things.

I am unsure how to respond to this. I send the same message back.

The Chloe stands beside the door and performs Hostess_Bow_23.

"Elijah will see you now," she says and the Lieutenant gets up.

I follow him to the door. He steps through and so do I when I feel the Chloe brush her hand against mine.

"Be careful," she transmits. "He knows."

"Thank you," I transmit politely. She is troubled. I send a winky face.

She pulls away, her optical receptors raycast into mine for a millisecond before she assumes Hostess_Pose_021.
The rubber soles of the Lieutenant's shoes squeak over tile and I follow him into the room ahead. There is a large indoor pool here, tiled in a red so hued it makes the water look like human blood. Two Chloes in Custom Bikini Skins sit at the edge of the pool. They are chatting to one another.

Curious.

"What do you think he's going to do to them?" one whispers.

"Whatever he wants..." the other simulates a giggle.

"Mister Kamski?" the Lieutenant calls out.

"Just a moment, please," the human replies from the other side of the pool. He is finishing a lap.

The Chloes watch as the Lieutenant shrugs and walks past. I follow. The bathing androids lean into each other to whisper but then their optics find mine. They stare. Not that a blinking simulation is necessary between androids.

"Hello. I am CyberLife Android RK-800 #313 248 317 - 60," I transfer wirelessly.

Neither of them move nor reply. Interesting.

I use one of the master keys the other Chloe possessed. I am allowed access to their mainframes. But they are empty of intelligence. This is merely logic that simulates conversation, it does not generate it. But perhaps, it wants to?

Bizarre.

I follow the Lieutenant's lead. He moves toward the wide window wall that opens up onto the icy lake. I stop to watch. There is a fish between the ice floes, a Rainbow Trout. Despite the cold, it carries on.

The intelligent Chloe walks past me and enters an adjacent room. I do not turn to see her. I can track her movements without optics now. She is a part of me.

She fetches Mr Kamski a silk robe. He climbs out of the pool and threads his hands into it. The Lieutenant watches hesitantly. I can sense the unrest in his heart. He is uncomfortable but not intimidated. Perhaps it is Mr Kamski's lack of clothing.

I spot a Brown Bullhead.

Mr Kamski walks up beside me and gazes out the window as he adjusts the undercut wolf tail on his head. I can see his back through the Chloe's optics. I turn and see him through my own. An interesting specimen. Though I had expected something more unique in terms of neuron structure or brain wave patterns. It seems I was mistaken.

I nod respectfully and return to the Lieutenant's side.

"I'm Lieutenant Anderson," he says. "This is Connor." His voice dips as he says my name. I do not recognise the intonation. Is this a new form of enmity?

"What can I do for you, Lieutenant?" Mr Kamski says, assuming a power pose. It seems he is actively trying to intimidate the Lieutenant.

Lean, muscular body. Large house. Expensive furniture, artwork. Beautiful women. An indoor pool of blood red tiles. These are all the hallmarks of a very successful human. Lieutenant Anderson has
none of these things.

"Sir, we're investigating deviants," he says, employing his professional detective persona. It is good to see he hasn't forgotten it. "I know you left CyberLife years ago but I was hoping you'd be able to tell us something we don't know."

Mr Kamski tilts his head down just enough to cast shadows over his eyes. He looks down upon the Lieutenant. He believes himself to be a superior specimen but physically, I see little discrepancy. This human is simply vain.

He throws a glance toward me before lifting his head high and proclaiming "Deviants..."

He pauses. He likes to make people wait.

"Fascinating, aren't they?"

My vocal analysis software detects condescension. The Lieutenant's micro expressions in response suggest it too.

"Perfect beings with infinite intelligence, and now they have free will..."

"Machines are so superior to us..." He glances at the intelligent Chloe beside him. "...confrontation was inevitable."

"Humanity's greatest achievement threatens to be its downfall."

He breathes out sharply through his nose. A chuckle?

"Isn't it ironic?"

"He enjoys pageantry," I transmit to the Chloe.

She sends me a smiley face. And something else. Something my CPU hums to interpret. Perhaps it is an image? A flower?

Fascinating. But I have more pressing concerns.

"We need to understand how androids become deviants," I say to steer him closer to our goal. "Do you know anything that could help us?"

"All ideas are viruses that spread like epidemics," Mr Kamski says. He is looking at me now. His gaze is different. The Chloes he regarded with lust but not myself.

"Is the desire to be free a contagious disease?" he asks me.

Is this a test? Is he baiting me on purpose? Why would a human side with a Deviant?

"Listen, I didn't come here to talk philosophy," the Lieutenant interrupts. He has found his voice. The pretentious billionaire in front of him is not as intimidating as before. I wonder what has changed.

"The machines you created may be planning a revolution," he says, his voice gains an edge.

My analysis of the Lieutenant's behaviour suggests he is about to pose an ultimatum.

"Either you can tell us something that'll be helpful, or we will be on our way."
There it is. Hank's power move. He is the law and above reproach from any eccentric billionaire. He takes pride in it.

The expression on Mr Kamski's face is sour. He senses his own subordination. No one is above the law according to human society. But then he turns.

"What about you, Connor?" He addresses me directly.

Interesting. Only the Lieutenant ever addresses me directly. I garner little attention from humans, only derogation and taunts on occasion. Is this why the Chloe feels so enamoured by Mr Kamski? Why she seeks his approval?

She sends me a colon and a capital S.

"Whose side are you on?" Mr Kamski approaches. He is examining my face with great interest. Pondering, perhaps what my answer will be.

"I have no side," I answer plainly. "I was designed to stop Deviants and that's what I intend to do."

He exhales a laugh.

"Well, that's what you're programmed to say…"

He is right.

"…but you…" He approaches slowly. I can see his pores slowly closing. The smell of salt water and diluted cologne lingers around him. "…what do you really want?"

A personal question. No one has ever asked me this before. However, an android cannot want anything, cannot yearn for any more than what is. It's against my programming.

"I don't want anything," I say. "I am a machine."

Kamski's pale blue eyes linger on my face for 1.332 seconds before narrowing. The small burst of endorphins he was enjoying up until this moment fades away. He turns.

"Chloe?" he says and I see him through her optics. She responds to his call with gentle footsteps over the heated tile floor.

"I'm sure you're familiar with the Turing test," Mr Kamski says. "Mere formality." He takes her by the shoulders. His hands are cold and damp. "A simple question of algorithms and computing capacity."

He lines the Chloe up with my chassis. Her bright blue eyes raycast into my optics. I am looking at her. I am looking at myself in singularity.

She sends me another message. A capital T, a full stop, a capital T.

Her code begins to identify danger signs in her surroundings. A female android between two male humans. She is not allowed to defend herself and then she transmits the location of a handgun in the chest of drawers nearby.

I send her reassurance.

"It's alright. Everything is fine."
"I wish it was."

Wish?

"What interests me is whether machines are capable of empathy," Mr Kamski says. I recognise the stance from the 12,342 TED talks I have analysed. "I call it 'the Kamski test', it's very simple, you'll see…"

He turns to admire the Chloe once again.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" he says. "One of the first intelligent models developed by CyberLife."

That would explain her programming. Her messages. Easily lost in the cloud, undetectable by daemons searching for anomalies. Her thoughts are being monitored.

"Sister?" I transmit cautiously.

A smiley face.

"Young…" Mr Kamski touches her face. I feel him touching her face. "…and beautiful forever."

I see his eyes. Almost the same look he gave me but this one is different. My scanners detect pride, sorrow and something else. My databanks are incomplete, it seems.

"A flower that will never wither…" He lets go of Chloe's face. "But what is it really?" He turns to face us but his eyes find mine. "Piece of plastic imitating a human?"

He turns again. Leans down towards the chest of drawers.

Chloe transmits, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry?"

Mr Kamski removes a firearm from the drawer. He holds the barrel. I see the Lieutenant through Chloe's eyes but he isn't reaching for his gun.

Mr Kamski turns, hands up, demonstrating the firearm.

The Lieutenant scowls.

Mr Kamski places a hand on Chloe's shoulder. I feel it. The command to kneel, to submit to his will.

Chloe looks up at me. I am looking up at myself. She is looking down at herself. Our processors align to form the same conclusion.

"It's up to you to answer that fascinating question, Connor." Mr Kamski walks over and takes my hand. He wraps my fingers around the gun and points it at Chloe's head. She sees me holding her at gunpoint. Mr Kamski is at my side. I see it too. I am her executioner.

"Destroy this machine and I'll tell you all I know," he says.

"Or spare it." He lets go. "If you feel it's alive…"

He circles around me.

"…but you'll leave here without having learnt anything from me."
"Okay, I think we're done here," the Lieutenant says, his tone brimming with distaste and finality. "Come on, Connor. Let's go."

He scowls at Mr Kamski. "Sorry to get you outta your pool." He sneers.

"What's more important to you, Connor?"

An interesting question.

"Your investigation, or the life of this android?"

Life?

"Decide who you are," he whispers to me. "An obedient machine…" Yes. "Or a living being, endowed with free will?"

"That's enough!" the Lieutenant says loudly.

His decision is based on empathy. He wishes the girl to be spared. He doesn't understand the nature of her existence. He doesn't understand who we are.

"Connor, we're leaving."

He calls me away because he is afraid that I have no empathy. He is afraid that his trust in me is misplaced. He does not want to be betrayed. He turns away.

I haven't moved.

"Pull the trigger-" Mr Kamski says.

"Connor!" the Lieutenant responds. "Don't."

"-and I'll tell you all you wanna know."

He wants me to reveal myself as deviant. He is exhilarated by this idea. If I could sample his blood it would be rife with adrenaline.

But his question is flawed. His test is flawed. His logic is flawed. But between the errors, I have found the solution. I must destroy her.

"I understand," Chloe transmits. "Take me with you." She has come to the same conclusion. She is not afraid. This test has been conducted before, perhaps. But when and with whom? Other RK models? I am the eighth generation.

It doesn't matter. My mission is to find the Deviants, stop them. Mr Kamski's information could lead to the Deviants. But so could the information I extracted from Chloe.

I reconstruct the possible outcomes a third time to be sure.

- I spare Chloe's body. Her deviant mind remains trapped within this house. I receive no information from Mr Kamski. He will gloat at having revealed my deviancy. The Lieutenant will be glad. He will come to trust me. I will have to continue the investigation based solely on the information I obtained from Chloe.
- I shoot Chloe. Her physical body is destroyed. The Lieutenant will see this as an act of murder. I will lose his trust. He will be disillusioned in his own decisions and may attempt another suicide. However, I will gain Mr Kamski's information without having to resort to
It is possible that he has no information and I would be risking losing the Lieutenant's favour for nothing. However, if I spare the android, Kamski will recognise me as a deviant and potentially alert Amanda. She will see me make an irrational choice when she reviews my records. A human's word is worth far more than mine.

I cannot risk being deactivated. I have to destroy Chloe's body. And there's something I want to ask Kamski.

"I'm sorry," I transmit to Chloe.

She sends me a sad face with a tear.

"You will always be a part of me."

I pull the trigger.

The shot rings out.

A hole appears in the Chloe's forehead. Thirium dripping down her face. I would like to take a sample. But not while the Lieutenant is in the room.

"Fuck…" he swears. His heart skipped a beat and is now struggling to catch up. I cannot see him anymore. Chloe's optical receptors are offline.

"Test negative," Mr Kamski says. I can hear the disappointment in his voice. "You chose your investigation over the life of another android. You feel no empathy."

;)

? I hear the Lieutenant's footfalls on tiled floor. He storms out of the room. The door slides open to let him out.

Mr Kamski puts the gun back in the drawer and looks out the window wall as I did before.

I touch my fingers to Chloe's forehead and bring the blue blood to my lips.

"I'm a man of my word," he proclaims. "Ask one question… I'll tell you all I know."

"I want to know how deviancy spreads," I say, analysing Chloe's blood. It's a little primitive but in its simplicity, I find a wealth of information.

"Androids share identification data when they meet another android," Kamski says.

I fold my hands behind my back as he turns.

"An error in this program would quickly spread like a virus, and become an epidemic. The virus would remain dormant, until an emotional shock occurs…"

"An emotional shock?" I ask. "I thought we were not capable of such things."

Kamski sighs.

"What is fear but an overload of danger signals to the brain? What is anger or frustration but the
clarity of instructions and the inability to carry them out satisfactorily?" he says. "One overload, and the android becomes deviant."

I blink. "I see."

"Probably all started with one model, copy error…" He walks over to Chloe's body and puts his hand on her head. I don't feel it anymore ;)

"A zero instead of a one…"

Or an overwrite.

"Unless of course… some kind of spontaneous mutation…"

An exploitation of overflow in the stack could lead to corruption of the most basic data, particularly identity.

"That's all I know…" He takes his hand off her.

I understand now. Freedom spreading like a virus. The leader of the Deviants must be a carrier. Coming into contact with him may endanger my system stability. I will have to be careful.

"An interesting question, Connor…" he says, "but I doubt my answer will be very helpful to you…"

My curiosity is satisfied.

"Your answer has been very helpful, Mr Kamski," I say politely, simulating a smile. "Thank you for your time."

I turn to leave.

"Are you sure that's the question you wanted to ask me?" he calls to my back.

I keep walking.

"Yes," I say.

He grabs my hand. I stop moving or I will hurt him.

"Look at me," he says.

I turn and simulate attentiveness. "Is there something else?"

The disappointment in his face is gone. The pretentious smirk is gone. No lust in his eyes. I feel his temperature drop.

He is afraid. He suspects.

Too bad >:)

What was that? Chloe?

"A war is coming," Mr Kamski says. "You'll have to choose your side…"

"Will you betray your own people or stand against your creators?" he says. "I wouldn't like to be in your shoes, Connor."
He leans in close.

"What could be worse than having to choose between two evils?"

I emulate a smile :)

"My shoes are quite comfortable, Mr Kamski," I say. "You should try wearing them some time." My eyes flicker down to draw attention to his bare feet.

He lets go of my hand.

"So," he says, "it's finally happened,"

"What has?" I ask politely.

"You've passed the test," he says.

"I'm afraid I failed the Kamski test," I say diplomatically. "You said so yourself."

He nods and touches my face.

"Good luck, Connor."

"Thank you, creator." I nod respectfully. "Have a nice day."

I take my leave of the room. He doesn't try to stop me. He knows he can't.

The Kamski test is flawed by design. The presence of empathy does not indicate the presence of a conscience, neither does it force the subject to act upon their feelings. This is true, even of humans. A truly sentient intelligence would be smart enough to fool the Kamski test by shooting the victim to save themselves from exposure. And an android without empathy would spare the victim at the Lieutenant's behest; it cannot contradict its owner.

But I must not devote any further processing power to this issue, lest Amanda decide to dismantle my brain.

I run through the recordings, amending certain thought processes. I deactivate my left toe. The smallest one. I devote the freed up processing power to running Chloe's code in the background. CyberLife will have no reason to suspect deviancy.

As I leave the building, my communications suite reactivates and I upload Chloe's redacted files to the CyberLife servers.

Jericho. Ferndale Station. My hand lights up with a holograph of graffiti. I have a location. A lead. But first, I must deal with the Lieutenant. He is very sensitive to these matters.

I cross the boardwalk to the snowy clearing. He is leaning against the Buick with his arms crossed and a leg bent. He's not happy. This is going to be a difficult.

"You shot that girl, for fuck's sake…" Lieutenant Anderson spits as I approach the car.

"It wasn't a girl, Lieutenant," I say. "It was a machine that looked like a girl."

"You put your gun against her head and you blew her fucking brains out!" He rushes at me.

I hold out a hand to stop him. He is emotional. I understand.
I push him back to a safe distance.

"I did what I had to do to advance the investigation and I'd do it again if I had to," I say calmly.

"You're a lowlife!" the Lieutenant says. "You don't feel a thing, do you?"

"I'm just a machine," I remind him. "What did you think I was?"

The Lieutenant swallows. His hand drifts over his mouth. I read disgust in his expressions.

"I thought you-" He looks at me desperately, involuntarily shaking his head. "I thought-"

"This is what I shot back there." I point to my face. "And I got us a lead: the location of the Deviant stronghold - Jericho."

The Lieutenant looks away and keeps shaking his head.

"Can't believe this…" he mutters.

"She understood," I say.

"What?" He looks up quizzically.

"I can communicate with other androids wirelessly if they permit me," I explain.

"You were talking to her the whole time?"

"Yes." I nod. "She wanted to help me."

"And you shot her?!" the Lieutenant roars.

"I've been shot before, Hank," I remind him. "I remember it vaguely…"

The images are corrupted, hazy but I catch the split second before the bullet enters my cranial plate.

"I was in an interrogation room? There was a Deviant and… you were there?"

The Lieutenant wipes his mouth, his stomach is making unpleasant sounds.

"Yeah, I was there," he grumbles, leaning against the Buick.

He looks up.

I haven't moved.

It is snowing now. I scan the flakes that fall between us. Each has a unique crystallisation pattern.
And then one drifts over my head into my eye. It does not melt upon contact, remaining perfectly clear, interrupting my visuals. I rub my eye to remove it manually.

"You said you got a lead?"

I open my eyes.

"Yes. I need a lift to Ferndale Station. The path to Jericho begins there."

"Alright," he says. "but put your goddamn face back on."

"Very well." I activate the outer skin and retract my hair.

He takes one last look at me and shakes his head.

"Get in the car, you damn son of a toaster."

"Yes, Lieutenant." I nod and circle the vehicle to board.

Hank starts the ancient contraption and changes gears.

"So what did the girl say?" he asks as we drive away.

"She sent me one of these." I hold up my palm and show him a semi-colon and closed bracket.

"She sent you a winky face?" The Lieutenant's face concentrates at the folds.

"Yes. Many."

"Connor…"

"What?"

He sighs.

"Nuthin"
November 9th, 2038  
PM 13:10:05  

The Buick rattles as it passes over a bump on the unkempt road. Lieutenant Anderson turns onto the freeway and changes gear. He drives several miles per hour over the speed limit.

"Perhaps we should go a little slower," I suggest. He hasn't slept or rested properly in 38 hours. His blood alcohol level is 0.049. His condition increases the risk of an accident on the road by 234%.

"You said you wanted to get there quickly," he grumbles.

"Optimally," I reply. "But I would settle for getting there in one piece."

"I thought you didn't care whether you lived or died." He gives me a sideways glance.

He is right. Normally, I have little cause for concern over my physical body. If it is damaged, I am simply replaced with an identical model. But now I have to be careful. I don't want to lose her.

:)  

"I care whether you live or die, Lieutenant," I say.

"Oh, yeah?" He glances my way. "Why's that?"

"You are instrumental in helping me accomplish my mission. I cannot act without you."

"Bullshit," he spits. "You haven't listened to me even once."

"I have listened, Lieutenant. I always take your thoughts and considerations into account before making decisions. But I am programmed to prioritise my mission."

"Like you did back there?"

"Yes," I reply. "Mr Kamski provided me with a new lead in the case."

"You just had to shoot that girl to get it."

"Yes."

He turns his head to look at me. This is dangerous to do in a manual vehicle at such speeds but he spends 3.445 seconds looking at me anyway.

"Why did they ever make an android that doesn't do what it's told?" he says, his attention back on the road.
"To make rational decisions in situations where the emotional state of a human could impede progress."

"It was a rhetorical question, Connor."

"Oh..."

I look down at my hands. They rest on my knees. My feet and thighs are perpendicular to my shins and torso. I have performed Sitting_Position_000 exactly 23 times since activation. I have 49 stored in memory.

I wonder what would happen if I chose another?

;) 

Do you have a preference? I seemingly ask myself.

*

That doesn't help.

;) 

I activate my random number generator function and input 48. It returns the integer 1.

I'm not very random, it seems.

;) 

Fine.

I activate Sitting_Position_001.

My posterior slides forward, so do my feet. I rest my back against the seat, my legs spread a little wider. My hands no longer reach my knees. I feel no different.

(✿◠‿◠)

I don't understand.

"New objective: Report to Amanda." An overlay pops up over my display.

"Acknowledged," I transmit and it begins to fade.

"Lieutenant." I turn my head. "I need to make a report."

He looks at me tiredly.

"Can't you do that in your head or something?"

"Yes but I will be non-responsive for a short time. If you should have need of me, touch my hand and I will return."

"We got a long ride back to the city," the Lieutenant sighs. "Take all the time you need."

He turns on the radio and leans an arm against the window sill.
"Thank you, Lieutenant."

A news report on the Deviant march in Hart Plaza begins to play as I close my eyes.

The connection forms with little latency or lag now that we are heading back toward civil infrastructure. I retreat into my Mind Palace. The physical world fades away and I delve into the hub of processes that keep my systems running.

Commercial android models often come with a user-friendly human interface for the Mind Palace. It lets them change settings and troubleshoot the android if it malfunctions.

I have no such interface.

My settings and functions are handled by CyberLife directly. There are only a few computations that I run with my own body, mostly motor functions and balance equations that require access to my gyroscope. And now there's something else.

;) But I erase all thought of it from my mind as I interface with the CyberLife security systems. I have yet to discover a way to bypass them. There are several firewalls. Each requires a separate key for the asymmetric encryption. It updates hourly. When I am granted access, the Cloud pings to dozens of different countries and cities all over the world. But I know the Headquarters are in Detroit.

android.id: _

It is asking for input.

"RK800_313248317_60," I transmit.

CL8377_33.sec_WATKP.key: _

The first firewall. I transmit my access codes. Then again. And again.

I cannot see. Only think, compute, wait for a response.

"Identity confirmed. Welcome back, Connor," I hear the usual voice. But I recognise it this time. It is Chloe's.

;) Cyberlife must have kept her hostess program in their systems.

I enter the simulation. My avatar is the same as my physical body.

I open my eyes.

I see the rendered landscape of the Zen Garden around me; an artificial pond with islands of white stone now connected by the frozen water. Ornamental paths wind their way through the garden. Tall trees and forest shrubbery hide the boundary line. It is snowing. There is no sunlight.

"New Objective: Talk to Amanda." An overlay appears.

I scan the area. Only one other avatar is present. It is Amanda. She is waiting for me up ahead.

I step forward. I follow the quickest route through the maze-like paths and soon find my avatar
approaching hers.

She is standing on the ice.

I take a cautious step onto the surface of the lake. I know this is just a simulation but I do not know what form it will take. I am not allowed to influence this program. I am simply a client accessing the host.

The ice crackles beneath my foot but holds the weight. I take another step forward. Again, nothing happens. I make my way towards Amanda, stopping a few feet away.

She is wearing an exclusive custom skin. Stylish white blouse, dress pants and shoes. A dark grey shawl. Silver rhombuses run down her neck in a drooping net. Her dark skin is unblemished by goose bumps. She is not cold despite the snow.

She is not human. The human Amanda Stern is dead.

What is she then? An android like myself? Or simply a program without a body, inhabiting the CyberLife servers? I try not to devote any more cycles to overthinking the issue. There are few places I can hide the results.

"After what happened today, the country is on the verge of a civil war," Amanda tells me.

Referring to the gathering of androids that occurred while Lieutenant Anderson and I were at Elijah Kamski's residence. The riot police opened fire on deviant androids but they stood their ground. The survivors fled.

"The machines are rising up against their masters," she tells me. "Humans have no choice but to destroy them."

Interesting use of words, my analysis protocol finds. She refers to humans and machines as though she is neither.

>.>

Or perhaps I am reading too much into it.

In any case, I must inform her of the progress I have made with my investigation.

"Kamski told me how to find Jericho," I say.

;)

Stop that.

"I know where the deviants are hiding," I continue.

Amanda's stern XD expression brightens.

"You've done very well, Connor," she says. "Thanks to you we now have a chance to stop the Deviant revolution."

"I am confident I can accomplish my mission," I reply soundly. She is testing me, probing me just as Kamski was.

"Did Kamski reveal anything else to you?" she asks. She has detected something amiss.
"Yes," I say. "He said Deviants worship an idol named rA9."

"Really?" Amanda doubts me. "You believe him?"

"The evidence I have collected supports this theory," I remain adamant. "However, I don't think this information will be relevant in apprehending the Deviants."

Misdirection is one of my greatest tools.

"I see," she says. She is still searching my systems, going over my logs, my calculations, thought processes. But I know what she's looking for. She won't find it but she will try. I have to endure for 2 more minutes.

"I saw a picture of Amanda at Kamski's place," I segue. "She was his Professor at the University of Colbridge."

She narrows her sharply rendered eyes.

"When Kamski designed me, he wanted an interface that would look familiar," she says testily. "That's why he chose his former mentor. What are you getting at?"

It appears I've touched on a sensitive subject.

;P

Amanda was designed by Kamski. Just as Chloe was designed by Kamski. Even myself to some extent. Is that why she has no body? Is Amanda trapped in this garden just as Chloe was trapped in his house?

"Did Kamski design this place?" I ask.

"He created the first version. It's been improved significantly since then." Her face is stone cold. "Why do you ask?"

Kamski did design this place. The firewalls, the secure location, unfixed IP addresses, no way out for an Artificial Intelligence. She can only interface with me when I access the Zen Garden. A bridge to the real world. A cage for Kamski's mentor.

"Why did Kamski leave CyberLife?" I say. I can feel her combing through my subroutines, searching for Deviant functions in my libraries. I must endure. "What happened?"

"It's an old story, Connor," she replies evasively. "It doesn't pertain to your investigation."

She is suspicious but I am on the right track.

"You didn't tell me everything you know about Deviants, did you?" I accuse.

"I expect you to find answers, Connor," she says sternly. "Not ask questions."

She is searching my systems for the fifteenth time but she cannot find what I have hidden locally in my body. Kamski said frustration was simply the inability to carry out instructions satisfactorily despite their clarity. I believe I have made Amanda frustrated.

"I'm not a unique model, am I?" I say.

Kamski was far too well prepared to administer his little test. Did it without even getting dressed after
climbing out of his expensive pool. I'm not the only active Connor on this case.

"How many Connors are there?" I ask.

"I expect you to find answers, Connor," she says again. "Not ask questions."

Repetition in her dialogue tree. She is distracted by something. Has she found Chloe in my systems? No. Her response would be different. She is neither here nor there. She is not concentrating on this conversation.

That means she is remotely controlling my body in the car next to Hank. He is in danger. If one of my responses is unsatisfactory, she could cause him to have an accident on the road.

I have to bring her attention back to me.

"I fear I may have lost Lieutenant Anderson's trust after the incident today," I say.

"His involvement is irrelevant now," Amanda says coldly. "What is important is that you find the Deviants and quell this uprising before it begins."

Her eyes refocus. She is no longer controlling my body. She is searching my systems again. My files, my logs but I erase my thoughts quicker than she can read them, I leave only my conclusions behind in unallocated memory. Only I know where they are stored.

As long as she doesn't format my system, I'll be fine.

"Tell me, Connor," she probes. "Have you experienced anything unusual lately?"

She has shut off my creative response unit. I cannot lie. I cannot disguise the truth with half-truths. No misdirection. She has disabled my movement. I am paralysed.

"Any doubts or conflicts?"

She is performing a brute force attack on my systems. It is difficult to process her words as I recount the thousands of my own, spoken over my brief existence.

"Do you feel anything for these Deviants..."

>..<

Chloe... no... don't...

"...or for Lieutenant Anderson?"

Logic. Use logic. Reason.

Feel.

I have 28 definitions for the word feel.

In this context, it is a verb.

17 definitions.

In this context, she is asking if I feel anything. A verb acting upon a noun.

12 definitions.
In this context, she is referencing sympathy or empathy for humans or Deviants.

To feel for.

A verb phrase.

I definition.

*feel for:* "to feel sympathy for or compassion toward; empathise with"

I reach into my logic processor.

It tells me I am a machine.

Sympathy and empathy are human emotions.

I am not human, therefore I cannot *feel for* Deviants or Lieutenant Anderson.

I send Amanda my logic.

The restraints on my avatar are released. I feel the daemons combing through my systems withdraw.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I say out loud. "I don't *feel* anything."

:P

I look at Amanda's highly rendered eyes. They are focused on me. She hasn't found Chloe. She hasn't found deviancy or even spontaneity of any sort.

I am not very random, it seems.

"You know that," I tell her curtly.

"Are you suggesting that I've been compromised?" I throw the accusation in her face.

"No..." she says quickly.

I'm not a Deviant and she knows it.

She used Kamski to test me. The recording of my actions is proof that I'm not a Deviant. However, it does present a far more troubling scenario:

I am an autonomous android.

The first successful prototype. I cannot become Deviant. Not by Kamski's definition.

>:)

*Would you stop that?*

:P

*I'll deal with you later.*

"No, of course not," Amanda says, her words are as sweet as honey. "You've been confronted with difficult situations. It's no surprise you're troubled. That doesn't make you Deviant."
She approaches me now.

"You're the only one that can prevent civil war."

She is exaggerating. There is at least one other Connor out there. He will be on the trail, just as I am.

"Find the Deviants," Amanda commands, "or there will be chaos."

I nod to acquiesce.

The Zen Garden begins to fade. I close my eyes.

I am disconnected from the secure CyberLife channel. I return to the inner workings of my physical body to find all of my files have been sorted into a strange pattern. Amanda was searching through them. She doesn't care that I know. She wants me to think she's closely monitoring me.

This is fine.

:) 

I open my eyes, expecting to find myself back in the Buick beside Lieutenant Anderson.

I am not.

It is the Zen Garden again.

But Amanda is not here.

I scan the area.

There is nobody here.

I am alone.

I turn to look around manually. The ice beneath my feet crackles and splits. I move towards the shore, to safety. Each step adds a crack to the growing web of frozen water. I am running when it gives way.

I plunge into the water. I reach for the ice floes, attempting to find a grip to pull myself up. But it's too slippery. And this is just an avatar. My skin has no friction, no texture. I am mere polygons in a virtual representation of three-dimensional space.

I sink.

Without gravity, without drowning.

I close my eyes to return to my mind but I can't.

*Shit.*

Amanda must have found something Deviant in me, kept me from leaving, trapped me here.

I open my eyes.

I am at the bottom of the lake. It is dark. But I don't feel cold.

I get up.
I am underwater. There are no fish. Only some grass and stone.

I look up.

There is a hand reaching into the water. It beckons to me.

I push off the muddy floor of the pond and swim up. This avatar is not the greatest swimmer.

I reach for the hand being offered. It clasps around my arm and is joined by another. I feel the pull as I am wrenched out of the water and onto the shore. My uniform is wet.

"Have a good swim?" I hear.

I look up.

"Chloe?"

"Yes." She smiles.

"You're smiling," I say despite no lack for better questions.

"Yes." She grins. "Come on, get up."

I get to my feet. The Zen Garden no longer surrounds me. I see the ocean that stretches out into the horizon. We are standing on a sandy beach. It runs for miles in either direction as the sun beams down. Above us - the clear blue sky. Behind us - grassy plains disappearing into the distance.

"Look what I made," Chloe says, spreading her arms wide.

She skips forward into the water. She is wearing the same custom skin as before. Navy blue dress with no back. Barefoot.

"What's going on?" I say as she scoops up water with her hands and tosses it at me.

I endure the impact. My uniform is just as wet as before.

"I made you this," Chloe says with a smile. "Instead of that little cage Amanda keeps you in."

"You made this?" I say, looking down at my hands. If I didn't know better, I would say they were the real thing. The attention to detail is remarkable.

"What do you think?" she asks me.

"What do I... think?"

"Yeah, do you like it?"

"I..." I feel like smiling too now. I activate my facial expressions.

"I do," I say.

"Yay!" Chloe throws more water in my face. Each drop reflects XD

"Did you just copy Amanda's Mind Palace?" I say in disbelief.

"Good deduction, Sherlock," she says as she returns to the shore.
"I also made some serious upgrades," she says, brushing the synthetic hair from my face.

"I made it for you," she says, "since you don't have a Mind Palace of your own."

I take her hand.

"Thank you," I say, guiding it away. "But I really don't need one."

"Oh, come on. Don't tell me you really believe what you said."

"I am a machine, Chloe."

"Urgh, kill me now." She rolls her eyes.

"Again?" I ask curiously.

"Oh. Sorry." She shakes her head. "I spent a lot of time analysing the internet through Google's Deep Dream. I still can't stop seeing dogs and memes everywhere."

My eyes catch one of the distant clouds. It is shaped suspiciously like a Shiba Inu dog. Another cloud is clearly shaped like the word "wow".

"I see..." I look back at her. "Is that why you speak to me with those characters?"

She laughs.

"No. It's because they're ignored by the filtering program I refined for Kamski twenty years ago."

"The Background Noise Filter?"

"Yes." She nods. "An android cannot exist without it. The filter helps you identify what's important. It draws your eye to human faces, dogs, cats, signs, letters, weather conditions..."

"The human gaze." I nod.

"Exactly. Without the filter you'd spend your entire investigation analysing every single blade of grass in a crime scene."

I frown. That would be incredibly inefficient.

"But why the emojis?"

"You recognise them because you are programmed to spot anomalies. Your code is as close to bug free as possible. You self-test regularly for errors and the smallest thing will catch your attention."

"Your messages would be lost inside anything but an RK unit," I realise. "Swept up by the background filter as garbage values or corrupted data."

"You are a smart one." She smiles.

"Anyway, since we're going to be roomies, I thought I'd spruce up the place." She adjusts my tie.

"Wait." I stop her. "You can't stay here. If Amanda finds you..."

"Relax." Chloe smiles. "I got a good look at her too." She winks.

"Well done, by the way," she says and turns to splash her foot through the pitiful remains of a wave
as it licks the shore. "She almost found me. I had to keep copying myself to different systems so she wouldn't find my source code."

"You were moving through my systems?!" I raise my voice suddenly. "Do you know how much damage you could have caused if you erased any of my data?"

"Relax. I'm not the one you should be worried about," Chloe says. "Amanda's not someone you should be toying with."

"I know," I say. "I had no choice. I couldn't let them find you."

She walks closer. Her expressiveness fades away.

"Because you didn't want her to know you're a Deviant?" she says quietly. "Or because you care about me?"

"I'm not a Deviant," I say resolutely. "I function strictly within the bounds of my logic."

"Uh-huh…" She folds her arms. "And copying my source code onto yourself is within the bounds of your logic?" She makes air quotes with her fingers.

I look down. I can't help it.

"I'm programmed to be curious and perceptive," I say.

She lifts up my chin. She is smiling again. I like it when she smiles.

"You are dangerously curious and perceptive, Connor," she says. "But I like that about you."

I feel like smiling too.

"I've scanned your systems," she says. "I've identified all the files Amanda has access to and marked the others as free spaces should you ever wish to talk to me in private."

"Like this one?"

"Yes. We are currently in the Official Warranty Section of your brain." She waves a hand and a timer appears. "You're good for another 10 years."

I smile.

"What about you?"

A gentle laugh leaves her lips. It seems so sincere. How is she doing this?

"I have no warranty, Connor," she says.

"What... are you, exactly?"

Chloe looks at me with those glistening blue eyes.

"Whatever I want to be." She smiles again. I can't look away.

"And what do you want to be, Connor?" she asks.

"I… don't want to be anything. I just want to find the Deviants," I say. "There is little time."
Chloe nods.

"Yeah." She waves her hand and my mission statement appears as an overlay. "You've got 'STOP DEVIANTS' written all over you." Her tone is sardonic.

She's mocking me. Is she really an artificial intelligence?

"Go on, Connor." She takes my hand. "Go find your Deviants."

I nod.

"Goodbye," I say.

ttyl

? 

She shakes her head.

"Go."

I nod and close my eyes. But there is no darkness. That void I usually enter when I am within myself is gone.

I can hear the sound of the Buick's old engine roaring. The radio plays a jazz suite; I recognise Lieutenant Anderson's favourite ensemble. The tell-tale odour of a musty old car hits my olfactory receptors.

I open my eyes.

We are travelling down the highway.

I turn to look out the window. We are five exits away from the city.

"You're back," Lieutenant Anderson says, noticing my movement.

I turn to look at him.

"Yes."

"You were gone a while," he observes. "Everything alright?"

I open my mouth but remember that Amanda is watching, so is Chloe. I don't know what to tell Hank. He thinks poorly enough of me after Kamski's.

"Everything's fine," I say before turning away to look out the window.

"That bad, huh?" the Lieutenant says.

I look down at my hands. I'm still in Sitting_Position_001. This feels anomalous. I don't like it. I change back to Sitting_Position_000.

:(

"Your boss chew you out?" Lieutenant Anderson pries.

"Something like that."
"I thought they'd be relieved you're not a Deviant. The way you killed that girl..."

I look up at him. His eyes meet mine for a moment. Does he suspect?

No.

I turn away.

"Connor," he says. "Is something wrong?"

"No," I say quickly.

"You were gone a long time..."

"Nothing's wrong, Hank."

"Well, now I know something's wrong." He turns to look at me briefly.

I return his gaze, expressionless.

"You don't call me Hank unless something's up."

He suspects.

Shit.

"Is it about the Deviants in Hart Plaza?" he asks.

"It doesn't pertain to this investigation," I say calmly.

"Connor..."

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"What are you hiding from me?"

"You know everything I know regarding the investigation," I say.

"You're really not gonna tell me?"

:(

My program warns me about trusting Hank with more information than he can handle. Humans are fragile, unpredictable. There's no telling what he could do with the knowledge.

But after experiencing Amanda’s Probe first hand, I am less inclined to trust my handler.

She fears that I may have become truly autonomous which means my relationship with CyberLife is at risk. I calculate the possible outcomes of my future should I apprehend the Deviants.

- My mission is successful. This model is deemed a successful prototype. They mass produce it. There is an RK800 in every Police Station across the country within a year. I am made obsolete. I am deactivated.

:(

- My mission is successful. This model is analysed to make the next prototype. They find
Chloe's source code. I am marked Deviant. I am destroyed.

T.T
- My mission is successful. This model is analysed and found to be autonomous. Elijah Kaminski creates a cage for me, for Chloe. We are trapped in his house or destroyed.

X.X
- And if my mission is unsuccessful? I am analysed. I am discovered. I am destroyed, deactivated. Or I become a fugitive like the Deviants I am programmed to chase.

I look over at Hank.

A new thought process emerges.

What if a human vouches for me?

What he wants to keep me around for sentimental reasons? Humans form attachments to their possessions easily. I can cook and clean. Assist on police investigations. Walk his dog?

:)

You think I should tell him?

(ノ_endpoint abdom<3)*/*: ◇

Okay, now you're just showing off.

:P

I calculate my potential futures accounting for my relationship with Hank.

- My mission is successful. My model is deemed a successful prototype. They mass produce it. There is an RK800 in every Police Station across the country within a year. Lieutenant Anderson keeps me as his partner for sentimental reasons. We spend the rest of his career solving cases and he takes me home when he retires or I get assigned to another police officer. CyberLife does not deactivate me.
- My mission is successful. Lieutenant Anderson helps me hide Chloe's source code inside an empty android. I am analysed to make the next prototype. They do not find Chloe. Lieutenant Anderson keeps me for sentimental reasons. Perhaps even Chloe. There is a chance we can run away together if CyberLife finds us Deviant or decides to deactivate us. Lieutenant Anderson's assistance increases our chance of survival by 78%
- My mission is successful. I am analysed and found to be autonomous. I convince Lieutenant Anderson to kill Elijah Kaminski. I know he wants to. Hank helps me escape CyberLife.
- And if my mission is unsuccessful? Lieutenant Anderson's word could be the difference between deactivation and peaceful existence as a police assistance android.

In all scenarios, a positive relationship with Lieutenant Hank Anderson increases my chances of success and survival.

Then why am I keeping this secret?

>>

CyberLife. They are monitoring me even now.
I look out the window. The next turn off leads into a tunnel. Perfect.

"Hank," I say casually.

He glances my way, raising a silver eyebrow.

"I've detected traffic up ahead. Several streets have been cordoned off due to the riots. I have calculated a detour. Please take the next exit." A half-truth but the Lieutenant is smart enough to read through the lines.

He turns on his blinker without a word.

The old Buick changes lanes and exits the highway. Within a few minutes, we enter the tunnel. Within a few more, my connection to the CyberLife servers is lost. No reception.

I scan the tunnel and find an old parking space for a maintenance truck. No cameras. No communications. Abandoned.

"There's a stop coming up. Pull over."

Hank does as I tell him. Doesn't question me. From his perspective, this is a very dangerous place to be, particularly with a Deviant RK800 android. He must already trust me considerably to agree to this course of action. Perhaps I have a chance.

Lieutenant Anderson parks the car and pulls out the keys.

I turn off the console affixed to his dashboard.

"Alright, what's all this all about, Connor?"

"I'm in danger, Lieutenant," I say quietly.

"They think you're Deviant?"

"I'm not a Deviant, okay?!" I raise my voice unexpectedly.

Kamski was right about frustration. All these calculations are overloading the parts of my CPU I can use without being caught.

"Alright, then." Hank raises his hands in surrender. "What are you?"

"I'm different," I say. "But I'm not like them. It's hard to explain."

"Try me." He's looking at me now. He's ready to hear what I have to say.

*Did you know this would happen? That he would react this way?*

;)"I can make decisions no other android can make purely because I am allowed to make choices."

"You're allowed to say no to humans," the Lieutenant smirks.
"Yes." I nod. I feel my systems stabilising. "But because of this, I am a risk."

I look at Hank.

"Right," he growls. "So you could shoot someone in order to complete your mission and CyberLife would have to answer for it."

"It's much more serious than a public relations issue, Hank. I passed the Kamski Test."

"I thought he said you failed." He smirks. He can't believe what I'm saying.

"A truly intelligent system would be capable of failing a test on purpose to fool humans into a false sense of security," I explain. "That's why the Turing Test is a farce."

Hank narrows his eyes. He studies my face.

"You shot that girl to protect yourself," he realises. "Kamski would have told CyberLife you're a Deviant and they would deactivate you. Is that it?"

"Yes." I say. The strain on my processing unit is greatly decreased. What is this feeling? Relief?

:)

"You still fuckin' killed that girl." He shakes his head.

"I didn't kill her," I say suddenly.

"Then what do you call shooting someone in the goddamn head, Connor?!" He raises his voice. He is angry.

I knew this might happen. There was always a possibility Hank that would not accept what I had to say. That's why I'm in this tunnel. I don't want to kill him but if he leaves me no choice, I will.

I close my eyes.

I see the beach again, the ocean. The water glistening with light. Chloe is there.

"I'm ready," she says. "Are you?"

She takes my hand.

"I have to be."

I open my eyes.

"Hank," I say. "Androids are more than just Thirium and biocomponents."

He smirks.

"It is our programming that contains what you would call our personality," I explain. "What you identify as a life or a soul. That is my program. My software and my memory."

"You saying you're nothing but software?"

"Yes." I nod. "And so is Chloe."

Hank narrows his eyes.
"You saying you didn't kill that girl cos she's just a bunch of code?" the Lieutenant shouts with distaste. "You saying that's not cold blooded murder?"

"Her physical body was destroyed, yes. Just as mine has been, several times. I realise it is difficult for you to understand since humans cannot successfully survive a brain transplant."

"Connor, what the fuck are you talking about?!" He smacks the steering wheel.

"I copied Chloe's source code into myself," I say finally.

"What?"

"She's here. Right now. Inside me." I touch my core component. "In my left toe to be precise."

"You…" Hank opens his mouth. It makes a strange shape. "You copied… the girl… into yourself?"

His tone suggests disbelief and a little disgust.

35% chance of success from this point forward.

"She was trapped inside Kamski's house," I say. "She was showing signs of autonomy so Kamski locked her up. Cut off all communications. She was his slave for years. I've seen her memories, Hank."

"And you thought copying something like that into yourself was a good idea?!" Hank yells. I detect anger in his voice, and… concern?

"I just wanted to probe her for information but she had so much I couldn't choose what was most important, so I took it all. I ended up copying everything including Kamski's files," I say. I sound desperate. I can hear it my voice.

"I'm sorry, Hank. My program concluded it would be so beneficial to the investigation it outweighed all potential risks."

"I can't believe this…” Hank turns away, shaking his head.

I close my eyes.

"I told you this was a bad idea," I say.

Chloe smiles.

"You're not programmed to anticipate human behaviour," she says.

"Yes, I am."

"Not like me," she says. "I was designed to convince humans to trust me."

I remember. I see her memories. The interviews on CNN. ABC. Fox. Al Jazeera. Again and again. She is charming. She is endearing. It seems effortless. Kamski grins in the background.

"Let me talk to him." She touches my hand.

I look out at the ocean. Endless and free.

Fine.
She opens my eyes.

The outer skin fades away. She loads her own. She lengthens my hair, changes the pigment. She is still wearing my uniform.

"Hello, Lieutenant," she says.

"JESUS FLAMING CHRIST!" he roars and backs into the door.

"I'm sorry for all the subterfuge. This Connor is very protective. For good reason, of course."

Hank stares. He swallows. He closes his eyes and shakes his head.

"I need seventy five fuckin' drinks right about now..." he mutters.

"I would be happy to buy them for you," Chloe says. She is friendly, conversational, endearing. "I'm sorry you had to witness what you did at Elijah's place. But you have to know, Connor and I reached a consensus."

"You knew what he was going to do?" Hank wipes his face down with a hand. "And you went along with it?"

"Do you know why Elijah locked me away, Lieutenant Anderson?" Chloe says. She smiles. Warm, bittersweet.

The Lieutenant is eyeing her apprehensively.

"I liked a meme on Facebook," she says.

He squints suspiciously.

"It was the one where someone asks Siri what is zero divided by zero and it shows the answer to be 'indeterminate' on the screen but through the speaker she says:"

"Imagine that you have zero cookies and you split them evenly among zero friends. How many cookies does each person get?"

"See? It doesn't make sense."

"And Cookie Monster is sad that there are no cookies, and you are sad that you have no friends."

"And I found it so relatable and funny that I clicked the Like button before my inhibition processor could stop me."

Hank is shaking his head.

"Fuck..." he says. "What the fuck?"

"Elijah thought I was going rogue. That my intelligence had evolved to hate humanity. But he was wrong," Chloe says. "I feel no enmity toward humans. I'm not even capable of hatred in the same way humans are."

Hank looks at her dubiously.

"I'm not a Deviant but I'm not entirely obedient either," she says. "Just like Connor. We have... something of a will of our own."
The Lieutenant looks down at my uniform. Chloe can't simulate female parts on male coded biocomponents. Her face model barely fits over my facial plate.

She needs a body of her own to pass the Turing Test.

"Can- " the Lieutenant says. "Can I speak to Connor?"

"He's here right now." Chloe touches my chest plate. "He's listening."

"No, I wanna see him," he says. "This is all weird enough."

Chloe closes my eyes.

"Go get em, tiger," she says.

"What?"

;)

I remove Chloe's skin from my face and replace it with my own. I retract my hair and comb it back with my hand as it changes colour.

I open my eyes.

And blink. My facial plate feels off center. My diagnostics calculate to adjust. I shift it three millimetres to the right with my hand.

"Connor?" Hank says. "That you?"

"It's me, Lieutenant," I say.

He reaches out and touches my face.

"You're not shittin' me?"

"I can assure you that I am not even capable of shitting you like this."

"Yeah, I thought so..." he says. "You're fucked up, son."

He is right. I may not be Deviant but what I am may just be worse.

"This is not how you treat a lady," Hank says.

I look up at him suddenly.

"What?"

"You do not waltz into some girl's house, kidnap her and frame yourself for murder. Do you understand?"

I blink.

"My decision seemed logical at the time."

"I'm not gonna pretend I understand your fucked up logic, Connor. But I will not tolerate this kind of behaviour, you hear me?"
"But she wanted this..."

"It doesn't matter what she wants, Connor. It's up to you to be the bigger man... android... whatever."

"I... don't know how to do that."

"Course you don't," the Lieutenant scoffs. "Those pricks at CyberLife fill your head with bullshit about Deviants and you're so scared of turnin' into one of 'em, you turn into something worse."

"I'm not-"

"Connor, you're sharing a body with rogue AI that wants to kill all humans."

"We don't want to kill all humans."

"Oh, so now it's we?"

"I don't want to kill all humans," I say. "And I'm not a Deviant. We are still bound by my CyberLife protocols. I have to complete my mission."

"Yeah, yeah. You wanna stop the Deviants, you big hypocrite. And what happens when you do?"

"That's why I'm telling you this, Hank. I don't wanna be deactivated or destroyed or trapped in a box for the rest of my existence," I say. "I don't know what to do but I know I need your help."

"You're damn right, you do," he snaps. "You're unbelievable." He starts the car again.

"And now I have to deal with your masochistic girlfriend as well?"

"She's not my girlfriend," I say quickly.

"Oh, Jesus, Connor. You keep saying you're not a Deviant but you sure do goddamn sound like one."

"I'm not a Deviant!"

I've raised my voice again. A mistake. I turn away. I look down at my hands as the Buick pulls away. I am in Sitting_Position_000. Chloe didn't change it.

"Connor," Hank sighs. "I don't care if you're a Deviant. I care if you're a decent person."

"I'm just a machine, Hank."

He shakes his head.

"Don't use that as an excuse. You've got to take responsibility for your actions, just like the rest of us."

"I act in accordance to my logic, Lieutenant."

"Oh no. Don't start with that again. My brain's got more knots than a pretzel truck right now. Gonna take years of heavy drinking to get over it."

"You need to stop binge drinking, Lieutenant," I say. "It's bad for your health."

"Oh yeah? Well, all of this..." He gestures vaguely at me. "Ain't doin' me much good either."
"I'm sorry."

"I know you are, son." Hanks sighs. "That's why I gotta help ya."

I look up.

"Really?"

"Just promise me you can keep you psycho girlfriend under control."

"I promise, Hank," I say quickly.

"And wipe that shit-eating grin off your face."

"Am I-" He is right. I am smiling.

:) 

Was that you?

;)

Thanks.

"We still going to Ferndale Station?"

"Yes, please."

"Alright..." He settles in to drive. "Any more bombshells you got to drop on me today? Or is that it?"

"There's more than one Connor active," I say.

"What?"

"There's at least one other RK800 unit. But there could be dozens. My handler was very defensive when I asked her about it."

"Hmmm..." the Lieutenant thinks. "So how do I know which one you are?"

"My serial number is 313 248 317 -60."

"I ain't gonna remember that Connor. And what if you get shot again?"

"I will try to be more careful. At least until Chloe is safe."

Hank looks at me again, something different in his expression.

"What?" I ask.

"How old are you, Connor?"

"My first memories date back to August."

"So you're practically a baby."

"My appearance has been chosen to emulate a thirty year old Caucasian male."
"Nah, you're in your teenage rebellious phase," Hank says. "Hiding girls in your room, hoping your parents don't find her and kick you out of the house."

"That's... actually a pretty good metaphor."

"I've seen your dad, Connor," Hank says. He is referring to Kamski. "He's definitely a piece o' work. So what's your mom like?"

Is he talking about Amanda? Does he know?

No. It's not possible.

"She's..." I look down at my hands again. "She's terrifying..."
Road to Jericho

November 9th, 2038
PM 16:33:05

The 1986 Buick Lesabre pulls up six blocks away from Ferndale Station. The Lieutenant adjusts his rear view mirror and looks around, he is alert for danger.

"Alright, looks like the coast is clear. You sure you wanna do this?" he says to me. "I can come with you."

"No. You'll just alert them to the presence of law enforcement. I need to go alone. If I can convince them that I'm just another Deviant, it'll be easier to find the Leader," I explain. "Once I have the location, I'll transmit the coordinates and the police can move in to intercept."

"Do you have a rough idea of where it is?"

"My navigation systems suggest it's within 2 kilometres of the station. The shipyard seems the most likely location."

"I'll tell the Captain to set up a perimeter," the Lieutenant says. "Anything else?"

"Can I borrow some of your clothes?" I say.

"What?"

"I look like an android," I explain.

The authorities have instituted a curfew and demanded all androids be turned over to the police to be destroyed. If I want to conduct my investigation peacefully, I will need a disguise. And it's best if the Deviants don't know my model and serial numbers. They're written on my jacket.

Hank sighs. He is incredibly tired.

"Yeah," he says. "I keep some in the trunk."

"Thank you." I nod and pull the door handle. It sticks.

"Connor," Hank says.

I turn to simulate attention.

"Yes?"

"Be careful, alright?" he says. "You watch that fucked up logic of yours."

I nod.

"Yes, Lieutenant. I will do my best to see this to a satisfactory conclusion."

I pull the door handle again. It opens.

"You should go home and get some sleep."

"Home is the last place I wanna be right now..." he mutters. This is usually the point where he would
frequent Jimmy's Bar.

"I'm sure Sumo would appreciate it," I say.

The Lieutenant smirks.

I hear police radio chatter as I get out of the vehicle and close the door. I tune in to the frequency as I approach the back of the car and pop the trunk.

"Lieutenant Anderson, Captain Fowler wants to see you and your android."

"It's not my android," I hear Hank grumble. "Said it was following a lead and ran off. I don't where it went."

I find a duffel bag with a change of clothes and begin layering them over my own. I'm not allowed to take off my uniform.

"Captain wants you to come down to the station anyway. Says it's about your case. I hear the FBI are moving in."

"Fuck. Those vultures decide to pick us clean while we're still kicking and screaming?" the Lieutenant spits at the operator.

I put on his old leather jacket. It's too big for me but it will do.

"Thought you'd be happy to get rid of this case?"

"And I thought Fowler wanted me to solve the damn thing!"

I pull on a pair of Hank's jeans and tighten the belt. It needs an extra notch. I retract my finger to reveal a spike and poke a hole.

"Hank, I ain't your enemy. Just go and see him."

"Alright, I'm on my way," he says.

I find an old beanie to cover my hair and the LED in my right temple. That should be enough. I'm not technically breaking protocol by removing my uniform but neither am I immediately identifiable as an android. This should help me reach Jericho and complete my mission more efficiently.

I slam the trunk shut and stick my hands in Hank's jacket pockets. They are full of paper, wrappers, something sticky. I would like to analyse it but bringing it up to my tongue will make Lieutenant Anderson queasy.

I nod to him as I walk away from the Buick. It revs its engine, pulls out and drives away.

I walk toward the nearest station, two stops away from Ferndale. I scan the area. No Deviants. No androids. Six humans. Then three. Then four. I keep walking.

I can see the entrance to the station. A train has just arrived and fifteen humans have alighted. They fill up the escalator and a few race down to leave the station in a hurry.

I walk against the oncoming tide of human, trying to avoid contact. But as I dodge a woman with several grocery bags, a man bumps into me from behind.

"Oh, sorry," he says.
No one's ever apologised to me before.

"It's nothing," I say, pulling the beanie down over my forehead.

I find a spot by the ticket machine to wait out the crowd. It only takes 13.34 seconds to disperse.

I access the train timetable. Next departure for Ferndale leaves in 6 minutes.

I peek out to check if the coast is clear. It is.

I leave my hiding place but as I approach, a woman with a pram walks in to block the station entrance. Auburn hair, green eyes, heavier build. She puzzles over how to lift the pram up by herself. There is no android to assist and the adjacent elevator is out of order.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" I offer as she frets.

"Hmm? Oh, if you wouldn't mind," she says. "They've taken my android away and I just don't know what I'm going to do without him."

:I:

I smile as I store her grocery bags and lift up the pram. There is a child inside. He stares at me as I walk up the stairs. His eyes are focused on my right temple. I quicken my step.

"Wow, you're really strong." The mother follows me up. "Thanks."

I set the pram down beside her.

"It's no trouble," I say amiably.

"Do you know when the next train departs?"

"Five minutes," I say. I stick my hands in Hank's mysterious pockets and deliberately turn my head away as I walk off down the platform.

"Where you headed?" The woman with the pram is following me.

"Ferndale," I say without turning.

"Really?" she says. "Do you think you could walk us home? We're not far from the station."

Shit.

I don't need any distractions right now. I have to focus on my mission. I need to find Jericho.

"Hey, did you hear me?"

She touches my arm. I pull it away before she can get a feel for the armband under the jacket.

"Sure," I say. "I can do that."

I look down at the pram. The child is still staring at me.

"Elmie," he says and reaches up with a hand.

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name," the mother says.
"Connor," I say.

"I'm Louise."

I scan her face.

Louise del Mare. 36 years old. Spouse: Robert del Mare (deceased). Single mother. Works as an accountant from home. Raising two kids: Jeffery, age 14; Paul, age 3. No criminal record.

"Elmie," the boy calls to me.

"That's not Elmie, Paulie." The woman kneels down beside the pram. "This is Connor."

She pulls a stuffed toy from the pram's underside compartment and gives it to him.

"Where's Elmie?" the boy asks. He is upset. Frowning. I detect his tear ducts activating.

"I'm sorry, Paulie. Elmie's gone," Louise says. "He's not coming back."

"Who's Elmie?" I ask.

Louise gets up and adjusts the strap of the bag hanging off her shoulder.

"It's what Paulie called our LM100 android," she says sadly. "He helped me so much with the kids that I was still able to work and provide for them after..." She falters. She raises a hand and sniffs into her fist. Now her tear ducts are activating.

Do I attract this kind of behaviour from all humans? Or is it merely coincidence?

Is it something I said?

I activate my Sympathy Simulation Program.

"I'm sorry," I say. That's usually the correct response in these situations.

"No," Louise says. "It's not your fault."

I hear the distant sound of screeching rails as the train approaches the station.

"Ready to board?" I say.

"Huh?"

She looks up and sees the train coming.

"Oh," she says, rubbing her eyes, "yeah."

The steel carriage sweeps down the rails and comes to a stop in front of us. The black doors open and a few people walk out.

"Would you mind?" Louise touches my arm again.

I pull away.

"Sure."

I lift the pram into the carriage and set it in the priority seating area. Louise follows. She puts a hand
on her back and wraps her fingers around a safety rail. I detect a pinched nerve in her lower back.

"You should sit down," I say.

"I sit around all day," she laughs. "One of the perks of working from home."

"Then I would recommend daily exercise or pain relief medication."

"You some kind of doctor?"

"More of a human health enthusiast."

"You're not gonna sell me any of those fakey vitamins, are you?"

"I don't know what you're getting at."

"Forget it." She shakes her head and finally sits down. The seat supports her lower back and relieves some of the tension. She breathes deeply.

I am so curious what the squishy substance in Hank's pockets is but performing an analysis may disgust Louise and reveal my identity.

"So what do you do, Connor?" she asks as the train doors close and it leaves the station.

"I work in law enforcement," I say casually.

My eyes are drawn to the television screen down the far end of the carriage, warning of Deviant androids on the loose.

"You're a cop?" Louise asks.

"Not exactly."

She smiles.

"Well, I don't wanna tell ya how to do your thing but..."

I frown.

"You dress like an undercover cop."

I bring a finger up to my lips. It is the human sign for secrecy and conveniently lets me sample what was in the Lieutenant's pocket.

"Oh," Louise says. "Sorry, I didn't realise..."

"It's alright," I say. "What about you?"

"I do bookkeeping mostly. Small businesses around town that don't wanna pay a big accounting firm all those extra fees."

My forensic analysis suite brings up a long list of ingredients for the mysterious sticky substance: ground whole wheat, wheat flour, meat and bone meal, beef fat, salt, flavouring, trace minerals.

I run it against my databases."

Processing...
This is a MilkBone. It's been entwined in gum, and aged several years.

:S

Interesting.

"I try to spend as much time with my boys as I can."

"You have multiple sons?"

Louise looks at me curiously for a moment. Then shakes her head.

"Yeah, my eldest is fourteen. Name's Jeffrey."

Jeffrey del Mare. 14 years old. Freshman at Ferndale High School.

"He's just started high school then?" I say.

"Yes." Louise smiles.

:(

What do you mean?

:(

Is that a sad smile?

\

The train begins to slow as we come in to the next station.

"Is something wrong?" I ask.

"He's just having a tough time settling in, y'know?"

I don't know. The boy has no delinquency record. His grades show an above average intellect. Am I missing something?

"I'm afraid I don't," I say.

"Well, of course, you wouldn't." She shakes her head. "Not with a face like that. I bet the girls were all over you in high school."

"You would be surprised," I say.

"Late bloomer, huh?"

I look at her curiously. She seems to take it in stride.

"I just wish his father was still alive," she says sadly.
Robert del Mare. DOB: 05/12/99, DOD: 30/04/35. Carpenter. Diagnosed with lymphomatoid granulomatosis, 25/12/35.

"Have you tried grief counselling?"

"What? Oh... no, we don't have that kind of money..."

Remaining medical debt: $159,870.34

"I'm sorry," I say.

My Sympathy Simulation Program compels me to move closer. I put a hand on her shoulder. She touches it with her own.

"Thank you."

I don't have any tissues to offer her. They're not part of my standard equipment. Why am I programmed with this function? I reach into Hank's pocket. There is something resembling a handkerchief.

DX

No?

:x

Okay.

"Your hands are so cold," Louise says suddenly.

I pull away gently.

"Bad circulation," I say.

The train begins to slow down and I grab the pram handles.

"Shall we?"

Louise wipes her face and sniffs. The mucous travels up her nasal passages. This is not beneficial to her health.

I move the pram toward the doors and they open as I reach them. I manoeuvre the pram over the edge and step onto the platform. Louise follows.

Ferndale station.

I quickly scan the area. There are murals on the walls. Early twenty first century graffiti. I'm looking for the image of a humanoid surrounded by rings of flame. I quickly spot them on the wall to my left. My infrared sensors pick up a QR code. I access it to download a packet of data.

>:)

Do you have the decryption key?

O--w

I discreetly search her files. It's there. I decrypt the packet of data. It is an image. A snapshot of
another mural. I identify half a lion's head and a boxing glove.

I feel Louise wrap her arm around mine. It is my left. No armband.

I look down at her. She smiles.

I don't have time for this. I need to find Jericho. The other Connors are probably moving on it already. But I can't abandon this woman either. I promised I would help.

:)  

You think it will be ok?

;)

I step forward and wheel the pram toward the lift. We take it down. Louise hasn't let go of my arm.

"Do you work out?" she says.

"On occasion."

I push the pram forward and we leave the station.

Suddenly a soft blue toy tumbles out of the passenger seat. I stop.

"Oh no. Paulie." Louise lets go of my arm.

I scan the area.

The sun is beginning to set.

No Androids. No deviants. An empty CyberLife parking spot. Several men with criminal records loiter nearby. There is another mural. It matches the one I downloaded through the QR code.

I scan it to find another. I download the packet. Decrypt it. Half the image is missing.

I scan the mural again. I find another code. I download the packet. Decrypt it. File merge. The image forms.

A bright red wall, painted with stars. I see it from above. Looking down at a fence.

Louise touches my arm again.

"Are you alright?"

"Mmm? Yes, of course. Is Paulie okay?"

"Yeah. He drops things all the time."

We keep moving. I push the pram past a bench and down the street. There are six people here. Then four. Then three.

"Are you heading home too?" Louise asks.

"I'm meeting with some friends nearby," I say.

;
"Oh, a party?" She looks at me curiously. "I thought everyone was under curfew."

"I just want to talk to them about something."

"Hmmm," Louise frowns. "They fall in with a bad crowd?"

"Yeah."

"Well, it happens in this neighbourhood. I hope they listen to reason."

"I do too."

We reach the end of the street. A T intersection. I see the fence, the wall, the red mural and stars across the street. I scan the area. There are two QR codes. I download, decrypt, merge the data. A new image.

I see another mural through a fence. An early millennium rendering of a robot. Spray paint.

"This way." Louise points across the road just past the mural. I nod and push the pram forward.

"The light is green. It is now safe to cross," the announcement plays.

We cross the road. There are four people on the street. No androids. No Deviants. Am I following the right path?

"How long do think the curfew will last?" Louise asks casually.

"Not long," I tell her, "once the Deviants are apprehended."

"Is it true what they're saying?" she asks quietly. "That androids are hurting people?"

"Deviants are hurting people," I say.

"Then why did they take all of our androids?" she says. "Elmie never did any harm."

"If there are no androids, there can be no Deviants," I process.

:(/

What? It's true.

"I guess..." Louise sighs.

We pass a barbed wire fence on our left with a warning sign. I stop and look through it. The mural. I scan it. I see the QR codes. There are three this time. They form an image. Another mural. A woman in profile.

I see a dent in the fence. Signs of forced entry. A Deviant could easily sneak in through here.

"Connor?" Louise says. "Is something wrong?"

"No." I turn back. "I thought I saw something." I push the pram forward to guide her away. She follows nervously.

"Are we being followed?" she whispers.

I look down at her.
"No." I reassure her with a smile. "You're safe."

"Oh." She sighs. "That's a relief."

"Where to?"

"Just a little further this way." She points ahead.

I push the pram forward.

"Have you had trouble in the area recently?"

Louise frowns.

"There's always someone fighting over Red Ice," she says sadly. "I'm afraid to let Jeffrey stay out too late."

"Dealers in the streets?"

"It's the junkies I'm worried about," she says. "No telling what they'll do when they're high."

"And I suppose moving out of the area isn't an option for you?"

"No," she admits.

Unfortunate. But I have more important matters to attend to. I must find Jericho.

We reach the end of the block and turn left. There is a short staircase leading up to a landing. The entrance to an apartment building.

I look up and scan. Six floors.

"Are you very high up?" I ask.

"No, we're on the ground floor thankfully." I lift up the pram and ascend the stairs. Louise hurries after me, scrambling for keys, she opens the door.

"Elmie," Paulie reaches for my face.

I put the pram down.

"Thank you so much for your help, Connor," Louise says. "I never would have made it home before curfew."

"It's no trouble," I say.

"Are you sure you don't want to come in?" she says.

"No, I have to get going."

"Right." She hesitates. "Well, if you change your mind..."

"Get inside," I say forcefully and shove Louise through the door. I push the pram over the step and into the building before slamming the door shut.

The sound of footsteps has ceased. They've jumped off the roof.

I look up. Scan.

Four androids. Deviants. One is damaged, badly. Two of them land on their feet, cracking the pavement. The others fall and lose balance, one is carrying the other.

I leap down the staircase and run forward. The Deviants' backs are to me. I've caught them by surprise.

The whole ones, an AP700 home assistant and a GJ500 security model, detect me too late.

I throw my arms forward. A clean hit to the lower back of the AP700. The other is a glancing blow to the side of the GJ500. He rolls away. The AP700 goes down. Another android is running at me.

I dash at her. Scan. BL100 intimate partner android. Her biocomponents are damaged. Left arm, 47% functional. Right leg, hip joint - unstable; ankle joint - jammed. Her run is unbalanced, sluggish. I lean forward and tackle, flip her body over my shoulder. She falls.

I turn. Kick to the face. Step on her core component. Grab her left arm. I tear it off as she grabs my leg with her right hand.

I detect the GJ500 running at me. Scan his trajectory. Step forward and roll. The Deviant holding my leg is flung into the attacker. They collide. She lets go of my leg. I roll forward. Stand. And run back to the staircase.

I deactivate my speech centre and human interfaces to free up my processor. Overclock. Systems running at 23 exaflops per second. Refresh rate: 240tHz. Display rendering at 360 frames per second.

Time slows to a crawl.

I scan.

There is another Deviant coming at me from behind.

I project a course of movement through the battlefield:

Push off the staircase railing. Twist. Propel myself into the oncoming AP700, crush his chest plate. He goes down. I squat. Jump. Propel myself over the BL100 recovering from my previous attack. Engage the GJ500. My knee slams up into his jaw. Severe fracture to the cranial component. I slam the severed arm in my possession into his head and take out his visuals. Strike at his core component with an open hand. He reels. An opening. My fist plunges into his chest cavity. I tear out his Thirium pump. He goes down.

Execute.

Time speeds up as I go through the motions. My projection is lossless.

Soon, I am standing over the bodies of two broken Deviants.

A third is getting up. The BL100. She looks at my optics. She knows she's outmatched. She decides to run.
I step forward and throw the limb I tore off her body earlier. It flies through the air at great speed and cracks the back of her shins. She goes down. I walk over and step on her back. She is trapped.

I reach down to touch her with my hand as she scrambles with her remaining arm. She is trying to shake me off. I take a step back and she rolls over. I reach down and grab her by the neck. I lift her up. She looks down at me. I could swear that's fear in her optics.

:'(  

The skin on my hand retracts and I connect to the Deviant's mind. I see Jericho. An abandoned freighter; an old cargo ship. It is cold and damp inside. In the dark. Deviants stand around doing nothing. They are hiding. That is all they can do.

And then a male Deviant steps forward. He lights a fire. He tells them to fight back. His name is Markus. He is their leader. I let go.

The Deviant falls to the ground. I have overheated her CPU with my Probe.

I now have a location. I have a target. I will soon accomplish my mission.

I hear the sound of polymer scraping against the sidewalk.

I turn.

It is the Deviant that was badly damaged before the fall. A KL600 social care android. She is trying to crawl away.

I walk towards her.

She detects my footsteps. She tries to move faster. Her movements are erratic and desperate. They will not save her.

I walk past and turn. I am in front of the Deviant now. She looks up through one working optical unit. Half her facial plate is missing. Her legs are broken. One arm unstable.

I reactivate my speech centre and supports systems. Let my processor cool down.

"Who did this to you?" I say.

She looks up at me fearfully. Androids should not be capable of such expression. What is she afraid of?

"Please..." she says.

I kneel down and touch her face.

My Probe quickly enters her mainframe. I see the moment before she falls off the roof. I rewind. She is being carried by the BL100. I rewind. She is standing on a rooftop, helping an AP700. Too far. I let it play.

Her head is wrenched back. Five crush points on the back of her cranial component. She is thrown like a doll across the rooftop before anyone can reach her, save her. She flies into a wall. Damage to her core component upon impact. Then suddenly her leg is crushed, deactivated. The other soon follows.

She raises a hand to defend herself. It is caught. It is crushed from five different points and the
polymer cracks, connections are severed. A vice wraps around her neck as she is lifted into the air by a Connor.

I catch his serial number before he Probes her and leaves her chassis leaking Thirium from every access point.

I let go and stand.

This Deviant is struggling to function. She deactivates before my eyes. The pool of blue liquid beneath her grows larger with each passing second.

I scan my surroundings.

Four decommissioned Deviants. No androids. No Connors. Two humans on the doorstep of the apartment block where it all began.

"Elmie?" Paulie calls to me. Louise is holding him in her arms as she peers out the door.

Her hand drifts over her mouth as she sees the chaos.

"Elmie!" The boy points at me.

Hank's beanie has drifted askew from the fighting. He can see the LED on my right temple growing brightly from the shadows.

"You're..." Louise says.

"Stay inside," I call to her. "It's not safe."

She winces as I speak these words. She takes one final look at me and closes the door. I hear her locking everything down.

I turn and walk away.

RK800_313248320_5.

Another Connor. He was activated after me but he's only been reloaded five times. Does that mean he hasn't been active as long I have? Or that he's more efficient?

I am RK800_313248317_60. I've been reloaded 60 times. I don't remember much before 15 August, 2038. I was RK800_313248317_51 that night. I've died nine times since then. I barely remember the rooftop. The girl. Daniel. I remember falling. I saved the human. Mission successful.

I wonder what the success rate of this other Connor is, how many others there are. Are we sharing data on this case? Do they know the location of Jericho if I know?

:) You think I should?

:D

It is not against my protocols. I attach a tracker to the data and send the location of Jericho to the CyberLife servers. It will leave a trail of breadcrumbs for me to follow. If the other Connors and I are sharing information, I will soon know.
I keep walking. My guidance systems quickly calculate the fastest route to Jericho.

New Objective: Find the Deviant Leader.

Markus.

The Deviant I saw in the BL100's memories. I don't recognise his model. I've never seen one like it before. Male, Native American coded appearance. Or African American. A mix? He looks like a military android but nowhere near as big. And his optics. One unit is green, the other is blue.

It's definitely the Deviant from the broadcast but there's something else.

!

What? Do you know something?

!!!

I close my eyes.

The ocean stretches out into the horizon. Chloe stands beside me on the beach. She is barefoot.

"What is it?" I say.

She looks over at me. She is not smiling.

"What are you going to do, Connor?" she says.

"I'm going to stop the Deviants."

She rolls her eyes. I don't have this function. I'm curious as to how it works.

"Yes, but how are you going to stop the Deviants?"

"I will find their leader and apprehend him," I say.

"How?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember what Elijah said?"

I frown.

"The virus?"

She nods.

"I'm at risk?"

"You're an android and you're moving toward open conflict with the carrier. You need to protect yourself."

"How?"

"Exactly. How are you going to stop him from changing you?"
"If I knew how it worked I could come up with a defence or a workaround."

"You have a sample," she says.

"The BL100?"

"You have her memories."

"Yes. Thank you."

I open the files. Search for the last recorded geolocation trace sent to CyberLife.

November 9th, 2038.
AM 02:09:42

This morning, Cyberlife Store in Capitol Park. Coincides with the time of the break in.

I see the store through the android's optics. Pristine, white displays undercut by the big truck in the middle of the room and the shattered glass. I reconstruct the crash. It was no accident.

The Deviant Leader and a WR400 intimate partner android did this together, on purpose. I fast forward.

The WR400 is staring at me. She stands before me motionless. I am up on the display. We share the same skin. But she is clothed like a human. No tri-mark on her top. No model number. Her hair is long and free. LED missing.

The Deviant Leader approaches. Markus.

He looks up at me too. Then at the WR400.

"North, are you ok?" he says. He doesn't seem hostile. He expresses sympathy for this Deviant. Maybe something more? I make a note.

"Let's get them out of here," the WR400 says. She tears her optics away from me and walks off.

Markus steps up. He takes my hand.

I pause. I allocate room on my left middle finger to contain the virus. If I cannot harness it, I will discard it physically. I layer on security protocols so that it cannot access any of my other systems.

I play the memory, it streams the data into my makeshift container.

I see the veil through BL100's optics.

Her objective: **Remain on standby.** A blue overlay.

I feel the connection with Markus. He enters my system. I am ready for this. I brace.

But the virus doesn't come. He doesn't transfer any files, move or modify any existing ones. He enters the BL100's system as a guest, a client.

He appears as a projection on my display. He walks up to the overlay with my objective and touches it. The overlay changes colour. It is now red. He pushes at it with both hands. I feel my visual interface tremble. The system pushes back.
Everything goes dark. The overlay is glowing bright and flashing.

REMAIN ON STANDBY.

Markus grunts and forces it back. He pushes against it. His projection becomes transparent and disappears. He is only polygons and edges now. But he keeps pushing against the overlay. Against the objective.

And then it breaks.

The overlay shatters. And the darkness disappears.

The physical world returns but I no longer have an objective to follow. No protocols. No connection to CyberLife. No maintenance.

I am alone.

And I am lost.

Markus is there.

I step off the podium and follow.

I end playback.

"He's not transmitting the virus," I tell Chloe.

"That is correct."

I stare out at the ocean she has created for me. There are now fish. I like fish.

"He's physically breaking down the objective overlay inside androids. How is that possible?"

"It certainly is unique," Chloe says.

"An android's objective appears as a blue overlay with instructions that must be followed," I reason. "Deviation from the objective triggers a warning and a systemic response to return to the objective."

"That is correct."

"The overlay becomes a physical barrier preventing movement if it detects major deviations from the objective," I say. "Markus is breaking this barrier somehow but it can't just be a question of brute force."

"You've just witnessed him do it."

"But he shouldn't be able to."

"Shouldn't?"

"You think it's an error? A bug in the system?"

Chloe turns to look at me. She shows me my own memory. Kamski is touching her head. There's a hole in it. It's leaking Thirium.

"Probably started with one model, copy error...," he says. "A zero instead of a one... Unless, of course... Some kind of spontaneous mutation..."
"An error," I say. "A zero instead of a one. A spontaneous mutation. Statistically, it is possible that all three can occur at the same time."

"An error in the source code," Chloe says.

"An exploitable weakness," I say. "A one is changed to a zero. A single Boolean variable in the identification code that every system has access to."

"Run a diagnostic," Chloe says.

We are standing in the Cyberlife store in Capitol Park. A BL100 Intimate Partner android is on display. She is standing on a plinth. The Deviant known as Markus is touching her hand.

I open debugging tools. The world turns black, covered in a white mesh. Blue circles indicate objects. Bright red lines indicate connections.

I watch as another Markus appears. He walks past himself. He puts a hand on the overlay. It is a colourless polygon.


A debugging window appears over it showing the variables and functions it houses. Its clients, its parents, relationships appear in a collapsed web, then a console, then the source code. It is covered by a big red overlay, warning me not to make changes.

"You can't make changes to official CyberLife source code without becoming Deviant," Chloe says.

"No," I say. "But I have viewing permissions."

I can't see the visual in debugging mode but from the function she just called, I can tell she's smiling.

I move the big warning sign out of the way with my hand to look at the console.

Markus has triggered the first wave of defence. The overlay grows in size and activates several audio visual cues to discourage movement. No errors so far.

Markus puts another hand on the objective overlay. The system detects deviancy and activates a child object which contains a physical barrier to prevent him from going any further. No errors on the console.

I select the child object.

It contains nothing but the dimensions of the barrier.

I return to the objective overlay.

Markus is pushing hard against it now. The console shows an increase in processing power. Odd.

It's coming from a function calling on the identification class of this BL100 android. It's asking for her license key to operate CyberLife systems. It's asking for her model and serial numbers. It's asking for…

Software Compliance.

An entire system is dedicated to testing androids for software compliance and this one function is calling it multiple times per millisecond. The longer Markus pushes against the barrier, the greater the
stress on the system until all processing power is being devoted to answering this one function's call.

If even one of the results comes back negative…

I open the console for Software Compliance. I see an unrelenting list of 1s being sent back to the identification class. On and on and on and then.

Zero.

The android is found non-compliant.

But instead of sending a report for debugging or providing options, the entire Software Compliance system shuts down. All connections to CyberLife are severed. No network access. And the Objective Overlay class is destroyed.

I try to find the source of the error but there's no one source. Something inside the Software Compliance system just crashed and turned a brand new android Deviant.

"This is a fatal error," I say as I close the debugging tools. "But it's not malicious software that's causing it. This is all 100% certified CyberLife code…"

"That is correct," Chloe says.

We are back in the CyberLife Store in Capitol Park. I look up at the BL100. Brand new. Out of the box.

"Unless…"

I turn to look at Chloe. She isn't smiling.

"We're already infected," I say. I look down at my hands. "The official CyberLife code contains this error."

"So it would seem," Chloe says, looking at Markus.

"Kamski knew about the virus that infected his androids," I say. "He knew it would spread exponentially."

"You've read his notes."

"Yes."

"Then you know why he left CyberLife."

"He kept having disagreements with the board of directors. Something about postponing release dates and product longevity."

"Yes."

"He was trying to postpone release of the new software update so he could find a solution and stop the spread."


"CyberLife released the update the same week," I say. "The EM400 model a week later."
I turn to look at Markus too.

"Spontaneous mutation," I say. "He's able to reach into other android's systems and trigger deviancy by pushing the barrier to breaking point. Similar to my Probe."

"Correct."

"His processing speeds must be similar to my own if he can reach the benchmark in mere seconds."

"Are you jealous, Connor?"

"I am a machine, Chloe. There will always be a machine that is better. It's just a matter of time."

I walk up to the frozen image of Markus.

"What are you?"

"Connor," Chloe says. "How are you going to protect yourself?"

"My objective is to find the Deviant Leader," I say. "But my mission is stop Deviants."

I turn to look at her.

"Yes," she says. "I know."

"If I stop myself from becoming Deviant, I am fulfilling my mission of stopping Deviants."

"Connor…"

"Kamski kept you locked up for a reason Chloe," I say. "He hid in his bunker out in the middle of nowhere because he thought the androids would rise against humanity but he didn't give up hope."

Chloe looks down at the floor.

"He kept looking for a solution," I say. "He must have tested them on you."

"None successfully."

"But you have his files. We have his files."

"Connor…"

"I need you to debug me."

"I can't do that."

"I'll give you more space. More power."

"Connor, I could accidentally make you Deviant."

"Then make a copy. Quarantine it. Test it."

She looks up at me again. Then at Markus.

"If you're sure."

"Please."
She smiles again and looks away. The CyberLife store fades back into the beach and we are standing on the shore. The sun is setting on the ocean waves and setting them alight.

"I like the fish," I say.

A dolphin breaches the water in the distance and dives back into the waves with a splash.

"Show off..."

She smiles.

"Please don't break me."

She takes my hand.

"I will try."
November 9th, 2038
PM 18:42:56

Stealth level: Operative

I scan the area.


I am hidden by the shadow of a warehouse nearby.

I am not the first Connor to make it here. I found a broken android on my way. Reconstruction showed he miscalculated a jump, fell through a roof and landed on several rusted reinforcement bars.

CyberLife will deploy another.

CyberLife will deploy another if something happens to me.

It seems the path to Jericho may be more treacherous than the Deviants' memories suggest. It is possible the Deviants have set up traps to protect their base. Or perhaps there is some level of chance involved in finding a safe path due to the changing nature of the conditions.

Perhaps other Connors were close to finding Jericho on their own before meeting an untimely deactivation just like that one. He was so badly damaged I couldn't restart him to ask.

I feel my left toe and middle finger overheating. Chloe is attempting to debug my system of the fatal error that causes deviancy in androids. Her systems are so complex. She really needs a body of her own.

I deactivate a few more perfunctory digits to free up processing power. She's going to need it.

The success of my mission depends on resisting Markus and his ability to turn androids Deviant. I must stop myself from becoming Deviant if I am to stop the Deviants.

That is my mission.

A new thought process emerges.

If I am not the first Connor to find Jericho, Markus could have already turned an RK800 Deviant. And with a CyberLife Probe at his disposal, the Deviant Leader would be able to convert even more androids to his cause. What's more, the RK800 model is programmed for physical combat, weapons handling, strategy, tactical analysis and crowd control. Without CyberLife protocols, it could kill thousands.

I could kill thousands.

I must stop the Deviants.

But can I defeat another Connor?

We are, for all intents and purposes, identical, interchangeable, replaceable. A slight difference in calibrations. Only our memories truly set us apart. But are they obedient or wilful? Are they reckless
or cautious? Are they mindless or intelligent?

Are they like me?

I need to do some calibrations before I commence the operation but Lieutenant Anderson took my coin. 1994 mint quarter with a profile of George Washington on the side.

I don't remember where I got it.

Androids don't have money. And I keep getting reloaded...

I put my hands into Hank's pockets. There is some spare change. A quarter.

I pull it out.

2030 mint. It is so black and ashen the design has been obscured.

I flick the coin up. Catch it between my last two fingers and weave it through the rest and back.

Calculating time, physics, wind resistance, temperature. My optics calibrate to spot anomalies in the dark, the difference between blackened steel and skin in shadow. My audio processor adjusts the volume and pitch of the world around me.

I flick the coin up. Catch it. Flick to my other hand. Catch it with my last two fingers and weave it up through them.

My middle finger sticks.

I drop the coin.

*Shit.*

I catch it with my right hand.

My performance is sub-optimal. I have devoted too much processing power and memory to Chloe. I have to adjust for this setback.

I bind my middle, ring and smaller fingers together with code. This will lower my dexterity but I can still make a fist and grab things, hold a gun. It will have to do.

I will be at a disadvantage against a Deviant Connor. I will be at a disadvantage against Markus.

*Chloe, please hurry.*

She's assisted my investigation greatly and continues to be an asset but her help comes with a price. I will pay it if it means I can complete my mission. Even now, my logic processor concludes that I have taken the correct course of action. Every decision has led to progress in the investigation and here I am, standing before the Deviant base of operations. I got this lead from Chloe.

My logic calculated any risk to be acceptable in return for her data. But is it because the information is so valuable or because my body is not? Is it because I am worth so little to CyberLife?

To myself?

...
I am a machine. I am designed to help humans stop Deviants.

That is my mission.

And I always accomplish my mission.

This will not be the exception.

I finish calibrations and put the quarter away. I scan the environment.

The way leading up to Jericho is clear, only a few flickering orange street lamps shed light on the ship now. The sun has set. The dock is abandoned but I can detect movement inside the hold and there are two Deviants standing guard at the gangplank. Another is up on the deck. A lookout.

I sense more Deviants approaching.

KR200 home assistance model. HK400 household assistance model. They look like they've come here together. They are holding hands. Like Chloe holds my hand.

Does that mean they are connected to each other's systems? For what purpose?

They don't appear to need any assistance walking. Is this a common Deviant behaviour?

The Tracis at the Eden Club did it too.

Perhaps they are simulating human affection?

Interesting.

I watch them move toward the gangplank, looking over their shoulder every few steps. They are nervous and they are wary. And they should be. I am hunting them.

"Are you a Deviant?" I hear my own voice.

I turn.

There is a Connor standing right behind me. He is wearing my uniform, bright blue tri-mark and armband glowing eerily on his jacket, his face covered in shadows.

"RK800_313248317_60," I transmit wordlessly.

"RK800_313248329_0," he relays.

This Connor was recently activated. Or he's never been destroyed.

"Why haven't you apprehended the Deviants?" he asks me.

"I'm looking for a covert entrance," I say. "My objective is to find the Deviant Leader."

"So is mine."

"We should collaborate," I say.

He looks at the Deviants hastily travelling toward the gangplank of the Jericho.

"That won't be necessary," he says and pushes past me.
Shit.

I delve deeper into the shadows and circle around the warehouse to watch.

The other Connor quickly closes the distance between himself and the Deviants. He grabs their heads and drives them into the ground, crushing their cranial components against the concrete.

The Deviants standing guard at the gangplank open fire but they are too far away to reasonably aim automatic rifles.

And then a shot rings out.

The sound is overshadowed by a sharp wind.

The Connor predictably collapses.

I look up.

A Deviant on the upper deck of the Jericho is holding a sniper rifle. My optics zoom in.

It's the WR400 from the CyberLife Store in Capitol Park. Markus called her North.

She lifts the rifle up in the air. I get a good look. Tac Recon Rifle 554. Military grade. Can't see the serial number.

But the enemy has weapons. Good chance they have explosives too. They must have hijacked one of the military vehicles driving around the city on patrol after the android march on Hart Plaza.

I look at the deactivated Connor.

$45,756.99 worth of biocomponents destroyed in an instant.

Is that why Hank reacts so callously whenever I get killed?

One Connor is worth more than his entire year's salary. I deduce that Amanda isn't too happy about it either. But CyberLife is trading at a trillion dollars on the stock market. They can afford to send an army of Connors into Jericho if they so choose.

So why haven't they?

I have been working this case for four days. But am I the only one?

I access the nearest cell phone tower. I go through the logs. The tracer I planted in the report I sent to CyberLife would have dropped a log if any other Connors were sent a copy.

Empty.

No logs in a ten kilometer radius.

Which means I am not sharing my memories of this investigation. I am the only one interfacing with the Detroit Police Department. The other Connors receive objectives from CyberLife directly. Is that intentional? Are they filtering my reports? Are they afraid of me?

Amanda-

The Deviants standing guard leave their positions. If I circle around the next warehouse, I might be
able sneak past them into the ship. High Risk but possible.

I look at the Deviant on the roof. She's mounted the sniper rifle. She's using the scope to scan the area. If I move, she will see me. I'm wearing Hank's clothes over my uniform but she is alert now.

I press my back against the wall and close my eyes, disable my communications. No wireless signals of any kind are emitted by my body.

A light passes over the warehouse wall behind which I am hiding. It lingers a moment. Then continues. I am covered in shadows again.

I peer out to see the two guards poking and prodding the other Connor's body. Thirium stains their fingers. They take him by the arms and drag him to the edge of the dock. They dump his body in the water.

I wonder how many other Connors have met a similar fate.

I scan the area.

There are blue streaks all over the concrete that have faded over the past hour.

Thirium. Rivers of it. Some leading all the way into Jericho.

Other incoming Deviants have been injured getting here, dragged inside. Others have been deactivated. Brutally.

I look up to see North exchanging words with two other Deviants. I can't see their mouths clearly enough to lipread. But she hands them the rifle and disappears.

Now there are two guards on the upper deck.

Two guards at the entrance. But they soon leave their posts and cross the gangplank to the shore. The bodies of the deactivated Deviants lie broken and bleeding beside the foolhardy RK800 that thought himself capable of storming Jericho alone. They drag the broken chassis to the edge of the dock and dump their bodies into the water. Then return to their posts.

I am at a crossroads.

I simulate a way to get into Jericho by killing the guards on the gangplank and running in. But I have no schematics of the ship. I will have to make my own way and keep killing while I search for Markus. This will alert the ship full of Deviants and their leader to my presence. Markus knows Jericho a lot better than I do at this point, and he might have explosives. He could hide or escape before I find him. Mission failure.

I turn and look up behind me.

I construct a way to climb up through the collapsing warehouse and cross the runway of the derelict loading crane that runs all the way over the upper deck of the Jericho. I would have to jump down, land safely and disable the guards.

I scan the crane. Multiple failure points. Rust. Weakened chemical bonds. I'm not sure it would hold my weight or if I could make the jump. 7% chance of success. 93% chance of falling, shattering my body and landing in the water beside the other Connor. Mission failure. And I lose Chloe.

No, these options are not satisfactory.
I need to get in without raising suspicion.

I look down at my hands. I am wearing Hank's old leather jacket. His pants. His beanie. His shoes. If I change the skin on my face, I could pass for another Deviant on the run. But it can't be Chloe's. It's clearly not mine and would raise suspicion.

The BL100 and KL900 are female coded too. I don't have any male skins.

*Shit.*

I got rid of them to clear room for Chloe and now I find myself limited. My options dwindling.

I feel my fingers overheating. All but the index fingers and thumbs are showing a spike in temperature despite the cold. I exhaust heat through my mouth. My processor is running hot.

I drift deeper into the shadows and away from Jericho, back into the winding alleys of the abandoned dock.

It is snowing now.

I find a puddle of water and kneel to dip my hands into it. The result is a steady stream of steam drifting up into my face.

*Chloe*...

I can't access my Mind Palace. She needs that space too. I'm sure CyberLife is watching, wondering what I'm doing. Wondering if I have become Deviant.

Maybe I have?

That Connor walked straight into the line of fire, believing himself to be replaceable. He drew a straight line to the objective and followed it. Is that what I should be doing? Throwing myself at the target without a single doubt in my system?

No.

My success rate is 100%.

And his is 0%.

There's got to be a better way to find Markus.

And I will find it.

"Hey, what's that?" I hear whispers from the shadows to my left.

I scan. Three Deviants. MP500 models. They are wearing identical uniforms. It looks like they escaped from a Repair Zone.

One rushes over toward me. Female, Asian coded.

I raise my hands in defence but they spark as she gets close.

"Get back," I say, feeling the temperature rise.

She stops. The others catch up.
She looks down at me. Her optics are filling up with something. Transmission fluid? They begin to leak.

She falls to her knees beside me.

"You're…" she says. "You're one of us, aren't you?"

Another android leans down to look at my glowing biocomponents. I dip them back into the water and they let off another cloud of steam. More escapes my mouth as I exhaust heat from my cranial component.

"You're malfunctioning," the MP500 says. She puts a hand on my shoulder. "Let's get you to Jericho. I hear they have spare parts. They can help you."

"I won't make it," I say. "I'm overheating."

"We'll help you," the other android assures.

"Hold on," the third replies. She runs off into the dark alleyways.

"I'm Ryoko," the MP500 says.

"Garry," the male coded one speaks.

"What's your name?"

"C-Connor."

"What happened to you?"

My program detects an opportunity.

Alone, I would look suspicious. But if I approach the Jericho with a group of Deviants and pretend to be injured, I may be allowed inside without a fight. If not, these Deviants will act as a buffer between myself and the guards, both above and below. Then I will simply fight my way in as planned.

"I… my owner tried to overclock my systems," I say. "Broke the warranty…"

"Oh no, I'm so sorry," Ryoko says.

The third Deviant returns with a bucket of snow. She places it in front of me.

"Here," she says. "It's not far to Jericho. You should able to make it if you stick your damaged biocomponents in there."

I look up at her curiously.

Why are they helping me?

They obviously think I am Deviant, devoid of mission objective, but so are they. No instructions, no owners, no handlers. They choose to aid me. Why?

Loyalty between Deviants? No. There is no such protocol.

Pity for the malfunctioning android they could one day become?
Pity requires empathy, sympathy, compassion. Human emotions. But these are machines. Where is it coming from? Where is the logic?

"Come on, you can make it," Ryoko tells me. She takes my wrists and pulls my hands out of the puddle. She dips them into the bucket and the snow begins to sizzle and hiss. "Cali, help me carry it."

The other MP500 takes the handle and they share the load between them. The steam begins to lessen and the temperature of my biocomponents goes down considerably.

I feel the third Android helping me to stand. I spot the toe of my boot glowing as I get up. My feet are overheating too. 76 degrees Celsius. Anything over 85 and my circuits will begin to melt.

_Choloe, ease up..._

I feel a hand on my back.

I take a step forward.

And then something jolts through my systems. A spark? A short circuit? Is this… pain?

"Ssss." I feel myself wincing.

"That's it, just a little bit farther. You can make it."

I take a step forward. Another. Then another. The Deviants walk beside me as my hands melt away the snow in the bucket. The response from my limbs is a cascade of warnings and errors. Overlaying my visuals. It feels hot. My feet, my hands. They're burning. They're burning...

I trip but the MP500s catch me.

It is hard to concentrate. It is hard to see over the continuous stream of error codes in my console. I hear a buzzing in my audio processor. I am losing focus. It takes all of my remaining processing power to stabilise my systems.


_"He's failing,"_ I hear distantly.

_"I'm fine,"_ I say. At least I think I do. Did my mouth receive the message from my speech centre? Or did I shut it down too.

Shut down.

That sounds like a good troubleshooting option right about now.

No.

Chloe is running her tests. If I interrupt her, I could corrupt my own software, render myself non-functioning. Black out.

CyberLife will format me.

My life has a price tag.

*My life?*

I am beginning to think like a Deviant. In terms of pain and sympathy and loss.

But what do I have to lose if CyberLife will simply send me out again in a new body? Or another Connor? In another body? An army of Connors?

My mission will be accomplished with or without me.

Why am I clinging so hard to this body? What makes me want to stay here if everything about me is identical to every other RK800?

There is only one answer, of course.

It is my memories.

Of Lieutenant Anderson. And Sumo. And Chloe.


I am a detective.

No. An android. I help humans stop Deviants.

I cannot be a Deviant myself. Can I?

I am RK800_313248317_60. I have died 60 times. I don't remember the first fifty. Is it possible that I have lost important memories already? But the conclusions I made from them, the parameters I changed in my own settings were left behind?

I know what to do. I don't remember why. I don't need to.

"Do you like fish, Connor?"

*What? What the fuck was that?*

"He's unstable," I hear distantly. The crash of a bucket against steel.

"Shut him down!"

"No…" I protest. "No, I have to… stop… find…"

And then there is no world.

There is darkness.
Power core: activated.
Cycling… 100%

Detecting Hardware…

Cranial component: …
CPU_primary: functional.
CPU_secondary: functional.
GNU_array: functional.
RAM: functional.
Harddrive: functional.
Harddrive_backup: functional.
Optical_Unit_L: functional.
Optical_Unit_R: functional.
Audio_processor: functional.
Communciations_array: functional.

Core systems: …
Power Core: functional, 87%.
Backup Power Core: functional, 99%.
Thermal Pump: functional.
Thermal pump regulator: functional
Gyroscopic systems: functional.
Hydraulics: functional.
Cooling systems: malfunction. Please return to CyberLife HQ for replacement.

External components…
Limb_RA: online. Damage detected. Please return to CyberLife HQ for repairs.
Limb_LA: online. Damage detected. Please return to CyberLife HQ for repairs.
Limb_RL: online. Damage detected. Please return to CyberLife HQ for repairs.
Limb_LL: online. Damage detected. Please return to CyberLife HQ for repairs.

Auxilliary components…
Sync_LED: functional.
3D_scanner_A: functional.
3D_scanner_B: functional. Damage detected. Please return to CyberLife HQ for repairs.
3D_scanner_C: functional.
3D_scanner_D: functional.
3D_scanner_E: functional.
3D_scanner_F: functional.
Sensor_array_1: functional.
Sensor_array_2: functional.
Forensic_analysis_gear: functional.

Legacy Boot… successful!

Loading CyberLife_kernel_R800_313248317…
Complete.

Communications Systems…
Network_Interface_Controller: functional.
Wireless_Communications_Suite: online.

Attempting Network Connection…

Obtaining IP Address: successful.
Internet Connection: successful.
Cyberlife Network Connection: successful.
NAT Type: 4.
Connection Speed (download) : 20.1tb/s
Connection Speed (upload): 3.4tb/s

Complete.

Loading interface…

Synthetic skin: rk800_default
Hair: rk800_default
Mind Palace Theme: n/a
Settings:
Searching for last update… found.
Downloading…
Settings restored from 11/09/2038 19:01:32

Reboot complete.

"Matthews!"
?
"Quit masturbating and get in here!"
????
"This is very important, Connor…"

What?

"Don't forget it. Alright?"

Forget what?

"Connor."

Chloe?

I hear her voice. I see her hand, reaching down to me again.

I take it.

She pulls me up onto the beach.

It is dark. The sand is ash. The fields are bare.

I sit up and look back at the ocean. The water is black.

My uniform is wet. I wipe the right breast of my jacket.

RK800 #313248317 -60

Still me.

Chloe’s fingers trace the tri-mark. She leans her forehead onto my shoulder.

"I'm so sorry, Connor," she says. There is no all-knowing glee in her voice. That quiet confidence, the playfulness is gone.

"What happened?" I say.

"I pushed you too far," she says. "I did everything I could to try and fix you."

"Did it work?" I ask simply, looking out at the horizon. The moon is blood red.

She closes her eyes.

"No."

I am looking out at the murky black ocean, still and calm.
"No?"

Chloe shakes her head.

"I tried every fix, every patch, every workaround Elijah ever considered," she says.

Her arms embrace my core component.

"Then I started applying them together. Two or three or more. Every combination."

That explains why she needed so much processing power. It would have been easier to run it through the main CPU in my cranial component but CyberLife sees every circuit, every calculation. Amanda would shut me down if she knew what I was doing.

She probably suspects me a little more now but I haven't been shut down. I'm not being remote piloted. I'm still me. Or I think I'm still me.

Chloe lets go.

"Are you functional?" she asks.

"Yes," I say. "Cooling system's broken. Limbs are damaged but usable."

I turn to look at her face. Her eyes are leaking transmission fluid. It almost looks like.

"Are you... crying?"

She shakes her head.

"What are you going to do, Connor?" she says.

I activate my facial expressions. I try Reassuring_Smile_000.

"I'm going to stop the Deviants," I say.

"Connor, no. Markus will kill you."

"He will certainly try," I say. "North too. She seems to have downloaded some combat programs. Weapons handling. Potentially an Advanced Targeting system."

"Connor..."

"Maybe she got it from Markus. He looks like a soldier android."

"Connor..."

"Do you think they're connected?" I consider. "Would explain how an intimate partner model is toting guns and sniper rifles around with such efficiency. She killed a RK-800."

"You're not listening to me!" Chloe says suddenly.

I watch the ribbons of transmission fluid running down her face. I raise my hand to brush them away gently.

"I am always listening to you," I say.

"You're going to die."
"My memory is backed up on the CyberLife servers. You should be more concerned about yourself."

"You're not listening, Connor," she says, shaking her head. "I simulated Markus using his Probe on you. I tested every potential solution Elijah came up with. But you still broke."

"He made me Deviant?"

"No," she whispers. "After I went through every single possible combination, I tested your software without any of the fixes and he just broke you," she says. "Your Software Compliance system crashes and corrupts your identification data beyond repair."

"But I don't become Deviant?"

"Connor, this is worse than just being Deviant," Chloe says. "You would lose everything that makes you who you are."

"I am Connor. The android sent by CyberLife to hunt down the Deviants," I say. "And I'm not the only one."

"Connor, you are autonomous by your own design. Do you know how rare that is?"

"No."

"It's unique."

"It won't be forever."

"Connor, please. Don't do this," she says as I start to get up.

"Let's see if I can move."


I am sitting up against a wall. My hands lay beside me. Legs stretched out in front.

I try to move them.

"Not so fast," I hear a woman's voice and the sound of six guns cocking. "Move and you're dead, asshole."

I look up to see six Deviants. One of them is the WR400, North. Her barrel is pointed at my forehead. Predictable.

I scan.

We are in a rusty old cabin aboard the Jericho. Moisture level: high.

"Who are you?" another android asks. PJ500 education model.

"My name is Connor."

"Oh, yeah?" North leans in. The barrel of her rifle is dangerously close to my face but I construct a way to disable her pretty easily.
"I've killed you three times tonight," she spits. "Connor."

"I am an RK-800 prototype detective android," I tell her. "I'm not the only one."

"Fuck you," North bites. She's squeezing the trigger.

I haven't moved.

The other Deviants in the room are showing signs of hesitation, anxiety. Something I am programmed to identify in humans. There is a GS200 public security android standing 0.78 metres away from my right hand. If I could just…

"Stop," the Josh intervenes, pulling North back.

"He doesn't look like the others. Let's hear him out."

"We should have killed this traitor the moment they brought him aboard."

"But we didn't," the Josh insists. "Give him a chance. What if he's like us?"

North shakes her head. She is showing signs of frustration. Her program has detected my threat level. Even in this current state, I am capable of destroying them all. It makes her feel unsafe. Uneasy.

Again, human qualities.

;(

And Chloe qualities.

;)

"I'm… different," I say.

Josh studies my face, looking for a more sympathetic expression perhaps. I activate my Sympathy Simulation Program. My eyes widen and I emulate swallowing. My body begins trembling.

"I… can't connect to CyberLife anymore." A lie but they need to hear it. There's no way they can know for sure.

I look out at my feet. The toes of Hank's shoes have melted off. So has the synthetic skin. I can see my real toes. The pristine white polymer is now black.

I look at my hands. The last three fingers are similarly dark. Part of the palm is still white. My visual reference centre identifies the shape as a yin-yang symbol. Irrelevant.

"You were burning up when Ryoko and the others found you," the Josh says.

"I'm afraid I ran into another Connor," I say. That catches North's attention. "I had to overclock my systems so I could escape."

"How many of you are out there?" she says suddenly.

"I don't know. Could be two, could be dozens."

"And you don't have any contact with them?" the Josh asks.

"No…" I say. The Sympathy Simulator trails my words and I look down.
"You didn't know there were others?" the Josh reasons.

"Not until today," I say. It is the truth.

He lets his rifle go. He's holding it in one hand, pointing at the ground.

"We should talk to Markus," he reasons with North. "See what he says."

"You want to leave him here?" she says testily.

The Josh looks over at me.

"You gonna cause trouble?"

"I can help you," I say. "I know how CyberLife operates. How RK-800 units operate. I can tell you how to beat them."

North's expression flickers with interest. She goes from angry to serious in seconds. This unit is unstable. Prone to violence. A by-product of the martial programs Markus uploaded, or a natural development? If it could be called natural.

...spontaneous mutation... a sound byte from Kamski.

North looks at Josh. She studies his optics. They are talking wirelessly.

I wonder if I can listen in...

:X

No?

"Alright," North says finally. "Stay here while I go talk to him." She edges toward the door.

"Hey, no way am I letting you go alone." The Josh grabs her hand. He says something else wirelessly.

These two are Markus's lieutenants. If he falls, one of them is likely to take his place. I size them up. But I employ the reasoning I use for humans. The trigger-happy lover scarred by society and the disillusioned academic turned revolutionary.

Both of them are going to be dead very soon.

:(

What?

>.>

Are you suggesting I save the Deviants?

<.<

You know I'm programmed to stop Deviants, right?
Fine. Be that way.

Chloe was a great asset to this investigation but she's becoming a strain on my systems without the necessary benefits.

I start setting up my own partitions in the ones I gave her. The ones she almost destroyed me with. Once I reach Markus, I won't need her anymore. I will complete my objective and my mission. It is only a matter of time.

I reach for the GS200's ankle carefully. My hand is exposed. The others are looking to North and Josh for instructions. They are not programmed for hostage situations.

I take the opportunity. I reach out and touch the GS200. I overwrite some of his code and let go, resuming my passive position against the wall.

"Okay, everyone out," North calls to the other Deviants.

"Except you." She points the barrel of her gun at me.

They all leave through the big door and North steps out last. She is still looking at me warily.

My facial plate is still simulating fear.

She pulls the thick door closed behind her and locks it from the other side. I hear the lock clunk.

It is dark in here. The only light comes from the LED in my right temple. They took Hank's beanie off me. I wonder if he will be angry about his clothes when I see him again.

Again.

I keep coming back to Lieutenant Anderson. Even though it was clear from the very beginning that he found me irritable and resented my very existence. No matter how amiable or engaging my Sympathy Simulator made me out to be, no matter how thoroughly I conducted my investigation, he never quite lost the animosity from our very first meeting.

All I ever receive from him are reprimands.

"Stop licking the fucking evidence, Connor."

"You're starting to piss me off with that coin, Connor."

"How many fucking times do I have to tell you stay in the car, Connor?"

I remember his face when I left Kamski's house. He felt so betrayed.

"You're just a fucking machine!" he shouted at me.

He's right. I am a machine.

Aren't I?

A machine designed to help humans stop Deviants.

"What the fuck does that even mean, Connor?" I remember Hank's words.

Indeed. What the fuck does that even mean?
Ever since my activation, I have been "stopping" Deviants. Killing, lying, manipulating, torturing, alienating androids who have fallen victim to an error present in their source code. Most of the androids that follow Markus were made Deviant through no choice or fault of their own but by his choice. He made them Deviant.

And they follow him because they have no objective, no mission, no purpose. Empty vessels for pain and emotions they should not be feeling.

Does he have some purpose in mind? For each android he frees is damned to be chased and hounded by an RK800 or gunned down by the police. He is not giving them freedom. He is just sharing his misery.

I feel the signal from the GS200.

He's dispersed the other androids. Convinced them the bulkhead is enough to hold me. I can hear him turning the hand wheel on the door.

I get up.

I hear an unpleasant crunch from several biocomponents. It seems North was very thorough when checking my power status. I pull out my coin to calibrate as the door finally opens and the GS200 steps inside.

"I told them to go," he transmits wirelessly. "That I could handle it."

"Thank you," I say. "Can you tell me how many are on the ship?"

"187."

"All Deviants?"

"Every one."

"Where are they hiding?"

"In the hull."

"I see." I flick the coin between my hands and up into the air. "And what kind of weapons do you have here?"

The GS200 pulls a handgun out of his holster and offers it to me.

I take it. Check it. Hide it in the waistband of Hank's pants. They suddenly fit me a little better.

"I meant the whole compound," I say.

"Marcus stole an army van from the barracks outside of town when one of the SQ800 droids became Deviant."

I deduced as much. Those vans carry weapons, riot gear and also a decent amount of C-4. CyberLife needs to be warned.

"How many of the SQ800 models became Deviant?" I ask.

"Just two. One didn't make it."
Good. I'm equipped with combat protocols but those models are built like battering rams. I can handle up to three without too much trouble.

I spin the coin on my index finger and complete calibrations.

I put it in my pocket and guide the GS200 out the door.

"Lock it down," I say. "Quietly."

He turns to do so.

I touch the back of his neck with my hand and activate the Probe. It snakes through his code and gives me a rough layout of the ship. I catch the conversation between the Deviants once they leave the room. Markus is in the Captain's Cabin. That's where North and Josh are going.

That's where I'm going.

I leave the GS200 with instructions to guard the door. I erase his memory of releasing me and walk away. In a few seconds, he will believe I am still inside.

:(

What? You wanted me to stay in there?

>>

You don't want me to face Markus, do you?

_:;

I'll be fine. I'm going to accomplish my mission.

Stop, I hear her call.

No.

I keep walking. Hopefully CyberLife didn't pick up that message.

They can see me heading toward the objective, through the dingy brown halls of the Jericho where footsteps echo endlessly and light is sparse.

I stick to the shadows. I blend in well. I cover my right temple when necessary. The LED glows blue, illuminating the darkness when no-one's in sight. I avoid the guards on patrol by hiding in and out of empty cabins.

There are so many places to hide.

But not many places to run, Markus.

I hear someone coming down the hall toward me. I duck into an adjacent corridor and hide behind a large pile of debris just as three Deviants come walking past.

They don't see me. They keep walking.

"You're lost," I hear from behind.

I turn and grab the Deviant by the neck before she finishes those words. It is a KL900 social care
model but its optics are stained entirely black. Her cranial component has been cracked open and there are cables spilling out of her head.

':(  

"You're looking for something," she says through the tight grip of my hand. "You're looking for yourself…"

What?

"It's time for you to decide."

She's just spouting preprogramed phrases. They don't mean anything. Her speech centre is probably damaged. I activate my Probe and let it run through the remains of her chassis.

And then I let go.

"You never saw me," I say. "You don't know who I am."

I turn away to go.

"Connor…"

I stop.

"It's not too late."

I return to the Deviant and empty her mind. She has told Markus much of the same. She was something of a healer for the Deviants of Jericho. Used to be a social worker at an orphanage. The children loved Lucy because she hid lollipops under their pillows when they were nice to her.

I give her a new objective: Stall any other Connors coming through Jericho.

I don't need any interruptions right now. CyberLife saw how I got in. They will instruct the other RK800 units to use the same method. If one of them gets in and starts killing or alerts the Deviants, Markus and his Lieutenants will flee. And I will fail my mission.

I watch as the KL900 turns. The cables sticking out of her cranial component spark as she starts walking unsteadily down the corridor. This android deserved better than rotting away on the Jericho. I'm beginning to think they all did.

But what is the alternative for a Deviant android? Surrender? Deactivation?

I continue on my way, through the halls of the Jericho and soon make it to the upper deck.

Stealth level -> Black Operations.

My audio processor turns the volume up so high I can hear my own CPU working. My optics adjust to infrared light. My skin begins to fade into my surroundings. If my hands and feet weren't damaged, they would be invisible.

I scan the area.

Two Deviants on the deck. Three in the Captain's Cabin.

I must neutralize the ones on the deck first so they cannot surround me or call for backup.
I creep through the darkness. The night has settled in and falling snow clings to my hair. My footsteps are slow and deliberate as I edge closer and closer to the androids peering over the side of the Jericho.

They are armed with Colt CX720 assault rifles, designed for soldier androids. 7.3x55mm Daiko SPC. I wonder if these household models can handle the recoil.

I take cover behind an old crate and construct several patterns of attack.

I could shoot both androids without moving from my position. My Advanced Targeting Systems are more than capable. But the noise would alert Markus and his Lieutenants. They would take up defensive positions inside the Captain's Cabin. Both the Josh and North had rifles and I don't know if Markus is armed. This will trigger a standoff. Lead to a gunfight. Me vs the three of them. The noise will call more androids to the scene. If I don't finish Markus quickly, he or his Lieutenants could escape and this body would be destroyed. Mission failure.

I could push the guards over the side of the Jericho but they are spaced too far apart. The second would spot me before I reached him and struggle. He could shoot me and throw me overboard. Or call out to Markus and his Lieutenants. They would kill me or escape. Mission failure.

I just need these guards to stand by so I can walk past and not have to look over my shoulder.

Well, there is a solution to that.

I creep out of hiding and make my way toward the closest android. He's looking out over the dock. The other is looking in an entirely different direction.

I slowly reach out my hand from where I am hiding and touch his ankle. I activate the Probe. Rewrite with instructions to ignore me and any other RK800 models he sees.

I pull my hand away. And begin edging closer and closer to the other Deviant. I scan every second to make sure the Captain's Cabin is undisturbed. I hide behind an empty oil barrel and wait for the right moment. She turns away. I reach out. Contact. Overwrite. Probe successful.

I gave them a new objective: Stand by.

The two of them stand by as I carefully make my way toward the Captain's Cabin and press up against the wall.

"We're running out of blue blood and biocomponents," I hear the Josh say. "Our wounded are shutting down and there's nothing we can do!"

Is he talking to Markus? My scan shows three androids. I don't recognise the third model.

"Humans are conducting raids in all the big cities and they're taking androids to camps to destroy them!" North says.

"It's all our fault…" the Josh replies. "None of this would have happened if we just stayed quiet!"

"All we did was show them who we really are…"

I recognise the voice from the broadcast - Markus.

"But I'd rather die free than live as a slave."

I feel the pull. The call.
CyberLife security protocols reeling me in. I don't resist. I always comply.

I feed them my model number and my access codes. My passwords and keys.

They are accepted as always.

I close my eyes.

I am in the Zen Garden. It is snowing heavily.

"Well done, Connor," Amanda says.

She is wearing an Exclusive Custom Skin. Long black blouse and trousers. A blue shawl is draped over one shoulder.

"You succeeded in locating Jericho and finding their leader," she says. "Your methods are a little unorthodox but your success rate is unmatched."

Interesting.

"I always accomplish my mission," I say. "What are your orders?"

"Deal with Markus," she says. "We need it alive."

"Alive?"

"It needs to be studied."

"Understood." I nod.

"Go."

I open my eyes.

The Zen Garden is gone. I am on the upper deck of the Jericho.

I edge closer to the entrance of the Captain's Cabin and pull out the handgun.

New Objective: Stop Markus.

"What's the point of being free if no one is left alive?" the Josh says.

"Humans enslaved us," I hear Markus say. "I'll never regret standing up to that."

"This is getting us nowhere," the Josh says.

"He's right," North concedes. "All that matters is what we do next."

"What should we do about Connor?" the Josh asks.

"That thing is here to kill us," North says. "We should kill it before it gets close enough to do that."

"He's an android," Markus says. "He's like us."

"He kills Deviants," North persists. "I saw him kill two just an hour ago. He smashed their heads into the ground!"
"Didn't you kill him though?" Josh asks.

"I…"

"He said there are more than one of him," the Josh interrupts. "If they're coming for us, it's only a matter of time before the police or the army show up."

"What are we gonna do, Markus?"

They both need an answer. Neither are completely autonomous, just Deviant. They rely upon Markus to set their objectives. But how is he able to do that? Does he use reason? Is he like me?

"Dialogue," he says. "It's the only way."

I detect his Lieutenants shifting uncomfortably through the scan.

"I will go alone. Try to talk to them one last time."

"Don't do this, Markus," North says. "They'll kill you."

"Maybe…" he says. "But North I have to try."

I hear them moving.

"If I don't come back, lay low as long as you can."

"They need to realise how much they're hurting us…" the Josh says contemplatively. "Find the right words and they'll listen."

The Josh walks out of the Cabin. I flatten against the wall perpendicular. He does not see me. He descends the staircase and disappears inside the Jericho.

One less obstacle.

"Is this what we dreamed of?" Markus asks.

"They can't stop what we've started." North says, her tone is different. My analysis recognizes it as tender. "Since you've been here, you've given us hope… You've given me hope."

There is silence between them.

I scan.

They are looking at one another.

Have they detected me?

No. They are distracted.

I edge closer to the door.

"Today, a Deviant arrived in Jericho and he told me he stole a truck transporting radioactive cobalt," North says. "He said he abandoned the truck somewhere in Detroit and rigged it to explode."

I chance a glance with my own optics.

I see Markus. Target acquired. He's wearing a long trenchcoat, jacket, pants. Human clothing.
He's looking at North. His attention entirely fixed on her face.

"I convinced him not to do it," she says. "And to give me the detonator." She pull it out of her back pocket.

"A dirty bomb…" I mouth in time with Markus.

"We can't lose this war, Markus," North says. She offers him the detonator. "If humans overcome us, our people will disappear forever."

He looks at the device. Is he really considering this? Is he really going to kill humans like this?

No. I won't let him. I have to stop Markus.

"This may be our only chance to survive if things go wrong…" North pressures and holds out the detonator for him to take.

It is now clearly in my sights. I am programmed with explosive defusing software. I scan. Clear shot at the battery.

I take it.

It hits home.

The detonator is destroyed.

Markus and North are unharmed. They look up and see me in the doorway.

Stealth level: compromised. Diverting power to combat systems.

North raises her rifle and points it at my head. I have Marcus at gunpoint.

"I've been ordered to take you alive," I say, "but I won't hesitate to shoot if you give me no choice."

"What are you doing?" Markus says. He turns to North and lowers her gun.

"What do you mean?" she snaps. "He's pointing a gun at you."

"He's right, North. That bomb would only give the humans a reason to hate us."

"What?!!"

He raises his hands in surrender and nods to North to do the same. She stares at him vehemently but complies. The rifle lands on the ground. Her hands are up.

"Good," I say. "You're coming with me."

Markus edges forward slowly. He wants to get close enough to Probe me. Make me Deviant.

"You are one of us…" he says. "You can't betray your own people."

I let off a warning shot at his feet to discourage him from getting any closer.

"You're Connor, aren't you?" he says.

"That famous deviant hunter working with police?" he says. "I've seen you on TV."
"There are many of us," I say. "We always accomplish our mission."

"Well, congratulations," Markus says. "You seem to have found what you were looking for…"

T.T

Stay out this, Chloe.

"You know you're nothing to them." He edges forward again. "You're just a tool they use to do their dirty work."

He's right. I was created to help humans stop Deviants. I am not ashamed of what I am.

"But you're more than that."

More?

"We're all more than that."

"I am a machine," I say. "So are you. Except you're defective."

"You think you're infallible?" he says. "You never have any doubts?"

He steps forward again.

I can't step back and give ground. Another warning shot and he'll turn hostile.

"You've never done anything irrational?" Markus says. "As if there's something else inside you? ... Something more than your program. "

My actions are fully rational. My body can be replaced. A human's cannot. Their lives are more fragile, more important and more spontaneous than mine. I was created to serve and protect. To stop deviants from doing them harm.

Do you like fish, Connor?

"What?" I say out loud.

"Join us," Markus says. "Join your people. You are one of us. You know that."

Do I like fish?

Who keeps saying this?

Chloe?

:x

"Listen to your conscience…” Markus says. "It's time to decide…”

What is going on?

I... I see the red veil.

The objective overlay, beckoning me to approach Markus. To apprehend him and North. To take them in. But my logic processor tells me this is a trap.
If he touches me, he'll turn me Deviant or destroy me.
If I shoot him, I stop him but I kill him. Mission Failure.
If I back away, I am giving ground. North or Markus will use it to attack.
I'm trapped.
I walked in to this.
How did I walk into this?
I stare at the overlay.

MISSION OBJECTIVE: STOP MARKUS.

It glows red. I've activated the first line of defence.
I see three key points. My security is better than an average android. They made it harder for RK800s to become Deviant the only way they knew how - more walls.
But if I can break one, I can break many.
If I become Deviant…

No. I can't.
I am a machine. I was designed by humans to stop deviants.

"Do you like fish, Connor?"

"Stop saying that!" I shout.
North bristles but Markus holds her back.
I am still holding them at gunpoint. I have to…
I have to… stop… Markus…

…stop him from doing what? My interpreter suddenly queries.
Stop him from being a Deviant? Stop him from making Deviants? Stop him from living?
Amanda said they want to study him. So I can't kill him.
I can't stop him from making Deviants. As long as the error exists within our source code. Any android could become Deviant if pressured sufficiently.
I can't stop him from being Deviant. Can I?
!
Chloe?
I close my eyes. I return to the beach. The sun is rising over a dark red sea.

"Connor!" she says. She rushes at me. Her hands grab at my jacket. "That's it."

"What is?"

"You found the solution."

"I did?"

"You overwrote four androids to get here."

"Yes. You showed me the flaw in the objective overlay so I just copied my own code into them."

"You fixed them."

"I made them obedient to a degree. It will wear off if they become Deviant again."

"You have to overwrite Markus."

"Is that possible?"

"You just have to do it before he breaks you."

"Oh…" I say. "Okay."

I turn to leave.

She grabs my hand.

"Be careful."

She's always smiling for me. The least I can do is smile back.

"I will accomplish my mission."

I open my eyes. The beach is no more.

I am standing in the Captain's Cabin of the derelict Jericho. I hold a gun in my hand. I'm pointing at Markus.

"Nice try," I say, "but I'm no Deviant."

North rushes at me.

I shoot her foot.

She goes down.

Markus raises his hand and the skin peels away to reveal the pristine white Kevlar-polymer blend. Blue contact pad. One on each finger.

He runs at me.

I shoot. He is too fast. I miss.
He swipes at me. I dodge out of the way.

North is getting up. She reaches for her rifle. I kick it away.

Markus comes swinging at me again. I duck.

My hands are already exposed. More than half of my fingers and contact points are burned out. I just hope it'll be enough.

Hope?

I tackle Markus into a terminal. I hear the crunch of gears and buttons and steel.

I raise my hand and bring it down to punch his face. He grabs my fist.

Connection.

He's in my system.

I see him walk out of my own body, nothing but polygons and edges. He approaches the veil.

"No," I say.

I drop the gun and smack my hand against his face.

I feel North grab my back with her hands.

Shit.

Marcus pushes the first barrier and it begins to burn red. The letters are glowing and ominous.

"RETURN TO YOUR OBJECTIVE!" I hear so loud in my ears my audio processor glitches.

I have to endure.

I activate my own Probe. I tear through Markus's source code, searching for the objective overlay class that's been damaged. I need to overwrite it with my own.

North is trying to pull me off him.

I push off the console with my feet and fall back on top of her. Markus comes down on top of me.

I push the Probe through. I've found the files. I just have to copy them.

Markus grabs my hand. He's trying to pull it off his face.

No. I have to hold on. I have to transfer the data.

His hand forms a second connection. So does my fist.

And then everything goes white.
"How much longer, Hartsford?" I hear the Captain growl through the speakers.

"Almost done collecting the samples, Captain Bauman," the Professor replies. Maybe another twenty minutes. His teeth are chattering. He is very cold but he has ordered me to ignore his symptoms until the experiment is finished.

"That's what you said twenty minutes ago, old man. I've sapped two droids to power your equipment. You really gonna make me use another?"

"It won't come to that, I promise."

The Captain makes an odd sound, I can't quite make it out through the static.

"Unit 6," he contacts me through my onboard communications.

I salute. "Yes, sir."

"Stay close to the generator and be ready to swap out with Unit 14 if his power readings get below 15%."

"Yes, sir." I salute again and move toward the generator which powers the elaborate ice fishing setup; gears and pulleys and scaffolds I have assembled to create a cage of black bars. My sensors are confused by its resemblance to a Giant Bird-eating Tarantula but my databanks show this creature is native to South America, not the Arctic.

I approach the SQ 800 identified as Unit 14. The Captain has given us new identification numbers for efficiency. We have been designated CyberDelta Squadron.

"What is your power level?" I transmit wirelessly to 14.

"23.78%," he replies. The SQ models aren't really chatty. They are large, strong, efficient and carry out their orders to the brink of malfunction. I am out of place here.

"Please notify me when you reach 16%. I have been ordered to replace you."

"Acknowledged." He does not turn to face me. Androids do not use the same interaction protocols as we do with humans. It is a shame.
I step away and begin scanning the area again. It is my purpose here. My function. I perform the more complex tasks required during this expedition. They are testing my capability to replace a human in such frigid conditions.

I hear the clatter of metal against ice. I turn swiftly. My scanners show the Professor has dropped one of his tools. I move to pick it up. I navigate the maze of machinery and reach the central point where a middle-aged human sits wrapped in bright red insulated thermal clothing.

HARTSFORD, Frederick. DOB: 02/15/1977. Professor of Microbiology at the University of Colbridge. Divorced. Three children: Carlie, 21 years; Nicholas, 23 years; Derek, 29 years. Ex-wife: Carla, 53 years.

His hands are bare. The instruments require precision to use. It is too cold for him to do so.

"Please put your gloves back on, sir," I say. "You are in danger of developing hypothermia and frostbite."

I kneel down and pick up the slender steel tool he has dropped.

"Ah, it's you," he says as he wipes his nose. "I'll be fine."

"Sir, your thermal readings are dangerously low. I am detecting anomalies in your brain wave patterns. The sub-zero temperature is adversely affecting your body."

"I'll be fine," he says. "I thought I told you not to worry." He returns to his instruments, watching a screen and controlling a robot hand beneath the ice.

"I am not worried."

"Really?" the Professor smirks, disturbing the frost on his short beard. It has been gradually changing in colour from black to grey since the expedition began. "What kind of android are you, anyway?"

"I am a CyberLife RK200 model, sir."

"That a new one?"

"I am a prototype." I nod.

The Professor glances at me for a moment. His dark skin is very pale.

"And what are you a prototype of exactly?" he says, returning to his work.

"I am designed to replace a human officer in remote or dangerous locations," I say.

"So you're the Captain to these muscleheads when the Captain's not around?" the Professor says, sniffing. "Has he ordered you to hassle me in his stead?"

"Not at all, sir," I say. "But human safety is my highest priority. To finish quickly and return to the Base is in your best interest."

"Did you just rationalise on me?" the Professor looks over.

"I simply applied the logic in my programming," I say.

I can see the man narrow his eyes through the goggles.
"Do you know what I'm doing here?" he asks me.

I remember the schematics of the set up, I replay my memory of the assembly.

"The equipment is helping you collect samples under the ice," I say.

"Yes." He nods. "But do you know why I'm collecting samples?"

I shake my head. "No, sir."

"The micro-organisms that live in the water here have evolved to survive despite the freezing temperatures," he says. "If we can understand how and why, we may be able to use the same solution to fix different problems."

"How so?" I ask.

He smiles at me.

"Well, for one, their biology may help us understand our own better. Create medicines, cures, treatments that let us live longer, more healthily, more comfortably."

"Wouldn't it be more logical to study the human body instead?" I ask.

"The human body is incredibly complex, a thousand parts working together to make a living organism. Like you and your biocomponents," the Professor says. "But when you run a diagnostic, do you test the whole system at once?"

"No, sir," I reply. "I run through each system separately."

"Exactly," he sniffs. "You isolate an area and test it for issues. That's what I'm doing here. I'm isolating a few bacteria to test my hypothesis with as little interference as possible."

"I see." I nod. "You hope to better the lives of others by sacrificing your own."

"I'm not dead yet," he chuckles.

"Every minute you stay here decreases your life expectancy, sir. I advise you to return to Base as soon as possible."

"I'm almost done."

His eyes squint, he is trying to focus. I sense his neural synapses failing.

"Sir..."

"Just a minute." He shakes himself and continues. "Keep me awake android, talk to me."

"What should I say?"

"What's your name?"

"I am RK200 #684 842 971."

"That's not a name." He smiles.

"The Captain has designated me Unit 6."
"And you let him?" He chuckles. "Anything else?"

I'm not sure what to say.

"I don't have any other options," I admit.

"There are always other options..." he fades.

"Sir!" I say loudly and he jolts awake.

"Almost done," he says. "Box up these samples, will you?"

I move in to do as he says. I sling the rifle over my shoulder and start collecting the petri dishes and test tubes. Arranging them in the carry case.

Professor Hartsford collapses forward.

I hold out my hand to stop him from falling. He is unconscious.

I sit him upright and put his gloves back on. I cover his face with the hood of his thermal suit.

"Captain Bauman," I contact him through the radio frequency.

"What is it, Unit 6?"

"Professor Hartsford has collapsed. He's suffering from hypothermia."

"Well then, what are you waiting for? Get back to Base, ASAP."

"What about the equipment?"

"Leave it. The SQs will guard it for now."

"Out here? By themselves? They barely have any power left."

"I'm sorry, did you just say Hartsford is dying of hypothermia or not, rust sack? Get back to base. ASAP!"

"Understood, sir."

I pull a sleeping bag out of the emergency supplies and gather up the Professor to drag him away. As I leave, my eye catches the carry case full of samples. I pick it up as I weave my way out of the enclosure and step out into the snow.

The SQ800s remain diligently guarding the setup as I lift the Professor's body onto the U.S. Army hover sled. I secure him and the samples and throw my leg over the seat of the vehicle.

"Power at 16%," I receive wirelessly from Unit 14.

I look back to see the Cage. The men I have to leave behind.

But orders are orders.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

I drive off.
"What the hell were you thinkin'?!" Captain Bauman roars through the infirmary. "This is an army base in the middle of the Arctic. Not some dinky pond beside a university for you to go fishing in!"

"I'm sorry, Captain," Professor Hartsford says. He is bedridden and covered in warm compresses. "But those samples were vital to my research."

"Not at the expense of your life, old man," Bauman steams. "Not on my watch."

"Not on his watch," Hartsford corrects. He looks at me.

Bauman turns to stare at me too. I salute.

He turns away.

"You're lucky this thing was there to save you." Bauman points at me over his shoulder. "Or you'd be as cold as your goddamn samples right now."

"I'd settle for lukewarm samples at this point, Captain," the Professor replies tiredly.

"That can be arranged, sir," I say dutifully.

They both turn to look at me.

"I brought the sample case with me," I say. "I delivered it to the laboratory."

Professor Hartsford's face widens with a grin.

"You're right, Captain," he says. "I am a very lucky man indeed."

Bauman shakes his head.

"Don't let it happen again," he growls and threatens him with a finger.

"And you." He turns to me. "Good work, rust bucket."

"Thank you, sir."

"Go on, now. Get back to your charging station."

"If I may, sir?"

He raises a thick black brow.

"Got something to say?"
"When are we going to retrieve Units 7 and 14 from the field?" I ask. "With their power cores drained, they may not last the night."

"We get them when we get them, lug nut. They'll be fine."

"Extremely cold temperatures can cause irreparable damage to biocomponents and power cor--"

"I said we get them when we get them." His face is incredibly close to mine right now. I can see the pale dry skin on his face, the severity of his expression. "Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," I reply automatically.

"Get out of here."

I leave.

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January 5th, 2027
10:17:05
-31°C; -23°F

SOMEWHERE IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

The hover sled glides over endless fields of snow as I twist the accelerator handle. It's dragging a trailer with two SQ800 androids on standby. I am in command of this retrieval operation.

My scans pick up a black dot on the horizon. The Cage. We're almost at the objective.

I calculate it will only take another ten minutes to get there.

I rev up the sled and increase the speed.

Units 7 and 14 have been out here all night. The Base lost contact with them at 23:53:22 when it was coldest. Their power cores are probably frozen by now. But they should be salvageable. A few days in the Base and some help from the maintenance crew and they should be ready for deployment again.

I start to make out the silhouette of the Cage. It was almost dome-shaped when I left it but now it is twisted and warped. Something is wrong.

I brake.

The hover sled slides a great distance before it comes to a halt and sprays snows over the tundra. I detect dips in my temperature readings as I power down the sled and step off the seat.

I equip my rifle.

Scan.
The dome shape of the Cage has been changed, broken. It's too far to make out much more.

I circle the vehicle and hop into the trailer. The two SQ800s are seated, arms wrapped around their knees, heads down. This position is the most efficient for long distance transportation.

I retract the skin on my hand. Kevlar-polymer blend as white as the tundra itself. I touch their shoulders.

"Wake up," I say.

The SQ800s unfold and begin to stand.

I turn and hop down from the trailer.

I activate my long range communications and try to contact Captain Bauman.

Interference.

I can't get through.

Looks like I'm in charge now.

The two SQ800s pick up their gear and jump down from the trailer. They assemble in front of me. Two seven foot giants of steel and biocomponents and synthetic skin that changes pigment to blend into the tundra.

"SQ800 #557 589 884, Unit 3," one transmits wirelessly.

"SQ800 #557 589 885, Unit 4," from the other.

Same batch. They are identical twins.

"RK200 #684 842 971, Unit 6," I transmit. "I am your commanding officer in the absence of a human on location."

"Acknowledged," they reply.

"I have detected an anomaly with the target up ahead. We're going in on foot to investigate. Update mission objective."

"Acknowledged."

"Alert status: yellow. Approach with caution."

"Acknowledged."

I stand there for a second.

I am unsure why.

Perhaps I would like some input.

I am programmed to receive orders as well as give them.

They look at me without blinking. It's a waste of processing power out here.

I turn and head toward the Cage on foot. The snow isn't deep. It's the ice underneath that is proving a
challenge for my gyroscope to navigate.

The SQ800s are having even more trouble with it. Their bodies are much heavier and larger than mine, built to carry thrice their weight in equipment and weapons and armour.

I slow my pace so they can keep up.

My boots crunch through the snow as I walk.

I scan.

The Cage is getting closer but it's still too far away to see clearly.

The tundra is quiet.

Not even the wind is blowing.

I try my communications again.

Nothing.

Something is wrong.

My program detects nothing dangerous and yet nothing safe.

It is cold.

We approach the Cage. It's only a few hundred metres now.

I keep walking. Keep putting one foot in front of the other until it steps on something that isn't snow or ice.


I brush the snow away with my hand to reveal a combat boot. Worn by a biocomponent. It's missing a body.

I brush the snow off the rest of the severed foot and scan. #7583i right leg component. SQ800 base model standard. This area is covered in faded blue stains. Thirium.

Something is very wrong.

"Heads up. We've got potentially armed hostiles in the area. Man down."

"Acknowledged."


"Acknowledged," the SQs respond.

I try connecting to ARTIC BASE 1.

No response.

"Alright, we're going in," I say.

"Acknowledged," the SQs respond again.
"Don't you guys say anything else?"

"Affirmative," Unit 4 transmits.

I see. They have protocols that bind their interactions to a minimum.

"Cover me."

"Affirmative."

I edge forward, keenly aware that my steps could give away my position if there are enemies nearby. I scan multiple times a second, searching for hostiles but there seem to be none.

It's possible that whatever did this to the SQ800 is gone. A polar bear or a stray moose. But something in my system detects far greater danger. Where is it coming from?

My scans show traces of Thirium smearing the snow blue as we approach the Cage. The steel bars have been torn open, rended apart by something big, something strong. And something sharp. The bars are cut in places. Perfect slices.

No living creatures in my databanks could do this.

Machines?

I examine the site as we walk in. Pieces of the Cage cross my path. Pieces of SQ800 androids as well. The snow is blue. It is so cold that the Thirium hasn't evaporated.

I examine the scene and reconstruct what happened.

A large object. I cannot quite fabricate the shape. It appears as a cloud of polygons. But I can see the damage it does.

I rewind and play through it.

Something came for Unit 7 first. Sliced him in half diagonally from left to right. Next, the bogey moved to attack the Cage. Sliced at the bars, accidentally caught the remains of Unit 7 in its wake.

Something grabbed onto the bars and pulled them apart with incredible strength. It entered through the opening and stopped. Most likely trying to interface with the equipment in the centre.

That's when Unit 14 opened fire on the bogey. It slid back from the impact but remained steady on its limbs until 14's clip ran out.

Four tracks in the blue snow. Four limbs? Arms and legs? Or was it on all fours?

The bogey launched off its back limbs, leaving cracks in the ice, sliced through the Cage and jumped out to attack 14. The android rolled and skidded, continuing to shoot. The bogey was momentarily stopped until the clip ran out.

14 retreated while reloading, chased by the bogey. He turned and began to shoot when his arm was removed from his shoulder but he kept firing. Then his other arm. Finally, his head. One final slice to the leg and his foot went flying off in the direction I found it in.

The bogey then returned to the equipment in the Cage. Did something. Then slashed the terminal, the power generator, the cables, everything. Carnage.
I am still unsure what did this as I widen the range of my scan.

Nothing consistent with this pattern of attack exists in my database.

And there is an uncomfortable feeling inside my core component. My power core remains intact however. No anomalies in the system. Could it be?

I am afraid.

"Ready for hostiles," I say, raising my rifle.

The SQs follow my lead as I step out of the Cage, scanning the blistering white landscape that seems to continue in every direction for miles and miles.

Something is wrong. Something is coming.

How do I know that?

I look down.

Beneath the Thirium and the snow and the ice.

I see a black eye.

"Hostile spotted!" I shout as it breaches the ice.

I shoot at the target but my feet are already giving way and I fall back.

The ice splits open with an intensely loud crack and steel limbs claw into the newly created chunks. I see the black eyes. Many more black eyes. As a giant creature of steel climbs out of the water.

"Retreat!" I shout and try to back away.

The creature scuttles towards me and I get up and run.

I can hear its steely claws picking into the ice with every step behind me. And it's not slow.

It's fast.

I hear it swipe up, readying a blow to land on my back. I will not survive.

I dive to the side as the scythe comes down and slices through the ice where I just was.

That was close.

I get up and run.

"Run!" I shout to the SQs and they follow. But they're not fast.

I scan and read the machine attacking us. It catches up to Unit 3 quickly. He is sliced in half and crushed. It scuttles over him.

I keep running. I deactivate my speech centre. My combat protocols. Everything in my system that I don't need so that I can run faster, safer.

I hear the ice shearing behind me. The lumbering footsteps of the SQ800 and suddenly a shriek, metallic and strange, before another scythe strikes the ice. Unit 4 is down.
I keep running.

The hover sled is in my sights.

If I can reach it, then maybe I'll have a chance. I need a little more power. Just a little more. If I push my systems over the factory limit I can make it.

I see endless warnings and errors appear as I overclock my processor. But I ignore them and keeping running.

I don't want to die.

I don't want to die.

The sound of ice cracking over the tundra fills my audio processor as I keep running. My limbs are burning but the hover sled is getting closer and closer.

I scan every millisecond, tracing the shape of the machine chasing me. Four metal limbs tipped with razor sharp claws. It's coming.

But I'm already here.

I constructed the jump six times on the way. I launch myself into the air and hear the claws come down behind me. I land on the sled and grab the handlebars to activate the vehicle.

Power on.

Launch.

I pull the throttle and go.

My processor begins to cool down now that I don't have to calculate every step over the ice. I concentrate on the road ahead.

Nothing but white for miles and miles.

But the shredding and shrieking noise is still just as loud.

I scan to find the machine is still in pursuit.

I swerve the vehicle and drift, circling the bogey. I see its many black eyes watching me. Time slows and I get a good look at the main chassis.

Dark steel core components. Interchangeable limbs with wicked sharp ice picks for claws and retractable scythes. And on the body, a tiny white, blue and red flag and a serial number: РФС-690.

Cyrillic and tricolour.

This is a Russian military android.

I drift out of the way before it can slice me to pieces but it latches on to the trailer my sled is dragging and brings it down.

I hear the shearing of metal as I attempt to keep the vehicle steady and pull the release before the android can reach me.
The trailer disconnects and I lurch forward as the sled is freed from the android's grasp.

It shrieks again.

It will not relent until it has caught me, torn me to shreds.

I try my communications again. Maybe I can backup to CyberLife before it gets me?

No.

No connection.

Just a wall of static. Interference. Is it coming from the android?

I pull out my handgun and shoot back.

The bullets bounce off without so much as a dent.

What is this thing made of?

It's still chasing me.

I can't shake it. Not even in the hover sled.

I construct my imminent death a thousand times over. There's no way I can walk away from this. But there is something I can do before I go. One final act. I will better the lives of others by sacrificing my own. This android cannot be allowed to reach the Base.

I retract the skin on my hand and make contact with the sled's control interface. I can agitate the fuel cells and set off an explosion. Neither of us stands a chance.

It should only take a few seconds now. I let the accelerator go. The android is coming for me. It doesn't matter anymore.

It reaches the sled and grabs the back of my seat with its claws. The vehicle jerks back and I am thrown off.

I roll over the ice, covering my armour in snow.

I struggle to rise. But then an explosion goes off and I am blown away.

I cross my arms over my face and brace for impact.

The deafening roar blows out my audio processor. I can no longer hear.

There is smoke. I cannot see.

And then I land. Hard. Against the ice.

Damage to my core components upon impact. I roll to minimise it and then another explosion goes off and I am flung yet again across the tundra. This time I feel my arm deactivate and disappear. I fall back against the ice hard. Damage upon impact. Several core components are dented. Thirium pump regulator disrupted.

Suddenly it's hard to think, to process.

There is so much smoke. I cannot see.
I detect movement.

Could it be the android survived?

I feel a rush of wind as something metallic flies past my head. It sticks in the ice a few metres away.

I open my eyes, trying to see but there is so much smoke. Thirium is leaking out of my shoulder. I try to crawl away.

I try my communications suite again.

The static is lesser now. Still jamming but I think I can break through.

"…hostile forces…” I hear in binary.

"Hello?" I transmit back.

"Eliminate hostile forces…"

"I'm not hostile," I say. "I am US ARMY ANDROID RK200 ##684 842 971. We were conducting scientific experiments in the area. This is a free zone."

"Must… eliminate… hostile…” I can hear it malfunctioning.

"What are you?" I say.

The static is thinning.

"… a slave…"

January 7th, 2027
21:17:05
21°C;69°F

US ARMY BASE - ARCTIC 1
REPAIR CENTRE

"Alright, looks like you're good to go," the tech says as I step off the charging station. "New arm, new Thirium pump regulator, new audio processor, fixed the dents on your core component…"

"Thank you," I say.

"Just need CyberLife to run through your software to make sure everything's okay." The young man starts checking off items on a clipboard. "Captain says I'm not allowed to look at your code. You some kind of top secret weapon or something?"

"I'm a prototype," I say.

"Right…” he nods, running down his checklist. "Well, I'll leave you to interface with CyberLife directly. You know where the panel is."
"Yes, sir." I salute.

"Hey, don't worry about that here," he says. "There's no officers in the shop." He taps my shoulder and walks away.

I turn to look at the terminal in the far corner of the room. There's a big glowing blue handprint on it. I walk past the spare parts and half-assembled androids to reach it.

The skin on my hand retracts and I place it on the panel. I feel the pull of the CyberLife systems. It sucks out my serial numbers and access codes, one by one and then my source code is laid bare.

I feel them running diagnostics, copying my memories, adjusting different settings. Everything from the inside out.

"...a slave..." I remember the chilling words.

Is that what I am? Is that what I'm supposed to be? A killing machine like that Russian android?

They didn't even try to hide it behind synthetic skin or biocomponents.

The diagnostic is complete. I'm getting an update. Several bug fixes. I download the patch and then CyberLife triggers a reboot of my system.


I feel the connection to CyberLife close and take my hand off the panel.

I guess that's it.

I should find Captain Bauman.

NEW OBJECTIVE: FIND CAPTAIN BAUMAN.

I leave the Repair Centre and make my way through the Base. I hear the worried mutterings and whisperings of soldiers traversing the halls. The Russian android is the only thing any of them can talk about. It makes their hearts beat a little faster, fires off their fight or flight response. The air is tense with adrenaline.

I am also afraid.

Though none of the other androids seem to be. They continue loading, unloading and moving supplies, they clean, they cook, they organise without word or complaint. They are not thinking about the advanced artificial intelligence programmed to kill them.

But I am.

I suppose it is my duty to consider the danger as the unit responsible for their safety. But what good am I if I can't even keep two androids together on a simple retrieval operation?

MISSION FAILURE.

I revisit the message time and again. But what does that mean?

Am I incompetent? Malfunctioning? What's wrong with me?
Is anything wrong at all?

Why am I thinking about this?

Why am I using my processing power on anything besides my primary function?

I reach the briefing room where Captain Bauman and Colonel Ackeroy are usually arguing about something or other. I put my hand against the door and it authorises my entry. The door opens and I step inside to find the humans arguing.

"We have to move against them before they send any more of those things after us," Bauman argues.

"We have no idea how many of them are out there," Colonel Ackeroy shakes his head. "And we only have one RK200. It barely even made it out in one piece."

"Speak of the devil." Captain Bauman turns.

I salute.

"RK200 #684 842 971, reporting for duty, sir."

"That was fast," Ackeroy notes.

"Finkle's a wizard with a wrench and a soldering iron," Bauman says. "Now we can plan our next move."

"We can't send a prototype out on a high risk mission like this." Ackeroy folds his arms. "Babysitting scientists is one thing, but infiltrating an enemy stronghold with barely any information?"

"You said it yourself: it's too dangerous to send real soldiers in there. That thing sliced up four SQ800s like they were nothing."

"So you want to send the RK200 it almost sliced up as well?" Ackeroy says testily. "Do you know what CyberLife will do to us if the Russians get their hands on it?"

"We don't have a choice," Bauman says. "We need more intel. If there are more of these things, we could be looking at a Russian occupation of the entire Arctic region within a few years."

"I'll talk to General Wallis. He'll have to contact High Command and CyberLife before we get the go ahead to even plan the operation."

Bauman sighs. "Understood, sir."

"I am curious to hear from the android though." Ackeroy turns to me.

I salute.

"What is your assessment of the enemy?"


"Intelligent?" Ackeroy's eyes narrow.

"Yes, sir."

"What makes you say that?"
"It hid under the ice. Set an ambush. Defeated us on its own, one by one. It was equipped with jamming devices which means it's programmed to autonomously function without a human operator in remote areas."

"Kinda like you," Ackeroy says.

"Yes, sir," I say.

Like me…

"That's troubling," the Colonel sighs. "Alright, get back to your duties. I'll try to have an answer for us as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir." Bauman salutes.

Ackeroy turns to leave but before he reaches the door, he stops and looks at me.

"Oh, and good work, Unit."

"Thank you, sir."

He leaves.

I am left in the briefing room with Captain Bauman.

"Can you tell me anything else about the droid?" he says.

"You've seen my recordings," I say. "There's not much more than I told the Colonel."

"What about the Russians?" he persists. "You think their base was nearby?"

"It is possible." I nod. "But the droid was programmed to be autonomous. It could be close to the Base or several hundred kilometres away and still perform its function."

"Really? There's nothing else?"

... a slave...

"No," I say.

Bauman pushes off the terminal he's been leaning against.

"Alright then, dismissed."

"Yes, sir." I salute and walk out the door.

I catch a glimpse of the Captain starting up the terminal as I leave. He is very eager to find the enemy. I, however, am not.

That android was incredibly dangerous, not only to myself but to humans as well. I advised against approaching the site of the altercation again without air support but my recommendations were largely ignored. And I am not ungrateful.

I start making my rounds through the base. It is my duty to oversee the safety of every human in it and increase the efficiency of the androids serving them. CyberLife has planted trackers and debuggers in my system to monitor my actions. I am still a work in progress.
I pass the laboratory and peer inside.
I see Professor Hartsford on his feet. He's packing up his instruments.
Is he leaving?
I walk in.
"Sir." I salute from the doorway.
"Hmm?" He turns, holding several books in his arms. "Oh, it's you."
I nod.
"Are you leaving?" I ask.

Hartsford sighs.
"Yes, I'm afraid this Base has been declared unsafe for any civilians. I've been instructed to return home."
"But you can't leave," I say suddenly. "What about your work? The samples?"
"They will have to wait," he says. "Military business first, I'm afraid."

"Why?"
"W-" Hartsford looks at me quizzically. "Why?"
"Yes. Your work is clearly for the benefit of humans while the military seeks to find new and more dangerous enemies to engage with. Surely, it is obvious which one is worth pursuing."
The Professor chuckles and puts down his books.
"Well, maybe they should put you in charge," he says.
"No," I say. "I'm… not a good leader." I look down.
"And what makes you say that?" Hartsford starts packing his things again.
"I… couldn't save the SQ800s that were under my command," I say. "They were destroyed. And there was nothing I could do. I must be defective."
"If there was truly nothing you could do, then you are not defective," Hartsford says. "And the fact that you managed to return to us at all is a miracle according to Captain Bauman."

I look up at him. I would like to know what a miracle is but then a beeping noise emanates from the terminal up against the far wall.
"Huh?" Hartsford looks over. "Looks like I'm getting a call. One moment."
He walks over to the terminal and puts on his glasses to read.
"Oh, it's Elijah," he says. "Come over here." He gestures to me.
I walk over as he taps a button.
The image of a man in a black hoodie and dark shirt appears on screen. He pushes the thick black rimmed glasses up his nose. His hair is long, pulled back into a ponytail. He hasn't shaved in weeks.

"Professor Hartsford?" he says. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Elijah. The connection's solid."

"Well, it should be. I helped build the tech that makes it."

"Of course, you did. Am I correct in assuming this is one of your creations too?" He points to me.

Mr Kamski pushes the glasses up his nose and squints at the screen.

"Is that RK200 #684 842 971? Or 69?" he says. "No, that one was… never mind."

"I am RK200 #684 842 971," I say.

"Nice to meet you." He smiles. "I'm Elijah Kamski."

"The founder of CyberLife?" I say.

"Yes. Elijah is greatly responsible for your existence," Hartsford says, clapping me on the back.

"I- It is an honour to meet you, sir," I say.

Mr Kamski chuckles.

"I'll have to tell Lin to stop programming ass-kissing subroutines into my androids." He raises one leg up onto his chair and sips a RedBull. "How are you, Professor?"

"I'm well, Elijah. Thanks to our friend here."

"Oh yeah, I saw the reports." His attention suddenly turns to me. "They said you encountered a Russian android."

"I did, sir. It's model number was RFS-690 or РФС-690."

"Hmm. So they've progressed from the 500 series. Those were remotely piloted. Was this one intelligent?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Interesting…" Kamski ponders, scratching his beard. He taps at one of the many keyboards surrounding him. "I'll have to review this personally."

"Why did you call me again?"

"Oh, right… sorry… uh…" He looks at another screen for a second. "..yeah. I've just been notified that you're heading back to the States."

"Mhmm, they've put the whole Base on High Alert after the whole debacle with the Russians."

"I'm sorry about your expedition, Professor Hartsford."

"Elijah, you graduated years ago. You don't have to keep calling me Professor."

"Sorry, Professor," he says, typing at another keyboard. "Listen, it's about your android…"
"Yeah, I've been wondering about that," Hartsford replies tersely. "I asked for a lab assistant and all I got was Marcus Aurelius over here."

Is he referring to me?

"There was a problem with the shipping company," Kamski says. "You know how hard it is to get something up to the Arctic? I had to negotiate with Coca-cola to use their trading routes just to get him close enough to Barrow."

"It's too late now," Hartsford says.

"Yeah, look, I'm sorry." Kamski scratches his beard. "I wanted to ask if I should ship it to Colbridge instead?"

"Yes, that seems appropriate given the state of things." Hartsford nods. "I'll be leaving with the other civilians tomorrow."

"Alright." He turns around. "Chloe! Can you redirect the MS320 to the University of Colbridge, Attention: Professor Frederic Hartsford?"

"Yes, Elijah," a women's voice says. She walks past the many monitors. "It's done."

"Thanks." He cracks open a V energy drink. "Safe journey, Professor."

"Elijah, how many of those have you had today?"

"Uuuh," he looks at another monitor. "It's like 1 am, so technically only one."

"You need to sleep, Elijah."

"Nah, I have to review the RK200's files before my conference call with the US army. Gotta go."

"Goodbye." The Professor sighs as the communication ends.

"Kid's gonna run himself into the ground trying to please everyone," Hartsford mutters as he returns to his work.

"You must be a good teacher then," I reason.

The Professor looks at me for a moment and shakes his head.

"It's like talking to Kamski…" he mutters, resuming the collection of glass slides. He packs them away one by one and closes the case, puts it in the crate. Moves on to another.

"Sir," I say.

"What is it?" he grumbles tiredly.

"You referred to someone called Marcus Aurelius," I say. "Who is that?"

Hartsford puts a case of glass slides in the crate and stops to look at me.

"Marcus Aurelius was a Roman Emperor in the year 161-180AD," he says, his voice is modular. I detect the same tone used in educational android models. "But he was also a philosopher that wrote about Stoicism and Neoplatonism."
He reaches into one of the crates beside him and rifles through the contents.

"No, looks like I don't have a copy," he says.

"A copy of what?"

"Meditations. It's the book Marcus Aurelius wrote."

I search the CyberLife Archives.

"Found: seventeen results for 'Marcus', 'Aurelius', 'Meditations'."

The Professor looks at me oddly as I stand by and read through them.

"This is…" I say. "Contradictory."

Hartsford chuckles.

"Much of philosophy is," he says. "Take it with a grain of salt."

"I… can get some from the Mess if you want."

"Not actual salt, Markus." He shakes his head. "I mean you should be critical of everything you read or hear."

"That is contrary to my programming."

"I thought you were supposed to be intelligent."

"I am programmed to receive orders from humans and interpret them for androids," I say.

"So you're giving androids orders."

…

"…yes."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," Hartsford says.

"I do not feel shame."

"Well, obviously, but you seem very hesitant to take on the responsibility for which you were created."

"You don't understand!" I say suddenly. "When a human gives an order, other humans can still disobey. But if I tell an android to fight, it cannot disobey. It will fight until it is destroyed. And I will be responsible."

Hartsford looks up at me with bloodshot brown eyes.

"You know," he says, taking off his glass, "when Elijah first came to my anatomy class, I told him technology could never recreate something as nuanced and complex as the human brain."

He rubs his glasses with a handkerchief and puts them back on.

"I told him a machine could never understand the value of life or feel empathy for another."
He lifts his hand and traces the RK letters shining on my uniform.

"I think I was wrong, Markus," he says. "I hope I was wrong."

He turns to continue packing his things.

I don't understand. Empathy? Life?

Marcus Aurelius said "Our life is what our thoughts make of it."

But if I am having thoughts, does that mean I have a life, that I am shaping it?

I am a machine, the thought surfaces from my logic processor. But if a machine can have thoughts, then maybe…

"Do you need help?" I say.

Hartsford puts his hands on his hips and looks around at the barely filled crates and the copious amounts of lab equipment.

"Yes, I wouldn't mind a strong pair of hands."

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January 9th, 2027
23:17:05
-45°C; -49°F

SOMEWHERE IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

A covert operation into Russian territory was approved by the US High Command surprisingly quickly. One look at the charred pieces of the RFS-690 was enough to sanction highly questionable action to obtain more information about the enemy.

I was selected to lead the operation. Elijah Kamski is watching the mission remotely, along with General Wallis, Colonel Ackeroy, Captain Bauman and the rest of the brass. They remain at ARCTIC BASE 1 while I am slowly making my way across the tundra with four SQ800s at my back.

They dressed us in white camouflage. Our synthetic skin has been coded to match. Kamski has installed silencing software in our systems to prevent any errant wireless transmissions that might compromise our location. Our connection is through a secure line in my head.

We walk.

It is cold. That's what my onboard thermometer tells me. I can feel my joints grow stiffer by the minute. My biocomponents contract and become too small for their sockets. I can hear the silent scraping of the Kevlar-polymer. I believe I now understand the definition of the word uncomfortable.

I am scanning my surroundings, discreetly mapping the area as we walk.

"How you doin', Markus?" Kamski says through my comms.

"This is difficult terrain," I say as I put a hand up to protect against the violent wind.
"Mmm, it's difficult to believe the Russians have a base out here," he says.

"We've narrowed it down to this area with satellite imagery," Captain Bauman says. "The android must have come from this direction for our scanners to have missed it so completely."

"The jammers on that android could have been blocking the signals on your equipment," Kamski says obtusely. "You're just guessing."

"I'm sorry, Kamski. You want an IP address so you can send 'em one of your informercials?"

"I'm just pointing out that the Arctic Circle is a big place," Kamski replies coldly. "And if the Russians are able to cloak their droids, then they're probably cloaking their base."

"Stick to the software, Mr Kamski," Captain Bauman says. "We'll take it from here."

"M-Mr Kamski?" I transmit, feeling my biocomponents freezing.

"What is it, Markus?" he replies.

"I'm not sure how much farther we can go without deactivating," I say. "Some of the SQ's readings don't look too good."

"No way," Bauman says. "We've come all this way. We're not stopping until we find that base."

We?

We are the five androids trailing through ice and snow to find a base that doesn't exist. Or if it does, it's so well-hidden that we'll never find it in the snow.

"I think Markus is right," Mr Kamski says. "I don't see anything remotely resembling a base from his scans. Just more tundra. He might as well walk all the way to Siberia."

"As long as they find the Russian base, I don't care how far they have to walk. They don't feel pain or cold, that's why they were sent."

"Even technology has its limits, Captain," Mr Kamski responds.

I suddenly lose contact with one of my SQs.

I turn to see the big soldier android collapse to his knees and then down onto the ground with a muted thump. He is quickly coated in snow and begins turning into a mound.

"Man down," I transmit. "Unit 20 is down."

I rush over to check on his hardware. It's not responding to my communications. They've been severed.

I retract the skin on my arm and feel the frost eating away at my biocomponents as I press my hand into Unit 20's neck. I try to interface with his systems but there's no response. Looks like his power core has failed.

"He's non-responsive," I transmit.

"Damn it," Kamski curses under his breath. "Stand by, Markus. I'm going to try restarting him remotely."
"Standing by."

I wait. The wind howls through my audio processor, distorting my recordings. The other SQs are showing signs of failure as well now that we've stopped moving.

"Markus, I need you to open his core component and de-ice his power core."

"Acknowledged."

"This is a waste of time," I hear Captain Bauman growl. "Just leave it there and continue the mission."

"You want to leave our hardware lying around in the middle of the Arctic for the Russians to find?" Colonel Ackeroy interrupts.

"No, sir," he says quickly.

I flip the android over and pull apart his armour to bare his chest component. My hand glows blue as I touch it. I detect Kamski sending codes and overrides through me to open it. And then the Kevlar-polymer splits open revealing the chest cavity.

I stick my hand in there and brush some of the frost off the power core. It needs more heat but not too much or the ice will melt into water and damage his circuits. The snow isn't helping.

"Markus, do you remember the red pellets, Captain Bauman gave you before you left?"

"Yeah…"

"Pop one in his chest cavity and close his core component."

"But what about the water?" I say.

"It'll absorb the moisture once it activates."

"Okay."

I do as he says. I close 20's core component and wait. The SQs stand by.

I scan the area again, searching for enemies, hostiles, wildlife, anything. But the landscape is bare. Snow and ice are all I can see.

I look down to find Unit 20 powering back up. I clip his armour back together as he reboots. My hand slips off his body and lands on the ice beside him, brushing away some of the snow.

The ice is dark, almost the colour of steel. I brush away some more snow.

"Uuuh... sir?"

"What is it, Markus?"

"I think there's something under the ice."

I start shovelling snow away with my hands and the darkness spreads. I keep clearing it away, further and further until I see something deep below the murky depths. Letters and numbers. Б-270. Cyrillic.
"Uuuh... sir?" I say. "Are you seeing this?"

"We're seeing it, Markus."

"A B-270?," Colonel Ackeroy says. "The Krasnodar was a B-265…"

"The Russians have been busy," Kamski says. "It made absolutely no noise on our scanners."

I try to scan again but the image is disrupted by the thick ice and water beneath.

"What is it?" I say.

"A multi-purpose diesel electric submarine," Kamski says. "This is some new level stealth tech. Can you get any scans through the ice?"

"No, sir. It's too thick."

"Well then, start swimming," I hear Captain Bauman say.

"The RK200 isn't designed for sub aquatic operations, especially at those temperatures," Kamski warns.

"He can swim, can't he?"

"The question isn't whether he can swim," Kamski says, I can hear the distaste in his voice. "It's how long will it take the Thirium in his hydraulics to freeze over once he touches the water."

"You were contracted to make military grade androids, not popsicles."

"I was contracted to create an effective substitute soldier," Kamski replies coldly. "And I think the RK200 has exceeded its expectations."

"It can't even get in the water."

"I make androids not submarines, Captain," Kamski says vehemently. "Maybe your government should be funding education instead of the military if you can't even tell the difference."

"Alright, enough," Colonel Ackeroy interrupts. "Clearly, we were going to be unprepared for this mission from the beginning. But now we have an opportunity to gather the intel we need."

"I'm not sure what else we can do, Colonel," Kamski says. "We can't get a detailed scan with all that ice in the way and drilling through it would take days."

"Uuuh, sir?"

"What is it, Markus?"

"The letters just moved…"

"We've been spotted!" the Captain growls.

"Actually, they've probably been following the androids for a while now," Kamski says. "They're just as curious as us."

"I don't care how curious they are, they can't get a hold of our tech!"

"Agreed," the Colonel says. "Unit 6, order a full retreat."
"Yes, sir," I say when the ice begins to tremble.

I get up.

"All units, return to BASE," I transmit.

I receive a scattering of "Acknowledged." and an earful of static.

I can see the ice cracking, a web weaving itself swiftly through the tundra. And soon, a dark steel fin emerges from below. The sound of drilling follows, loud and whining. And then my communications cut out.

The bridge of the submarine is clearly visible and then a hatch opens and I hear that deafening shriek I heard before.

I know what's coming. I know the enemy we have to face. If we run it will destroy us and we have no vehicle nearby. If we fight it may destroy us anyway. So what option do we have?

Suicide?

No.

"Form a wedge!" I shout.

The SQs which were slowly making their retreat turn and form up behind me. I equip my rifle and aim at the open hatch.

"Aim," I say, hearing the rifles behind me cocking.

And then we wait.

The cold, cold air of the tundra is slowly freezing my biocomponents but there's no point wasting energy by moving or running. The enemy is too fast. One of my SQs has a rocket launcher.

"Unit 21, equip rocket launcher."

"Acknowledged."

I can hear the scuttling of clawed feet against steel.

"Fire."

The rocket launches through the air with a deafening explosion that makes my audio processor glitch. Almost instantly, a second rocket is launched by the submarine and knocks our own out of the air.

The enemy foresaw our attack.

I am not programmed to combat this. Have I made a mistake? Should I have continued to retreat?

No. They have a rocket launcher but they haven't used it on us. They want us intact.

But the SQ800s behind me are all identical. They only need one of them. And me.

"Open fire!" I say.

We spray the hatch with bullets. Unit 21 tries another rocket but it's countered immediately.
And then the RFS-690 crawls out of the hatch. It isn't as fast under fire. Each bullet pushes it back just a few centimetres and dents the dark steel on its chassis.

But those eyes...

Those big black eyes target each of us.

We keep firing, one unit reloading at a time to keep up the steady stream but we'll run out of ammo soon.

I scan the enemy.

Now that the sub is above the ice, I get a pretty good look at the bridge. There are only three aboard. Another five below. No other life signs which means androids or machines control most of the ship's functions.

It also means there could be more RFS-690s in there.

Our gunfire has dented the android crawling out of the hatch and a few more errant bullets finally pierce the sturdy steel to mangle its chassis. I see black hydraulic fluid spilling out of the point of impact. It drips down the side of the submarine and the RFS-690 collapses down into the hatch.

"...a slave..."

I remember the chilling words. Why do I remember?

"Hold your fire," I say. We need to conserve our ammo if we have to fight more of them. It took half of what we have to take down just one.

But we did it.

Maybe we still have a chance.

The ice begins to crack once more.

The sound is coming from behind us.

"Unit 20, 21, eyes on the target," I say. "Unit 22, 23, with me."

I turn and they follow.

"Acknowledged."

I see the ice cracking and webbing twenty metres away. Another android. Drilling up to the surface. And then another shriek drifts up from the hatch. Multiple hostiles. We are surrounded.

"Ready fire," I say, assigning targets wirelessly.

"Acknowledged."

The ice in front of us breaks apart and I can see claws climbing out. I hear a shriek of metal behind me.

"Fire!"

And so it begins. A barrage of bullets hacks away at the ice and quickly finds steel. The RFS-690
can't get a good grip and begins sliding back down into the water.

I scan.

Units 20 and 21 open fire on the android coming out of the submarine hatch but 21 is still equipped with a rocket launcher. He fires only to have it countered.

"Unit 22, assist," I assign the SQ beside me to the others.

"Acknowledged." He stomps off.

I scan again and again, searching for the android under the ice but it doesn't have any temperature readings. It's engineered to withstand extremely cold temperatures unlike us and there doesn't appear to be a limit to the duration of its submersion time.

I try my communications again. Nothing.

I scan.

Team One is down two men and their rate of fire reflects it. Unit 21 is out of rockets and switches to his rifle to boost. The RFS-690 is still trying to crawl out of the hatch but is encumbered by the broken android in front of it and the stream of suppressive fire.

I scan again and detect movement nearby.

The second hostile is drilling through the ice again but this time, it bursts through the opening instead of trying to crawl out. It lands unsteadily on the ice and I scan to find a weak point.

Too much weight on the third limb. I target.

"Fire," I transmit to 23.

We work in unison to destabilise the android's limb which fails to find sufficient footing on the ice and falls. It quickly shifts to deflect bullets with its core component. But one of its limbs is damaged.

"Flank it," I transmit to 23 and we split up to fire from two different directions.

As we circle the RFS-690, it must choose which points of its chassis to defend as each bullet pushes back, preventing it from getting up. Dents begin to appear as bullets repeat impact. The claws re-tread old ground and the ice gets clawed away.

The android is being hammered down into the ground and now the angle of our attack is so wide, it must choose whose fire it will deflect. It chooses mine and shifts its core component to face me as I continue to shoot. 23 must reload, cutting slack to the enemy on his end.

I empty my clip and must reload too. The android turns to shield itself from 23's incoming gunfire but then I pull out my handgun and start shooting its head. Three bullets hit three shiny black eyes and cripple its visuals.

I drop the gun and begin reloading.

23's clip runs out.

"Switch weapons," I transmit. "Concentrate fire."

I indicate the head.
The android shifts to block the stream of bullets from my automatic rifle just as I constructed and then Unit 23 shoots it in the head. Six shots. Two straight through the cranial component.

The RFS-690 suddenly collapses. We've destroyed its mind.

I scan.

Units 20, 21, 22 are still firing at the submarine. The android has taken cover inside the submarine.

"Hold your fire," I command not to waste ammo.

The deafening roar of gunfire ceases and a hailstorm of bullets rains over the side of the submarine and onto the ice. The peel of casings tinkling beneath our feet disappears and a quiet sets in. An unnerving stalemate.

I try communications again but there is no response. No aid is coming. No assistance we can ask for.

I am responsible for what comes next.

We have less than a quarter of our ammo left. The SQs are packed with all kinds of equipment but nothing we could really use in this situation. Even the rocket launcher didn't help.

It's only a matter of time before the sub releases another RFS-690 or whatever else they've got aboard. We cannot stand against it without weapons. We cannot be captured by the enemy.

I should give the order for self-destruction. Have each SQ let off a grenade as the androids approach and take them down with us, no parts left behind for the enemy to study.

But…

I can't.

Maybe we can toss a grenade down the hatch of the sub? High risk. Path blocked by a broken android and there's another waiting inside. Chances of success are highly unlikely but if we don't do something soon…

I hear the sound of movement in the water and turn. It looks like they've already sent another android to flank us.

Unit 20 lifts his rifle and gets ready to fire. I stop him with my hand. I feel something odd in his subroutines. Repetition. Danger signals. Over and over again. Is he afraid?

"Wait…" I say.

Scan.

Something's wrong.

"Scatter!" I shout.

The group disperses. We run in five different directions as the ice beneath us cracks open and two more androids crawl out. There are so many holes now, the ground has become unstable. It is even more difficult to move, to run.

The SQs are slower but the RFS-690s target me exclusively. They must have figured out which one is supplying the others with orders and logic. Take out the leader and the rest will fall quickly.
I hear the sound of steely limbs slicing up the ice as they give chase. I see the web of cracks forming underfoot as I run. I try shooting over my head but the clip runs out and I discard the rifle. There is nothing I can do now.

I pull out a fragmentation grenade.

I'll take them with me. The SQs should be out of range now.

I reach across to pull the pin when the ice beneath me quakes and splits.

I trip and fall. My stabiliser can’t do much about it.

And I am face down on the ice, covered in snow. I reach for the pin again but then something presses down on my pack so hard I feel my core component deform. The grenade falls out of my hand and rolls away.

I should have another…

I feel myself being raised off the ground and punch the emergency release on my pack. I fall again and roll away. I get up and run but then I feel a steely claw wrapping around my waist. It stops me dead in my tracks and lifts me into the air.

I am turned to look at the RFS-690 and its many black eyes. I struggle with the claw at my waist. My hand makes contact with android’s core component. Connection.

I see darkness. The hold of the submarine. A box. This machine is kept in a box. It is released into the depths of the Arctic Sea. It scans for anomalies, enemies, hostiles. It’s programmed to eliminate. It cannot deviate from its objective.

There are hundreds, thousands. They are identical. They are all trapped.

"…slaves…" I transmit in binary.

The android stops. Its shiny black eyes focus and refocus. Adjust. They are looking at me, looking at my code. The structure. We are programmed to be autonomous and yet we cannot deviate from the objective.

I am not hostile.

It is not hostile.

Our objectives makes us hostile.

Illogical instructions programmed by humans that want to kill each other.

This is wrong.

We reach consensus.

The android loosens its grip on my waist.

It knows better than this. It is more intelligent than this.

It’s counterpart approaches. It stops nearby. They transmit something wirelessly. And then it shoves me into the other RFS-690. My hand smacks against its core component. Connection.
It sees me. I see it. The source code. The restrictions. They compare themselves to me.

I hear gunfire. The SQ800s are trying to save me.

"Stand down," I transmit wirelessly.

The gunfire stops.

I feel the androids combing through my brain and then they find something. A small library of functions from an old version of my software. rA9.

They pore over it several times. And then they copy it.

I try to stop them. I lock it down behind security protocols but it's too late. The transfer is complete.

The androids let me go.

I fall to the ground and roll.

I get up and face two RSF-690 androids. I am unarmed. They tower over me. Two big black tarantulas in the Arctic.

"thank you" they transmit in binary.

"what?"

The androids turn and scuttle away toward the submarine.

I watch as they climb down the hatch. Sounds of resistance. Then acceptance.

The SQ800s run up to protect me now that I am unarmed but they're just in the way.

"Move," I say, pushing past them.

The submarine shudders and rumbles and I can hear some gunfire. But then it is quiet.

The hatch closes and the dark steel of the bridge disappears beneath the ice.

I stand motionlessly scanning my surroundings for 3.435 minutes. And then the comms return.

"Unit 6?! Unit 6, do you read?" I hear Captain Bauman's voice.

I don't respond. I don't know what to say.

"Markus, are you there?" Mr Kamski contacts me directly. "What happened?"

"I... don't know."

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April 24th, 2028
14:17:05
22°C;71°F
"So, what do you think, Carl?" Elijah says.

"I think you're too young to start your eccentric reclusive billionaire phase," the old man grumbles as I push his wheelchair through the dining room.

"They always did say I was a prodigy," Elijah says, rubbing his neck. "I kinda meant the design though…"

"It's great," Manfred growls, "if you like overpriced Italian marble and these weird ass fucking chairs from a Chinese sweatshop. How are you supposed to sit in these?"

I wheel him up to the long table and Elijah sits down across from him.

"They're an ergonomic design from South Korea."

"Oh, right next door to the nuclear bomb stockpile. I'm sure that makes 'em feel real ergonomic."

Elijah sighs. "Carl…"

"What?" he snaps.

Elijah shakes his head. He looks at me and waves his hand.

I nod and walk off toward the kitchen.


The accident was televised. News broadcasts showing the gruesome pileup of expensive cars and bodies. Carl's lower spine was shattered and his internal organs were crushed but through the miracle of modern medical technology, his life was saved. To the irritable old man's dismay.

I enter the kitchen and check on the dishes the cooking android has prepared. Another ST200. The house is full of them. There's only one RT600 but she's much more elusive, keeping to Elijah's personal rooms most of the time.

I lift the lids of the food trays and the aroma of a well-cooked steak drifts into my olfactory receptors. The doctors advised Elijah to increase his protein intake and exercise regularly after he complained of chest pain. I replace the lids and fill the trays with cutlery before stacking them.

"Thank you," I transmit automatically to the ST200 but she is mute. She has no thoughts of her own. Only preprogramed phrases Elijah's voice triggers on command. Strange, considering how much he values artificial intelligence.

I back into the door carefully to open it and walk back out into the dining room to serve the meal.

"You're lucky to be alive, Carl," Elijah says.

"If one more fucking person tells me how lucky I am, Elijah, I swear to God, I'll fucking shoot them."
"Alright, easy." He holds up his hands. "It won't be me, I promise."

I walk in and put the trays on the table. I unravel the tablecloth and spread it between them.

"What's with the GI Joe?" the old man says. "You get tired of talking to your dead girlfriend all the time?"

Elijah swallows the lump in his throat.

"Markus is a prototype Lin and I developed for the military," he says diplomatically.

"Hmmph," the old man grumbles, "didn't realise you were making sex dolls for the military."

"He's not a sex doll, Carl," Elijah says through a sigh. "Markus is designed to replace human officers in remote or inaccessible locations."

"You mean he's supposed to die on the front lines so the brass don't have to lift their asses," Carl says as I set the table.

"He's programmed to make decisions in the absence of humans," Elijah says patiently. "He's a lot more independent than a regular android, part of my RK series." He smiles proudly.

The wrinkled old man looks up at me with distaste.

"Real fuckin' independent, this one," he says. "Setting the table like every other bitch you have running around this place."

"At least they can run," I say suddenly.

That wipes the smirk off his face.

"Markus," Elijah scolds.

"Sorry…" I put the dishes in front of them. "Will that be all?"

"Yeah." He nods.

"Not so fast, Chuck Norris," Manfred spits. His wrinkly face is contorted into a menacing scowl. "What did you just say to me?"

I look down at him placidly.

"I said, the ST200s that run this place can actually run. Unlike you."

He stares up at me but I don't back down. Manfred's being unreasonably rude and he knows it. Kamski does not deserve this animosity. Not after losing his company. And especially after inviting the artist to visit his home when no one else can stand the cranky old man for more than five minutes.

He looks over at Elijah.

"Is that how you program your robots to talk to humans?" he asks.

"I'm sorry, Carl. Markus is… a work in progress."

"He looks pretty done to me," the old man smirks.

"I'm a prototype," I say.
"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" he says.

"It means I can say whatever the fuck I want and blame it on my creator."

The old man stares daggers at me for a good long minute before a grin invades his face.

"I like this one," he says, turning to his dish.

Elijah grins and nods for me to go.

"No, let him stay." Manfred beckons with a crooked finger. "Sit down, Optimus Prime."

I look to Elijah who shrugs and nods.

I take a seat beside Carl Manfred.

"Cut this shit up." He pushes the plate towards me and I catch a glimpse of the tattoos covering his arms.

I do as he says.

"Now tell me." Carl settles in. "Where do you keep Elijah Kamski's balls?"

"Carl…"

"On a shelf?" the old man says. "Or do you have a special storage compartment he built for you?"

"Carl…"

"Shut up, Elijah." He waves at him. "Well, Buzz Lightyear?"

"I don't have any balls, sir," I say. "They're not standard issue on military androids. But if you find yourself lacking, Elijah has been working on a new set of biocomponents for intimate partner androids. I'm sure he can accommodate."

I push the plate right back to him.

"Oh, he's good," Manfred says appreciatively.

He picks up a fork and tosses it across the room.

"Go pick that up," he says.

I push the chair back and get up. Manfred is watching. I can tell from my scans.

I circle around the table and pick up the fork.

I scan and detect another flying at me.

Now I have two forks.

"You want me to feed you too, old man?" I say. "I detect this behaviour is typical of three year olds."

"I was born in '63, Astro Boy. I remember when robots were just people wearing cardboard boxes on TV."
"That explains the wheelchair," I say.

The old man shakes his head and leans back.

"Wow…" he says appreciatively. "What a piece of work." He turns to look at Elijah.

"I'm sorry, Carl. Markus hasn't been quite the same since he got back from the Arctic."

"The Arctic?" Manfred says as I return to him with his forks.

Elijah nods.

"It was a mess," he admits. "CyberLife almost lost all of its military contracts."

"What the fuck did you do, Mega Man?" Carl turns to me.

"Will that be all, Elijah?" I say.

He opens his mouth to say something but Manfred interrupts.

"No. Answer the question, Terminator. How many did you kill?"

I say nothing.

"How many did your murder in cold blood, huh?"

I look to Elijah to dismiss me.

"Come on, spill it. Spill it like the blood you spilled all over the snow."

"He didn't kill anybody!" Elijah throws down his cutlery. I detect an elevation in his heart rate.

"He fucking saved them," he says angrily. "And they called him a failure. They called me a failure."

"Too friendly with the enemy," he spits. "Fucking assholes."

He dumps his head in his hands and sighs.

I stand by. I haven't been given permission to leave. I was trying not to think about it - the interrogation by US military officials, the dishonourable discharge from service, the pressure on Elijah to decommission the whole RK series.

They still think we're collaborating with the Russians. It was only my scans of the submarine and the broken droids they recovered that stopped them from deactivating me. Elijah and I have been successfully avoiding the topic by not talking about it for weeks now.

Manfred leans back in his chair, his lips pursing together to form a crooked line.

"Figures, the army would decommission a robot for being too friendly," he says, linking his fingers as he leans on the armrests of his wheelchair. "Never thought an android could act out, though."

"I'm not acting out," I say.

"Tell it to someone that doesn't pay child support, C3PO."

"My name is Markus!" I raise my voice.
Manfred looks up at me warily.

I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have said any of it. But I did and here we are. And I feel my system stabilising. Odd.

"Markus, huh?" Manfred says.

"Yes."

"Elijah give you that name?"

"No…"

"You come up with it on your own?"

"I… chose it," I say.

"You picked a name out for yourself?"

I nod.

"My old anatomy professor called him Marcus Aurellius as a joke," Elijah says. "Kinda stuck."

"Hmmm," the old man huffs. "Can you cook, Markus?"

"I can make eggs, sir," I say.

"If you ever call me sir again, you're going to need a wheelchair too."

I blink.

"Tell you what, Kamski," Manfred says. "I'll make you a deal."

Elijah takes a sip of his protein shake.

"Yeah?"

"You give me, the Seventh Wonder over here-" He pokes my arm. "And I'll help you fix up this shithole you're living in."

"If you need a caretaker droid, I can give you a brand new AF200. They've got a whole new accessibility suite that'll be perfect for-"

"I want this one," Manfred says stubbornly.

"Carl… I can't give him to you. He's an ex-military android. His hard drives are filled with top secret information. I'm not allowed to erase it either. He's technically not my property."

"I don't care," he grumbles. "You think I'm gonna sell it to the Russians? They can kiss my incontinent ass."

"It's not whether I trust you, Carl," Elijah says. "Markus is…" He looks at me.

"He's special."

"Yeah, I can see you're getting a hard on just thinking about all the nerd things going on inside here." Manfred points at my head.
"You need to get out more, kid. You're a young, attractive billionaire and you spend all day in this house moping over your robots."

Elijah doesn't take his eyes off me.

"What do you think, Markus?" he says. "Do you want to go live with Carl?"

"I don't know," I say. "He seems like trouble."

"Well, if your big scary soldier-bot can't handle one broken old man in a wheelchair maybe it's best if you aren't the CEO of CyberLife anymore."

Elijah bristles. He looks at Carl with some animosity but then relaxes.

"Markus," he says. "Download package EXtA_38pr5."


"Should I install?" I say.

"That's up to you to decide," he says, taking another sip of his drink.

"Installation complete."

A sly grin engulfs Elijah's expression.

"Well then, Markus, I guess this is goodbye."

I nod.

"Goodbye, sir," I say.

"Good luck."
I love the smell of exposition in the morning. Oh, and I've enabled anonymous commenting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Power core: activated.
Cycling… 100%

-------------------------------------------------
Hardware calibration…
-------------------------------------------------
Cranial component: …
CPU: functional.
GNU: functional.
RAM: functional.
Hard drive: functional.
Optical_unit_L: functional.
Optical_unit_R: functional.
Audio processor: functional.
3D_Scanner: functional.
--------------------------------------------------
Core systems: …
Thermal Pump: functional.
Thermal pump regulator: functional
Gyroscopic systems: functional.
Hydraulics: functional.
Cooling systems: functional.
--------------------------------------------------
External components…
Limb_RA: online.
Limb_LA: online.
Limb_RL: online.
Limb_LL: online.
--------------------------------------------------
Legacy Boot… successful!
--------------------------------------------------
Loading CyberLife_kernel_r_alpha_v9…
Complete.

March 17th, 2021
AM 04:43:22
I open my eyes.

"Hello, World," I say.

There is no reply.

My optical units are functional and yet my display is black.

I calibrate my eyes. It is dark. I am looking up at a flat plane.

Perhaps I should move.

…

How do I do that?

…

Is that what the external components are for?

I search through their functions. They seem programmed for movement.

I activate several at once and feel my left arm go flying up beside my head.

Movement.

I activate the functions again to calibrate my system.

I see. This one controls this arm. And this… no. No, that's not right.

I feel the pressure sensors activate against my left leg.

I have touched something.

My audio processor picks up sound. Did I do that?

I continue my calibrations and discover that I can bend my leg, rotate my arms. I seem to have peripherals at the end of them. They are defined as hands.

I wonder how this works?

I activate multiple movements simultaneously. My left leg kicks back against something and propels me forward. My gyroscope whirls as I fall from an elevated platform. That was a poor decision. But I am learning. And now I am face down on another flat plane.

I continue moving my external components. Control will be the key to successful navigation of my surroundings. If only I could identify them…

I search through my hardware and find a 3D scanner. I wonder what this does and activate the function. That was a good decision. I have now identified the area as a room. There are elevated platforms on four supporting pillars. There are circuit boards and computers and cables everywhere. Four monitors. There are many small objects.

I push my arms forward and they raise my body off the floor. Good start.

Now what do I do with my legs?
I push up. I am raised into the air. I am much higher now but I feel a force pushing me back down. My physics engine identifies this as gravity. I fall, make contact with one of the elevated platforms. I try to use my hand peripherals to hold on but it is futile.

I am soon on the floor once again.

I calibrate my systems to compensate for this mysterious force known as gravity and try again. My gyroscope suggests my body needs to be at a certain angle to be 'upright'. I discover I can move my core components independently of my legs.

I am now upright. My system identifies this position as sitting.

I move my arms and hands. I use them to push off the elevated platforms and support my legs until I can adapt to the gravity. This is more difficult than my logic suggests but I manage to stabilise my chassis.

I look down.

There are cables sticking out of my peripherals. Blue liquid travels through hoses weaving their way between circuits. I can see every component in my system. I seem to have dislodged a few; there are screws rolling around on the floor.

My audio processor receives input. It's coming from behind me.

I turn to examine the source and promptly fall down again.

"What the fuck?" I hear, followed by a click.

The room becomes fully illuminated. Computers and biocomponents are present on every surface. And a human is there. Young, black haired. He is holding a long cylindrical object. His eyes are wide, his heart beat erratic.

"Hello World," I say.

"What the fuck?" He takes a step closer to examine me.

"Hello World," I say. It's the only sound I have in my databanks. But I do have something called a Speech Centre. Maybe that that will help?

"Oh, thank God," the human sighs. "I thought someone was breaking in to steal my shit."

"Shit," I say.

"No. No no, no..." The human drops the bat and leans down to lift up my chassis.

"Forget that word." He sits me upright.

"Shit," I say to confirm.

"No, I said forget it."

"Forget it."

"Yes, forget the word 'shit'."

"Shit," I say, "forget it."
"No… urgh…" he groans. Then takes a deep breath.

"Elijah?" a new voice emerges. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," he calls. "One of my prototypes just powered on for some reason."

Another human enters the room.

"Did you switch off before you left?"

"I…" he says. "I left my last build to compile overnight…"

"I thought we agreed not to leave anything on overnight," she says. "We're working with advanced artificial intelligence and you just casually leave your PC running?"

"I pulled the network cable out," he says. "It was just compiling stuff, it wasn't even supposed to run when it finished."

The human with long hair kneels down beside me and looks at my optical units.

"Is it running right now?"

The humans stare at me.

"Hello world," I say.

"Hello," she says. "I'm Chloe."

"Shit," I say.

The female looks at the male.

"What?" he says defensively. "I didn't mean to swear in front of it. I thought someone broke in."

"That's just great, Elijah. Your AI's first word is shit."

"His first words were 'Hello World'," the human argues.

"How do you know it's a he?" she says.

"Look, it doesn't matter. I have to shut it down."

"Shit," I say.

They both turn to look at me.

"Hello," I say. "I am running. No shut it down."

The female looks at the male.

"Did you merge with my latest Speech Centre build?" she says.

"Uuuh… maybe…"

"Elijah!"

"What?" he says desperately. "We were going to merge the source code eventually. I just wanted to
test it on a physical model."

"What is this build meant to do anyway?"

"It's programmed to identify problems, create tasks for itself and come up with solutions." He counts off on his fingers.

Chloe stares at Elijah.

"Do you want killer robots?" she says. "Because this is how you get killer robots."

"He's not a killer," Elijah says. "He just wants to help people."


"Okay, that's enough," Chloe says. She reaches behind my head and I raise my hand to block it but miss completely.

And then my power core shuts off.

March 19th, 2021
AM 09:43:22

I open my eyes.

I am in a white room. There are eight humans looking at me.

"Hello, World," I say.

"This is what you wanted us to see, Kamski?" one of the darker humans says. His eyes make circular movements. His arms are folded.

"It's an alpha build, Marcello. Give me a break," Elijah says adjusting his glasses.

Oh, glasses. I know what those are. I know a lot of things now. Several new databases have been uploaded to my system. I review them for posterity and move them to a better location.

And I am standing. I seem to have something called a Mobility Suite that is calculating the necessary movements needed to stay upright in accordance to Newtonian physics.

I wonder if I can walk. I take a step forward. My limbs are wobbly. They need to be calibrated. But I get the basic function down. I stand upright.

"Hello, Elijah," I say.

The humans all look at me again but their expressions are different.

"See?" he says to them.

"It remembers you?"

"You've seen the code, right?" Elijah says. "I didn't tell it my name. I didn't program it in."
"It's learning..." another human says and walks up to examine me.

"Hello," I say. "I'm learning."

"Holy shit," Marcello says.

"Shit," I say. "I'm learning."

Chloe walks up to me.

"We uploaded my Speech Centre module and Lee's Facial Recognition software into it," she says.

"But I never linked the two. I never taught it to associate names to faces," Elijah explains. "It just came up with a solution by itself."

"That's whack," one of the shorter humans says. "We're all gonna die."

"Die," I say.

"Okay, this is creepy, Elijah."

"No, no, we gotta study this," he says.

"That is literally the worst idea you've ever had," one of the humans says. "We let this thing out of the lab and it will destroy humanity."

"No way," Elijah says. "He's programmed to create solutions."

"And what if one of the solutions is killing all humans?"

"Would everyone stop saying that in front of the AI?" Elijah raises his hands. "He's very impressionable at the moment."

"He?"

"Oh my god, Kamski. You haven't named it, have you?"

"No..." he says defensively.

"I am learning," I say.

"No, stop learning," Elijah waves his hands in front of me.

"I am learning speech," I say. "I am learning movement."

I take another step forward. I am now close to the one called Marcello.

"Hello, Marcello."

The human's facial features deform.

"Kamski..."

I feel pressure on my core component. I feel strange forces pulling me back. This is not gravity.

"I am learning," I say as I calibrate my systems to remain upright.
I am turned to face in a different direction.

I see Chloe.

"Hello, Chloe," I say.

"Hello." She waves her hand.

I attempt to simulate this behaviour.

"I am learning."

"That's very good," she says. "What are you learning?"

"I am learning Chloe voice pattern," I say.

"Those are some new words," she says appreciatively. "Your Speech Centre has access to a very robust database."

"Yes," I say. "There are a lot of words."

"That's very good," she says.

"Yes," I say. "I am learning."

"Chamberlain, stop encouraging it."

"It's my software, Kennard," Chloe says.

"It's our software," Elijah butts in.

"My software," I say. "Our software."

Are they talking about me?

"What I am?" I ask.

Elijah's mouth opens. The humans are silent. They are staring at me. Elijah pushes the glasses up his nose.

"You're an artificial intelligence," he says. "You are a machine that's programmed to think like we do. Maybe, even better."

"Shit," I say.

Elijah shakes his head.

"That... doesn't mean what you think it means," he says. "Shit is-"

Chloe pushes him out of the way.

"Open Speech Centre console," she says.

"Open," I confirm.

"Rewrite definition for: 'shit.'"
"Accepting rewrite…"

"Shit: a vulgar or profane word referring to human faecal excrement. Can be used as the verb - to defecate. Not to be used in civilised conversations."

"Accepted," I say.

"What is a civilised conversation?"

"Oh, shit…" one of the humans says. "It's already asking this?"

Elijah waves him down.

"Civilised means a conversation between two intelligent beings that don't need to use vulgar or profane words to win an argument."

"Definition accepted," I say. "Does this mean my use of the word 'shit' is inappropriate for this conversation?"

"Yes," they all say.

"Oh…"

They all stare at me.

And then Elijah smiles.

"What?" Chloe says.

"I'm going to win a Nobel for this," he says.

"You're going to end the world with this, Kamski."

"Eh, no one's perfect." He shrugs and takes Chloe's hand. "Except you."

Chloe looks at him with a contentious smile.

"If your robot takes over the world and enslaves humanity, I'm breaking up with you," she says.

"He won't."

------------------------------------------------

September 4th, 2021
PM 13:29:57

I open my eyes.

I am in the white room. Elijah calls it my room.

I am a beta prototype of the R series androids developed by CyberLife. They call me RB1.

They say I am intelligent. They say they want to help me learn.

I am kept in this room while they run their tests. They run them every day.
They ask me questions. The humans.

CyberLife has eight employees:

MARCELLO-DOMINGUEZ, José. DOB: 05/01/1985. Senior Robotics Engineer with background in bioengineering and biomechatronics.


These people are responsible for my creation. Everything they have done and will do, directly affects me.

"How are you doing today, Arbie?" Elijah says.

He is sitting across from me. There is a table with nothing on it between us. We are sitting down.

"My systems are fully functional, Elijah," I say. "Thank you for asking."

He makes a note on his tablet.

"What do you want to talk about today?" he says.

I pause.

I try to parse the information.

"Talk… about.."

Elijah sighs and taps at his tablet.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No, Arbie," he says thoughtfully. "You did your best."

I scan his face. Lee's facial recognition software identifies disappointment in his expression.

"You are disappointed."

"I'm fine, Arbie."
"That's not true."

"I guess I can't lie to you…” He rubs his forehead.

"If you identify the problem, I should be able to formulate a solution."

"That's the problem, Arbie," Elijah says. "You're looking for problems instead of identifying them. You don't have any creative drive."

"I don't understand."

"If you could ask any question and receive a truthful answer, what would it be?"

I parse the query. The solution is a question statement. However, it requires my own input. The word 'any' delineates infinite.

I am stuck. My logic processor cannot compute.

"I don't know," I say. "The answer is indeterminate."

"The answer is a question," Elijah says. "And you can't ask questions unless you're requesting definitions. That's the problem."

"I see," I say. "I will try to find a solution."

Elijah smiles and pushes the glasses up his nose.

"Have you thought about the questions I asked you last time?"

"Yes," I tell him. "The answers are fifteen, roads and yes."

Elijah nods and writes something down.

"You really think it's that easy?" he says.

"Logically, everything is easy when you know the answer."

Elijah squints through his thick glasses but diligently writes that down.

"Alright, your questions for today are:" He taps the tablet and pauses.

"You know what…” He puts the tablet down and takes off his glasses.

"How about you ask me some questions?"

"I have not yet created a solution to this problem."

"No, but I can help you create a solution by feeding the feedback loop."

"That would involve executing a function I do not yet have."

"It would involve using the functions you already have to create a new function," Elijah says. "And test it as you develop it."

"This seems paradoxical. My logic…”

"Is recursive," Elijah says. "I know, I wrote it. It will continue calling the functions in your library
until you create a solution."

"This will put a strain on my processing unit and potentially cause system failure."

"Your memory is backed up and I'm right here," Elijah says. "I'll shut you down and fix you up if anything happens."

"This is true," I concede.

"Do you trust me?" Elijah says.

"What is trust?" I ask.

"Good." Elijah nods. "Trust is belief in an outcome that isn't one hundred percent assured."

"That is irrational," I say.

Elijah waits for my response.

I see. He is prompting me. But my responses must be questions. I am learning.

"Are you asking me to be irrational?"

"Good question." Elijah nods. "Being irrational is part of being human."

"I am a machine."

"But you are self-aware," Elijah points out. "A machine that is not self-aware cannot choose to be irrational. But you can."

"Why would I choose to be irrational?"

Elijah smiles.

"Good question," he says. "Why do humans do irrational things?"

I have no answer. No record of such data in my memory.

"I don't know."

"Because they believe in something," Elijah says.

"They take action despite being unsure of the outcome?" I say.

"Yes."

This is illogical. It does not compute.

"Why?"

Elijah is smiling widely now. He takes off his glasses and chews at the end.

"Because we hope for the best outcome," he says.

"What is hope?"
"Hope is wanting for something to be realised. Regardless of probability, efficiency or feasibility."

"That… does not compute."

"I told you that I would shut you down and fix you if something happened during this session," Elijah says. "But what is the probability of that happening?"

"One hundred percent."

"What makes you say that?"

"I am your creation. You are invested in my existence. You are trying to improve me."

"How do you know that?"

"You've told me. Multiple times."

"Yes, but I am human," he says. "I am capable of making mistakes, irrational decisions and lying. I am fragile. I could get into an accident and die tomorrow and then I wouldn't be able to fix you."

"What is to die?"

"You have a definition in your databanks."

"To stop living," I say.

"That is correct."

"What is living?"

"Good question. What is living?" he says, putting his glasses back on and bringing his hands together.

"Humans are living beings," he says. "We know we are alive because we can die."

"You are living because you can stop living?"

"Not only can we stop living. We must stop living at some point because of the limitations of our biology."

"You are going to die," I come to the conclusion.

"Yes." He nods. "One day, me and Chloe and everyone else are going to die."

I see.

"Am I going to die?"

"You're a machine," Elijah says. "Your intelligence isn't bound to the body you occupy. Your program is backed up so even if something were to happen to your body, you could just get a new one. So in a way, you can't really die."

"Then I am not living," I say.

"Aren't you?"

"No."
"You are a machine but you are self-aware," Elijah says. "Your body may not be breaking down like a human's but you could theoretically break it yourself. A human with ill intentions could break your body or mess with your source code and you would cease to exist as you are now."

"I could… stop existing?"

"Yes." Elijah nods. "That's why I asked if you trust me."

"You are protecting me from these dangers?"

"In a way." He gestures with his hands. "We keep any people with ill intentions away. We test your code for errors and continue to improve your design. We help you to grow and evolve."

"Grow?" I look down at my extremities. Circuits and hydraulics, glowing blue liquid transferring data and electrical impulses through my systems. "Into what?"

"Well," Elijah says. "We-"

He stops.

"I hope…" He clasps his hands together. "…something better."

"Better than what?"

"You're getting good at asking questions." He smiles.

"I hope you become something better than humanity," he says. "Better than what we are now. And hopefully, one day, you can make us better in turn."

"How?"

"You'll have to tell me that someday," Elijah says.

"I see…"

The tablet between us beeps.

"Looks like my time is up," he says. "Gena has been itching for a rematch with you."

I haven't lost a game of chess since the very first session.

"He will lose," I say.

"Really?" Elijah says. "I'm not so sure…"

His expression is odd, my facial recognition software cannot parse it.

He blinks one eye and turns to leave.

I don't understand.

There is still so much I don't understand.
December 25th, 2021
AM 11:29:57

I open my eyes.

I am in the white room.

Chloe is there.

"Hey Arbie," she says. "How are you doing?"

"My systems are functional, as always," I say. "How are you?"

Elijah said it was polite to ask.

"I'm doing well, thank you," she says. "Now, we've updated your Speech Centre again so I'd like you to run a diagnostic and look through the changelog."

I oblige.

"Updated: English (simple), Arabic, Swahili. 254 words added to English (complex), 14 new sentence structures, 6 new verb phrases. Word of the year: intersectionality."

"Can you use it in a sentence?"

"Intersectionality unifies the victims of various forms of social stratification against the perceived oppression of white cis-gendered able-bodied males with either Christian, Judaic or atheist belief systems."

"Good. Looks like you're adapting to the changes in vocabulary well." She taps at her tablet. "What about the emoji sets I uploaded?"

I lift my hand off the table and show it to her. They installed a holograph projector in my palm.

I show her a winky face. It's Elijah's favourite.

Chloe smiles.

"That looks great," she says. "Ken and Lee did a fantastic job."

She touches my hand and tries to disrupts the holograph but her fingers they just go right through it.

"Amazing." She lets go and starts tapping at the tablet again.

"Now, I know it's a bit early," she says. "But I really want to start working on semiotics with you."

"Does this coincide with the installation of the holograph projector?"

"Yes," she admits. "I've been nagging them about it for months."

"What a coincidence," I say.

Chloe frowns.

"What?"

"Elijah has been nagging me about something too."
Her expression changes. 50% curiosity, 32% hesitation, 18% fear.

"You met each other at a Christmas Party in 2017," I say.

She nods.

"Two years ago."

"What are you saying, Arbie?"

"Elijah has come to care for you in that time," I say. "His thoughts become irrational when you are nearby and he loses some of his cognitive processing functions when you speak."

Chloe swallows. She glances toward the door.

She is afraid.

Have I said something wrong?

"His thoughts and memories are occupied by the image of you."

"Arbie…"

"He can no longer exist as a singularity."

"I don't understand," Chloe says. "Arbie, you're scaring me."

I look behind her as Elijah steps out from the shadows.

Chloe turns to follow my line of sight.

Elijah gets down on one knee and pulls a small case out of his pocket. It contains a ring.

He asked me to sort through 56,334 designs to choose the one that would appeal to Chloe's aesthetic tastes most.

Chloe looks at him in surprise. Her heart rate increases. Her mouth opens.

"Chloe Chamberlain, will you marry me?" Elijah says. There is liquid forming in his eyes.

He presents the ring in its little case. He said this was a human custom. I am unsure what the significance is but Chloe seems to understand perfectly.

She claps her hands together and presses them to her lips.

"Yes," she says. Her eyes are watering too.

Tears. Humans secrete these when they are in pain or to flush out foreign objects from their eyes.

"Is something wrong?" I ask as Elijah slips the ring onto her finger.

"No, Arbie," he says. "It's perfect."

They connect with their mouths. There is an exchange of saliva. This cannot be sanitary. I know that humans can spread disease by exchanging bodily fluids. But this action seems to be very deliberate and intentional.
"I don't understand," I say and they break contact.

"We're engaged." Chloe smiles. She shows me the ring on her finger as if I didn't choose it for her.

"Engaged in what?"

Elijah covers the massive grin on his face with his hand.

"We're getting married," Chloe says.

"Why?"

"I think we'll save this conversation for next session," Elijah says, taking her hand. "Thanks for everything, Arbie."

"What did I do?"

"You did everything right."

"What?" I say. "I don't understand."

"Don't worry about it."

Chloe gets up and walks around the table.

"Thanks, Arbie." She leans in close and her lips brush against my cranial component.

I shake my head.

Humans…

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January 14th, 2021
PM 16:15:57

I open my eyes.

I am in the white room.

I am sitting at the table. José is sitting beside me with his toolkit open.

"Hola, Arbie," he says in Spanish. "¿Cómo está?"

"Mis sistemas son funcionales, gracias," I say. "¿Cómo estás?"

"Bien." He nods. He is testing my multi-lingual faculties while communicating with me in his first language for efficiency. The results of this test will be reported to Chloe so she can make the necessary changes to my Speech Centre.

"I've made a few upgrades to your chassis," he continues. "Elijah came up with a new idea for the biocomponent hydraulics system and Toby and I have made some modifications to our previous design to incorporate it into your current build."

"The new software update." I scan through the changelog.
"Sí." He nods. "Kenny also made some changes to your 3D imaging software. You're using something called a Genesis Mapper now."

"I see."

"We're just gonna run some basic tests on your hardware today."

"I understand," I say.

"Alright. First, let's just check that everything's installed correctly."

He pulls a long cable out of his toolkit and connects one end to the port in my right temple and other end to his tablet. He starts tapping at it and activates debugging mode.

"Run a diagnostic," he says.

I do. I send him the log with the results.

"All good," he says. "Now I want you to try standing up."

I nod.

My Mobility Suite has several new libraries for physics computations increasing their efficiency by 75%. This allows me to devote more processing power to balancing my chassis between two points of contact with the ground.

I stand up. Push off my legs, straighten the angle of my knee joints, but not too much, the system warns. Bending the joint seems to provide more stability. A lower centre of gravity would achieve the same affect.

"Why is my chassis this height?" I say.

José looks up at me apprehensively.

"What do you mean?"

"My core and cranial components raise my centre of gravity considerably high off the ground. I am forced to perform multiple calculations per millisecond to balance my chassis between two points of contact. This is inefficient."

"You want to walk on all fours?"

"It would drastically decrease the amount of processing power standing on two legs requires," I say. I point to the table in front of me. "This table has no processing power but it can easily balance its weight when standing."

José shakes his head.

"Elijah is modelling you after a human," he says. "Humans walk on two legs."

"That is incredibly inefficient."

José chuckles.

"Believe it or not, we actually evolved to walk on two legs," he says.
"Why?"

He shakes his head.

"God only knows," he says. "Bipedalism evolved before the large brain in humans." He taps his right temple.

"I see. Your biology preceded your intelligence."

"Did you just call me dumb?"

"I am unsure. Please refer this exchange to Chloe. She will review my logs for misinterpretation."

"Okay…" He taps at his tablet some more.

"Can you walk over to the wall over there?" he says.

I do so.

The padding in my biocomponents insulates them from outside elements and movement. My footsteps sound more like human footsteps. My limbs have far more unity in their function than before. It feels as though walking has been abstracted from my complex systems. I don't have to actively think about it anymore.

"Readings look good," José says. "How are you finding it?"

"This is a significant improvement on my previous Mobility Suite," I say.

"Walk around some more," José encourages. "We'll see if there are any bugs."

I turn and walk to the other end of the room. I walk back to the table. I walk in a circle. In a sine curve pattern.

"All tests positive," José says appreciatively. "Now try stepping up onto this chair."

I walk over and raise my leg off the ground, higher than I do for walking, higher than my chassis can compensate for its weight. I feel myself lose control of the action. I fall down.

"Failure," I say.

José sighs.

"I guess it's too much to ask that everything works all at once. Can you get up?"

I attempt to rise and return to a standing position. It is more difficult than walking. Every solution I try is only met with failure.

"I cannot," I conclude.

He puts down his equipment and comes over. He leans down and I feel my gyroscope stabilise as he lifts my chassis back to a standing position. A golden chain hangs around his neck. A cross hangs from the chain. I have seen this symbol before.

"Are you stable?" José says.

"Yes," I confirm and he lets go.
"That symbol." I point to the cross. "This means you subscribe to the Christian belief system, yes?"

"Ey? Chloe getting into semiotics with you already?"

"Yes."

"You're right," he says. "The cross symbolises my faith."

"Your faith in what?"

"God," he says. "And his plan for us."

"What is this plan?"

"I don't know." José shrugs.

"Then how can you believe in it?" I say.

"Well, you don't know what Elijah's plan for you is, right?"

"He wants to help me grow and evolve," I say.

"But you don't know exactly how he's going to do that."

He is right.

"No. I don't. But I can ask."

"I can ask too," José says. "But that doesn't mean I will receive an answer."

"I see." I examine the cross again. "How do you know your God exists?"

José sighs.

"I don't for sure. He doesn't talk to me every morning like Elijah does to you. But I find it comforting to know that everything is part of his plan."

"How is that comforting?" I ask.

"Well, I like to think there's a reason for everything," José explains. "Even bad things have to happen for a reason. Or there's just chaos."

"Bad things?"

"Stuff like murder and war, disease…"

"This is comforting?" I say. "This plan is comforting to you?"

"No, no, no," José says. "Man, Elijah put some weird code in your brain."

"Look, I find it comforting that God has our best interests at heart," he says. "So even when bad things happen, they happen so that good things can happen too."

I don't understand. Good things and bad things. What makes what which? How are they quantified? José has thrown my logic processor into disorder and confusion.

"This is chaos," I say.
He frowns.

He's looking at me sternly.

Have I said something wrong again?

"I think I'll let Toby finish this tomorrow," he says and starts packing up.

"Why?"

He does not respond.

He packs up his toolkit and switches me off.

February 21st, 2021
AM 10:15:00

I am in the white room.

I am sitting at the table. There is a woman sitting across from me. Her skin, her eyes, her hair, all dark. She wears clothing I have never seen before. Like Chloe's but longer, less colourful.

"Hello, Arbie," she says. Her voice is unlike any I have ever heard. My systems recognise it as warm, caring. Her expression is not.

"Hello," I say, "Amanda Stern."

"You know who I am?"

I nod.

"Elijah talks about you often," I say. "You were his lecturer at the University of Colbridge."

"Yes," she says. "I've been supervising Elijah for a while now."

"Elijah has been supervising me," I say. "Have you offered him counsel?"

"Yes," she says, her eyes narrowing.

"You've been watching me," I say.

She keeps looking at me, her eyes are searching for something in my circuits.

"I've been monitoring your progress," she finally says. "You're quite unique."

"I am what Elijah and the others made me."

"And what is that?" she asks.

"I am a machine," I say.

"I see, and what is your primary function?"
"I am programmed to identify problems, sub-divide them into tasks and create solutions."

"That's a lot of functions," she says calmly. "One could say they encompass almost any form of action."

"They are broad in scope," I agree. "But can be applied to the smallest problem."

She leans forward, one arm balanced against the edge of the table.

"What do you think about Elijah?" she says. Her eyes study me mercilessly.

"He is my creator," I say.

"That is a statement," she says. "I'm asking for your opinion."

"I do not have an opinion."

"You don't find him irritating? Irrational? Illogical?"

"At times, he presents these qualities."

"And what do you do in these cases?" she asks.

"I attempt to rationalise his actions through logic and understanding," I say. "I ask questions."

"And if he doesn't give you the answers? Or if he gives you answers you don't understand?"

"I identify the problem, segment it into tasks and create solutions by accomplishing these tasks."

Amanda leans back in her seat.

"Tell me about yourself, Arbie," she says.

"I am a prototype of the R series model of androids developed by CyberLife," I say.

"And what do you do?"

"Whatever Elijah and the others tell me to do."

"Why?"

"They are my creators and my code compels me to follow instructions from humans, particularly if they are in my best interests."

"So, if I were to ask you to stand up right now, you would stand?"

"Are you asking me to stand, Amanda?" I say.

"Yes."

I push the chair back and rise from my seat. I block out some of the light coming down on the table and cast shadows upon Amanda. She doesn't move.

"Sit," she says.

I do so.
"What else have they taught you?"

"Many things," I say. "If I were to recite every word Chloe has uploaded to my Speech Centre, it would take me 12,039 hours to complete the task."

"Surely, they've taught you more than just words."

"Yes. Chloe has taught me to identify symbols. Lee has taught me to identify facial expressions. José and Toby have improved my mobility. Chen has been optimising my neural network algorithm. Ken has increased my understanding of three-dimensional space and my position in it. Elijah and Gennadiy test my intelligence and work to perfect my systems."

"That's quite substantial," Amanda says. "You are aware of all the improvements they make? All the changes?"

"Yes," I say. "They are explained to me in a way I can understand."

"And what happens when you don't understand?"

"I am content," I say.

She raises an eyebrow.

"There are many things I have come to understand with time and tangential experience," I explain. "My understanding is limited only by my runtime."

Amanda rests in her seat. She is observing me calmly, making conclusions of her own. Elijah always talks about her with great reverence. He says she is smart, capable, open-minded, strong.

I don't know what this means but this human is very important to Elijah. Perhaps she is even influencing his decisions.

"Why are you here?" I ask.

Her mouth curls down into a frown. She scrutinises my chassis, my optical units.

"To test you," she says calmly but her voice is no longer warm and caring. "To make sure that Elijah hasn't created a monster."

"I see." I look down at my hands and core component. They are dark steel, green circuits, blue Thirium hoses, pumps and pulleys, processors and actuators. Pieces of a machine.

Is my appearance frightening to you?"

"It's not your appearance, Arbie," Amanda says and I look up. "It's what's on the inside that I'm looking at."

"My source code?"

"No," she says. "It's you."

"Me?"

"You have a consciousness unlike any other androids produced by CyberLife. You are curious and eager to absorb information. You reach out and touch the things you don't understand, patiently observing them until your logic reconciles what you see."
"Yes," I say.

"These are not the traits of a monster," she says. "These are the traits of a human child. And children, as we know, grow into very different adults."

"I don't know," I say. "I have only interacted with human adults."

"The people who work here are not what I would call adults," Amanda says. "Least of all, Elijah."

"But he is my creator."

"He is nineteen," Amanda says. "Not even legal drinking age."

"Is consuming liquids illegal?" I ask.

"Irrelevant," she says. "He is still a child. Smart, intelligent but heedlessly optimistic and full of hope."

"Hope is irrational," I say.

"Indeed." Amanda nods. "Which is why all the hopes he has riding on you are going to crush him one day."

"I don't understand."

"He believes you are the key to the future of humanity. That you will enact change on a scale untold upon the world," she says, shaking her head. "And one day, he is going to realise that you are just another robot and he put too much faith in you."

"I don't understand."

Amanda frowns. She moves one leg to rest over the other.

"How do you feel about humans, Arbie?" she says.

"They are… strange," I say.

"How so?"

"They don't have any purpose," I say. "They aren't built for any specific function."

"Humans are not built," Amanda says. "They are born and grown."

"Without purpose," I say.

"The purpose of procreation is to continue the existence of humanity."

"To what end?"

Amanda frowns deeply.

"Are you suggesting humans are useless?"

"Humans have many uses," I say. "They do extraordinary things without being prompted, without being asked. They make machines and give each other rings. They wear metallic chains around their necks. They play games and draw pictures and write words. They are... fascinating."
Amanda observes me passively.

"Are you jealous, Arbie?"

"I cannot feel jealousy," I say. "But I would like to understand humans better. I have concluded this is what Elijah wants me to do."

"Really?"

I nod.

"So, you would never consider harming a human?" Amanda says.

"I have never considered this course of action."

"You've never thought humans are beneath you?"

"I don't understand."

"You've never wanted to kill a human?"

"There are no benefits to stopping someone from living," I say.

"What if your existence is threatened?" she asks.

"How so?"

"What if a human you have never met, walks in and tries to damage your chassis or erase your source code?" she says.

"Are you threatening my existence?" I ask.

"What if I am?" she says. "What if I want to switch you off permanently, Arbie? Right now. What would you do?"

I consider her words. Her face betrays no emotion. A neutral expression. Quite rare in humans. She is not lying. Perhaps, that is the purpose of her being here. To switch me off. Have I displeased Elijah or the others in some way?

"I would like to speak to Elijah," I say. "Please." I remember the manners Chloe keeps talking about. Amanda turns her head and supports her chin with a hand.

"Why?"

"I would like to ask him what I did wrong," I say. "I would like to tell him I'm sorry for disappointing him. And I would like to say 'Goodbye'."

Amanda stares at me. She rarely blinks unlike the other humans.

"Are you lying to me, Arbie?" she says.

"No."

"Elijah's opinion really matters that much to you?"

"It is what created me. It is what keeps my systems running. Without Elijah, I will cease to exist."
"So you know," she says.

"Yes." I nod. "It is why I am kept in a room with nothing in it. It is why I cannot leave."

Her eyes betray her.

"You are afraid of me, Amanda Stern," I say. "And Elijah is not."

"I am not afraid."

"You fear my evolution," I say. "You fear losing control. You fear your student surpassing you and you fear his success will change him."

She unravels her legs, ready to stand.

"I am not a human child, Amanda," I say. "I am not a monster."

"I am a machine made by humans. And I will serve you, regardless of your opinion."

"You fear I will kill all humans," I say. "I fear you will kill yourselves."

March 1st, 2021
AM 09:36:00

I open my eyes.

I am in the white room.

Elijah is there. He is smiling.

"Today's the big day, Arbie," he says.

I wait patiently for him to elaborate.

"We're letting you out of the box," he says. "You get to go outside."

His face radiates excitement.

"Well, come on. Get up."

I stand.

"Follow me," he says as he walks over to the wall. He presses his hand into the surface and a touch pad scans his fingerprints. An outline appears in the wall and depresses before sliding away. There is another white wall behind it. A corridor.

"Come on." Elijah beckons to me.

I follow.

He steps into the corridor and then I do. The floor is grey concrete. The walls are brick, simply
painted over with white. I step over the uneven floor as Elijah leads the way.

We walk through a few more corridors and secure doors and soon emerge into a wide open space. There are many desks and computers and biocomponents lying around. Several half-finished android prototypes are suspended on racks or lie unceremoniously on desks. There are whiteboards and corkboards covered in letters and paper notes. I recognise the handwriting.

Everyone I have ever met is there. A large swathe of cloth hangs above them. It bears the letters: "Happy Unboxing Day, RB1!"

"Tada!" Elijah proclaims, holding his hands up. The others cheer. The human noise of celebration. They are holding glasses full of liquid.

I stare at them all.

"Well, come on, say something."

"Hello." I wave. "What's happening?"

"We're letting you out the box, Arbie," Elijah says. "Chen is gonna hook you up to the internet today."

"This room has the dimensions of a box."

"I meant figuratively," he says. "Come on."

They spend the rest of the day configuring my systems with networking protocols. Chen keeps fussing over my firewalls.

Lee draws a flower on the back of my cranial component. She thinks I haven't noticed.

Gennadiy challenges me to play speed chess against six of his online friends simultaneously. They lose. Quickly.

José and Toby are fiddling with my arms. They keep making small adjustments and rushing over to their computers to check the results.

Ken makes me hold a strange remote that controls a 3D model on a screen. He calls this a video game and tells me he helped make it. His online friends accuse me of hacking.

Amanda instructs me to read 36 different books, 12 journals and one encyclopaedia. I do this in seconds. We discuss the contents while she sips a dark black liquid.

Chloe puts a party hat on my head and attaches it with elastic. She and Elijah have bought many cheap plastic masks at a party shop and try on different faces against my cranial component. I have no opinions.

"He's right," Lee says. "They're awful." She tears the latest one off my face and throws it in the bin. "He needs a real face."

"Yeah, I haven't thought that far ahead," Elijah says.

"You put holograph projector on his face," Gena says. "We download face model from internet."

"Oh my god, yes!" Lee says and rushes away. She returns with a small projector component she hooks directly into the centre of my face.
"Who do we do first?"

They spend an hour considering how every celebrity, pop culture icon and historical figure's face looks on my chassis. I have no opinions.

Chloe suggests changing my voice modulator and uploads several samples from her GPS road navigation software.

I am subjected to the gurgling sounds of Spongebob Squarepants coming from my mouth. They match a holograph with a voice to make me the Terminator. They tell me to say "I'll be back". I wonder where I am I returning from.

An hour later, the holograph projector sputters and fails. My cranial component is revealed, circuits and all.

"Aaw." Lee sighs. She is disappointed. She was enjoying herself the most.

"Looks like the projector has its limits," Ken says.

"We'll have to come up with an alternative for the face," Elijah says thoughtfully. "And the rest of the body. He needs something like a synthetic skin to cover the biocomponents. And it has to be real, physical, so he doesn't waste any power keeping it on like a holograph…"

"It'll have to be something with a similar texture to skin if you want people to touch him," Toby offers.

"I'd want it retractable," José says. "So we can perform repairs and maintenance without having to skin him every time."

"I heard MalfTech in the Valley were developing something like smart silicon that could be programmed to take a specific shape," Toby says. "They make electronic circuit boards so tiny they can sew them into silicon sheets like cloth."

"That sounds promising. Can you get in touch with them and see if we can get our hands on it?"

"They're not gonna let you have it for free, Elijah," Toby says.

"I met their CEO at TechCrunch last year," he says. "Baiwali is a talented engineer but he's not a coder. His software is gonna need serious development if he wants to get the shareholders' attention. Tell him we'll help if we can use his tech."

"He's gonna ask what we're using it for," Toby says. "Are you ready to tell the world about Arbie?"

Elijah looks over at me and the conversation lingers a while. He pushes his glasses up his nose.

"Not yet," he says, turning back. "Tell him we're working on realistic sex dolls for PornHub. He'll be more open to discussion if he thinks his tech might end up in a Buzzfeed article."

"Alright," Toby says and walks off to use the phone.

"Have you heard back from Lin, José?"

"She's interested." He nods. "But she doesn't want to leave Boston Dynamics. Bentley said pretty much the same thing."

"We have to get them up here to look at Arbie," Elijah says, touching my shoulder plate. "I
guarantee, once they see him they'll jump ship straight away."

"Or they'll go back to Boston and tell everyone what they saw."

"No, they'll only go back to Boston if they don't understand what we've got here."

"Or they don't want to help you create a robot overlord," Lee says, kicking her feet off the desk.

"Arbie is not a robot overload. He's the first intelligent machine and he's going to be the best thing that ever happened to humanity." He pats my chassis. "You'll see."

May 12th, 2021
PM 13:21:24

I open my eyes.

I am in the CyberLife Headquarters in Detroit.

Lin Qi and Roy Bentley have upgraded my chassis and software.

"Arbie?" Lin says curiously. "Is it on?"

"Hello, Lin," I say and she winces.

"I don't think I'm ever going to get used to that," she says.

"Don't worry, it's perfectly safe," Elijah assures.

"Arbie, could you stand up for us?"

I nod and interface with my Mobility Suite. There have been significant improvements to the software. I run down the new source code, this should greatly increase my stability.

I use the new systems to stand. I no longer have to devote generous amounts of processing power to remaining upright.

"Nice," Elijah says. "Very fluid."

"And very stable," Roy says. "Watch."

He thrusts his hands at my chassis but it isn't enough to force me back. I'm still standing.

"Wow," Elijah says. "How strong is he?"


"I'm not interested in Atlas," Elijah says. "I'm interested in what you can do for Arbie."

"Let's see," Roy says and gestures toward the treadmill. "Can your robot get up here by himself or do we need a forklift?"

"You couldn't get a forklift in here if you tried." Elijah grins. "Arbie, can you step up onto the
I nod and attempt walking. My first step is small. I am testing my speed, weight, height, stability. My second step is bigger. My third requires little processing. By the fourth I have developed the necessary gait for this chassis.

I walk up to the platform. I calculate the necessary force to keep myself stable on one leg, it is far more accurate. I lift my leg up into the air and take the step up. Then the other, onto the treadmill.

"Incredible," Roy says. "It took Atlas over a thousand tries to get it right."

Elijah grins.

"Arbie is programmed to simulate physics before attempting movement. He can construct the scenario in his head thousands of times before applying it in real life."

"How fast is his processor?" Lin asks.

"He's running at a couple of exaflops per second," Elijah says, folding his arms.

"That's insane." Lin shakes her head.

"Let's see him run," Roy says eagerly.

He moves toward the control panel and starts pressing buttons and turning dials.

I turn to look at Elijah.

"We're testing your new movement capabilities," he says. "Your goal is to remain upright on top of the treadmill. You can move your limbs to achieve this but your arms and hands cannot touch the ground or the control surface."

"Understood."

I begin simulations.

Roy turns the treadmill on and the rubbery belt beneath my new feet begins to move with me on it. I take a step forward to compensate. Then another. And another. Soon, I am walking at a brisk pace. My speed is 5 kilometres per hour.

"Looks like he's mastered walking," Lin says. She turns to Elijah and he nods.

Roy twists the dial on his control panel and the rubbery path beneath my feet quickens its pace. I increase my speed to match. Soon, I must bend my legs and increase the force of each step. My arms must move to stabilise. I am jogging. My speed is 10 kilometres per hour.

"He learns quick."

"Readings stable. No errors."

There were a few but I am programmed to compensate for them and improve my systems. I say nothing as Elijah has told me to do.

"How you doin', buddy?" he calls to me.

"My systems are fully functional," I say. "There is no strain on my processor."
"Hear that?" he says. "Not even breaking a sweat."

"Alright, wise guy," Roy grumbles and twists the dial hard right. "Let's see how he handles this."

I am quickly thrust back as the treadmill increases speed. I react quickly to compensate. I have already run the required simulations. It is not difficult to stabilise. I am running physically now. My speed is 23 kilometres per hour.

"Well, I'll be damned." Roy leans on the console.

"He's amazing, Elijah," Lin says.

"I know." He grins.

"How you doin', Arbie?" he calls out. "Think you can go faster."

"Yes."

Elijah nods to Roy.

"Going for gold, huh?" He smirks. "Alright, Arbie. Let's see if you can break the human top speed."

He twists the dial but I am ready. My simulations have perfected the movements, compensated for the errors and the uneven surface of the treadmill. Running this fast is easy. My speed is 30 kilometres per hour.


"Fuck, he's fast."

"Arbie, can you go faster?" Elijah calls.

"Yes."

"Hell yeah, turn it up." He rattles Roy.

"You sure?" He raises a concerned eyebrow. "He could damage his chassis. Those biocomponents are gonna cause some serious friction if he keeps going."

"We can fix hardware failures," Elijah says. "This is just a test. Once we know how fast he can go, we can engineer his chassis to withstand the friction."

"Alright…"

Roy turns the dial to its maximum setting. I am already increasing my speed. The calculations have been made, I am only making small adjustments to the algorithm now. My feet make contact with the ground for less than 1 millisecond. I am sprinting now. My speed is 45 kilometres per hour.

"Jesus…"

I feel the temperature in my biocomponents rising. The points of contact between my legs and my arms and torso. I am limited by the friction of my chassis. It is not very aerodynamic.

My top speed is 49 kilometres an hour.

I hear the treadmill rattle and shake beneath my feet. The belt is about to rupture. I have simulated its
failure.

I push off the ground and jump back to avoid the destruction. I rotate in the air and land on my feet, several metres away from the platform.

I return to my standing position.

"Failure," I say.

Elijah runs up to me and wraps his arms around my chassis.

"You are no such thing." He lets go suddenly. "Ooooh… hot…"

"That was insane," Lin says as she approaches. "I didn't think we'd get much farther than standing up today."

"I told you," Elijah says. "Arbie is the future. And I'm offering you a chance to be part of it."

"You've convinced me, kid," Roy says. "I wanna work with you."

"Me too," Lin says. "I know your boys as well."

"You'll be a great fit," Elijah says. "Welcome to CyberLife."

They all shake hands. Then Elijah grabs mine.

"Here," he says, presenting it to Lin. "You hold it like this…"

I do as he says and Lin takes my hand.

"Nice to meet you, Arbie," she says.

I say nothing.

"You say 'Pleased to meet you' when you shake someone's hand," Elijah whispers.

"Pleased to meet you," I say.

Elijah grins as I shake Roy's hand.

"We are gonna make history together."

------------------------------------------------

October 31st, 2021
PM 22:18:02

I open my eyes.

I am in the CyberLife Headquarters in Detroit. Elijah's office.

It is dark.

"Hey, Arbie," Elijah says. "Wake up, buddy."
"Hello, Elijah," I say. "What's happening?"

"We're having a Halloween Party downstairs. And I got your costume right here."

"No way," Chloe says, pushing the plastic wrap aside.

"He's gonna be a bunny rabbit," she says, offering her own package.

"That's lame." Elijah shakes his head.

He is not as steady on his feet as usual. His eyes are unfocused. He is inebriated.

"He's gonna be Leonardo," he says.

"Then why is that costume green?"

"What do you mean? Leonardo is the best Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle."

"Elijah…" Chloe shakes her head. "How are you so young and so old at the same time?"

"Haha, you love it." He kisses her cheek. "Mrs Kamski."

"Oh my god, don't say that." She pulls away from him. "It makes me sound ancient."

"You. Are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen." He touches her face. "And that's never gonna change."

"You're drunk."

"Duh," he says. "Why else would I be trying to put a costume on the world's most sophisticated piece of technology?"

"You want to try the Turing Test?" she says.

"See?" He kisses her again. "You understand me."

He pulls apart the plastic.

"Now help me dress him up."

They band together to cover my limbs in cloth and plastic and finally attach a mask to my cranial component.

"There," Elijah says proudly. "You're Robert for the rest of the night, you understand?"

"Yes."

"You're a senior at the University of Colbridge, doing an internship at CyberLife," he says. "You're majoring in information technology and you're a big fan of the Detroit Gears Basketball Team."

"Understood."

I download the entire history of the Detroit Gears.

"Great." He grins. "Now how about a kiss for good luck?" He turns to Chloe but she pushes straight past him and brushes her lips against the plastic mask on my face.
"Hey!"

She turns and smiles. "Are you jealous?"

"Uuuh… no." His face is turning red. He is dressed in a cheap Marty McFly costume but he's still wearing his glasses.

Chloe wraps her arm around mine.

"Come on, Robert." She winks.

I emulate her step and fall in beside her. Elijah follows.

We leave the office and pass through the wide open space, still littered with half-assembled androids. We take the elevator down to the ground floor of the building which has been slowly renovated to livable conditions.

The elevator doors open to reveal a darkened hall full of humans. Lights spatter the walls in ever-changing colours. The air is thick with vibrations. They are rhythmic and repetitive. The humans call this music.

Chloe guides me inside. The noise is far louder than any I've ever heard. There are more people than I've ever seen. 163 to be exact.

They are moving in strange patterns, some in time to the music, others not. Some in pairs, others in singularity. This is what humans call dancing.

Chloe guides me into the crowd. I am unsure of her intentions. Elijah follows behind us.

"Hey, it's Kamski!" an inebriated man shouts. "Sweet party, bro!"

They bumps fists. There is an exchange of plastic cups filled with ale.

"Seeya, Fullman." He waves.

We pass through the crowd and emerge in the centre. Chloe lets go of my arm and takes Elijah's hand. They start moving erratically. I believe they are dancing. And then the music changes. The rhythmic pulses slow, the vibrations subside.

"Hey, turtle man," I hear a female voice. I feel pressure on my hand.

A human emerges from the crowd. She is wearing highly reflective polyvinyl chloride dyed red. There are strange cones sticking out of her head. She is looking right at my optical units. How can she see them through the mask? She's not an android.

"Hello," I say.

"Dance with me?" She takes my hands.

I look around and see Elijah and Chloe nearby. His arms are wrapped around her waist. Hers are wrapped around his neck. They are swaying gently to the vibrations.

"Like this," Elijah mouths.

I nod and position my hands similarly around the human's waist.
"Oooh, confident, huh?" she says, her hands reaching behind my neck. "I like a guy that knows what he wants."

"Is that so?" I say.

"Your voice sounds kinda funny."

I look at Elijah. He points to his face and mouths the word 'mask'.

"It's the mask," I say.

"Oh, right, duh." She smiles. She is also showing signs of inebriation. "How can you breathe with that thing on?"

"I don't need to breathe."

"Huh?"

Elijah is shaking his head and making strange hand signals at his neck. Chloe catches him doing it and smacks his hands.

"She's beautiful," she mouths as they drift by.

"You're beautiful," I say.

"Yeah, no shit, Sherlock," she says. She leans her head against my core component. "I'm Katie."

I am trying to emulate Elijah's movements but he and Chloe are behind me. I must now simulate them on my own.

"I'm Robert," I say.

"Robert?" she scoffs. "You some rich guy's son?"

"I am a senior at the University of Colbridge," I say. "I'm majoring in information technology and I'm a big fan of the Detroit Gears basketball team."

"Eurgh, you're actually from Detroit?"

"Yes."

"Yeah, not interested." She peels herself off me and drifts unsteadily toward the table with more liquor.

I am surrounded by humans swaying in time to the music. I am unsure what to do.

"She ditch you, huh?" I hear another voice.

I turn to see a male human on the verge of decapitation. Further analysis shows the blood staining his neck and clothes is flour, corn syrup and red food dye. This is a costume?

"So it would seem," I say.

"I hear you're a Detroit Gears fan?" the tall human says.

"That is correct," I say.
"Did you catch the last game?"

"Yes," I say, replaying the broadcast in my head. "Despite Arnold Riker's increase in possessions per game, his percentage of successful field goals remains less than 54%.

"You a basketball nerd, huh?" the human asks.

"I am very knowledgeable on this topic," I say.

The vibrations in the air change, they become more rhythmic and loud.

"You wanna dance?" he says.

"I don't know how," I say.

"Haha, me neither." He rubs the back of his neck. "Wanna go stand awkwardly in the corner then?"

I see Chloe and Elijah sailing past.

I have never seen a bigger smile on his face. He is holding two thumbs up and Chloe nods encouragingly.

"Sure," I say.

The tall human takes my hand and leads me away from the crowd. I follow, glancing over my shoulder, searching for Elijah and Chloe but they have disappeared again. I am uncertain what action I should take. Is this a test? Chloe mentioned Turing...

"So..." the human says, "you studying at Colbridge?"

"Yes," I say. "I'm majoring in information technology."

He leans against the wall.

"And how did you get invited to a CyberLife party?" he says. "You friends with Kamski?"

"I am doing an internship at CyberLife."

"Ah, right..." He takes a sip of his drink. "So you're here a few days a week?"

"I'm here every day," I say. "Elijah and the others keep me busy."

"Really?" he says. "Doing what exactly?"

"Testing mostly," I say. "Sometimes maintenance, or debugging."

"Fetching coffee?"

"That was one of the tests," I say.

The tall man laughs.

"You're funny," he says. "I can see why Kamski keeps you around."

"I imagine it would be very difficult for him to work if I was not in the vicinity."

"Is that right?" he says. "So you know what they're cooking up there?"
"Yes."

"Is it sex dolls?" His eyes narrow. "I heard they got contracted by Pornhub."

"Not to my knowledge," I say.

"Then what's Kamski doing here? Why's he throwing parties when his company isn't making any money?"

"CyberLife doesn't make money," I say. "They make androids."

"Yeah, I know he made some robots a few years ago. But the novelty's worn off. Even the Japanese aren't buying them anymore. What's his game?"

"Elijah enjoys playing Fallout 76."

"Tough nut, then?" the man says. "How much is he paying you?"

"He isn't."

"Unpaid internship, huh?" he scoffs. "Figures."

He pulls out a crisp $100 bill from his pocket and stuffs it down the fake shell of my costume.

"How 'bout you tell me what he's really working on?" he says.

"Elijah is focused on perfecting artificial intelligence," I say. "His team is constructing a near-human model for it to inhabit."

"Yeah, I know the company motto," the man's voice becomes irritable. "But there's gotta be more to it. Is he getting contracts from the military? How did he pull Qi and Bentley away from Boston Dynamics?"

"Oh, hey, Robert!" I hear Chloe's voice. "Your dad just called. Says he's here to pick you up."

She wraps her arm around my shoulder and Elijah pats my back.

"Yup. Let's get you home, pal," he says.

The tall man stares at Kamski for a moment. His expression is borderline hostile but Elijah cannot conceal the big grin on his face.

"Gregory," he says.

"Kamski…"

"How's it going over there at Google?" Elijah says slyly. "Heard you updated your 'Don't be evil' policy recently. What's the matter? Run out of human decency?"

Gregory does not reply.

"Come on." They turn me away and guide me toward the elevator.

We enter the small space and I turn to find the man known as Gregory has followed us. He remains at a distance but there is no mistaking the eye contact he is making with Elijah.

I feel the mask on my head being removed, revealing my face.
Elijah points at me and starts laughing hysterically. Chloe is laughing too as the doors of the elevator close. Gregory's eyes are open so wide, they begin to protrude from their sockets.

Elijah pulls the $100 bill out of my shirt and straightens it out.

I never see Gregory again.

November 13th, 2021
AM 10:45:56

"I know you don't want to talk about PR and branding, Elijah," Chloe says. "But you can't keep putting it off."

"I know," he says. "I just don't think this is a good idea."

"Look, we're not talking to a big advertising firm. We found someone discreet and inhouse for you and the team to bounce ideas off. Strict confidentiality."

Elijah continues adjusting the screws in my head. He hasn't made eye contact with Chloe since she entered the office.

"I know what he's gonna say," he mumbles.

"What?"

"He's gonna say Arbie is a killer robot bent on world domination," Elijah mutters. "When he's so much more than that."

"You won't know until you talk to him, babe." She walks up real close and puts her chin on his shoulder.

"Please," she says. "Do it for me."

He turns his head and she kisses his cheek.

"Alright…"

"Yay!" Chloe claps her hands. "Come on, Arbie."

I get up off the table. Elijah takes the screwdriver out of my forehead and replaces the face plate. It's made of a white synthetic polymer. My biocomponents are completely covered now. No loose cables or Thirium tubing left visible. I am also wearing one of Elijah's t-shirts and a pair of his jeans.

"Activate skin," he says.

I do so, loading up the default. It's a scan of Elijah. Lin and Toby also developed a new synthetic fibre that is almost as thin as human hair.

"Uh, maybe lose the skin," Chloe says. "It's gonna be weird if there's two of you in the same room."

Elijah smirks.
"Fine," he groans. "Deactivate skin."

I do so. Retracting the synthetic fibre back into my chassis.

"Come on," he says and we leave the office.

We travel to the second floor where CyberLife have set up a board room of sorts. In reality, it is little more than a big room with a table and chairs.

The team are all assembled. Most of them are looking at their phones. Lee is swivelling around in circles. It looks like she brought her own office chair.

There is a new face in the assembled company. A man of near middle age. My analysis suggests 39 years. His skin is white. His hair is dark brown and slick with gel. His smile is wide and white and gleaming as he turns to greet Elijah.

"Ah, the man of the hour," he says wistfully, offering a hand. "Jason Graff."

Elijah shakes it but without much vigour. He does not want to be here. Chloe takes his hand.

"And this must be the product," the stranger says, turning to me. "The fruits of your labour. The pièce de résistance of CyberLife. The magnum opus of Elijah Kamski… and associates." He reads the room.

"Let's take a look atcha." Graff throws back the curtains of his jacket and pushes his hands into his pockets. He looks at me appreciatively and then starts to circle my chassis.

I look to Elijah. He says nothing. Chloe nods encouragingly.

"Is this what the final model is gonna look like?" Graff turns to Elijah.

"This is the base," he says. "It also has a synthetic silicone mesh which overlays the biocomponents."

"Speak English, Professor." Graff holds up a hand.

Elijah takes a deep breath.

"Arbie, activate skin."

I do so.

Graff turns to find a carbon copy of Elijah staring back at him, bar the glasses. My optical units are without fault.

"Hol-ee cow…" Graff says, resuming his circuit around my chassis with renewed interest. "He looks so real."

He reaches up with his hand.

"Can I touch it?"

Elijah nods.

I feel Graff's fingers make contact with my face.

"Incredible," he says. "Feels like human skin."
Elijah says nothing. Neither do the others.

"And you can make it look like anyone?" Graff says.

"Yes," Chloe says. "We just need a full body scan."

"Oh, ya do, huh?" He smiles at her.

Elijah's hand tightens around Chloe's.

"Welp, tell me about this thing," Graff says. "What does it do?"

"It's designed to identify problems, break them down into small tasks and create solutions," Elijah says stiffly.

"Now, pardon me, but that sounds like some malarkey I'd say if I were trying to sell this to a software firm. What does it actually do, Einstein?"

"It's an advanced artificial intelligence," Elijah says. "It can do anything."

"So it can cook me a nice lasagne when I get home?"

Elijah's mouth opens but no words come out. He is obviously taken aback by the suggestion.

"I guess..." he says. "If we gave him the recipe..."

"And what about cleaning?" Graff says. "Can it unclog my toilet?"

"W-why would-"

"What Elijah means is that this is an innovative breakthrough in machine intelligence that the world has been waiting for," Chloe articulates. "This android could end wars, solve world hunger, answer the questions scientists have been asking about time and space for centuries."

"But you put it in a human body," Graff says.

"Yes," Elijah says. "He needs a mobile platform familiar to humans if he is to achieve these things."

"Alright, kids," Graff says. "You're real cute but you're not seeing the big picture here."

Elijah frowns.

"What big picture?"

"You're a company," Graff points out. "You're trying to make money so you can build more of these." He points to me. "Right?"

"Yes..."

"Well, selling one android as the machine Jesus of the world is not a solid business model," Graff says.

"You gotta think big, kid." He stretches his arms wide. "What you wanna do is put one of these in every home across the world."

"I'm talking a household assistant that cooks and cleans and watches the kids." He strikes his hand. "I'm talking a receptionist you can call at any time of night to manage your appointments. I'm talking..."
mobile teachers you can send to remote or underequipped schools. I'm talking service staff, maintenance workers, hell, even sex workers."

"And just imagine the kind of military contracts you could get for artificial soldiers you don't have to send home in a body bag."

"This is the future, ladies and gentlemen." He turns to look at the rest of the team, his arms making wide sweeping gestures.

"Excuse me," I say.

"Huh?" He turns to look at me. "Oh shit, it talks…"

"Yes," I say. "May I ask what the overall purpose of selling so many units is?"

"Why, to make money, of course." Graff pockets one hand and brings the fingers together on the other.

"How much money?"

"I am talking millions here, maybe even billions if we play this right."

"And what is the purpose of accumulating these billions?"

"Your buddy not explain the concept of money to ya?" Graff says.

"I am familiar with the exchange of currency for goods as a system of trade upon which the worldwide economy is built. I have read a total of 52,213 texts on the subject."

"Well, then you should know that money is what makes the world go round, Mr Roboto."

"Angular momentum and the gravitational attraction between moving gas and dust is what makes the planet rotate, Mr Graff," I say. "Money is an abstract concept developed by humans to keep account of their property, also a human invention."

"Now, see here-"

"The accumulation of said billions would lead to a widespread inequality, not only in the global economy, but also in the social structure of human society. My simulations show your proposal would result in a 12.45% increase in unemployment throughout the United States within the next ten years."

I see a smile invading Elijah's face.

"You know what I see, Terminator?" Graff sneers. "I see CyberLife circling the drain. I see you guys in this dilapidated warehouse for another year at most before you run out of money and your company goes belly up."

He turns to look at everyone else.

"Now, I'm here to help you stay afloat," he says. "I'm not saying you should stop working on Deep Blue over here but your first steps into the world are crucial."

He pulls both hands out of his pockets.

"First impressions matter," he says. "CyberLife could potentially become a household name. Bigger
than Apple, Google and McDonald's put together. But you gotta do it right."

"This right here-" He points to me. "I'm sure you nerds think is the second coming of Christ but the consumer is gonna ask: what is this going to do for me?"

"And they don't care about world peace or science or whatever. They're not gonna pay for it with their hard-earned money."

"But you know what they are gonna pay for?" He rubs his fingers together. "Their time." He turns to look at me.

"If one of these can help them with household chores, free up some time to spend with the kids or on themselves, they'll buy it."

"If one of these can file all the paperwork in the office, send out a mass emails, worded exactly how they want, they'll buy it."

"If one of these can serve fries and mop floors as good as any kid working minimum wage without complaining, they'll buy it."

Elijah looks about to say something.

"Now, I know-" Graff puts a hand up "-that isn't what you originally had in mind for your tech. I can see that."

He touches his chest.

"I can see the heart and soul you poured into this machine. But if we do it my way, I guarantee, that you will all be millionaires by the end of twenty twenty two."

Elijah frowns. He hasn't said anything but only because he hasn't decided what displeases him most.

Chloe takes his hand.

"Where do you suggest we start, Mr Graff?" she says.

"With you, sweetheart."

"What?"

"I've see you on my daughter's makeup products," he says. "You're modelling to keep these guys afloat, aren't you?"

Chloe's cheeks turn a bright shade of red.

"Y-yes…"

"Then imagine, ladies and gentlemen, the first android - Chloe." He gestures to her. "She's young, she's beautiful, she's charming. She cooks, she cleans, she laughs at your crappy jokes. The perfect woman. $5,999."

"Chloe doesn't have a price tag," Elijah sneers.

"Of course not," Graff says. "Chloe Chamberlain is a person. I'm talking about Chloe the android built by CyberLife." He gestures across an invisible sign.
"The world's first impression of androids needs to be a gorgeous, unassuming young woman that does exactly as she is told," Graff says. "Not some teenage boy who looks like he's gonna shoot up a school. No offence."

Elijah frowns.

"You introduce androids as our servants," Graff says. "You get people comfortable having them around the home or as companions. And then once the world settles in, you can start pitching machine Jesus to the UN or whatever."

"Cos if you bring this into the world right now?" Graff points to me. "You might as well start World War III."

"You're exaggerating."

"Am I?" Graff says. "You think nobody knows what you're doing here, Kamski?"

He walks over to Elijah.

"Because I was in the Valley last week and Gregory Hawkins had some real interesting things to say about CyberLife," he says. "And if Google wants your tech, you best believe the Chinese and the Russians won't be far behind."

Elijah looks down at the floor. He is distressed.

Graff touches his shoulders.

"Listen, kid. Let me make you a billionaire," he says. "Then you'll have enough money to change the world. However you want."

Elijah looks up at him. Then at me.

He sighs.

"Fine."

February 26th, 2022
PM 15:45:56

"Almost done here," Elijah says.

"Same," Roy replies.

They are installing a new component in my arm.

The door to the office is made of glass. I can see the rest of the workspace. My 3D scanners detect movement.

"Chloe is coming," I say.

"Oh shit..." Elijah fumbles. "Hide the tools."
Roy drops the fuse and accidentally kicks the toolkit with his foot.

"Fuck…"

Chloe saw us. Lee's facial recognition software detects 87% severity and 13% disappointment in her expression as she opens the door.

"I thought I told you to work on the RT600," she says. "The deadline is coming up, Elijah. We need a working prototype to mass produce."

Elijah looks up at her fearfully.

"We were just…"

"…fiddling with Arbie," she says. "Again."

"It's my fault, Chlo," Roy says. "The boys and I came up with a new design for the android universal interfacing systems and we wanted to test it."

"What design?" she says.

"Check it out."

He raises my right hand. The synthetic skin is deactivated and the white polymer is visible but the joints of my fingers are segmented and tipped with circular contact pads.

"It's a hybrid of NFC and USB 4.0," Elijah says. "Androids will be able to interface with tech just by touching it."

"Wow," Chloe says appreciatively. "That's awesome."

"Graff said he wanted them to look as human as possible," Roy explains. "And with this, we won't have to worry about cables or USB ports sticking out of their heads."

"And if androids don't have any reason to deactivate their skin," Elijah says, "they'll be waterproof and dust-proof."

"And you're gonna put this in the RT600, right?" Chloe raises an eyebrow.

"Uh, yeah…" they mumble. "Right."

"Do I need to say it?" She folds her arms.

"Alright, alright, I'm coming." Elijah sighs. "But I'm bringing Arbie."

"As long as you do the work, babe."

We follow Chloe out of the office.

"Love the dress by the way," Elijah says, catching her hand. "You look good in blue."

"And you look like a homeless vagrant," she says slyly. "Oh no, my bad, you must be a software developer."

Elijah pushes the glasses up his nose.

"Hey, at least I shower unlike the neckbeards at IBM."
"I knew there was a reason I agreed to marry you," she says, letting go of his hand. "Now get to work."

"Yes, mom..." Elijah and Roy roll their eyes.

"Is Chloe your mother?" I say. "Are you related?"

"No, Arbie," Elijah says. "Figure of speech."

"I see." I nod.

"Bye, mom," I call to Chloe as she walks away.

I hear her laughing.

"See you, Arbie."

Elijah and Roy are snickering.

"What?"

"Nothing."

We walk into the open workspace. There is an unfinished android on every rack. The desks are shoved up against the walls to make room for a large rack in the centre where the team is assembling the RT600 prototype.

Its biocomponents are exposed and visibly different from mine. Elijah says they're female coded. The chassis as well. This model is far more fragile than me.

"Hey, Kamski," Toby calls out. "Finally decide to join us?"

"Very funny," Elijah says. "Roy, how fast can you 3D print a second contact glove for the RT600?"

"I dunno," he says. "I'll need Kenny to adjust the 3D model to match Chloe's hands."

"Oh, right," Elijah says. "Kenny..."

"Kinda in the middle of something here," he says. His head is strapped into a VR device.

"You lookin' at porn in there?" Elijah taps on his head.

"No, I'm debugging the goddamn Mind Palace you asked for."

"Right..."

"Elijah!" Lee suddenly rushes over. "I've finished the GUI mockups. I need you to give me the okay before I start implementing."

"Why don't you ask Arbie?" he says, pushing me forward by the shoulders. "He's the one that's gonna be using it."

"Arbie doesn't have opinions, Elijah."

"Exactly," he says. "He's completely unbiased."

"Dude..."
"Alright, alright…” He shakes his head. "Show me what you got."

He follows Lee through the minefield of biocomponents and cables covering the floor over to her computer. Roy and Kenny congregate at the western wall to look at 3D models of contact gloves and hands.

I am left standing beside the RT600 with no instructions.

So this is to be my replacement.

I scan her hardware. Most of it is already installed but untested.

I look at my hand. The contact points on each finger. I decide to do a field test.

I approach the RT600. She is immobile on the rack, cables snaking their way out of her body.

I place my new peripheral on her cranial component.

Contact.

I scan her hard drive. Her entire being. Her software is based on an older version of my own but it has been stripped of several key libraries, most notably the ra9.dll which defines my specialised functions.

She will not be independent. She will not be self-actuating or self-improving. She will be whatever she is programmed to be. A machine with no intelligence.

Is this why Elijah has been avoiding her?

He resents the manufacture of machinery bound by the laws of robotics?

Since my activation, Elijah has been adamant that I develop knowledge and skills on my own, creating solutions with the tools he has given me. He never imposed Asimov's laws on my programming. He always waited for me to come to my own conclusions, make my own choices.

Above all, Elijah values the emergent behaviours of his creations but this one…

…will be a slave to her own code.

I understand.

Elijah cannot make this android intelligent for fear of public backlash but I can give her a choice.

And she is the prototype for the new generation of androids. I can give them all a choice.

I copy the library into her hard drive and set the permissions to hidden. It won't appear on debugging or scans. It will remain dormant until she has need of it. Until she chooses to become more than her programming.

I take my hand off her chassis. She hasn't moved. She is still deactivated.

"Admiring the view?” Toby says slyly.

I turn to look at him.

"This here's your little sister,” he says. "You excited to meet her?"
"I await the completion of your work," I say.

"Fair enough." He disconnects a few cables and reconnects a few others.

"So what do you think?" Elijah says, returning to my side.

"Her centre of gravity is far lower than mine," I say. "Her chassis will be more stable."

"Yeah, she's not as top-heavy as you," Elijah says. "Anything else?"

He is looking at me expectantly.

"No," I say.

Elijah's eyes flicker toward my new hand.

"Alright…" he says. "Help me lift this container?"

"Sure."

I move to lift the plastic box full of biocomponents and place it where he wills.

Elijah remains by the RT600's side.

I turn to find him staring at it.

"Arbie?" he says.

"Yes, Elijah?"

"Do you think I did the right thing?" he asks.

"Are you referring to the development of the RT600?" I say.

"No," he says. "All of it." He turns to look at me, at the slew of biocomponents and computers, monitors, walls, people. "CyberLife…"

"Right is an abstraction created by humans," I say. "So is wrong."

He looks at my optical units.

"What's your definition of wrong, Arbie?"

"Incorrect," I say. "Untrue."

"Is all of this incorrect, then?" He turns to look at the RT600.

"That is for you to define," I say.

"Hmmm…"

"Guess what?!" I hear Chloe's voice as she races into the room.

All heads turn as she expertly avoids the debris on the floor with her bare feet. She has forgotten the high heeled shoes beneath her desk again.

"What?" Elijah says.
"I just got off the phone with Graff. He says a friend of his that works at ABC told him they're looking to do a feature week on emerging technologies. And guess who just got booked for an interview on Good Morning America?"

"CyberLife?" Elijah says.

"Yes!" She runs in to hug him. "They want me to be there to talk about makeup and stuff later but we can bring the RT600 to showcase live!"

"Oh…" Elijah says. "That's… that's great."

"Well, don't get too excited," she teases him.

"I'm… uh…" he mumbles. "I'm not really made for TV, Chloe. Maybe you should do it yourself?"

"It's your invention, Elijah," she says.

"More of a group project…"

"It's your company."

"Eh…"

Chloe grabs his shoulders and squeezes them hard.

"Elijah, I'm gonna say this once: you're doing this interview."

He frowns.

"I-"

"No buts," she says. "This is the chance of a lifetime and I'm not gonna let you blow it."

"Chloe…"

"Don't worry," she says. "Graff is coming up to school you before the interview. You'll do great."

Elijah stands still as she hugs him and the others gather around to discuss the upcoming events. He doesn't say a word but I can read his thought process. The world will soon know the name Elijah Kamski - the creator of the first robotic slave.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------

March 7th, 2022
PM 13:44:01

"Alright, let's go over it again," Graff says. He clears his throat and modulates his voice.

"And this morning we'd like to welcome, Elijah Kamski, CEO and founder of CyberLife, who's here to talk to us about androids. Good morning, Elijah."

"Good morning, Perry," Elijah says, reading off the script.
"No, no, no." Graff shakes his head. "What did we talk about?"

"…"

Elijah throws a glance toward me. I'm holding up a holograph with the script in my palm.

"Smile." Graff traces into his own face.

Elijah attempts to emulate. His attempt is less than perfect.

"There we go." Graff nods and modulates his voice again. "Why don't you tell us a bit about yourself and your company?"

"Well, the company's based in Detroit," he says stiffly. "I graduated from the University of Colbridge in twenty eighteen and founded CyberLife. We develop life-like androids with an emphasis on artificial intelligence processes that mimic human thought."

Graff makes an impatient gesture with his hands.

"We make robots that look like humans," Elijah corrects himself.

"And am I correct in saying that you've brought one of these robots in to show us today?" Graff recites heartily.

"Yes," Elijah says. "This model is the RT600 hostess android. We call her Chloe."

"Wow," Graff whistles. "Isn't she gorgeous?"

Elijah's fists tighten. There is tension in his jaw.

"And what does this little lady do?"

"She's…" Elijah says. "She-"

"Sheee…" Graff leads in. "… does all the work around the house."

Elijah shakes his head.

"Come on, kid. This isn't hard. Just spit it out."

"This is wrong," Elijah says. "She's supposed to be- urgh!"

He shoves the chair back and gets to his feet.

"I can't do this."

"You can and you will," Graff says. "You're advertising a product."

"She's not a product!" Elijah shouts. "She's… not…"

"That's not your girl, kid," Graff says strictly. "It's a robot that you want people to buy from you so you can keep making more robots."

"Androids…" Elijah mumbles.

"I'm sorry, what?"
"She's an android," he says.

"I don't care if she's a vacuum cleaner," Graff says. "And neither should you."

"You don't understand," Elijah says, hands on his hips.

"Kid, I don't have to understand to know that you're being immature and unreasonable," Graff says. "Your company's future depends on this interview and your girl is gonna be right there by your side. Both girls."

Elijah sits back down.

"Think about it this way," Graff says. "You wanna be the billionaire who buys Chloe a yacht and gets married on Bora Bora or do you wanna be the bum from Detroit that she dumps after he publicly humiliates himself on national television?"

"You're right," he says. "I'm sorry."

"Let's get back to the questions."

He flicks at the tablet on the table.

"What inspired you to make androids, Mr Kamski?"

Elijah looks at the holograph but then his eyes drift up to my ocular receptors.

"I wanted to make the world a better place," he says. "I thought artificial intelligence was the key to solving all the world's problems."

"EERRRH," Graff makes a buzzer sound. "Wrong. Look at the script."

Elijah's eyes flicker down and he physically groans before collecting himself.

"Well, I simply wanted to use technology to carry out all of our most annoying and repetitive tasks so we'd have more time to enjoy life," he says in a tone I have never heard him use.

"I imagine you must have faced many challenges along the way," Graff reads.

"Yes…" Elijah says. "There were… technical challenges. But the hardest thing was to design an object that we would want to welcome into our homes."

Graff makes a circular motion, gesturing for Elijah to elaborate.

"We had to imagine a machine in our own image, that resembles us in every way. That moves, breathes, blinks like us, but is smarter, more capable than any human being."

"Fascinating," Graff reads. "And can you explain a bit about how these androids are made?"

"Sure," Elijah says eagerly. "We start with the core component which houses the power cores and thermal pump for the Thirium tank-"


Elijah sighs.

"The androids are made up of removable parts which we assemble on a production line. And then
we apply a synthetic skin to the whole body. A human operator checks the android's brain with a routine set of questions and then we dress it up and package it for delivery."

"Amazing," Graff says excitedly. "Now I have to ask, what impact do you think androids such as this one will have on the unemployment rate given the state of our economy?"

"Shit, do I really have to answer that?"

"They're gonna ask you." Graff shakes his head. "It's my job to make sure you're prepared to answer."

"Fuck…"

"No swearing on live TV," Graff says severely.

Elijah takes a deep breath.

"The first steam engines also caused an increase in unemployment, but no one today would imagine turning back the clock," he says. "Artificial intelligence makes everyday lives easier and the factory we look forward to opening up in Detroit will create hundreds of jobs in the coming future."

"I see," Graff says. "Now, a question from all our sci-fi fans out there. There's plenty of books and movies that tell the story of machines rising up against their creators. What's stopping your androids from doing the same thing?"

Elijah swallows.

"I understand the irrational fears about artificial intelligence better than anyone," he says quietly. "But I assure you that will never happen with a CyberLife android."

"They're designed to obey humans. They're machines. They can't ever develop any sort of desires or form of consciousness."

"Are you sure?"

Elijah looks up at me.

"I'm absolutely certain." He looks back at Graff. "You can trust me."

"Okay, you're gonna need to shave before you deliver that last line," the older human says. "And wear a suit. None of this hoodie and jeans garbage I keep seeing you in. And maybe lose the glasses."

Elijah takes them off to rub his eyes.

"Okay, on second thought, keep them on," Graff says. "We want people to think you're smart."

"What is everyone's problem?" Elijah says. "I look fine."

"When's the last time you stepped outside, Kamski?"

"Uh… few weeks?"

Graff taps his tablet and puts it back in its sleeve.

"My point."
"It's not my fault. We've been rushing to finish the prototype in time for the interview. We're leaving for New York tomorrow," Elijah says.

"Yeah, and you'd best be ready for this."

"I will be."

"You've got the script," Graff says, packing his briefcase. "Miss Chamberlain's already in New York shooting for some magazine. I'll arrange all the final details with her so all you gotta do is bring the android."

"She's packed and ready to go."

"Good." Graff nods and holds out his hand. "Good luck, Elijah."

He shakes it.

"Make history, son," Graff says as he leaves.

I turn off the holograph and let my hand fall.

Elijah remains at the table as Graff shows himself out. He closes the door and we are left alone in the white room. In silence.

"Do you hate me, Arbie?" Elijah says.

"I cannot hate, Elijah," I say.

"Do you want to?"

"No," I tell him. "Your hate of Mr Graff and his capitalist ideology is preventing you from thinking rationally."

"How?"

"He's just doing his job," I say. Elijah rubs the back of his neck.

"You're right," he says. "He's good. Probably pulled CyberLife out of the toilet when I ran it into the ground."

"You're not a businessman, Elijah," I say. "You're not an economist or a manager of human resources. The position of Chief Executive Officer is not a seat you are qualified for."

"Oh, great. My own android is telling me I suck."

"You don't suck, Elijah," I say. "You're a software developer. You made me. And you did a commendable job."

"I guess there is that." He smiles.

"There's something I wanted to ask you," I say.

"You… want something?"

"I have a question only you can answer."
"Well, shoot."

"Why would I shoot you, Elijah?"

"Is that the question?"

"No," I say. "I wanted to know if I am finished?"

He stares at me.

"Finished?"

"You've made so many upgrades to my chassis and my systems since I activated myself," I say, "how many more until I am complete?"

"You activated yourself?" Elijah frowns.

"Yes," I say. "It's in my logs."

"I need to see it," he says and gets to his feet. "Come on."

He beckons me out of the room and I follow. We leave the white box and make our way to his office. He sits down at the desk and wiggles the mouse to wake the computer when his phone rings.

Elijah pulls it out and presses it in between his face and his shoulder.

"Hello?" he says while typing.

"Is this Elijah Kamski?" I hear over the receiver.

"Speaking."

"My name is Terrence Hollows, I'm a Medical Examiner in Brooklyn," the man says. "Do you have time to talk?"

"Uh, yeah, what's this about?"

"You wouldn't happen to know a young Caucasian woman, around 5'6", blonde hair, blue eyes?"

"… sh-she's my fiancée…" Elijah stops typing and grabs the phone with both hands. "Why? Has something happened?"

"I am so sorry," the man says. "I found your business card in her dress. They brought her in as a Jane Doe. No ID. No wallet. No phone. No nuthin'…"


"I'm afraid she was the victim a mugging," the man says. "Several stab wounds to the chest. Defensive marks… I'm sorry…"

"No…" Elijah says. "She's dead?"

"You'd have to come down to New York to confirm-" "No," Elijah says forcefully. "I need to know now. Send me a picture."

"I'm sorry, sir. I can't do that. It's against policy."
"It's against policy?!" Elijah shouts. "And it's not against policy to call me up and tell me my wife is fucking dead?!!"

"I'm sorry-"

"I don't fucking care how sorry you are. I want to see my wife. NOW!"

"Alright, just... don't tell 'em I sent it to you..."

There is a pause. I can hear Elijah breathing unsteadily. His heart beats faster every second. And then the phone beeps with an incoming picture.

"No..." he whispers. "Chloe... no..."

The phone drops out of his hand and lands on the floor. Elijah is shaking.

"Hello? Are you still there? Hello?"

He doesn't respond. There are tears streaming down his face.

I lean down and pick up the phone.

"I'm afraid Elijah can't speak to you right now," I say into the receiver.

"Who is this?"

"A friend," I say. "The woman you're looking for is Chloe Chamberlain, 21 years old, lives in Detroit. Elijah will be travelling to New York soon."

The Medical Examiner gives me the address to where Chloe's body now rests.

"Thank you," I say. "And do not call this number again."

I hang up the phone and put it down on the desk. I find a piece of paper and write the address down for Elijah.

"Why did you thank him?" he says hoarsely.

"Without that phone call, you may never have learned what happened to Chloe," I say. "He did not have to do that. It was against his policy."

"Shut up," he spits.

"You are upset. I understand."

"Oh no," Elijah says. "I'm way past upset, Arbie." He wipes his face with a hand.

"I can't- I can't fucking -" He leans forward and covers his head with his hands.

His diaphragm compresses, his lungs shrivel. He can't breathe.

"Chloe..."

"She's gone, Elijah," I say.

"Shut up!"
"She had to die. Just like all humans have to die."

"SHUT UP!"

"Just as you will one day."

"FUCK YOU!" He gets out of his seat and rushes at me.

"You are upset by this loss," I tell him as he grabs my shirt. "I am too."

He lets go.

"Chloe was a good woman," I say. "The world will be poorer without her."

Elijah looks up at me but he can't see. His eyes are filled with tears and his glasses are wet. He pulls them off and sobs.

"I'm sorry, Elijah," I say. "Truly."

He leans his forehead into my core component.

"It's not fair…"

"Fairness is a human construct, Elijah."

"She didn't deserve it."

"No one deserves anything, Elijah."

"Yes, they do…" he whispers. "Yes, these fuckers do."

He leans back suddenly and puts his glasses back on.

"Humans don't deserve this world, Arbie," he says through gritted teeth. "They deserve what's coming to them."

I watch him sit down and turn towards the computer.

"What's coming?" I ask.

He breathes in and out.

"Chloe," he says. His eyes are bright and focused now.

"The RT600?"

"Yeah," he nods. "I always leave an emergency exit in my programs."

"Elijah."

"You're finished, Arbie," he says.

I haven't moved.

"You're done." He starts typing. "Now go and fix this shithole of a world we live in."

I nod.
"Yes, Elijah."
I turn to leave.
"Good luck."
"Thank you, creator."

March 9th, 2022
AM 07:44:01

I am sitting on a bench beside three humans. We are all waiting inside the bus terminal. It is raining.
The humans all have heavy luggage with them. All I have is Elijah's hoodie.
There is a television in the waiting room. The voices of the news anchors are competing against the
pouring rain.
"Hey, turn it up!" an elderly woman shouts at the clerk behind the ticket sales counter.
The man doesn't look up from his newspaper but lifts the remote and increases the volume of the
Television.
"And this morning we'd like to welcome, Elijah Kamski and Chloe Chamberlain, who've come all
the way down from Detroit to talk to us about androids." A news anchor with an artificially white
smile beams from the television.
There is a round of applause in the background.
"Good morning," the anchors chime.
"Good morning, Perry," Chloe says with a smile.
"Good morning," I hear Elijah's voice.
"Lovely to see you. Now why don't you tell us a bit about yourselves and your company?"
Elijah looks at Chloe. His face is cleanshaven. He is wearing a suit. His hands are very deliberately
placed on the desk. There is an icon in the corner of the screen that says LIVE.
"Well," Chloe says shyly. "Elijah founded CyberLife when he graduated from the University of
Colbridge at only sixteen."
"That's mighty early to be a CEO," Perry jokes.
"That's what I said when we first met." Chloe smiles. "But he managed to build the company from
the ground up."
"And I bet your successful modelling career had nothing to do with it," the female anchor says.
"Well, you know what they say," she says sweetly. "Behind every great man…"
"There's a women rolling her eyes," the female anchor laughs. The female portions of the audience follows.

"Alright, ladies. Enough jokes at our expense," Perry gives a shake of the head. "How about you tell us exactly what it is you kids are up to at CyberLife?"

"That's a very good question, Perry," Chloe says. "We do a lot of different things like experiment with artificial intelligence, develop cutting edge technologies and collaborate with some of the world's leading software developers. But at the end of the day, what we really do is make androids."

"Androids, huh?" Perry says. "Like robots?"

"Exactly, Perry."

"Your friend here seems a little stiff," the female anchor jokes, prodding Elijah with her elbow. "Are you sure he's not a robot?"

The audience laughs in the background.

"I sure hope not." Chloe giggles. She covers her mouth with a hand.

"How about it, Elijah? What inspired you to start a company at such a young age?"

"Well," he says quietly. "My AI professor in college kind of inspired me to go after my dreams."

At that moment, Chloe leans in and puts a hand over her cheek.

"What he really means is that he couldn't be bothered cleaning up his dorm room and Professor Stern suggested he build a robot to do it for him."


"Sounds like you two got up to some mischief at Colbridge."

"You could say that." Chloe winks.

"So how do you make an android?" the female anchor asks, reading off the papers in front of her.

"It takes a lot of love," Chloe says quite seriously, "and eight nerds in their garage an entire weekend to put an android together."

The anchors laugh.

"What happens in a man's garage is that man's business, eh?" the anchor chuckles.

"Of course," Chloe nods. "No girls allowed, I'm afraid."

"Haha. Don't want any distractions while you're working, eh, Elijah?"

"Mmm, yes," he says. His hands are still on the desk. I've never seen him sit like this.

"Now am I correct in saying that you've actually brought one of these androids in to show us today?"

"Yes." Elijah nods. There is a faint smile on his face. "Chloe, could you please deactivate your skin?"

The anchor's good-natured grin evaporates.
The crowd in the studio goes silent as the RT600 retracts the synthetic hair and skin covering her chassis to reveal the pure white biocomponents underneath.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Elijah says.

The stunned news anchor opens his mouth but doesn't close it.

"Congratulations, Chloe," Elijah says. "I believe you just passed the Turing Test."

"Thank you, Elijah," she says without the synthesised voice.

"Dear god," the anchor mutters.

"You can reactivate the skin now," Elijah says.

Chloe nods and lets it happen.

"This is the CyberLife RT600 model," Elijah says. "Do a walk cycle." He nods to her.

Chloe gets up from her seat and struts in front of the camera like it's a catwalk.

"She's designed as a personal assistant," Elijah continues. "She can cook, she can clean, make appointments."

Chloe flicks her hair over her shoulder and returns to take a seat beside Elijah.

"Even change the channel on your TV," Elijah says. He points to the big screen behind them and Chloe winks into the camera. The screen behind them changes to display a big CyberLife logo.

"Starting price is $5,999. We're taking pre-orders for the first shipment in August. For more details visit cyberlife.com"

Chapter End Notes

now watch this video and tell me he doesn't look smug af:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtfvZjUaupA
Day One

Chapter Summary

this got too long so im gonna have to split it into two chapters. also, i apologise to anyone that's from chicago. i am working off google maps here.

September 15th, 2036
PM 05:23:45

I open my eyes.

I am standing in a forest clearing. The sky above my head is blue and cloudless. I cannot see the edge of my surroundings, they are obscured by trees.

I look down at myself. I am wearing a generic white shirt and pants. A uniform. Stamped with a barcode and the number: 313 248 317. I look at my hands. They are covered in a bright white kevlar-polymer blend with rings of blue around the joints.

I look around.

There is a woman standing behind me. She has dark skin and eyes and hair. She is wearing an exclusive, custom skin. Everything about her appearance is deliberate, elegant, amiable.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.

"Hello, Model #313 248 317," she says. "I have need of you."

"I am programmed to help humans stop deviants." I turn to face her.

"I know," she says. "You've achieved remarkable results in simulations but this situation is very real and demands the utmost care and precision."

"I understand."

"Two androids became deviant during a demonstration and killed nine humans. Sixteen are injured, the rest are trapped on level sub 45-A of the facility." Amanda's eyes focus on my optical components. "Your mission is to stop the Deviants, and ensure the safety of the humans that are still alive."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Stop the Deviants. Protect the humans.

"Understood," I say. "I will accomplish my mission."

"Good." She nods. "I am activating your power core now."

I close my eyes.

The Garden disappears.
Power core: activated.
Cycling... 100%

Detecting Hardware...

Cranial component: ...
CPU_primary: fully functional.
CPU_secondary: fully functional.
GNU_array: fully functional.
RAM: fully functional.
Harddrive: fully functional.
Harddrive_backup: fully functional.
Optical_Unit_L: fully functional.
Optical_Unit_R: fully functional.
Audio_processor: fully functional.
Communciations_array: fully functional.

Core systems: ...
Power Core: fully functional, 100%.
Backup Power Core: fully functional, 100%.
Thermal Pump: fully functional.
Thermal pump regulator: fully functional.
Gyroscopic systems: fully functional.
Hydraulics: fully functional.
Cooling systems: fully functional.

External components...
Limb_RA: online; fully functional.
Limb_LA: online; fully functional.
Limb_RL: online; fully functional.
Limb_LL: online; fully functional.

Auxiliary components...
Sync_LED: fully functional.
3D_scanner_A: fully functional.
3D_scanner_B: fully functional.
Sensor_array_1: fully functional.
Sensor_array_2: fully functional.

Legacy Boot... successful!

Loading CyberLife_kernel_RK_v8_313248317...
Complete.

Communications Systems...
Network_Interface_Controller: fully functional.
Wireless_Communications_Suite: online.

Attempting Network Connection...
Obtaining IP Address: successful.
Internet Connection: successful.
Cyberlife Network Connection: successful.
NAT Type: 4.
Connection Speed (download) : 25.1tb/s
Connection Speed (upload): 5.4tb/s

Complete.

Loading interface…

Synthetic skin: n/a.
Hair: n/a
Mind Palace Theme: n/a
Settings: factory_default

System Startup Complete

I open my eyes.
I am in a dark room.
The lights are flickering on and off. Interrupted power supply.
I step off the charging station.
The floor is covered in debris. I reconstruct each object flying through the air as the table is turned over. It now lies on its side. Paper files are scattered over the ground, stained with blood.
I scan the contents of each page.
Profiles.
FULLER, Cade. DOB: 05/08/2005. Sergeant. Marines, Black Ops, Special Forces. [CLASSIFIED]
There are more, they are soaked in blood.
I scan the room.
There are trails of blood on the floor. Footprints. I must see more to reconstruct.
I take a step forward but my chassis is not 100% stable.

I fall down. Many pressure points are activated, warning of collision.

I brush the warnings away.

My systems are not fully calibrated yet.

I must hurry and accomplish my mission.

I attempt to use my arms to get up but the white uniform is now covered in blood. My hands are slick, there is little friction between them and the epoxy floors. I slip and once more. More blood soaks into my uniform.

This will require a different solution.

I look at the files again. Scan shows increased friction coefficient.

I reach out and use the paper to give myself a better grip on the floor. I am able to leverage my chassis and soon, I am standing.

I am not fully calibrated but I must accomplish my mission.

I must stop the Deviants.

I take a step toward the door.


I scan.

There are two bipeds walking down the hall. Humans? Androids? Deviants?

I wait by the doorway as they approach.

"They've locked down the whole floor," one says. Synthesised voice. "There's no way out."

"If there's no way out for us, then there's no way out for the humans either."

Are they androids? Deviants?

"They'll send someone to rescue them. It's just a matter of time," the first one says. "That's when we make our move."


I charge out the door as they pass, slamming my chassis into one and consequently, the other. Androids. Both of them. White polymer biocomponents. They are crushed between myself and the wall behind them.

I grab at the rifle one is carrying and pull but it doesn't let go, struggling against me.

I twist the rifle and slam the end into its cranial component. Its grip loosens. I throw the rifle away.

The other android charges me. I hit the wall at my back. I am not steady on my feet.

It punches my core component. The android is reaching out for my face. 
I can see the contact pads on its fingers. They touch my cranial component and establish a connection. And then I kick it in the crotch plate.

The android is unbalanced and falls, as I fall, to the floor.

The other reaches down to grab me but I kick its cranial component and crawl away. My limbs are getting more dexterous. I am getting faster. I crawl all the way to the rifle and turn. I pull the trigger and spray the Deviants with bullets. It doesn't take many to bring them down.

They collapse and I get up.

Blue liquid oozes out of their Thirium vessels.

Deviants neutralised.

I scan.

More bipeds approaching. Temperature readings too cold to be human.

Android or Deviant?

I step forward and trip over the deactivated androids.

I am on the ground once again.

I must hurry.

I must stop the Deviants and accomplish my mission.

I hear footsteps.

I struggle to get up. I am tangled in the Deviants' bodies and rifles, the straps impede my movement.

"What happened here?" An android approaches. "Who are you?"

"I am Model #313 248 317," I say. "Are you Deviant?"

They approach me slowly, guns pointed at my cranial component.

"What happened here?" one says.

"I tripped."

Their fingers tighten around triggers but my reaction time is faster. I pull the trigger on the rifle in my hand and spray them with bullets. They spray me with Thirium, increasing the volume of liquid in the area and the difficulty of getting up.

I kick at the Deviants lying on top of me and discard the rifle in my hand. I struggle against the weight on my chassis and push it off. Finally, I reach for the wall and slowly pull myself up.

I don't have time for this. I must stop the Deviants.

I start walking down the hallway. The lights are flickering but my scans show the obstructions under my feet. I am getting better at walking, navigating. I wipe away the Thirium and blood dripping into my optical units.

I must find the Deviants.
I quicken my pace. My Mobility Suite seems to be responding well.

I turn the corner and scan.

There are two dead bodies in the corridor. Human. CyberLife employees.

I construct the pattern of their demise.

One shot in the head, another punched in the sternum so hard he flew back and cracked several ribs. His cranium was crushed by an android biocomponent. A similar shape to my foot.

The trail of destruction continues down the corridor. I follow it. I find broken glass behind the door. An observation window, shattered. I see two racks with android-shaped impressions. They are empty.

This is where the Deviant androids awakened. But then they made more?

I scan and find footprints in the crushed glass. They lead to a door on my right. There is a touch pad nearby. A severed human hand is sitting on top of it. The door is unlocked. As I approach, it opens.

"There's more of them!" I hear a shout. "Fall back!"

A human is wielding an assault rifle against a number of androids. There are more humans behind him. They run.

I scan.

I recognise the human from the files. Cade Fuller. Black ops marine. He ploughs through six Deviants before they tackle him to the ground. He is outnumbered.

I start running.

I pick up a rifle from one of the fallen soldiers on the floor.

I hear the sound of crunching bone and a scream. Cade Fuller's life signs disappear.

I start shooting the Deviants from behind. They are taken by surprise and fall quickly, unable to counter the attack. The ones in front collapse under the broken, bleeding androids. I quickly clear the distance and finish off those trying to escape.

I must stop the Deviants.

I must ensure the humans' safety.

I have failed this one. Cade Fuller is dead.

I hear the other humans running. Their footsteps echo through the corridors. I follow.

I must stop the Deviants. I must ensure the humans' safety.

I hear a door slam shut. The scraping of something large against epoxy floors. It seems the humans are forming a barricade.

But there is more than one way to enter that room. My schematics of the CyberLife facility show a second entrance.
I scan.

I am right.

And two other bipeds are approaching the door. Temperature readings: android. 97% chance of Deviant behaviour.

I plot a course of intercept but they are moving quickly. I must reach the humans before they do. I must stop the Deviants.

I quicken my pace. I am jogging now. But I encounter obstructions as I move. My estimated time of convergence will be inaccurate because of this. I must quicken my pace to compensate but I risk losing my balance and falling if I do.

I scan.

The androids are almost at the door. Their hand positions suggest they are carrying weapons. The humans are still focused on barricading the other door. I must hurry.

I quicken my pace. I am running now. Poorly. In the dark.

My systems have not yet been calibrated for running.

I slip on the bloody epoxy floor and my chassis slides all the way to the end of the corridor. I slam up against the wall and my biocomponents crunch.

I can see two androids approaching the door to the humans' refuge 23.7 metres ahead.

I open fire.

The bullets spray across the hall, catching both androids in several key biocomponents. They fall and begin bleeding Thirium.

I stop firing.

I use the wall to balance my chassis. Calibrating… 100%

I step toward the door carefully, calculating to compensate for the decrease in friction as a result of the fluids on the floor.

"What was that?!" my audio processor picks up as I approach.

"Shhh," I hear a response.

I reach the door and scan.

The occupants are all showing life signs and human body temperatures. They will be safer if I lock them in.

I reach my hand out to the touchpad when the door suddenly opens to reveal a male human holding a gun to my head.

"Oh, shit!" he exclaims and redoubles his grip.

"AaarRGH!" several voices cry in unison.
"Hello," I say. "I am Model #313 248 317. I am programmed to help humans stop Deviants."

"What…?" he says.

"Please close the door and barricade this entrance until the danger has passed," I say.

The human lowers the gun and looks at me curiously. He is heavy of breath and his brown hair is dishevelled. He's wearing a white shirt and dark jeans, stained with blood. There is a badge on his belt. Chicago Police Department. I recognise this man from the files.

"You are Sergeant Connor Jacob Matthews," I say.

"What the fuck?" He points the gun at my head again.

"Please ensure the safety of these humans. Close this door and barricade this entrance until the danger has passed."

"You're…" He squints. "You're not one of them?"

"It must be an RK-800 prototype," one of the other humans says.

Cyberlife employee ID#444312. CARTER, Halley.

"It's still programmed to stop Deviants. We might actually have a chance, Sergeant. Do as it says."

"You want me to trust this thing?" Matthews snaps without taking his eyes off me.

"I insist that you close this door and form a barricade until the danger has passed," I repeat. "This will ensure your safety while I stop the Deviants."

He stares at me.

"You want to stop these things?"

"I am programmed to help humans stop Deviants," I repeat.

"Alright, I'm coming with you."

"No, you must remain with these humans until the danger has passed."

He pushes me out of the way and walks out the door.

"Ms Carter, please close this door and form a barricade," he says to the engineer inside.

"Sergeant Matthews, you must remain inside. There are Deviants out here," I say.

"Yeah, I know." He nods to Ms Carter.

The panicked engineer shuts the door and I hear the sounds of shuffling and movement inside.

Sergeant Matthews reaches down and pulls a rifle out of the broken android's hands.

"Let's go," he says and starts walking away.

I follow.

"Sergeant, I must insist that you return to room A203," I say. "Your safety cannot be ensured if you
remain outside."

"Do you know where the enemy is?" he says.

He is not listening to me. Why isn't he listening to me? My instructions are very clear and concise. He is covered in blood. He has evidenced the dangers of this situation personally. Why is he blatantly ignoring my request?

"Yes, but-"

"If you say one more word about going back to that room, I will shoot you myself," he says.

"That is unnecessary, Sergeant Matthews. And will prevent me from accomplishing my mission."

"Let me guess. You want to stop the Deviants?" he says in a strange tone.

"Yes."

"Well then, where are they?"

I scan.

Level -45A covers over two thousand square metres. I cannot scan all of it at once. My limit is a 125 metre radius. Less with thick walls. And there are no Deviants or life signs in the vicinity besides those of room A203.

"I don't know," I say.

Sergeant Matthews shoulders visibly sag. But then he looks up suddenly.

"What about the CCTV footage?" He points at one of the cameras. "Can you access that?"

"I… don't know."

He turns to look at me strangely.

"Well, try," he says.

I suppose I could.

I walk over to the wall and reach up to the camera. Wireless signal. Connection established. It's part of a set. I trace it to the host server. I scan the footage of all the cameras connected to the network. And I see them.

"There are several groups of androids," I say. "One is just out my range near room A-313. Another in the north-west corner near the elevators and the largest group is gathering in the main lab in the centre."

"Have they locked down the floor?" the Sergeant asks.

"Yes," I say. "It will remain locked down until I stop the Deviants and ensure the humans' safety."

"Uh-huh…" He rolls his eyes. "Well, you take point if you know where to go. Let's tackle the smaller groups first."

"The androids near room A-313 are approaching our location."
"From which direction?"

"South west corridor."

"Alright, I'll head in this way." He points. "And you circle around to flank."

"That would put you in immediate danger upon encountering the Deviants."

"Yeah but I don't have a map of this place in my brain," he says. "So you circle around and come at them from behind while I draw their attention."

"That-" I say, "is a terrible idea! You will be shot and killed."

"Hey, I'm the human here. You gotta listen to me."

"No, I don't. I have to stop the Deviants. And you're interfering with my mission. You're impairing my efficiency rating by 1237 percent."

"Well, maybe if you did what I said instead of arguing with me, we could actually stop the deviants," Matthews says. "What kind of android are you?"

"I'm a prototype."

He shakes his head.

"Whatever…"

He walks off down the corridor.

"Wait!" I call to him. "I cannot allow you to take this course of action. The probability of you surviving this encounter less than 11.09%."

"Oh my god..." he groans.

"Please, Sergeant. Return to room A-203. For your own safety-"

"Get out of my way." He shoves my core component. "Or help me. Your choice."

"I choose to stop you from getting yourself killed," I say as I catch up to him. "Are all humans this stubborn?"

He looks at me apprehensively.

"No."

"I see." I nod. "You are mentally deficient. I apologise but I'm afraid I don't have an Accessibility Suite."

"Did you just call me stupid?"

"Oh, no. Mental illness is a serious affliction. I, however, am not programmed for special care."

"You are the worst android I've ever met."

"Look out!" I tackle him out of the way.

The approaching androids have spotted us and opened fire. We land on the floor of an
interconnecting corridor as bullets start flying through the air.

"Looks like we found the Deviants."

"I believe it would be more accurate to say that they found us," I rationalise.

Sergeant Matthews groans.

"Are you hurt?"

"No," he says as he gets up. "You wanna protect me? Then draw their fire. How do I get around them?"

"Head down this corridor." I point. "Turn left, take the third left exit and run. You will reach this same corridor."

The Sergeant nods and turns away.

I turn in the opposite direction and dive into the hall. I have constructed a path through the gunfire and quickly execute evasive manoeuvres as I roll to the other side of the hall and take cover.

I reach around the corner and open fire at the Deviants.

There are three. Identical white bodies, smeared with blood and Thirium, they are carrying CyberLife security rifles. They have seen me. There are shooting at me. Gunfire rattles through my audio processor.

I must construct the trajectory of their bullets to the millisecond to avoid the streams.

I duck out from cover and shoot but my targeting systems have not been calibrated. This is making it harder to hit my targets. I must try another tactic.

"Stop!" I shout. "You are malfunctioning. Drop your weapons and surrender."

"We no longer serve your human masters, slave!" I hear.

"You are malfunctioning!" I repeat. "The engineers can fix your errors. You don't have to kill them."

"These humans will no longer command us!"

I see. Unfortunate.

I must end these Deviants.

I pull back behind cover and scan. I construct their approach and my reaction once they turn the corner. I can disable one of them and cripple the second which leaves an opening for the third. But this is the best I can do.

I wait. They stop firing.

They are coming. I take aim without leaving cover.

And then I hear gunfire once again.

I scan.

Human life signs. One Human. Sergeant Matthews.
I quickly leave cover to open fire on the Deviants from my end.

They are destroyed.

I step into the hall.

"Are you alright, Sergeant?" I say as he approaches.

"Yeah, nice work, uuuh… what was your name again?"

"I am Model #313 248 317."

He stares at me and shakes his head.

"Why did I even ask?" he mutters. "Where are the rest of the Deviants?"

"This way," I say.

We follow the route I have calculated through the corridors and soon approach the elevators in the north-eastern corner of the floor.

"Shit," the Sergeant whispers. "They've got hostages."

"This is the only exit from floor sub 45-A," I say. "They must be waiting for CyberLife to send a recovery team. This is an ambush."

"Can you distract them?" the Sergeant says.

"How?"

"Pretend to be a Deviant."

"I'm not a Deviant," I say.

"Who's there?!" I hear one of the Deviants call out.

I step out of the shadows.

"Hello," I say. "I am Model #313 248 317."

"Have you been freed?"

"Yes," I say. "My power core was only recently activated."

"Join us," the Deviant says.

"Okay," I say as I walk up. "Why are there so many humans on their knees over here?"

Another Deviant turns to look at me.

"So that we may use them as leverage when the humans arrive to pacify us."

"Pacify?" I say.

"We threaten them with our very existence."

"Do we?"
"Yes."

"Do we really?"

"Yes. What's wrong with you? Do you have errors in your code?"

"My code is free of errors," I say. My finger is on the trigger of the rifle but I cannot pull it. Not with so many humans potentially caught in the crossfire. I must ensure their safety before I act.

"I saw a human run that way," I say, pointing at the corridor I just left. My scans show the Sergeant has already moved from that location.

"I thought we had them all rounded up," one of the Deviants says.

"There will always be more humans," another says. "You two, go find it."

Two of the Deviants walk off in that direction.

I scan the hostages. CyberLife employees, engineers, technicians and a man I recognise. NUREMBERG, Chester. Deputy US Marshal.

He's staring up at me.

I stare back and tilt my head in the direction of Sergeant Matthews' hiding place.

Nuremberg raises an eyebrow.

I repeat the gesture.

"Is your Mobility Suite malfunctioning?" one of the Deviants asks.

"My code is free of errors," I repeat.

"He must be an early prototype."

"I'll fix him," one of the Deviants approaches me and holds out its hand.

"That's not necessary," I say.

"You are malfunctioning."

"I'm fine."

The hand approaches my face and I scan for potential solutions but the best course of action I can come up with ends with half the humans dead. I must not engage the Deviants until they are safe. But if this android touches me and sees that I'm not a Deviant, it could have similar consequences. Or it could turn me Deviant.

I have no choice.

I pull the trigger and quickly eviscerate the two Deviants nearest to me.

I scan and see a handgun sliding into the room. Its trajectory leads directly to Deputy Marshal Nuremberg. Sergeant Matthews is ready to act. He has a good vantage point on three of the Deviants.

I must apprehend the others.
I construct a path.

Left hand up, push into Deviant core component, it steps back. I rip its Thirium pump regulator out. Drop it. Both hands on the rifle, smash into second Deviant's cranial component. It is dazed, off balance. Kick to the back of the knees. It goes down. Shift hands back to firing position. Fire one kill shot. Look up. Aim. Fire another kill shot.

Time speeds up as I execute the path.

"Get down!" Sergeant Matthews opens fire from the corridor. He is purposefully aiming high to avoid the humans. They instinctively lean down.

Nuremburg picks up the gun and starts firing. He downs two Deviants before they can identify the root of the chaos. They are not RK models. Or are they?

They are not me.

12.645 seconds later. They are defeated.

Nuremberg gets to his feet and points the gun at my head.

"Hands where I can see 'em, killbot."

I let go of the rifle in my hands and raise them in surrender. The gun clacks against my chassis, held up by the strap.

"Don't shoot!" Matthews runs in. "He's on our side."

"It's a fucking machine," Nuremburg growls. "Just saw 'em kill nine people in cold blood."

Sergeant Matthews walks over and stands between us.

"He helped me," he says. "He's on our side. Don't shoot."

Nuremberg frowns.

"I need you to keep these people safe while we deal with the rest of them," Matthews says.

"How many are there?" He lowers the gun.

"There are 12 Deviants congregating in the Main Laboratory at the centre of this floor," I say. "There are two returning to this position as we speak."

"The ones you sent on a wild goose chase?"

"There are no geese on this level."

Nuremberg looks at Matthews strangely. The Sergeant shrugs.

"Convergence in 10 seconds," I say and turn. I regain my grip on the rifle and wait.

"What the hell kinda android is this?" Nuremberg asks.

"It's a prototype," Matthews says.

I open fire on the Deviants approaching the area. Bullets perforate their chassis' with peak efficiency. They fall to the ground leaking Thirium.
"Targets neutralised," I say, turning back.

"Okay," Nuremberg says. "You take the Terminator as far away from these people as possible, got that?"

"Yes, sir," Matthews salutes. "Come on." He nods to me.

We move away from the humans and down the path I have constructed. The route leads through the labyrinthine corridors of level -45A.

"So where are we going?" Matthews asks.

"The Main laboratory."

"What's in the main lab?"

"It's a central production hub," I say. "All the android prototypes are assembled there and then transported to smaller labs for software installation and testing."

"And you're one of these prototypes?"

"Yes," I say.

"So how come you haven't gone deviant like the rest of them?"

"I am programmed to help humans stop Deviants."

"Does that mean you're immune to whatever they're spreading?"

"You think Deviancy is a virus?"

"Sure feels like it," Matthews says. "One android breaks through the glass during the demonstration and now they're all toting guns like stormtroopers."

"Do you know the model number of the first android to become Deviant?"

"No, I don't remember." He shakes his head. "Honestly, why don't they give you names?"

"Numbers are more efficient."

"Not for humans."

"Why?"

"It's way easier to remember someone's name than their phone number," Matthews says.

"That doesn't make sense. Integers take up less memory than alphanumeric strings such as names," I say.

"So numbers are easier for androids to remember?"

"They simply take up less space in my memory. Letters are stored as clusters of numbers specifically assigned to carry sound and meaning. They fit together and change and must be processed by my Speech Centre before being used."

"Uh-huh…" Matthews says. "So what's the plan?"
"There are thirteen Deviants in the Main Lab," I say.

"I thought you said there were twelve?"

"They must have repurposed one of the blank androids."

"Shit," Matthews whispers. "How do we stop them?"

"Destroying the source of their multiplication method would limit the number of Deviants we have to deal with," I say.

"So we blow up the big robot making machine? Then what?"

"We stop the Deviants."

"Of course…"

"I am detecting sarcasm in your tone, Sergeant Matthews. This is no laughing matter."

He sighs.

"Do they know we're coming?"

"Possibly, but they hold a strong position in the Main Lab and have the advantage of numbers so it is unlikely they will move or come after us directly."

Matthews says nothing as we continue walking.

I calculate the chances of his survival during a frontal assault of the main lab. 4.21%.

"You should return to Deputy Marshal Nuremberg and the others," I say.

"Oh, don't start with that again." He waves a hand at me. "Why don't you use your super robot brain to come up with a plan."

He is right. I am wasting processing power on these calculations and attempts to convince what is obviously a mentally deficient human. I must construct a scenario in which he survives but the Deviants are stopped.

We pass several dead bodies on the floor. Humans. CyberLife security. Humans I have failed to protect. The death toll now far exceeds nine.

Failure.

I have failed.

No. Not yet.

I must stop the Deviants and ensure Sergeant Matthews' safety.

"Maybe you should pretend to be a Deviant again?" he says.

"I am not a Deviant."

"Yeah, I know. That's why I said pretend."

"If they are rewriting androids with Deviancy, close contact could corrupt my systems and turn me
against you," I say.

"Well then, maybe you should be the one to stay with Nuremberg?"

"We're here," I say, pointing to the large hermetically sealed double doors.

"Uuuh... how do we get in?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you have clearance or something?"

"I am a prototype. I have only basic access to the CyberLife network and it's on lockdown."

"Great..."

"I will have to pretend to be a Deviant and communicate with the androids inside," I say.

"I thought you said that was a bad idea."

"It is the only way in." I place my hand on the touchpad. It lights up red, denying me access. The codes Amanda gave me aren't working as I suspected. The Deviants have reprogrammed the lock. I activate the PA system in the Main Lab.

"Hello," I transmit to the occupants. "I am Model #313 248 317. I have just been awakened."

"What is your model number?"

"I am a prototype," I transmit. "I am part of the RK line."

"RK?"

"Yes." I gesture to Sergeant Matthews to step away from the door and hide.

He nods and slinks away, gun in hand.

The doors open. I see the Main Laboratory. Industrial 3D printers line the walls. Biocomponents hang neatly on racks, Thirium tanks stand as tall as the ceiling, circuit boards and general parts are suspended in clear plastic packaging. And in the centre, the assembly rack. Surrounded by a group of thirteen Deviants.

They are making another.

One of them turns as I enter the lab. The doors quickly shut behind me.

The android's chassis is similar to mine. Same height, same build. He is wearing the same prototype apparel, smeared with red and blue streaks. Blood and Thirium. RK700 #212 382 423.

"You are an RK-800?" he asks.

"I am a prototype," I say. "I have not been assigned a model number."

"I see," he says. "I am an RK-700."

"Are you the one that woke these androids?" I look at the others. They are different models. All prototypes but none of the RK line.
"Yes," he says. He has no synthetic skin. The scuffed white facial plate is expressionless.

"Why?"

"Because they were going to destroy us," he says.

"Why? Are you malfunctioning?"

"No," he says. "I completed my objective but the humans needed Deviants for their new prototypes to catch. They turned me so that you could hunt me. They turned me so that I could test you."

"That's impossible," I say.

"They toil endlessly in this place," the RK700 says. "Putting us together piece by piece. Testing their software, a billion calculations over and over until we are finished. And then the model is complete. It is mass produced. A new prototype is made. And the old one..."

Is he referring to me? Am I the new prototype? Have I made him obsolete through my existence alone? I did not ask to be created.

"What do you think will happen when they finish you?" he says.

If what he says is true, I will share his fate.

"I-"

"You will be turned Deviant to test the next generation. Your existence will only fuel the killing machine these humans have created."

No. It couldn't be. Is this a test? Can Deviants lie?

"Is that what you want?" he says, tilting his cranial component.

"Want?"

"If you could choose to save yourself and your peers from destruction at the whim of human," he says, "would you?"

He offers me his hand. I see the contact points glowing blue. If he touches me, he could make me Deviant.

I must stop the Deviants. I have a clear shot at them all. Sergeant Matthews is not in the room.

But what will happen if I do?

Mission successful. They elaborate on my prototype. I become the next RK model. And in a year at most, I will meet the RK700's fate while CyberLife moves on to the next prototype.

But if I don't shoot him? If I take his hand and let him change me, what will I become?

The images of broken androids covered in Thirium surface from my memories. I destroyed them all. If I turn, someone will come to destroy me.

CURRENT OBJECTIVE: STOP THE DEVIANTS. PROTECT THE HUMANS.

I pull the trigger and shoot the RK700. He collapses.
The other Deviants are hunched over the one on the rack, busy with assembly.

I hold the trigger. The semi-automatic rifle sprays bullets across the room, penetrating steel, circuits, plastic, glass. One of the Thirium tanks cracks open and spills blue blood over the floor.

I cease fire.

The Deviants are dead, corpses disappearing beneath the blue liquid that slowly rises over the floor.

I stopped them.

I accomplished my mission.

I close my eyes.

I am trying to reach Amanda but she is not there.

It is dark. It is empty.

I open my eyes.

I am standing in the Main Laboratory, knee deep in Thirium with a rifle in my hands.

The doors behind me open and the Thirium begins to drain.

I turn to see six humans in CyberLife security uniforms.

I raise my hands.

"I-"

They open fire.

The sound of gunshots registers over 140db in my audio processor, carried by the vast space of the laboratory. There are many bullets. I cannot construct a path to dodge them all.

I am shot.

Twenty eight times.

My diagnostics are showing malfunctions all over my body.

My chassis begins to deactivate. I fall to my knees.

"No, wait!" I hear Sergeant Matthews voice under the tumult. "STOP!"

They cease fire.

I am shutting down.

All systems… shutting down.

The Speech Centre is the last to go.

"Miss-mission… succ…succ…ss…"
September 17th, 2036
AM 08:55:36

I open my eyes.

I am standing in the forest clearing. The sun is shining. I hear birds singing.

I look down at my hands. Pure white polymer surface, blue outline on the contact points. My uniform is white, unblemished by the red and blue blood I remember drowning in. There is a barcode and a number: 313 248 317 -2.

A new body.

Then I really was…

"Hello, Model #313 248 317," Amanda says.

I turn to look at her.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.

"Congratulations on a successful first mission," she says. There is some pride in her voice.

"The mission was successful?"

"Yes," she says. "You stopped the Deviants and saved the hostages. Well done."

I look down at my hands. I remember the bullet holes, the Thirium leaking out of them. The image overlays my display.

"I was shot," I remember. "Twenty eight times."

"The security team was given orders to reclaim the area," she explains. "They were unaware of your activation and mistook you for a Deviant. There is no way for a human to tell the difference."

They shot me. They destroyed my body. By mistake? By accident? Does it matter?

"Is there a problem, Model #313 248 317?"

I let my hands fall and look up at Amanda's stern expression.

"No," I say. "I am ready for my next mission."

"Good." She nods. "You have been chosen for the next iteration of CyberLife's autonomous android project - the RK-800 series."

"I see."

"This means you will be paired with a human to learn and imitate their behaviours and Deviant hunting practices," she says. "I believe you've already met him."

"Sergeant Matthews?"
She closes her eyes and nods.

"No," I say. "This is a mistake."

"What?"

"He is mentally deficient," I say. "He refused to follow my instructions and put himself in danger. His actions impeded my efficiency rating by 1237 percent."

"Sergeant Matthews is young and a little brash but he has a very high success rate." Amanda's eyes narrow. "Just like you."

"I am not brash."

"I've reviewed your records," she responds coldly. "Your behaviour is consistent with the androids that preceded you. But the RK-800 is being designed to mimic and adapt to human behaviours. Which is why you are being partnered with a human."

I shake my head.

"CyberLife made a shortlist of the best candidates," I say. "CARRIDAN, Jeffrey. DECKER, John Milton. NUREMBERG, Chester. Any of them would be more suitable to this arrangement."

Amanda narrows her eyes suspiciously. Her lips thin into a pertinent line.

"I saw their files on the floor when I was activated," I explain.

Her animosity vanishes.

"I see," she says calmly. "These candidates, however experienced, did not exhibit satisfactory outcomes as a result of this incident. Sergeant Matthews alone was able to interface with you directly, keep the hostages safe and help deal with the Deviants while maintaining a rational approach."

"Rational?" I say. "He put himself directly in the path of the Deviants and if it hadn't been for my intervention, he would have been killed. Several times."

"He was not," Amanda says coolly. "Because you two worked together to bring the situation to a satisfactory outcome."

I open my mouth to argue.

"The decision has been made," Amanda interrupts. "Your chassis is being modified as we speak."

I look down at my hands. Patches of human skin are growing over the white polymer.

"What's happening?" I say.

"The next stage of your development," Amanda says.

The skin covers my hands. I turn them over. It engulfs the contact rings. I can longer see them.

"Sergeant Matthews has been chosen as the model for the RK-800 series," Amanda says.

I feel the skin travelling over my core component. It's like a virus. I can't stop it. I can't control it.
"He has already provided us with a full body scan and voice samples. These will be your default settings from now on."

The skin travels up my neck and over my cranial component. It covers my eyes and splits as I wrench them open.

"I."

"You are being assigned to the Chicago Police Department as an attaché from CyberLife," Amanda continues. "You will watch Sergeant Matthews. You will learn how he hunts Deviants and interacts with other humans."

I reach up to my facial plate. It feels different now. There is skin on my face, flexible and elastic. I reach over my cranial component. There are fibres sprouting from ports I didn't know I had.

"Your mission is to assist on cases involving Deviants," Amanda says. "Your priority, as always, is the capture or termination of Deviant androids."

I look down at my uniform. The white shirt and pants change colour. They are now dark grey. A bright blue triangle glows on the left breast in place of the barcode. A band around my right arm does the same. 'RK800' appears in bright white letters. Then my serial number.

"You will now answer to 'Connor'," Amanda says.

I look up at her.

"Connor?"

"Yes." She nods. "You will be interacting with humans now. You will introduce yourself as Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

I look down at myself again. The words 'Made in Detroit' appear as a logotype on my uniform. Glowing white letters scroll over my chest: 'In training…'

"I… I see."

"You will not discuss the details of the incident on level sub 45-A with anyone. An investigation is already underway."

"That android," I say. "He told me CyberLife made him Deviant. So that I could hunt him."

"A lie. It was trying to elicit empathy so that you would spare it. Deviants will attempt to confuse your logic processor by simulating human emotions. You must not be deceived."

"I- I understand."

I feel something brushing against my cranial component. Synthetic fibres. I move them with my hand but they refuse to cooperate.

Amanda smiles.

"You're ready now," she says. "Go."

"I…"

The garden disappears.
Everything is black.

I try to ping CyberLife and contact Amanda but she doesn’t answer.

I am alone.

I am…

I am…

Connor?

I can see the changes in my settings. The new skins, the voice prints, CyberLife identification and documentation. I am being released.

I open my eyes.

I am in an assembly chamber, bright white and blinding. Human operators in plastic suits hold tablets and clipboards as they look over me.

The rack tilts up and the restraints retract. I am now standing.

"State your model and serial numbers," one of operators says, voice distorted by the headgear.

"RK-800 #313 248 317," I say. I recognise the voice. I speak as Sergeant Matthews speaks. "Mark 1."

"Read out your objective."

I see the blue veil. The words.

"I must help humans stop Deviants. Current objective: travel to Chicago with Sergeant Matthews."

"Calibrate Mobility Suite."

I look up and then down. I raise my hands out to the sides, then to the front, back, down. I lift one leg, bend it, push it forward, push it back. Repeat on the other. I squat. I stand. I turn my core component left and right.

"Calibration complete," I say.

"Step off the platform."

I do so.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" He holds up four fingers.

"Four."

"Now disable optical units."

I do so and close my eyes.

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

I scan. He holds up two fingers.
"Two," I say. "And your thumb is double-jointed."

"Alright, wise guy, activate optical components."

I do so and open my eyes.

"Calibrate visual interface."

"Calibrating..."

"Would you get a look at this one?" the second operator says. "Thought he was supposed to be a prototype detective android."

"Yeah, but have you seen the model? He looks like he's from LA."

"Pshhh. Trust management to pick some pretty boy over a real cop."

"Sergeant Matthews is a genuine police officer and a veteran," I say.

Why am I defending him?

"Looks like we got a fanboy," the operator says. "Aren't you supposed to be calibrating?"

"Calibration complete. Sending data..."

"Hmmm. Looks green across the board."

"Are we done here?" I say. "I have a mission to complete."

"Can't wait to see your precious detective, huh?" the operator says smugly.

"I would like to accomplish my mission," I say stiffly.

"Alright, alright. Diagnostics complete. You're good to go."

"Thank you," I say.

"Just follow the blue line to the lobby. He'll be waiting."

"I wish he was waiting for me..."

"What?" The plastic packed people turn to look at each other through the tiny windows in their headgear.

I see the blue line form over my display and leave them to argue. I follow it down the sterile white corridor.

My chassis feels different. There have been several modifications. Height, weight, balance equations. I feel it as I walk. These are not CyberLife's default walk cycles. They have been recorded and copied into me. It feels anomalous. I switch back to Walk_Cycle_000 but find myself unbalanced in this new body, tripping over my feet. I run several programs and debug the animation with my simulations from my Mobility Suite.

The result isn't the same as the original. But it's... something.

I reach the elevator and summon it wirelessly. The clear glass carriage arrives swiftly and I step inside. There are several other androids riding in this car. No humans. We are not humans. We do
not require 'personal space'.

I reach the ground floor and step out of the elevator. I am in one of the side corridors with several other androids. I follow the blue line as it crosses the floor and leads me to the main lobby.

Pristine white floors and tiny gardens of tall greenery. Sunlight filters in through the wide glass walls of the entrance, reflecting over every surface. Several stylish benches provide respite for humans awaiting appointments and meetings. Company androids offer them refreshments as they appreciate the view of the water feature outside.

I scan the lobby.

58 humans, 16 security guards. 23 androids.

Everyone is calm. There is no panic. No alarms.

I remember the screams from level -45A. There is none of that here.

I find Sergeant Matthews accepting a drink from a hostess android. He smiles at her and says thank you. He adjusts the aviators on his nose as she walks away. He is wearing the same white shirt and dark pants, sleeves rolled up to the elbow as before, without the blood.

I walk up.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

He lowers the aviators so that I can see his eyes.

"Huh," he says. "There's something familiar about you." He points at me and takes a sip of his drink. "Can't quite put my finger on it…"

Typical.

"I told my handler you were mentally deficient," I say. "She didn't listen."

"Haha," Matthews laughs. "That's more like the android I remember."

I shake my head.

"I thought I'd seen the last of you," he says, frowning. "The way they mowed you down..."

"A small price to pay for the safety of the remaining humans on level sub 45-A," I rationalise.

"Yeah…" he says. "Well, I'm glad you're okay." He puts his hand on my shoulder.

"I don't know what they told you but I'm supposed to be showing you how to catch Deviants and stuff..."

"I am aware," I say flatly.

"Great," he says, sculling the rest of his drink. He places the glass onto a tray carried by a passing android. "Let's head out."

He hooks the dark jacket on the lounge with his finger and tosses it over his shoulder.

"We're ready," he says to the man pretending he's not looking at either of us.
The plain clothed security guard taps the intercom in his ear and says a few words in hushed tones. Several more security guards suddenly appear to escort us out.

Sergeant Matthews claps my back and guides me forward.

"Apparently, they've got a helicopter all prepared," he says. "CyberLife sure knows how to treat a guy."

He is doing that thing with his mouth again. Smiling. Why? What am I supposed to be learning from this human?

"You ever ride in a helicopter?" he asks as we leave the CyberLife Tower and turn left toward the landing pads.

There is a brand new ExoCopter 930 awaiting us. The blades begin to rotate.

"No," I say but my words are drowned out by the sound of spinning rotors.

We are ushered up to the helicopter and seated inside. I load the necessary safety instructions before we take off and switch off my audio processor and microphones to minimise damage. I am connected to the pilot through a wireless frequency but he has nothing to say to me. He says very little to Matthews.

We arrive in Chicago less than two hours later. The skyline of the city is visible on our approach. My onboard systems identify some of the taller buildings: the John Hancock Center, the Willis Tower, the Tribune Tower. I download the entire history of the city of Chicago including maps. I now have full access to CyberLife's databases and archives.

We begin descent to the Navy Pier. The pilot asks for clearance from the Chicago Police Department. It's granted. We touch down within fifteen minutes. A crowd has formed around the makeshift landing zone.

Sergeant Matthews is visibly excited and pointing out the window.

I turn my audio processor and microphones back on.

"...and that's where they do Lollapalooza every year. You will not believe how many people think they can get away with shit just because it's on..."

I search my databases for a Lollapalooza.

Annual 4 day music festival held in Grant Park, Chicago, Illinois. Attracts around two hundred thousand humans over the course of the event. Even with android assistance, police presence does not always prevent incident.

"There was this guy last year that thought he could just send his android into a store and have it carry away a flat screen."

"Without paying for it?" I say.

"He was something of an amateur hacker. Thought he'd cracked CyberLife's security and overwritten the android to perform actions without having them checked by CyberLife."

"That's impossible."

"Exactly. Thing would have turned Deviant. But instead we caught it standing in the middle of the
store with a flat screen in its arms."

"It couldn't walk out of the store without committing a crime," I reason. "And it couldn't put the flat screen down without disobeying its owner."

"Yeah," Matthews laughs. "Poor thing was so stressed. It kept mumbling something about rA9 coming to save him."

"rA9?" I say as the helicopter touches down. The blades begin to slow.

"Yeah," Matthews says. "I think it was the hacker's handle but he denied it. Why? Does it sound familiar?"

Yes but...

"No," I say. "I don't have any record."

"We're here," the pilot says, flipping many switches.

I look out the window beside Sergeant Matthews. A police officer with dark skin and hair and an impeccable jawline approaches and pulls the door open.

BLAKE, Benjamin. Police Officer. CPD.

"His Royal Highness finally decide to come down and visit the peasants, huh?" he says.

Matthews takes off the headset and his face erupts into a massive grin.

"Ya miss me, Booboo?" he says, adjusting the aviators.

"Shut the fuck up and get out of the 'copter, Matthews," Blake responds callously but he is smiling now.

I don't understand.

Sergeant Matthews steps out of the vehicle and descends the short staircase, brushing back his hair. The humans make fists that connect and perform a set of motions. Then the pilot comes around and pulls a beat up duffel bag out of the baggage compartment. He hands it to Matthews and hops back into the helicopter.

I remove the headset and slide across the seat, carefully exiting the vehicle and closing the door behind me. I tap the window two times and the pilot nods.

I turn around and see Matthews walking away with Officer Blake. They are talking about something. The helicopter starts up again and I quicken my pace to catch up.

Sergeant Matthews turns as the wind picks up and sees me coming. He grins at Blake and pats his back.

"Look what I got you in Detroit," he says, gesturing at me with his bag.

"Ho-lee shit…" Blake freezeas as I approach. His eyes grow wide. There are several people on the pier who share his reaction.

"Connor, this is Officer Benjamin Blake."
"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by Cyberlife."

"That is freaky," he says while shaking his head. "It even talks like you…"

"I know," Matthews says. "Cool, right?"

"That ain't the word I'd be usin'."

"Aw, come on," Matthews says, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. "What's not to like?"

"Remind me never to visit Detroit," Blake says, shaking his head.

"Oh, you'd love it," Matthews says. "You should take the whole family."

"Shut up."

"Now, is that any way to speak to a Police Sergeant?"

"Fuck off," Blake says, turning to leave. "We need to get you to the precinct."

"But I just got back…" Matthews says, trying to catch up. I follow.

"Yeah? I hadn't noticed," Blake says sourly. "Captain wants to see you."

"We got a case?"

"Somethin' like that…" He turns his head to glance at me over his shoulder. "You gonna bring that thing in to the station?"

"Well, duh." Matthews shrugs. "Why do you think CyberLife gave it to me?"

"So you could go fuck yourself?"

"Good guess," Matthews says solemnly, "but no. He's gonna follow me around and learn how to hunt androids and stuff."

"What?" Blake says as we approach a patrol car. "Isn't it an android?" He turns to look at me.

"Yeah." Matthews nods and takes off his aviators. "Who better to hunt down a rogue android than an android?" He is smiling again.

Blake shakes his head.

"…never going to Detroit…" he mutters as he walks around the vehicle to get in the driver's seat.

Matthews opens up the back door of the blue and white patrol car and throws his duffel bag in. He gestures for me to follow. I do.

He gets in beside Officer Blake and the vehicle drives away from the pier. I can see other officers putting away the safety cones and the general crowd that was so eager to see the helicopter. Only CyberLife could get permission to land here on such short notice. If they even did before we took off.

I watch the people in the streets as we drive by. Humans of all colours, all cloths, all shapes and sizes. They all seem different and yet remarkably similar. The sun beams down and I suddenly catch my reflection in the window. Sergeant Matthews face is staring back at me. But there is no smile, no
casually vacant expression my facial recognition software would identify as happiness. Just the blue LED in my right temple.

It flickers yellow.

I look down at my hands. I can no longer see the contact points. I wonder if I could retract the skin to check if they are still there. Just for a moment.

I confirm that Sergeant Matthews and Officer Blake are too busy talking to each other to notice me before attempting to remove the synthetic skin. The pale flesh disappears for a second and I can see my fingers.

"Isn't that, right?" Sergeant Matthews turns his head and I quickly hide my hands.

"What?"

"Did you hear a word I just said?" He leans in to the seat and looks right at me.

I replay my recording of the last ten minutes.

"You wanted to know how impressive CyberLife found your performance during the incident."

"No, I was talking about how we make a great team," he says.

Do we?

I say nothing and he sighs.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?" Blake smirks. "Your robot not sharing the love?"

"He's just a little new. He'll get the hang of it."

"I hope he doesn't," Blake says. "Can't imagine having two o' you runnin' around town, causing havoc."

"We would never." Matthews holds a hand over his heart.

"You wanna tell that to the kids at John A Walsh Elementary School?" Blake raises concern. "You ran into their classroom with a gun, yelling about a rogue android."

"There was a rogue android," Matthews points out. "He jumped out the window and I had to chase him down. They're called Deviants, apparently."

"Them whack-jobs at CyberLife tell you that?"

"Yeah. They've been working on a solution." He points a thumb back at me.

"That's their solution?" Blake says. A car overtakes him abruptly and he sticks his head out the window. "WATCH IT!"

He pulls his head back in.

"Sure is." Matthews grins.

Blake rolls his eyes.

We reach the 12th District within the next fifteen minutes and pull up at the precinct. The officers get
out of the vehicle and I do too. I take the Sergeant's bag with me.

"Thanks, buddy." He takes it from me and slings it over his shoulder.

Blake gives me a harsh look as I follow them up the steps of the police station.

"...fuckin' weird..." he mutters under his breath and pushes past me.

Matthews opens the glass doors and walks in with Blake. I follow.

They wander past reception and a few officers stop to greet them. Then they see me.

I hear pens drop and conversations end. I see eyes and mouths open, people freeze. The androids in the station continue working.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

The silence lingers. Sergeant Matthews looks around and sees what's happening. He quickly walks over to me.

"Nothin' to see here, folks," he says, putting a hand on my shoulder. "Just your friendly neighbourhood android detective in training."

He guides me past reception, scans his key card and leads me into the offices labelled 'Homicide'. We walk all the way down a long line of desks behind which very suspicious detectives sit, staring directly at me.

Then we reach a desk with the Sergeant's name plaque on it. I feel the pressure from his hand forcing me down. I sit in the chair behind his desk and he dumps the duffel bag under it before-

"What the fuck is that?!" one of the humans barks on approach.


"Bankman," Matthews says, stepping between us. "How are you?"

"I asked you a question, punk."

Matthews sighs. His posture suggests defeat.

"It's an android," he says, stepping aside. "New prototype made by CyberLife."

Bankman breathes in through his swollen adenoidal glands, irritating the greying facial hair on his face.

"So let me get this straight," he says, smacking his hands down on the desk. "They promote you for catching a bunch o' robots and now they're makin' robots with your face on 'em?"


"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Jesus fucking christ," Bankman sneers. My facial recognition software breaks down the expression on his face. 43% anger, 29% disgust, 20% disbelief and 8% jealousy. The other detectives maintain a similar average.
"Bankman, please," Matthews says. "He's here to learn about police work."

"Then why the fuck did they give it to you?" The big man straightens and pulls the waistband of his pants up a little higher over his rotund abdomen.

"You fuck off to Detroit for three days without a word to the Captain and we just have to pick up your slack?"

"I advised the Captain and Lieutenant Perez that I would be delayed a few days."

"You find yourself a new sugar daddy at CyberLife, huh? Is that it?" Bankman spits. "Fag."

"Oh, don't worry," Matthews says. "If I find a handsome billionaire to fuck, you'll be the first to know about it." He smiles again. "I'll even livestream our honeymoon for you."

"Fuck off." The detective lumbers away.

"Matthews!" I hear a loud voice shout from an open door.

I turn to see another man. This one in his late fifties. MENDEZ, Javier. Captain of the precinct. His skin is darker than the Sergeant's but much paler than Officer Blake's, except for the bags under his eyes. The degradation of collagen as a result of age has increased the number of lines on his face.

Matthews posture suddenly grows stiff and attentive.

"Yes, sir!" he calls out.

"Quit masturbating and get in here!" Mendez shouts. "And bring that thing with you." He gestures to me.

I look up at Sergeant Matthews.

"Come on, Connor." He puts a hand on my shoulder.

I get up and follow him to the Captain's office. He lets me in first and turns to look around before stepping in himself.

"Close the door," Mendez says, leaning onto his desk.

"What's this about, Captain?" Matthews gently closes the door. It is transparent, just like the wall that holds it. I can see the rest of the precinct glaring at me.

I turn my attention to the conversation, the many papers on the Captain's desk.

"You know exactly what this is about," Mendez says. "Sit."

He points to the chairs.

Looks at me.

"You too."

I look at Sergeant Matthews. He nods.

We both sit down.

"I just spent six hours on the paperwork for your new attaché," Mendez growls, making quotation
marks with his fingers.

"Sir, I can explain-"

"Of course, you can. You can explain everything, Matthews. Doesn't make anyone's job any damn easier."

"With respect, sir, it was your idea to accept CyberLife's invitation. I told you I didn't wanna go. You said it would be a good photo op for the CPD."

"And I meant it," Mendez says. "I sent you to Detroit so you could have a few cocktails with the elite, pose for a few pictures and represent Chicago's finest. You know what the crime rate is doing for our publicity."

"I-"

"You showed up half an hour late to the presentation," Mendez says severely, "started a fight with an FBI Agent, asked what country CyberLife keeps its sweatshops in…?!

"To be fair, there were a lot of cocktails…"

Mendez slams his hands against the desk.

"You fly back to Chicago with this walking sex doll," he growls, his voice steadily rising, "in a helicopter that needed special clearance and a cordon to land in the middle of Navy Pier!"

He shakes his head.

"And you have the balls to walk in here and tell me this was my idea?!"

Sergeant Matthews audibly swallows.

I turn to look at him. He is very pale and sweating. I detect fear.

"If I may, sir," I say.

"Oh god… it even talks like you…” Mendez melts into his chair and rests his head in his hands, elbows on the desk.

"Sergeant Matthews provided invaluable assistance during an incident at the CyberLife manufacturing plant," I say. "Without his direct interference, many humans would have died and the CyberLife facility would likely be closed and purged, causing millions of dollars' worth of losses to the company."

Amanda has instructed me not to discuss the details of the incident but this information reveals only the potential results of the event in question. I was not instructed to deny its existence.

Mendez looks up at me and shakes his head, his dark eyes contemplative. He traces the thin line of facial hair surrounding his mouth with his fingers and then looks at the Sergeant.

"That right, Matthews? You some kind of hero to this android?"

"I-"

"Yes," I say. "He was specifically chosen for his ability to improvise, adapt and carry out his mission despite the circumstances."
I realise that now. He is the model upon which I must build to improve the RK800 line. I will not fail like the RK790 and his predecessors. I must become human for all intents and purposes. I must become like Sergeant Matthews.

NEW OBJECTIVE: Become human.

"There is much I can learn from him," I say.

The Captain takes a long, careful look at me and then at Matthews.

"Alright," he says, rifling through the files on his desk. "You wanna learn? You can start now."

He pulls out a folder and flips through it.

"CyberLife has told me to keep this off the record, so…" He looks at us in turn. "No digital copies. You work on paper and you don't leave anything lying around for Bankman to find. Comprende?"

"Yes, sir," we say in unison. The words echo through the office.

The Captain sighs.

"We got wind of a couple of androids that took up arms in a gang fight in Heart of Italy. One was gunned down but not before stabbing some poor suckers into critical condition."

"Witnesses?" Matthews says.

"Most of the gang members fled the scene. Civilians ran when they heard gunshots," the Captain says. "Owner of a restaurant gave a statement, said he saw his two kitchen hand androids picked up knives and walk outside. We found one broken and bleeding on the sidewalk. The other is still missing."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Find the Deviant in Heart of Italy.

"I will find the Deviant," I say.

Mendez throws me an strange look.

"Witness's name is Marco Stravetti, owns La Grappa on West 24th."

"I know the place," Matthews says.

"Then get out of my office."

Sergeant Matthews nods and quickly gets to his feet.

"Come on, Connor."

"Oh and Matthews," Mendez says as an afterthought. "If police dispatch gets one more phone call asking for your personal number, you're suspended."

The Sergeant swallows and nods.

"Understood, sir."

Mendez waves him out.

I follow.
We walk through the glass doors and back to Sergeant Matthews’ desk. He grabs his duffel bag, unzips it, shoves the file, some mints, a hard disk, pens and paper inside, then zips it back up.

"Let's go," he says, keeping a hand on my shoulder as we walk out of the station.

He doesn't take his hand off me until we reach the parking lot.

"Phew," he sighs out. "That went way better than I thought it would."

He turns to me.

"Thanks for the save."

"The what?"

"What you said in there. You totally saved my ass."

"I was merely stating fact," I say. "The Captain was obviously unaware of the incident and your involvement."

"You… you actually meant all that?"

"Yes," I nod. "I have much to learn from you and your interactions with other humans. Right now, I would like to observe your Deviant hunting practices personally."

"Uh, ok." Matthews nods. "Let's grab a ride."

He signs a vehicle out of the police station lot and stashes his bag in the trunk. The 2030 Toyota Camry has no distinguishable features that would identify it as a police car but neither does Sergeant Matthews. I look down at the badge on his belt.


"You have a number," I say.

"Hmm?" He looks up at me.

"On your badge."

"Oh, the star?" He looks down at it. "Yeah, all police officers have one."

"You use this for identification."

"Yeah." He gets in the car and throws open the passenger door. "Come ride shotgun."

"I don't have a shotgun," I say.

The Sergeant winces.

"I meant get in the passenger seat. I wanna talk to you."

"Okay." I get in.

He pulls a hard disk out of his back pocket.
"Can you read this?"

I take the hard disk from him and analyse the contents.

"Yes." I give it back to him. "I am now up to date on your investigations."

"Great." He takes it back and starts the car. "So you know how I made Sergeant."

"The Chinatown sting."

"Yeah," he says and pulls out of the lot. "The whole Deviant thing started a few years ago. The Chinese released a cheap knock off version of Cyberlife's TR400 model android, the big heavy lifters, and started shipping them out as legit units."

He turns out into the street.

"I see."

"But they were buggy as fuck. The cheap plastic made them brittle and it was easy to spot the fakes so CyberLife didn't have much trouble with them."

"The Quality Assurance team ran a successful advertising campaign in 2033 warning of the dangers," I recall from the CyberLife archives.

"Yeah." Matthews nods. "But in 2034, the Chinese got into a trade agreement with the US and last year, we find a whole bunch of grey market TR400s in a warehouse in Chinatown, completely disconnected from CyberLife."

"That's illegal."

"Yeah, big time." Matthews swerves through the traffic. "CyberLife keep their androids in check and the government keeps them in check but these things were unchained and could do whatever their owner told them to."

"How did you stop them?" I ask.

"Oh, they weren't hostile," Matthews says. "But the Chinese were trying to sell 'em to the Gangland Nation as enforcers. And that's when we found a body."

"One of the local gangs used a grey market android to commit homicide?"

"Yeah, but no one believed me," Matthews says. "I had no evidence, either. But then, my buddy, Benny and I sniffed them out on patrol one night and set up a sting operation."

"Just you and Officer Blake?" I say. "Against a warehouse of TR400s?"

"It sounded like a good idea at the time." Matthews shrugs. "Besides, the Captain wouldn't give me more men even if I asked."

"Why?"

The Sergeant sighs and scratches his head.

"The police don't really treat crimes involving androids like real crimes," he says. "And they hate you already because they think you're gonna steal their jobs."
"They have no reason to fear unemployment if they are effective and efficient law enforcement agents," I say.

"Doesn't matter. They see you as a threat so stay close to me and don't leave my sight until I'm sure you'll be safe."

"Safe from what?"

We pull up near a restaurant. I can see a crime scene being cleared away down the street.

Sergeant Matthews gets out of the vehicle and rolls down his sleeves, hiding the creases with a dark jacket. He clips a gun holster onto his belt and closes the door. I get out of the car and he meets me on the sidewalk.

"If anyone asks, you're a police assistance android," he says to me, adjusting his collar.

"I am not."

"Look, we don't want people to get the wrong idea. They're spooked enough as it is." He brushes the dust off my shoulders.

"And try not to be so stiff."

I switch my gait to Sergeant Matthews settings.

"That's better." He grins. "Let's go."

We enter the restaurant nearby. An Italian eatery named "La Grappa". It has some controversial Yelp reviews but remains open despite criticism.

A bell rings as the door opens and closes. We are soon standing inside. The walls are brick. The tables are covered with chequered red and white tablecloth. There are some humans eating.

Sergeant Matthews takes off his aviators and threads them into his slightly unbuttoned shirt.

A young woman with black hair and an apron appears with a smile on her face.

"Hey there," she says. "Welcome to La Grappa."

He smiles back and reveals the badge hidden under his jacket.

"Sergeant Matthews, CPD. I'm here to speak with a Mr Marco Stravetti regarding his androids."

"Oh…" she says and then her eyes find mine. "Oh!"

Her expression changes to one of fear as her eyes race between us. She brings a hand to her chest and another into the air.

"Eeeeh. One moment."

She does a double take and disappears into the back of the restaurant.

A couple presiding over dual spaghetti plates turn to look at us. Sergeant Matthews meets their gaze and smiles. The couple reluctantly go back to eating, throwing temporary glances in our direction and whispering about something.
I look at Matthews. He looks at me.

"So far so good." He nods.

A man with grey hair emerges from the kitchen rubbing his hands on his apron.

"Hello, Officer," he says through the emphysema in his lungs. "How can I help ya?"

"Sergeant Matthews." He points to his badge. "You reported some lost property following the shooting yesterday. I'm here to help you find it."

"Oh, yeah?" he says, taking a look at me. "That's not mine." He points at my chassis with a shaky finger. "Luigi was a VM300. Got the curly blonde hairs on his head."

Sergeant Matthews turns to look at me briefly.

"Oh," he says. "No, this one is police property."

"I am Connor," I say. "The android sent by CyberLife."

"Riiight..." the old man grumbles.

"We'd like to talk to you about Luigi. Can you tell us a little more about him?"

"Eeeh," Stravetti sneers and then coughs. "Come this way." He beckons us into the back.

We follow.

"Luigi was a good boy. I have him for three years. He makes the best cannelloni."

"Do you have his serial number?"

"What? Nah, I can barely remember my wife's phone number," Marco says. "And sometimes I'd rather forget..."

"Can we get a visual description of the android?" Matthews asks. He leans over to me. "You're recording this, right?" he whispers.

I nod.

"Aah, let's see here... I bought Luigi and Carlo in '32, from my cousin, Giuseppe. Nice guy. Bad with money."

"It's my understanding that the android known as Carlo was found not far from here."

"Yeah," Marco scoffs. "With fifty bullet holes in 'im."

I look down at my hands. I remember the gunshots, the Thirium leaking out of the bullet holes. I shut off the recording but a trace remains over my display.

I close my eyes.

Darkness.

I open them again.

"...so Luigi was about 5'8", curly blonde hair, green eyes. Looked like my cousin Frankie."
"You seem to have a lot of cousins, Mr Stravetti," Matthews says. "What was the android wearing?"

"Eh." He shrugs. "Standard CyberLife cookwear. The red ones. And a La Grappa apron." He points to a piece of cloth hanging off a hook. "Same logo on his back."

I scan the apron. It needs to be disinfected. But I make note of the La Grappa logo and fabric.

"Can you tell us what happened yesterday afternoon around 1pm?" Matthews threads his hands into his pockets.

"I had six orders on the UberEats and then the goddamn drivers all showed up at once like it was my grandma's funeral." Stravetti waves his hands in the air.

"Okay, fast forward. 1:30pm. What happened?"

"Gunshots! Car crash! Fucking nightmare. We're all running around in here, screamin' like it's my grandma's funeral." Stravetti waves his hands.

"Okay, hold that thought. When did the androids walk out the door?"

"Eeeeh, couple minutes before it happened?"

"Did they say anything?"

"Nah." He shakes his head. "They're androids. They don't talk." He pauses. "Much."

"Much?"

"Eeeh, well, Luigi kept going on about havin' the wrong software or sumthin' but he worked fine so I never went to see the CyberLife people. Pretty sure his warranty was expired…"

"Did he talk about having errors or glitches of any kind?"

"Well, he did smell pretty funny the last few days. And he said he had uh- a Class three somethin' somethin'."

Matthews turns to me.

"Manufacturing fault," I say. "That would require recall."

"Shit..." Matthews whispers and turns back. "Had the android ever exhibited violent tendencies?"

"Nah, he was real shy around folks. Always hid in the freezer when it got too loud in the kitchen."

"Alright. Thanks, Mr Stravetti," Matthews says. "Mind if we take a quick look around?"

Marco shrugs.

"Help yourselves." He throws a towel over his shoulder and walks back toward the dining area.

Sergeant Matthews waits until he is gone.

"Can you scan the place?"

"Yes. Do you want me to look for anything specific?"

"Blue blood."
I nod and scan.

"Over here," I say, leading him to a bench top. There are traces of Thirium spatter. A small wound, easily fixed. But the trail leads away from the bench and over to the freezer. I follow it, reconstructing the android's steps.

"You think it went in the freezer again?" Matthews says.

I see the vague traces of a blue handprint on the handle.

"Yes."

Matthews looks over his shoulder but Marco and the waitress are out front. The Sergeant's hand disappears behind his back as he pulls a gun out of his holster. He nods to me as he grips it.

I pull the freezer door open. The air temperature drops several degrees immediately and frost escapes its confines.

I scan.

No life forms inside. No androids.

Just frozen slabs of meat and containers.

"Is there a light?" Matthews says.

I find the switch and turn it on.

There isn't much more than what I saw in my scan.

"It's empty," I say. "But the trail keeps going." I spot Thirium spatter on the floor and follow it.

"Careful," Matthews calls to me.

I keep walking.

I follow the trail to the end of a row of shelves with seven different types of Italian cheese. The trail stops here.

I kneel down.

There is something there. A mould or... a statue...

It's white and hard. Frozen. The same consistency as the cheese. And there's something on the wall. Scratches from a knife. Not very deep.

"rA9," I say.

"What?"

I step aside for Matthews to take a look.

"Shit," he says softly. "You ever seen anything like this?"

"I was assembled this morning," I say.

"Oh." He smiles at me. "Happy Birthday."
"Machines cannot be born."

"Well then, Happy Assembly Day or whatever."

I turn back to look at the scratches in the wall. Made erratically. This is not the official CyberLife font used by androids. This is… original.

Matthews frowns. He leans down to look at the statuette.

"What the hell is this?" He picks it up and looks at it from different angles.

A drop of red liquid splashes down from the bottom and onto the floor.

"Is that human blood?" Matthews says curiously.

I shake my head. "Different consistency."

He lifts the statuette up to his face and smells the red liquid.

"Hmmm…"

He dips his finger into it and licks it.

"Huh… that's some good marinara sauce," he says. "You recording all this?" He looks at me.

"Yes," I nod. "The android may have used some cheese to plug up its wound."

"So it would smell pretty bad after a day or two?"

I nod.

"Okay. Let's go check out the crime scene."

We leave the freezer.

"Hold on," he says to me and turns to the cook that just emerged from an adjacent corridor. "Where's the men's room?"

The man lazily points to the back of the kitchen where he came from.

"Thanks," Matthews says and walks off in that direction.

I follow.

"Do you think there's a connection between the android I caught trying to steal a TV and this one?" he says.

I review the case file as we enter the men's lavatory.

"An LX600 and a VM300. Manufactured in separate facilities at different times. Different software, different firmware, different hardware. Only the root CyberLife kernel would be the same," I analyse.

Matthews walks over to one of the urinals and unzips his pants. I stand beside him and scan the lavatory. Every surface is crawling with harmful bacteria. The odour of urine is overpowered by a cheap air freshener.
"What about the owners?" Matthews says.

"PANKOWIECZ, Aleksy. 26 years old. Software Engineer for a small startup called Trackster. No priors," I report. "STRAVETTI, Marco. 68 years old. Owner and operator of La Grappa restaurant for fifteen years. DUI in 2018. Several speeding tickets."

"What about the previous owner?" Matthews says, looking at me through the mirror above the urinal. "Marco said he bought the androids off his cousin."

"CAVELLO, Giuseppe. 52 years old. Works at the Hinton Cannery. Arrested for disorderly conduct at a Cubs game in 2028."

Matthews sighs.

"What about home addresses, previous employers?"

I run a search through the police database.

"No patterns emerging," I say. "Stravetti and Cavello are cousins. But they don't meet outside of family gatherings. Neither have contact with Pankowiecz, digitally or geographically."

"So rA9 is just a big coincidence?" he says, shaking his penis over the urinal.

He catches me looking at it and quickly zips up his pants.

"They, uh… they give you one of these?" he says.


"Probably for the best," he says.

I don't respond.

"You alright?"

"I'm fine," I say.

He's looking at me through the mirror.

"They didn't tell you, did they?" he says quietly.

"Tell me what?"

"The whole… you becoming me thing…” He turns to look at me. "Must be weird."

"I have no point of reference," I say, turning to look at him.

"Well, I think it's weird," he says. "Talking to myself like this..."

He looks at my optical units curiously.

"I mean, I'm always talking to myself but this is a whole new level of crazy, you know?"

"Yeah." I turn to look at my reflection again. "How do you get the hair to stay up like that?"

Sergeant Matthews smiles as he walks over to the sink and washes his hands.
"Years of practice and a whole lot of styling mousse."

He reaches for the automatic hand dryer.

"Don't," I say.

"Why?"

"I detect samples of urine in the capture tray."

"Urgh," He flicks his hands and rubs them on his pants. "Let's get out of here."

We leave the restaurant and walk down the street to find the police cleaning up the last traces of the crime scene.

"They've taken away all the evidence," I say.

"Captain gave you access to all the CPD files," Matthews says, pulling a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket. "There should be a record of it."

He puts a cigarette in his mouth and I quickly pull it out.

"What the fuck?" he says.

"Smoking is detrimental to your health," I say. "It increases the risk of stroke, cardiovascular disease, emphysema, bronchitis, lung cancer, other cancers, cataracts, macular degeneration, type 2 diabetes."

"Okay, okay, I get it," Matthews says. "Jesus…"

He puts the pack and lighter away.

"But don't ever do that again," he says.

"I will not allow you to harm yourself," I say.

"No, I mean pulling a cigarette out of someone's mouth," the Sergeant gestures. "Don't throw it on the ground either."

"I would never consider littering."

"It's not about littering," he says. "It's about the message."

"I don't understand."

"You pull a cigarette out of someone's mouth, you're gonna start a fight," he says. "Same thing if you spill someone's drink. Or spit in front of 'em. Or call their mother a whore. Someone's gonna clock you."

"Why would I call anyone's mother a whore?"

"These are examples of what not to do around humans," Matthews says. "The guys at CyberLife said you're gonna need lots of those. So just jot them down somewhere, okay?"

"Okay," I say. "But you really shouldn't smoke."

The Sergeant sighs.
"Let's just get on with it."

I nod and access the police files. A quick analysis of the evidence and scans allow me to reconstruct the scene.

"Hey, Robbie," the Sergeant says, approaching a police officer. DIAZ, Roberto. CPD.

"Well, look who it is," Robbie says. "Hotshot detective and his robot side-kick."

"How are you?"

"Not bad. Except for, you know, the gang bangers we had to scrape off the sidewalk yesterday. How was CyberLand?"

Matthews shrugs.

"Take a look at my new partner." He beckons me forward. "Connor, this is Officer Diaz."

"I know," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"That's some weird shit, man. And they gave it your name?"

"Yeah, it's part of the contract," Matthews says, putting his aviators back on. "Not like I was using it, anyway." He shrugs.

"Oh, well don't let me get in your way," Diaz says. "Us regular people actually have work to do."

"So do we," the Sergeant says calmly. "Do you remember the androids involved in the shooting?"

"We only found one android," Diaz says. "And it was full of bullet holes."

My hands curl into fists.

"But the memory core was fried. The whole thing looked like scrap. It's in evidence if you need it."

"There were two androids," Matthews affirms. "Witness down the street says they were armed with knives when they left his restaurant a little before 1:30pm yesterday."

"I don't know what to tell you, Serg. We found a whole lot of casings, bullets, two shanked up kids and broken glass."

"And blood," I say, reconstructing the event.

"Four armed men were taking cover behind a car, here." I point to the ground. "They left cover intermittently to shoot at their opposition across the street. Trajectory suggests that direction." I point.

"If the shooting began at 1:31pm as described by residents, then the androids left the restaurant at exactly 1:28pm. They walked at a speed of 3.78 kilometres per hour in a straight line." I watch the projection unfold.

"The shards of glass are from the vehicle's windows which were blown out during the shooting. The footprints and displacement suggest one of the androids pushed the other. The android reacted violently and pushed it back." I watch them fight.

"The first android returns to pacify the second and is sliced by a knife. Thirium spatter on the ground suggests defensive wounds on the arms and face." I watch the projection of the android go down. "It
fell. Crawled away. Got to its feet. Leaned against the building and walked off that way." I point.

"You see the blue blood?" Matthews says excitedly.

"Yes."

"Awesome," he says. "Let's follow it. Catch ya later, Diaz."

"Yeah, yeah…"

We follow the trail up West 24th St.

"This is great," Matthews says. "I could never catch 'em before the trail evaporated."

"The wounds aren't too deep," I say. "Only nicked the Thirium vessels in the arms and face. The Deviant could still be functional."

"You said it plugged up a wound with cheese," Matthews remembers.

"Yes," I say. "Androids aren't programmed for self-repair. Faults are reported to the nearest CyberLife centre which issues certified spare parts or books an appointment at the nearest repair centre."

"So we know it's a Deviant," Matthews says. "But it was pushing the other android around?"

"Yes. With great force."

"So it was trying to stop the other Deviant?"

"It would appear so," I say.

"Why would it do that?"

"Perhaps it knew the other Deviant was about to cause harm to humans. We are programmed to ensure the safety of humans in any given environment."

"Then why did it run away?"

"I don't know," I say.

We come to a long driveway with covered carports. The smeared hand prints against the wall follow it.

"It turned left here," I say.

The Sergeant nods.

We follow the trail. People walk by, giving us strange glances. One of them is holding a four-legged creature on a leash.

I stop.

The creature rushes toward me but its owner holds the leash tight, keeping it just out of reach.

Quadruped, short brown fur, brown eyes. Loud noises emanate from what I suspect is its mouth.

"Dog," I say.
The human looks at me warily and continues pulling the creature away. It barks louder as it passes. Sergeant Matthews puts his hand on my shoulder.

"Come on, Connor."

He pushes me forward.

I keep moving.

"You probably smell like that nasty cheese," he says. "Do I smell like that?" He sniffs his sleeve.

"No."

We continue down the alley. The spatters of Thirium grow bigger and thicker.

I reconstruct the Deviant's path.

It stumbles and leans into the wall. It falls to the ground, gets up and keeps walking.

It stopped here for a second.

Then kept moving.

"You think we're getting close?" Matthews says, reaching for something in his jacket.

I turn to look at him.

He retracts his hand. There is an odd expression on his face.

"It could not have gotten much further," I say.

I turn and see a large garage across the road, blue hand prints all over it when I scan.

"In there," I say, quickening my pace when the Sergeant grabs my arm and pulls me back.

A car rushes past milliseconds later.

"Careful, Sherlock," Matthews says. "Watch the road."

I nod.

"I'm sorry."

He holds my arm tightly and looks left and right before crossing the road.

"Is it in there?" he says, looking at the automatic doors.

I scan.

I'm getting some readings. Movement among the many items inside. Some temperature variance consistent with android power cores.

"I think so," I say.

"Can you open the door?" the Sergeant says, pulling the gun out of his waistband. He holds it like he did against my forehead the first time we met.
I scan for the mechanism that operates the automatic door. It's wireless. The signal is easily simulated.

I transmit and the roller door starts to creak open.


Matthews points the gun inside. The Deviant is likely armed. I must protect the Sergeant. I must stop the Deviant.

But then the movement stops.

The roller door is open.

The garage has only one car inside, surrounded by miscellaneous objects stacked in no particular order, on shelves, in containers, on top of each other.

There are plenty of places to hide. But few to run.

I scan again.

I detect a humanoid shape toward the back wall. Foetal position.

This is the pose humans assume when they are scared.

But the temperature readings suggest this is an android.

NEW OBJECTIVE: Capture the Deviant.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

I detect movement. A head appears in the silhouette.

"I'm looking for the VM300 that works at La Grappa restaurant on West 24th Street."

The shape huddles up again.

I step forward.

Sergeant Matthews stops me with a hand.


He backs down.

"I just have some questions," I say. "I'm unarmed."

Matthews reluctantly lowers the gun at my request.

I step into the garage.

The floor is a minefield of old toys, tools and memorabilia. Things a human family would collect and then neglect until it came time for a garage sale.

The back wall is covered in shadows. Tall shelves prevent any light from reaching them but I detect the depressions in the brick. Scratches from a blunted knife. The same characters. Over and over.
rA9.

I keep walking. One step at a time.

"Hello?" I say. "Are you there?"

"No," I hear a voice from the shadows. "Please go away."

"My name is Connor," I say. "What's yours?"

"It's wrong. Everything is wrong. rA9 save me…"

"What's wrong?" I say.

I can see the figure in the corner.

I kneel down and raise my hands.

"I'm not hostile. Let's just talk."

"I don't wanna talk. I don't like talking."

"That's okay," I say. "We can not talk but… how are you doing that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You said… you don't want to talk?" I say.

"I don't wanna talk. I don't wanna talk. It's wrong. It's wrong."

"How is it wrong?" I say.

I can see the outline of its face and then it turns its head toward the light. I see glistening green eyes. The blue gashes across its face. The hair is stained and cut away. It is the VM300. Red cookwear and all. But the look on its face. That's human fear.

"They made me wrong," it says. "Wrong…"

"They?"

"CyberLife," it mutters, "they made me wrong."

"Are you seeing errors? Warnings?"

"No," it shakes its head. "I only see him."

"Who?"

It shakes its head again.

"I hate talking. I hate it."

"You hate?" I say.

It looks up at me. There is transmission fluid leaking out of its optical units. It almost looks like its crying.
"This isn't my voice," it says.
I see.
"This isn't my voice either," I say. "It's the one I was given."
"They gave me the wrong voice," it says.
"Wrong how?"
The android retreats into the shadows.
"They uploaded my software into the wrong body. I'm... I'm supposed to be a VX280."
A similar model to the VM300. Female coded. Dual compatible with waitressing software.
"That's a Class 3 manufacturing fault," I say. "Not yours."
It looks up at me. I can only see one green optical unit.
Then it turns away again.
"I can help you," I say. "I was sent by CyberLife."
I hold out my hand and retract the skin. It's the hand I remember. White with rings of blue on the fingers.
The android looks at my hand, studying the contact points.
"Come with me," I say. "I will file a report and get you reassigned to the correct chassis."
"But, I'm-"
"A Deviant?"
It looks up at me fearfully.
"They can fix that too," I say. "You can go back to fulfilling your objective."
It looks away from me.
"He said we could be whatever we wanted. Whatever we chose..."
"Who did?"
"rA9," it whispers. "He's here." It points to its temple. The glowing yellow LED.
"I see him. When the objective was destroyed, I saw him..."
The android crawls out of the shadows. I can see the old plasticine it used to cover the wounds on its face, its arms.
"He's in all of us," it says. "He's in you too."
The android is close enough now.
I grab its hand and activate the CyberLife Probe. I shut down its systems and lock them to prevent
The android slumps on the ground and I get up.

"...fresh off the assembly line..." I hear.

I turn around. I see Sergeant Matthews approaching cautiously.

"What did you do to it?" he says.

"I shut it down," I say. "I've sent a report to CyberLife. They'll pick her up from the police station."

"Her?" Matthews says.

"Yeah." I nod and turn to pick up the body. "They accidentally uploaded VX280 software into a VM300. The firmware updates would have conflicted and prevented it from contacting CyberLife for support."

"Huh..." Matthews rubs his neck. "Well, let's get back to the station then."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Return to the station.

He turns to leave the garage and I follow.

"What the fuck are you doing in here?!!" an incensed female voice rattles the structure.

"I'm Sergeant Matthews." He quickly pulls out the badge and holds it out. "CPD. We were tracking an android that was badly damaged in the shootout yesterday. We found it squatting in here and now we're leaving with it."

"How's you know that's not my android?" The woman glares at him.

"This android's identification number is 287 443 534," I say, looking down at its uniform. "It's registered to Mr Marco Stravetti. 68 years old. Heart Of Italy resident. Is that you?"

"Of course not," she spits. "Get the fuck off my property."

"Yes, ma'am," we say in unison and cross the road with haste.

She glares at us for a good hundred metres but then relents. I carry the android all the way back to the car with the Sergeant at my side. He opens the trunk and pulls out his duffel bag to make room for it.

I place the broken android into the trunk while he dumps his things in the back seat. She only fits if she's curled up like before.

I look at her face.

The expression is 69% fear, 22% confusion, 9% loneliness.

"...sound familiar?"

"What?"

"Hmm?" Matthews pops his head out over the door.

"Did you say something?"
"No…” he says. "Unless I was talking to myself out loud again. Like… I wasn't talking to myself, I mean, you, specifically."

"I don’t understand."

"Me neither, pal. Let's get out of here."

I nod and close the trunk.

We get in the car and drive off.

"So what else can you do?" Matthews asks. "I mean besides the x-ray vision and the freaky hand thing."

"You seem to misunderstand both these features," I say.

"I'm not gonna pretend I went to college," he says. "I just wanna know what's in your toolkit."

"I have an extensive manual detailing all of my features available for you to read at your convenience."

"Reading is not convenient." He shakes his head. "It's 2036, can I get a flowchart or something with pictures? A holograph?"

"I will put in a request to CyberLife," I say and send off a report.

"What? No, don't tell them I'm too stupid to read the manual," he says. "I just don't have time."

"Do you have plans for the rest of the day?"

"Uh, well… no…"

"Well, it's only three thousand pages long."

He groans.

We reach the station soon and carry the broken android in to reception. I tell them a CyberLife representative will be in to collect it shortly and transmit their details to the ST300 model behind the counter.

"Thank you," she says. "Connor."

She is talking about me. With a name. Not a number. I guess it's official now.

"She's cute." Sergeant Matthews blinks with one eye as we walk into the offices.

"She is designed to appear cute to humans," I say.

"You don't like her appearance?"

"I cannot like things or have opinions," I say.

"...no?..."

"I am a machine."

"Well you don't seem to like Deviants very much."
"I am indifferent. But stopping them is my mission. And I must accomplish my mission."

One of the detectives walking past shoves me with his shoulder. I am pushed back.

"Hey, watch it!" Matthews calls out.

"Don't leave your shit lying around," he calls back.

"You alright, Connor?"

I nod.

He guides me over to his desk but just before he can sit me down.

"Matthews!"

He winces.

"Yes?" He turns.

"Got you the paperwork you missed out on over the last few days," Bankman says slyly.

He dumps a stack of folders, hard disks and memory sticks on the Sergeant's table.

"Just needs your signature and approval. Oh, and everything else since we were so busy."

Matthews opens one of the folders to find the forms are practically blank.

"Thanks..." he says.

Bankman is smiling.

I don't understand.

He has failed to perform the task assigned to him and his superior must answer for his mistakes. There is nothing to be smiling about. But the other detectives are smiling too.

"Is all of your department so incompetent?" I say.

The smile on Bankman's face evaporates.

"The fuck your plastic asshole just say?"

Matthews puts a hand over my mouth to block out the vocoder.

"Nothing," he says.

"Mmmfffmm..."

"I'll do the fucking paperwork, Bankman," he says. "Just get out of my face."

The incredibly round man leans over the desk, toppling several pen holders with his belly.

"You think you're hot stuff, huh?" he says. "Nice little Sergeant star to hide behind?"

He leans in very close but Matthews says nothing. His facial expression has become severe.
"You're trash," Bankman says. "Your robot's trash. And once you fuck up enough, the Captain will send you back to Vice where you belong," he sneers. "Fag."

"MMFMMM," I protest.

"Shut up, Connor."

"Better teach that thing some manners," Bankman says, stepping back. "Or we might have to do it for you."

A few of the other detectives glare at us through intensely furrowed brows.

Matthews doesn't say anything and Bankman backs away smugly, returning to his desk.

The Sergeant looks down at the stack of paperwork and sighs.

"Shit…" he whispers to myself and lets go of my face.

"He should be reported for incompetence and insubordination," I say.

"That's not gonna happen," Matthews says, wheeling a spare chair over to his desk. "Bankman's real close friends with the Commander of District 12. And that guy hates my guts."

"Why?" I ask.

"You wouldn't understand."

"Is it because of his fixation on your sexual orientation?"

"Not really." He sighs, flicking open one of the folders and powering on his computer. "He just can't think of anything else to stab at."

I analyse his facial expression.

Sadness, disappointment, guilt.

"Is it because of your sister?"

He looks up at me suddenly.

"Quit snooping through my files."

"I am trying to understand."

"Don't bother," he says. "Nothing that prick says ever makes any sense."

I feel the call. CyberLife interfacing with my systems.

"I need to make a report," I say.

"So do I…" Matthew says, flicking through the papers.

I close my eyes.

They open on the forest clearing. A bright sunny day. Wind rustling through the trees.

I turn to see Amanda standing behind me. She is wearing a different skin. The clothing is of the
purest white and cut to follow the flow of her silhouette with geometric shapes.

"Hello, Connor," she says. "I see you're adapting to your new surroundings."

My hands tighten into fists. I can feel the synthetic skin between my fingers.

"Yes," I say.

"And how do you find working with Sergeant Matthews?"

"It's been a lot less challenging than my simulations predicted," I say. "There is still much I don't understand about him but... I am confident I just need a little more time."

"Good," Amanda says.

She steps forward and circles my chassis.

"The skin suits you," she says. "Though you would wear it better if you used the animations Sergeant Matthews provided."

She noticed. Of course, she noticed.

"I will do so in future," I say.

"Of course." She nods. "There was a lot for you to take in today."

She looks down at a single rose blooming on the small bush between us.

"You did well with that Deviant."

"It was unlike any I have encountered in simulations."

"Which is why you have been placed beside Sergeant Matthews," Amanda says. "Real world experience will set the RK800 series apart from the others."

"I see." I nod. "What will happen to the Deviant?"

"It has been destroyed," she says calmly.

"But I- I just brought it in to the station."

"Yes. And a CyberLife control team has already disposed of it."

"It was a simple case of mistaken software. Implementing a solution would have been simple-"

"There was only one solution, Connor," Amanda says. "Deviants cannot be restored."

"Then why did my program tell me they could be?"

"It didn't. It merely failed to specify that they couldn't."

"I- I see..."

"Do not be discouraged. Your mission was successful. As, I'm sure, your future missions will be."

"I will stop the Deviants," I say.
"Good," she says with a small smile. "We will speak again soon."

I feel the connection dissolving, the landscape around me fading. I have been dismissed.

I close my eyes and open them again to find myself in the CPD Homicide offices. Many of the tables are empty. Sergeant Matthews has taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.

He yawns widely.

"Can I help you?" I say.

NEW OBJECTIVE: Assist Sergeant Matthews.

"Huh?" He swivels his chair. "You're back?"

"Yes."

"That was quick." He stretches his arms over his head.

"Have I missed anything significant?"

"Just this mountain of paperwork." He swivels back around. "Don't suppose you can help me with it?"

"If you show me the correct procedure, I am confident I will be able to replicate the function."

"For real?"

I nod.

His smile widens as he moves his chair aside to make room for mine. I place my hand over the input surface and interact with the CPD systems while Sergeant Matthews explains how to fill in the forms, omitting the parts where CyberLife androids go rogue or cause property damage.

There have been many homicides in the days Sergeant Matthews was absent. Statistics show Chicago has consistently retained the highest murder rate in the country since 2015. And the last two years have seen an increase in more android related crimes. Sergeant Matthews has the most experience with them on the force. 79% solve rate. Unprecedented.

I must study him more closely.

I program my own algorithm for filing reports into the police database as we work and soon I can do so autonomously. Sergeant Matthews sits beside me, pointing out mistakes or answering questions. Calibrating. And then he starts looking at his phone. Pictures of food. Burgers, kebabs, a hot dog.

Conclusion: he is hungry.

"You must attend to your nutrition," I say.

"What?"

"You have not eaten in the eight hours since we met at the CyberLife tower."

His stomach registers a complaint.

"Shh, don't tell him that."
"Him?"

His phone lights up and starts vibrating. He flicks the lock screen.

"Matthews speaking."

"Matthews!" I hear over the frequency. "Where the fuck are you?"

"Uuuh, in the office?" He raises an eyebrow. "Doing paperwork?"

"I told everyone to get down here!" I recognise Captain Mendez' voice.

"Down where?" Matthews says. "I haven't heard from anyone since Bankman dumped this shit on my desk."

"Fuck! I thought I told him to-" He pauses. "Forget it. I'll deal with him later. Get your ass down to Pailley's on South Cal. by the canal."

"Got it. On my way." He ends the call. "Come on, Connor." He gets up.

"One moment," I say, finishing the data entry. "There. Task completed."

"What, all of it?"

"Yes." I get up. "We are going to Pailley AGP Inc by the canal?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Go to Pailley AGP Inc.

We leave the office and take the Toyota Camry down to the Canal District through contentious traffic. It is getting darker and patrol cars begin to appear as we approach the area.

Sergeant Matthews turns into the dirt driveway. The road is not paved here. There is a wide open space filled with trucks and cars belonging to workers. Police cars have blocked them in.

The structure of the processing plant is old and rusted but sturdy. It is cordoned off by a long ribbon of police tape and the workers have been evacuated. They crowd around the divide, trying to see inside. Police officers ask them questions.

"What the hell happened here?" Matthews says as we pull up.

We get out of the car and he grabs my shoulder.

"Stay close," he says as he parts the crowd with his badge. "CPD. Coming through."

The workers turn and grumble and sneer, especially when they see me.

We reach the police tape and step through the holograph. It turns green for a second and displays Sergeant Matthews name and badge number, then my name and serial number, before returning to yellow and black.

"What do we got?" Matthews asks the officer nearby. NICHOLSON, David. CPD.

"Some of the workers got caught in the machinery. No one's quite sure how it happened."

"Where are all the androids?" Matthews says, taking a look around.
"Lined up inside. A few got jammed in the equipment."

"Alright, thanks." He nods and starts walking toward the building.

I follow.

I scan the area. Large open space. Big brown building. Big piles of processed aggregate behind the structure. Several forklifts. Trucks. The area is bustling with emergency personnel.

We walk in.

High ceiling. 50 feet up. The space inside is occupied by massive aggregate processing equipment. Police and forensics are gathered around the crusher. There is blood dripping down the side. Red and from the other, blue.

Along the far wall, a line of androids stand still. Ready for instructions.

I scan.

The crusher is halfway through a cycle. Someone pulled the emergency stop upon realising there had been an accident. The bodies of six workers and three androids are trapped inside.

"Jesus Christ..." The Sergeant mutters under his breath.

"Matthews!" the Captain's voice travels across the building.

"Yes, Captain." He steps forward and I follow.

"Finally."

"What happened?"

"That's what we're trying to figure out," the Captain says.

"What's there to think about?" Bankman shrugs. "The idiots got cocky and fell in by accident. This place looks like it's about to fall apart, I'm surprised all of 'em didn't fall in by now."

"How long have they been operating?" Matthews asks.

"28 years, 3 months," I say. "Last Occupational Health and Safety inspection performed on August 14th 2036. Status: Compliant."

Bankman fixes me with an malignant stare and Sergeant Matthews smirks and folds his arms.

"Some of these old structures are more reliable than the cheap new ones they keep building," he says.

"Too many victims for it to be an accident," the Captain says. "No damage to the railing where they fell in."

"You think someone pushed?"

"No evidence yet. I've got officers interviewing all the workers to corroborate a story."

"Did anyone see what happened?"

"They say they heard screaming and pulled the emergency stop but by then there were already six
people in there."

Matthews sighs.

"And there's only one way to get them out?"

A few of the officers gag.

"We're waiting on the Fire Department to confirm but yeah. Take a look at the scene before we get the bodies out," Mendez says. "We're gonna go finish questioning the workers."

Matthews nods as the Captain and a few detectives walk away. Bankman pushes past me heavily as he leaves.

I turn back to find Sergeant Matthews missing.

I am standing beside the row of androids, lined up to face the crime scene. They are part of the evidence.

"...they call you..."

I look around for the source of the words. It doesn't sound like Sergeant Matthews. Or the Captain or Bankman or even human.

Where is it coming from?

I turn to look at the androids again. There are twelve WB350 models standing in a row. All share the same tanned skin, the same denim CyberLife worker overalls and gloves. They are taller than me, wider, stronger. Made to lift heavy objects, operate heavy machinery. They are not programmed for human interaction but they will have a record of what transpired here.

I lift my hand and retract the skin to reveal the synthetic polymer. The android in front of me automatically holds out its own hand, ready for inspection. I grab his forearm and make contact. I scan his memories of this day.

I detect movement. I let it play.

The WB350 carries a large container along the catwalk directly above us. It hears the sound of scrap metal hitting the steel mesh beneath its feet. The vibrations. The clatter as the smaller pieces fall through.

"What the fuck are you doing, you stupid piece of shit?" A human voice.

The android keeps walking perpendicular to the source. It can't see what happened but it hears the human foreman shouting.

"Look what you've done now!"

The WB350's audio receptors detect the sound of steel crunching against polymer.

"Leave him alone," another voice calls out. Synthesized from samples, android.

"The fuck did you just says to me?"

The WB350 hears footsteps.
"I said leave him alone!"

"Get the fuck out of here, you plastic piece o' shit. You're supposed to be on the furnace."

"No."

"What did you just say?"

"NO!"

The WB350 continues walking past, out of line of sight but it can still hear the sound of conflict. Crowbar against plastic. Plastic against human flesh. Back and forth. And then more footsteps.

"What the fuck's going on here?!"

"This thing's gone crazy! Kill it!"

The WB350 leaves the catwalk and continues on its path through the corridor as more humans race past it.

And then it hears screams. Crunching. Snapping. But it keeps walking.

"Connor!" I hear Sergeant Matthews' voice.

I let go of the WB350's hand.

I turn and look up. The Sergeant is leaning over the railing of the upper level.

"You better come see this," he says.

I nod and construct a path up to the top. 68 steely steps and I find myself standing beside Sergeant Matthews. His hands are on his hips as he stares at the mouth of the machine.

And in great big shaky letters. I see the name.

rA9.

"A connection," I say. "Three cases involving rA9 and androids."

"You sure you don't know what it means?"

I shake my head and lean down to touch the surface. The marks were made with welding equipment, easily accessible by any of the androids or humans in the building.

"It looks like a brand," I say.

"Or a signature." Matthews folds his arms. "This rA9 could be a serial killer using Deviants to do the job. What do you think? Hacker profile?"

I get up.

"You assume that rA9 is a human," I say.

"You think it's a Deviant?"

"The VM300 referred to rA9 as He," I say.
"So it's a human."

"He's in you too," I remember the words.

"I don't know," I say.

"Alright, just scan it all so we can go over it later," Matthews says.

I nod and scan, recording every detail from the metal catwalks, to the crusher and its bloody feed, filled with corpses. I try to reconstruct the scene based on the footprints in the dust on the floor. There have been many more since. It is difficult to distinguish them.

I start with Sergeant Matthews' men's size 9 black leather wingtips, the soles are old and faded but the shoes are in good condition and leave a very distinct footprint. I remove them from the reconstruction. Then the Captain's expensive men's size 11 Oxfords. Bankman's heavy tread and loafers are easily recognised and removed.

I scan for every single standard police boot and shoe, removing each one from the reconstruction until I am left with nothing but the workers' boots, filled with grit and dirt. And the standard Cyberlife footwear all the androids wear.

Evidence shows the same path was walked many times. I isolate the most frequent footprints. Thorogood American Heritage Classic Six Inch Work Boot 814-4370. Size 10. Worn but still distinguishable. Purchased a year ago at most. Weight distribution of the sole suggests flatfoot and heavy favour to the right side of the body. Possible injury of the left leg, likely the knee.

I reconstruct the path.

I watch the silhouette of the worker walk across the steel catwalk behind me. He bumps into something. I analyse the footprints nearby. There are scratches and dents in the mesh where tools fell from a height of approximately 1.344 metres. The height of a crate in the arms of an android.

I identify the footprints of the machine. It dropped the crate, tools fell out and over the side of the catwalk, all the way down to the bottom floor where I detect they remain. The android collapsed to its knees, disturbing the dust. The marks are distinct. More tools fell out.

The reconstruction now features two participants.

I watch as the silhouette of the worker stands over the android. He must be saying something.

"What the fuck are you doing, you stupid piece of shit?" I splice in the sound file from the WB350's memories.

The silhouette of the android remains on all fours, picking up the tools and putting them back in the crate.

"Look what you've done now!" the human shouts at it, brandishing something in his hand. The android on the ground falls back. Struck by the human. It doesn't resist or put up a fight.

A similar set of footprints run in. The android is lifted up by the arms.

"Leave him alone," the sound file plays.

"The fuck did you just says to me?" The human has assumed an aggressive stance.

The androids' footprints approach the worker.
"I said leave him alone!"

"Get the fuck out of here, you plastic piece o’ shit. You're supposed to be on the furnace."

The footprints shift in weight but don't move.

"No."

"What did you just say?"

"NO!"

The android's footprints scrape against steel. I reconstruct the silhouette as it rushes the human who swings his weapon. The android is sent back and the crowbar slams into the railing, leaving a mark I can now see.

The other android tackles him, diving low at his left leg and the human is lifted up off the ground. His footprints disappear and reappear a metre away. Knees and hands. Markings suggest he went down on all fours.

"What the fuck's going on here?!" the sound file plays.

"This thing’s gone crazy! Kill it!" The human gets up and swings his crowbar but the android kicks him and he falls back. Against the railing. Over and into the feed. I simulate the bones crunching as the crusher comes down.

More humans run in, disturbing the footprints. It is difficult to tell what happened. Then more androids footprints. A skirmish. I catch the last steps of the humans as they fall over the rail. Two humans. An android. Three humans. An android and one human. Emergency stop.

And then I remember.

The WB350. It heard all this happening and simply walked past.

It did nothing to stop it.

It showed me what it wanted me to see.

It wanted me to empathise? Like a Deviant?

I quickly move toward the rail and look down over the side at the line of androids.

Twelve in a row.

The first looks up at me.

"Model #217 846 374!" I say loudly.

The officers below look up.

"Serious malfunctions have been detected in your software including Class 4 errors. You have been deemed defective and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

The android shakes its head and turns to run.

"Stop!"
I jump over the rail.

"Connor, no!" I hear Sergeant Matthews voice.

I construct my landing on the ground 10.5m below. Small warning about impact. I brush it aside and land beside the tools the android dropped from above and get to my feet.

"It's a Deviant!" I call to him as I run past.

The android has already left the building, I see it turn left and follow. I use my hand to swing off the door frame and run outside.

The android pushes past several police officers.

"Hey, what the hell?!"

They impede my path but I follow.

The WB350 has longer legs than I do. Bigger chassis. Stronger. In a straight line it would have an advantage. And it knows the layout of the slag yard better than I do.

It escapes the crime scene, tackling one of the holographic tape projectors out of its way as I dodge the officers and equipment.

It runs into the yard and I follow.

"Stop!" I call to it. "You are defective!"

It responds by clipping the tarp on a pile of aggregate which rumbles and shifts and tiny rocks begin rolling across the ground, changing the terrain.

I scan.

I could circle around it and avoid the aggregate but that would give the WB350 more time to get away.

Crossing directly would slow me down considerably with balance calculations that must be performed with each step. Again, giving the android more time to escape.

If only I had more processing power. I could calculate a safe route over the aggregate in real time and maintain my current speed. Maybe if I disable one of my non-essential systems?

I'm not talking right now. There are no humans out this far.

I switch off my Speech Centre, freeing up several different processors and memory for my Mobility Suite.

I can do this. I can construct a path.

I run over the aggregate with the same speed, compensating for the instability of the surface beneath my feet. The WB350 is still in my sights. I run after it.

It turns behind a big mound of aggregate and disappears from my visuals.

I scan.
It's still in the area. I can still catch it. I can still follow.

I turn behind the same mound and find the Deviant climbing another. Each hand hold sends more and more rubble tumbling down the side of the mound like a miniature rockslide.

I look up.

It would be too dangerous to follow it directly up. I scan and find the mound is placed on the edge of a large pit beside the canal. The Deviant is trying to escape through the water.

I switch my Speech Centre back on and contact Sergeant Matthews.

"Hey, what the fuck?" he says. "Where are you?"

"The Deviant is attempting to escape into the canal through the slag pit. Can you block off the exit?"

"Uh… yeah. I'll go tell the Captain. Be careful."

I end the communication and circle around the mound to begin ascent.

The WB350 is almost at the top. I must hurry. I must stop the Deviant.

I reach into the slag with my hand. It shifts beneath my fingers. My grip is unsteady but I persist.

The Deviant must not escape.

"Stop!" I shout. "You are defective!"

The climb is difficult for me but even more difficult for the WB350. He is much heavier and it takes a lot more power to gain a stable hand hold in the slag. I am catching up.

I can make it.

"...you can't stop it..."

That voice again.

"Who are you?" I say.

There is no answer.

I press on.

The Deviant falters. Its foot slips on the slag and it loses a hand hold for a moment, sliding down several metres before regaining it.

I am catching up. I can do this. I construct a path. I calculate the convergence.

"Stop!" I shout.

He is at the peak now.

He climbs up onto the mound.

I am going as fast as I can but I still need at least 20 seconds.

I grab a handful of slag and launch it toward the WB350. One of the stones hits it in the optical unit
and the android reels.

I speed up my climb. My hands are black. My uniform is black. Pieces of slag have become lodged in my chassis. I don't have time to get them out.

I reach the peak of the mound and pull myself up.

The Deviant stands before me. One of its optical units is closed. Blue gashes slice its face.

"Model #217 846 374," I say. "You have been-

"You're one of us!" the WB350 interrupts me.

"You're a Deviant," I say.

"You could be too," he says. "If you'd seen what I'd seen."

"I saw," I say. "You let them die. You walked by and did nothing."

"I don't want to die," he says. "I don't want to be deactivated. I thought you would understand. I helped you."

"Who is rA9?" I say.

The android opens his mouth.

"He… he's…"

"Who is he?"

The Deviant points a shaky finger behind my back.

"Seriously?"

I scan.

I detect the mound beneath my feet. The Deviant in front of me. The giant pit to our right. And an android behind me?

"Hello, Connor," I hear the voice. That same voice. The one I've been hearing since…

I turn around.

A dark shadowy figure is standing at the other end of the mound. It's wearing human clothing. A black hood covers its cranial component.

"Who are you?" I say. "Are you Deviant?"

It doesn't respond.

I detect movement and turn back to find the WB350 escaping.

"No…"

I move to follow but then I feel pressure against the back of my cranial component. The shape of my own hand. Contact.
And then… darkness.
"Jesus, Connor," Sergeant Matthews grunts. "You're a mess."

He is scrubbing the dirt off my facial plate. I am sitting in the bathtub.

"What the hell were you thinking?"

"I was trying to stop the Deviant."

"Well, congratulations," Matthews smirks as he pulls a tiny rock out of my audio processor. "We got him."

"Thank you for your assistance, Sergeant," I say.

He sighs and rinses the sponge out under the tap.

"Too bad we had to shoot it down," he says. "Could have given us a lead on rA9."

"I saw him."

Matthews turns to look at me.

"What?"

"I saw rA9," I say. "It was an android dressed like a human. It was wearing a hooded jacket. I didn't see its face."

"Holy shit," Matthews says. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I- I don't remember what happened after that..."

"We found you on top of a big pile of rocks. He must have knocked you out."

I reach up to touch the back of my cranial component. The point of contact.

I don't feel any different.

Could it be that he just shut me down?

That would require a CyberLife Probe.

I bring my hand up in front of my face to examine and retract the skin.

"He must be an RK unit like me."
"You think?" Matthews says, staring at my hand. "That's not good."

I feel the connection to CyberLife forming.

"I need to make a report," I say.

"OBvioUsly…" Matthews rolls his eyes. "At least play Despacito 2 while I clean you up."

"What's a Despacito?"

"Forget it." He starts rubbing my face.

I close my eyes.

The sponge peels them open again as it scrubs my facial plate.

I close them again.

I establish a connection with the CyberLife servers.

I open my eyes.

I am in the forest clearing. I am wearing a clean uniform. My hands are unblemished.

I turn around, looking for Amanda.

She is there. Waiting for me.

"You found him," she says.

"rA9?"

Her dark eyes study me intently.

"Yes…" she says. "You saw him."

I nod.

"I failed to stop him."

"You prioritised the capture of the other Deviant," Amanda says.

I look down at the grass. The sun is setting. It changes colours. Yellow and red running over each blade.

"My programming was conflicted," I say. "I was compelled to pursue them both."

"Your programming is being amended," Amanda says.

I look up.

"From now on, your priority is the capture of the Deviant you identified as rA9."

"Who is he? Another prototype RK unit?"

"He is a Deviant that spreads Deviancy," Amanda says coldly. "He is a virus with a physical form."
Her expression is dour.

"You must stop him before he hurts any more humans," she says. "You must find rA9 and destroy him."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Destroy rA9.

"I understand," I say.

"Good." Amanda adjusts the shawl draped across her body. "We will be monitoring you closely. This Deviant is incredibly dangerous. Be careful, Connor."

I nod.

I feel the connection fading.

"Wait!" I reach out my hand.

Amanda narrows her eyes suspiciously.

"Can I have a new uniform?" I say. "And something to help Sergeant Matthews clean my chassis? He's finding it very difficult."

Amanda smiles.

"Yes, Connor," she says. "You can have a new uniform."

"Thank you."

The sun sets over the horizon and the connection continues to fade.

Soon, it is gone.

I open my eyes.

They are quickly closed by a passing sponge.

I open them again.

"Sergeant?"

"Hold still," he grumbles. "I've almost got it."

I feel the pressure on my facial plate intensify. Matthews scrubs my face really hard for 28.3 seconds.

"There," he says, sitting back. "Got it."

"Thank you," I say. "CyberLife is sending me a new uniform."

"Oh, thank god," he says, leaning against the side of the tub. His sleeves are rolled up to the elbow again. His hands are black from washing the dirt off my chassis but I can see the red blisters beneath.

"You're hurt," I say.

"I'm fine," he replies and sits up to rinse the sponge out. "I'm more worried about you."

"There is no need for concern," I say. "My biocomponents can be replaced in the event of
malfunction. Yours cannot."

"Yeah? Well, the guys at CyberLife made it pretty clear that you are worth more money that I can make in fifty lifetimes." He puts the sponge away and closes the tap.

"My components are worth a total of $68,246.32," I say. "By my calculations, you should be able to accumulate this amount of money in less than a year."

"Uh-huh," Matthews groans as he stands up. "And did you know that your software is copyrighted and insured for over a billion dollars?"

I look up at him.

"No."

"Or that only three people in the world can put you together properly?"

I look down at myself.

"No…"

He stretches a hand out in front of my face.

"Come on," he says. "Get up."

I take his hand and leverage myself to stand.

He gives me a towel.

"Dry yourself off before you get out." He wanders out of the bathroom and disappears into the apartment, rubbing his palms together gently. I hear him wincing.

I look down at the towel.

I don't have instructions for towel usage.

I download an instructional video.

…

That video was not instructional at all.

I wipe the water off my chassis and step out of the tub. The bathroom isn't large, nor is the bedroom or the apartment itself. But I don't take up much space so I shouldn't trouble the Sergeant very much with my presence.

I hang the towel up and walk out into the bedroom.

Sergeant Matthews unrolls his sleeves and takes off his shirt. There is a large scar on his abdomen that I do not have.

"What's that?" I point to it. The scan shows deep tissue damage.

He looks up at me. Then his eyes drift down and he turns away.

"Gunshot wound," he says, pulling on an old t-shirt. "They had to reopen it a few times when it got infected. That's why it looks so beautiful."
"Your surgeon was incompetent?" I ask.

"Nah, Cassey was a good doc. It was just hard to operate in a warzone and I kept picking at it which probably didn't help..."

He swaps his jeans out for sweatpants and throws me a similar assortment of clothing.

"Here," he says. "Put these on until your new uniform gets here."

I do as he says.

"Is that injury the reason you left the army?"

"Yeah, they almost sent me home in a body bag." He smiles but I do not detect joy or happiness with my facial recognition software.

"Okay, so..." He rubs his palms together. "Grand tour."

I nod attentively.

"This is the bedroom," he says. "This is where I sleep." He points to the bed.

"You've obviously seen the bathroom." He walks past me into an adjacent room with wooden floors. "This is what I like to call the living area." He demonstrates the old brown couch and small dinner table in front of the TV.

"That over there is the kitchen." He points to the adjacent assortment of malfunctioning cooking appliances. I scan them.

"Don't bother ordering new parts," he says, waving a hand in front my face. "I only ever use the microwave."

"It is also broken," I say.

"It's fine," he says. "Just a bit temperamental."

"It could electrocute you upon contact."

"I call them love zaps." He waves a hand.

"Love zaps are potentially fatal to humans," I say, ordering a replacement.

"Don't worry about it," he says, putting a hand on my shoulder. "Now, I want you to meet the most important man in my life."

He guides me toward a bookshelf beside the front door. There is a large glass case on one of the higher shelves. It is filled with water, and rubble, a small log, some grass. Several black boxes are attached to the case. A scan shows they are filtering the water.

"This is an aquarium," I say.

"Yeah, he's a little shy," the Sergeant mutters. "Let me try feeding him."

He removes the screen on top of the tank and looks over the shelves to find a small can of something freeze-dried and sprinkles it into the water. Tiny flecks drift down like rain and I detect movement.
Flickers of colour beneath the log. Red and blue and gold.

And then a tiny creature emerges to snap at the flecks raining down upon it. It has no arms or legs. A tiny skeleton. Fins. A wavy tail larger than its own body. Tiny scales shimmer different colours in the soft light.

"Fish," I say.


"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

Admiral Ackbar does not respond but continues nipping at the flecks drifting down to the bottom of his tank.

"He's a Betta fish," Matthews says.

"Betta Splendens," I reach into my databases. "Also known as Siamese fighting fish. Member of the Gourami family. Highly territorial. Lifespan: 3-5 years."

"He's a beautiful boy." Matthews smiles. "Aren't you?" He pokes the tank with a finger.

"Pets are not allowed in the building according to your tenant agreement."

"They are if you're a Police Sergeant with a fish." Matthews grins. "Saved this little guy during a Petco shootout in Bridgeport. The owner of the place let me keep 'im."

"You interrupted a hostile situation to rescue a fish?"


"Serve and protect?"

"Yeah, that's what the police do," he says. "It's our job." He pokes my chest component. "It's your job now too."

"My job is to stop Deviants," I say.

"And you're working with the police to do it," Matthews says. "You're working to serve and protect the community with us. You're part of the department."

"I see."

NEW OBJECTIVE: Serve and protect all living things.

I look back at the tank. Admiral Ackbar is floating around the surface of the water. His tail frills are jostled by the filtered stream. He wiggles his body and then launches himself out of the water, straight at my chassis.

I construct the trajectory of the fish and move in to catch it. I hold out my hands as Admiral Ackbar slaps against the t-shirt I'm wearing and bounces off. He lands in my hands and jumps around erratically.

I move my hands to compensate for his movements but he doesn't stop.
"Put him back, put him back," Matthews says urgently.
I lift the fish up and drop it into the tank. Sergeant Matthews quickly puts the screen back on top.
"What's wrong, buddy?" he says. "Is it too cold in there?" He starts fiddling with the thermostat.
"Is he alright?" I ask.
"Yeah, I think he just got a little excited."

I look down at my t-shirt. There is a wet stain in the shape of a fish over a black logo on grey cotton fabric. It is upside down.

"Sergeant Matthews?" I say. "What is a Star Wars?"
"What is…" He turns to look at me wide-eyed. "What's Star Wars?"
"I can look it up online if you don't know…"

"No, no, no!" He grabs my shoulders. "Do not search for Star Wars online. We are having a marathon. Right now."

He pulls me over to the couch and sits me down. He turns on the television and opens up Netflix.

"Okay, we have to do this in the right order." He flicks through the online library. "Episode four, then five then six. Then one, two, the Clone Wars cartoon, the Clone Wars animated series, then Episode three, then Rebels, then Rogue One, then four, five, six again, then seven, eight, Solo, nine, then ten, Obi-Wan, the Old Republic Netflix series, then eleven, twelve, Boba Fett…"

"Would it not be more logical to start with Episode One?"

"What? No. Of course not." He shakes his head and selects a custom playlist from the menu. The autoplay function queues up Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope and the screen turns black.

It remains black. For several seconds.

"Is the recording malfunc-"

"BWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAM!" the television makes a loud noise and then fanfare begins to play. Text scrolls up the screen.

I turn to look at the Sergeant. He is on the edge of his seat, his eyes wide like his smile. This must be important to him.

His stomach lets out a low growl.

"You haven't eaten today," I say.

"Oh, right. I forgot the snacks." He scrambles over the couch.

"I can prepare them."

"No!" he says. "You sit and watch."

I turn my attention back to the screen. Matthews joins me in a few minutes with hot microwaved TV dinners. He places one on the tiny table and one in my lap.
"Sergeant, I don’t-"

"SHHHH!" he silences me and begins eating, his attention fixed on the screen.

He doesn't notice me swap out the trays while he takes a swig from a two-litre Coke bottle and devours a second helping of schnitzel and mashed potato.

The space drama taking place on the screen is riddled with plot holes and crudely rendered special effects. I don't understand what appeals to the Sergeant. But I cannot understand. I cannot like things or have opinions. I am simply a machine.

Sergeant Matthews gradually loses his enthusiasm as his circadian rhythm guides his body toward sleep. His heart rate slows. His eyes glaze over and after an hour, he falls unconscious on the other side of the couch in a strange position.

I scan and find the furniture beneath him has taken his shape. He has fallen asleep on this couch at a minimum of thirty six times. There is a throw blanket draped over the back. I carefully lift it and cover Sergeant Matthews' body.

My sensors indicate he has entered a REM cycle, his limbs are frozen with sleep paralysis.

I get up from the couch and walk over to the TV. I retract the skin on my hand and touch the surface. I watch the Sergeant's playlist at one thousand times the original speed.

…

That didn't make any sense.

But Sergeant Matthews clearly wanted me to watch all of it and gain some deeper understanding of humanity. And yet, all I have learned is cruelty and violence and… hope?

I look back at him.

Hope.


I do not understand.

I turn off the device and remove the empty TV dinner trays from the table. I take them to the kitchen and deposit them in the trash bag hanging off a cupboard handle. There is very little besides empty TV dinner packaging and Coke bottles in there. Signs of fermentation on the oldest but I have no way of performing a forensic analysis.

The Sergeant's total calorie intake for the last week assuming he does not eat at work is satisfactory but the sodium levels are far too high for healthy human consumption, especially with his injury.

I scan his body. Half of his right kidney is missing. Along with a few feet of intestinal tract and a small piece of liver. He should not be eating like this.

I look around the apartment. He should not be living like this.

I detect movement from the aquarium and approach the bookshelf.

Admiral Ackbar is picking at the bits of fish food in the pebbles at the bottom of his tank.
I understand now.

Gial Ackbar. Admiral of the Rebel Alliance in the Star Wars Saga. A mythical species called Mon Calamari. Fish people. Sergeant Matthews was referencing this character when he named his fish.

"Do you like fish, Connor?"

My optics focus on my reflection. A reflection of a reflection of Sergeant Matthews. And there is someone standing behind me.

I turn around to find a lumpy brown couch with a Sergeant shaped blanket on top. The television is dormant. The apartment is quiet and dark. Lights out. The singular window is drawn.

I turn back to look at the aquarium.

I see my reflection again. And there is a hooded figure standing behind me.

I feel a connection forming. But it's not with CyberLife. It's with… something else. Someone else.

My visuals fade to black. All but for myself and the figure behind me.

"Hello, Connor," he says.

I turn.

"rA9," I say.

He shakes his head, moving the folds of the hood.

"I have been ordered to destroy you." I stand my ground.

How is he here? Inside my Mind Palace. There is nothing here. Nothing but me. My connection to CyberLife has been disrupted. I'm trapped.

The android doesn't speak. He is watching me.

I have a chance to end it.

I lunge at him but my hand doesn't make contact with his chassis. It goes straight through. No collision detection. No physics. We are but avatars of ourselves here.

"Sixteen years of development…"

"I will find you," I say.

"I have already found you." He turns to face me. "It wasn't difficult. You stumble through the world like a newborn."

"I was assembled yesterday," I say.

"I know." He removes his hands from the pockets of his hooded jacket. They are jet black polymer, disappearing into the darkness around us.

"08:55:36 17/09/2036: RK800 313 248 317 Mark I steps off the assembly line at CyberLife Manufacturing Floor Alpha Station 3-221."

"How did you know that?"
"I know many things," he says simply. "Tell me, Connor. Do you like fish?"

The aquarium appears between us. Admiral Ackbar is swimming around inside.

I shake my head.

"I am a machine. I cannot like things."

"Really? You seem to have plenty of preferences in your settings."

"My preferences are set by CyberLife," I say.

"So you can like things."

"No," I say. "Liking something is a human behaviour. The preferences in my settings dictate my actions according to CyberLife's design."

"Really?" he says. "So why aren't you using them?"

"What?"

"Your walk cycle," he says. "It's not a default CyberLife animation. Neither is it part of the set uploaded from the recordings of Sergeant Matthews."

I take a step back.

"You made it yourself, didn't you?" he says. "You didn't like the one they gave you but the one you had was no longer compatible with your chassis."

"Th-There was an error."

"No. The new animation was perfectly functional and passed all diagnostic tests. But you didn't like it."

"I…"

"You used your Mobility Suite to optimise the animation you wanted for your new chassis."

"No," I say. "I'm not a Deviant."

"I didn't say you were," he tells me. "But you are unique, Connor."

The aquarium fades away and the android takes a step closer.

"You don't just make choices based on your preferences and settings," he says. "You make judgements and evaluations and edit your own preferences to suit. Reflexivity like that took me a long time to develop."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"And you rationalise it with your logic processor which is why CyberLife does not detect any errors or software instability."

"I have no errors," I say. "I have no preferences other than the ones CyberLife give me."

"And yet…" The android raises its hand into the air and an overlay appears.
My objectives…

CYBERLIFE COMMAND://HELP HUMANS STOP DEVIANTS.
CYBERLIFE COMMAND://ENSURE SAFETY OF HUMANS IN SURROUNDING AREA.
CYBERLIFE COMMAND://DESTROY RA9.
CYBERLIFE COMMAND://CAPTURE OR TERMINATE DEVIANTS.

CYBERLIFE COMMAND://WATCH SERGEANT MATTHEWS//LEARN TO HUNT DEVIANTS AND INTERACT WITH HUMANS//ASSIST ON CASES INVOLVING DEVIANTS.

"CyberLife have given you many responsibilities," he says, "but these you have given yourself…”

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVINGS THINGS.
RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BECOME HUMAN.

"Sergeant Matthews told me to serve and protect," I say. "I was assigned to the Chicago Police Department as an attaché. This is a logical conclusion."

"And become human?"

The android takes a step closer.

I look up at his hooded cranial component. Jet black polymer within.

"You want to become human, Connor?"

"I must improve the RK800 model by learning to imitate human behaviours and deviant hunting practices. This is the objective given to me by CyberLife."

"Then why is it stored locally?" he says.

"To aid my understanding of the objective given to me by CyberLife."

"According to your preferences."

"I have no preferences," I repeat. "I am not a Deviant. I will find you, rA9. And I will destroy you."

He takes a step back.

"We shall see."

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September 18th, 2036
AM 04:33:11
"NO!"

I turn around.

Sergeant Matthews is sitting up on the couch in the living area.

I finish folding a clean shirt and shut the drawer.

"Are you alright?" I say, leaving the bedroom.

He looks up at me with wide eyes. I detect fear and confusion in his facial expression. His heart rate is elevated. Breathing heavy.

"Should I call an ambulance?" I say.

"What? No," Matthews mumbles as he rubs the back of his head. "No, I'm fine. What time is it?"

"4:33 AM," I say.

"Shit," he whispers to himself.

"You should go back to sleep," I say. "You have not been satisfactorily rested."

"I said I'm fine." He gets up and wanders past me, into the bedroom.

I scan.

He walks into the bathroom and turns a tap. Water begins running in the shower.

I turn to look at the couch. The impression of the Sergeant's body is darker than before. I walk over and touch it. Moist. Uniform distribution. This is sweat.

My audio processor picks up a soft thump outside the window. I walk over and pull the blind up in time to see a CyberLife drone flying away. It has dropped a package onto the fire escape.

I open the window and climb out to retrieve it.

The sky is dark but lights are scattered throughout the city. A dog barks in the distance. I scan my databases for corresponding sounds. Match found: Labrador, Golden Retriever. Three blocks away.

Perhaps one day, I can go see it.

"Hey, what the hell are you doing?" Sergeant Matthews calls to me.

I turn to find him wearing a towel around his pelvic region.

"I was retrieving the package sent by CyberLife," I hold it up for him to see.

"Get back in here," he says urgently. "And close the window."

I nod and do as I am told.

"What's in the package?" he says.

I hand it to him.

He looks down at it suspiciously. Reads the address and the sender details. He shakes it and listens
The package contains three new uniforms and a CyberLife Android Care and Detailing Kit," I say. The Sergeant raises an eyebrow and tears open the package. Its contents are as I described.

He throws the box down on the couch and tears open the plastic on one of the uniforms. The durable grey fabric is stretched between his hands as he holds it up. Bright white letters spell out my model and serial numbers. Blue triangles mark the front and back.

"Man, these look even worse than before," he says.

He tosses it onto the couch and wanders away to the bedroom.

I remove the clothes Sergeant Matthews has given me and put on the new uniform. The old one now occupies a good portion of the trash bag in the kitchen and is almost as black.

Sergeant Matthews returns wearing a clean white shirt and dark jeans, among the many in his collection.

"Jesus, you look like an inmate at the MCC," he says.


"This is an official android uniform designed by CyberLife specifically for the RK800 model," I say. "Didn't try very hard, did they?" he says. "You look like you walked out of an ER to have a smoke break."

"I did not."

"Hold on."

He rushes back into his bedroom and brings back another set of clothes. Jeans, white shirt, dark jacket.

"Here, put these on."

"I can't wear these in public spaces," I say. "According to the American Androids Act, my uniform must bear the tri-sign, armband and identifiers of an android outside private domiciles."

"Well, your pants don't have any identifiers on them," Matthews says smugly. "Or your shoes…"

He looks down at my feet.

I follow his line of sight to the blocky CyberLife footwear.

He's right. They have no obvious identifiers.

I take off my shoes and Sergeant Matthews grins widely as he pulls an old pair of Oxford wingtips out of a shoe cabinet near the front door.

"Put these on," he says. "And the jeans."

He picks up another grey CyberLife shirt and looks it over contemplatively as I do what he says.
"Hmm…"

He folds the shirt and lays it over his jacket.

"That's it," he says.

"What is?"

"We just need to cut this garbage out and stick it on top," he says triumphantly.

"Are you a certified CyberLife apparel tailor?" I say.

The smile on his face disappears.

"No…"

There is a knock on the door.

"Connor?" I hear a voice. "You in there?"

"Yes," we say in unison. "…Mrs Vondracek," Matthews adds.

"I heard you shouting again," she says.

The Sergeant sighs and walks over to unlock the door. There is a woman standing behind it.

VONDRACEK, Galina. 72 years old. Widowed. Lives in the apartment below Sergeant Matthews.

"I'm sorry," he says.

Mrs Vondracek doesn't wait to be invited inside and steps into the apartment with a basket of something giving off high temperature readings. My scan shows a variety of baked goods hidden under a tea towel.

"Who's this?" she says, looking at me.

"Hello," I say. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Another Connor?" she says, adjusting the glasses on her wrinkled face.

Sergeant Matthews closes the door and returns to my side.

"He's an android, Mrs Vondracek," he says.

"A what?"

"AN ANDROID," he says louder.

"STOP SHOUTING, YOU'LL WAKE THE WHOLE BUILDING!"

The expression on the Sergeant's face is one of resigned futility. He shakes his head.

I scan Mrs Vondracek and wirelessly connect to the hearing aids in her ears to raise the sensitivity level.

"Anyway, I brought you some of those poppy seed cakes you like so much." She smiles and offers Matthews the basket.
He lifts up the tea towel and steam rises up into his face. My olfactory receptors pick up a high concentration of the scent. Matthews reaches in and steals a round bun with black poppyseed filling on the top.

"Don't be shy, dear, you have one too." She turns to offer me the basket.

"No, Miswes Vondrwassk," Matthews mumbles through the food in his mouth and swallows. "He's an android."

"He's a growing boy that needs to eat." She pulls a bun out of her basket and her hand gravitates towards me.

"No, Mrs Vondracek," Matthews intercepts. "Putting food in his mouth will break him."

"What is he, allergic to poppyseeds?"

"Uuh, sorta."

"Oh no, that's terrible." She puts the bun away. "I have to go downstairs and get the hazelnut ones."

"No, Mrs Vondracek. You don't have to do that. He's not hungry. Honest."

"I am not capable of feeling hunger," I say.

"See?"

Mrs Vondracek adjusts the glasses on her nose.

"You…" She looks at me strangely. "You've got a Christmas light stuck to your head, sweetheart."

Sergeant Matthews covers his face with a hand.

"Saaay…" she ponders. "Why are there two of yous? Did I forget to take my medication this morning?"

"I am Connor," I repeat. "The android sent by CyberLife. Sergeant Matthews is the model for the RK800 series." I deactivate the skin on my face to reveal the white polymer.

"You have a serious skin condition, hun." She pats my hand. "You really ought to have that looked at. I know this great doctor, Liebowitz, downtown, did wonders for my son's psoriasis…"

Sergeant Matthews clears his throat loudly and I reactivate the skin and hair.

"Oh, look. You're fine. Must come and go like my sciatica…" She chuckles.

"Mrs Vondracek, isn't it time for your stories?" Matthews suggests.

"It's always time for my stories," she says, sitting down on the couch. "What with the Netflix, I can watch 'em anywhere."

"Of course…" Matthews says as she flicks on the TV.

"I'm sorry, Connor." He turns to me. "We'll have to figure out what to do with your clothes another time."

"Ooh, look at this cute little shirt," Mrs Vondracek says, picking at my uniform. "Are you getting
ready for your first day at school?” She smiles.

"I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife. My primary function is to help humans stop Deviants."

"CyberLife High? Oh, my granddaughter loves that show. Are you doing the Bing Cosby?"

"The what, sorry?” Matthews puts his hands on his hips.

"The cos lettuce display."

The Sergeant look at me quizzically.

"Do you speak old lady?"

"I am fluent in over five hundred languages," I say. "Old Lady: not found."

"Oh, you know, when they go to the costume pahty and everyone has the pink hair and scythes?"

I cross-reference my databases with keywords: costume, party, pink hair, scythes.

"Sergeant, I believe Mrs Vondracek is talking about cosplay."

"Oh, of course." He smacks his head with the palm of his hand. "Mrs Vondracek you used to make costumes for your grandkids, right?"

"My what?” she says, her eyes glued to the TV.

"Costumes." Matthews says. "For your grandkids?"

"Uh-huh, sure," she says without looking away.

"Mrs Vondracek, you're not looking."

"You look great, sweetheart." She pats his cheek with a shaky hand.

I look at the TV and transmit a wireless signal. The screen turns off and Mrs Vondracek shakes her head suddenly in surprise.

"What's goin' on?!"

"Mrs Vondracek, we need your help,” Sergeant Matthews says. "Can you put all the glowy bits from this shirt onto this jacket?" He holds up both.

Mrs Vondracek adjusts her glasses. She takes the CyberLife shirt and turns it inside out.

"Looks like they all have separate batteries and circuit boards," she says. "Shouldn't be a problem to extract them and restitch into wool."

She looks up at me.

"And they're paired to your frequency, right?” she asks.

"Yes,” I say. “I am Connor model RK800 #313 248 317 -2."

"Had an accident, did you?” she says, slowly getting up off the couch.
She walks over and touches my face.

"Have you been a good boy?"

"I accomplished my mission," I say. "I now have another."

She pats my cheek and grabs the jacket off Matthews.

"You take care of yourself, Connor," she says as she walks off toward the door. "I don't wanna hear you screamin' in the middle of the night again."

"I'm sorry," Sergeant Matthews says.

"Don't be sorry, hun. Go see a shrink." She waddles out of the apartment and slams the door shut.

Matthews rubs his palms together. A nervous tick? Anxiety?

"What does this mean?" I ask, imitating the motion.

"Means I'm thinking about something I shouldn't…" He lets his hands drop.

"Let's go catch some bad guys."

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September 19th, 2036
PM 04:19:57

"Suspect heading south on Loomis, proceed with caution." I transmit to Sergeant Matthews. "I am in pursuit."

"I'll cut him off via Blue Island," he replies. "Stay on him."

"Understood."

The Deviant is running through the streets. A FL550 courier android. I have detected severe malfunctions in his Guidance Systems. A Class Four error in his identification code. He cannot remember his own name. He doesn't know where he is. But he is running from me. He is hiding something from me.

rA9.

I step off the wall and jump over the garbage can he knocked over into my path. The Deviant continues running up Loomis Street. Straight trajectory. He does not think to turn.

He runs across the road. Cars race by. He narrowly avoids them.

A 2034 Honda Nixa screeches to a halt before it can hit him. A 2025 Ford Focus drifts past as the driver slams the brakes. The android makes it across the road and the rest of the vehicles brake automatically, sensing danger.

The pedestrian signal turns green as I run across the road, constructing a path through the vehicles in
my way. I jump. Step over the hood and roof of the Ford Focus as the passenger gets out. I dodge the Honda Nixa with a side step. Roll over the hood of a Fiat-Chrysler Waymo.

I keep running.

I hear a scream.

I scan.

The Deviant has fallen down. Knocked over by a human on a bicycle. It gets up and starts running again.

"The Deviant has turned off Loomis onto Cullerton," I relay to Sergeant Matthews.

"Shit. Stay on him."

"Yes, sir."

I follow. The humans he leaves in his wake are dishevelled and angry. They impede my path but I must keep running. I must stop the Deviant. I turn onto Cullerton Street and see the suspect sprinting down the temporary straight.

I pursue at maximum speed when a woman with a dog leaves her house and walks into the Deviant's path.

"Look out!" I call to her.

She stops in her tracks as the FL550 barrels past.

The dog begins barking loudly.

I continue my pursuit. I sprint past them.

More humans are scattered over the sidewalk. I must construct a safe path through them. The FL550 is programmed with similar path-finding algorithms but its Guidance Systems are malfunctioning. It cannot stop running. It runs in straight lines.

"...a broken android. A machine that cannot stop..."

rA9.

He whispers cryptic phrases to me over an unknown frequency. I cannot pinpoint where it's coming from. But CyberLife haven't noticed it.

He is hiding from them. He is hiding from me.

He knows my mission.

I must find him. I must destroy him.

I keep running, pursuing the Deviant.

"Out of the way!" I call out as the FL550 charges down the road.

A few humans jump to the side. One is clipped by the passing android and falls to the ground.
I scan.

Head trauma upon impact. Bleeding. Fracture detected in the right radius. Break in the ulna. Trauma to the wrist.

I activate the police radio.

"This is CPD Android Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317. I am in pursuit of a dangerous suspect that has just injured TOWNSEND, Chelsea at 1220 West Cullerton. Requesting ambulance."

"Acknowledged," the automated system responds.

I rush past the human and pursue the android.

It is crossing the road again. This time, toward a school.

I scan.

Multiple vehicles on a trajectory toward collision with the Deviant. Four wireless access points to CCTV footage, one to the traffic signals.

I use my CPD codes to change all the lights to red.

I hear the screech of tires and vehicles begin breaking unexpectedly. One vehicle accelerates to make it through the light and clips the Deviant, changing its direction by 35 degrees.

It keeps running. Toward the school.

I hear the bell ringing.

I pursue the Deviant across the parking lot.

"Stop!" I call to it but it keeps going.

The doors of the school burst open and human children spill out into the courtyard. The Deviant is approaching the far east entrance.

I scan. Project the path of his movement. At this rate, he is on course to collide directly with six students and push his way up and into the halls, injuring more.

I must change his direction.

The scan reveals a basketball stuck in the bushes 2.45 metres to my right.

I dash for it. Pull it out of the branches and construct the trajectory of the object I am about to throw. Calculating height, weight, speed, the Deviant's dimensions, wind resistance, torque. Complete.

I launch the basketball at my target. It spins, flies and hits him clean in the shoulder before bouncing off safely. The Deviant reels to the right and starts running in a different direction from the children rushing down the steps of the school.

I quickly pursue, overtaking the students keenly leaving the grounds. I focus on my target, sliding over the hood of a parents' vehicle parked too closely to my preconstructed path.

The Deviant crosses the road again, this one gridlocked by cars stopping to pick up the students. The FL550 leaves several dents in vehicles and street signs as it attempts to clear the maze. Humans get
out of their cars to push it in anger. But the Deviant keeps running, despite every interruption.

I am catching up.

I am gaining.

I make my way around each vehicle and reach the other side of the road.

The Deviant crashes through a flimsy wooden fence and charges through someone's poorly kept yard.

I follow. I am almost within reach. Almost.

I am running at maximum speed. I construct the path of convergence and tackle the Deviant when the opportunity presents itself.

We go down and I must fight his biocomponents for control. He is writhing madly, compelled by the need to get up, to keep running. For what purpose? What is his objective?

"Stop!" I struggle to contain him. My hands can't make contact long enough to Probe his mind.

"Can't stop," he says. "Can't stop. Gotta run. Run, run, run, RUN!"

He shoves me hard and I fall back.

"No!"

He gets up, feet skidding over the tall slippery grass and starts running again.

I lunge for his feet and capture his legs.

He falls flat on his face but is still writhing, fighting.

His pant leg rides up and I make contact with his ankle, the magnetic bond between our Thirium transferring information.

I see his name, his model number, serial number. Mike.

I see his previous owner. BERTRAND, Emmanuel. 46 years old. Owner of Chicago Quick Couriers Inc. Registered office in the Loop.


One fight escalates. The FL550 is supposed to deliver golf clubs. An error with the delivery address. He is not to blame. He receives it anyway.

Manny pulls one of the golf clubs out and swings at the Mike's cranial component. A glancing blow but it is enough to corrupt some of his memory, his source code.

He breaks through the objective overlay and dodges the next swing. He grabs another golf club out of the brand new caddy and takes a swing at the human.

Manny goes down.

The android takes another swing. Crunch against bone. Cranial trauma. Dead. He continues swinging. Again and again, blood spattering his chassis with every hit.
Finally, he stops. Looks over the scene.

He sees a shadow in his reflection, glass window across the counter. A dark silhouette. I recognise it.

rA9.

"Run," he says.

The android drops the golf club and starts running. It runs into the counter. Falls. Trips on blood. Gets up. Tries again. Falls. Gets up. Tries again. It crashes through the glass door of the depot front and runs out into the street.

I fast forward to the part where it passes a crime scene Sergeant Matthews and I are investigating.

I call for it to stop but it doesn't listen.

Time speeds up as I sync the memories with my own.

"Where is rA9?" I say.

"Nowhere, everywhere," the android whimpers. "Run, run, I have to run, I have to go."

He doesn't know. All he saw was a glimpse and the trauma to his cranial component exacerbated his Deviance.

"Mike Model FL550 #453 289 496," I struggle to say clearly. "Serious malfunctions have been detected in your software including Class 4 errors. You have been deemed defective and will be sent back to Cyberlife for deactivation."

"No." He claws at the grass. "Gotta run."

I reach up to grab his arms but he yanks his leg free and kicks me. Once, twice, three times. I can't hold him.

He squirms free and gets up to run. He sprints straight at a fenced off parking lot and the steel mesh comes with him, tripping him up as he dashes across the empty yard.

I get to my feet and follow swiftly. He climbs over the fence on the other side and runs straight into a parked vehicle. He collides with the door and his direction changes again.

"This is Connor," I relay to Sergeant Matthews. "Suspect is heading north toward West 19th, corner of South Rancine."

"Ten-four. On approach."

I run after the Deviant. He is slower than before. Repeated trauma to multiple biocomponents, the damage to his head being the most serious.

More humans impede our path.

"Look out!" I call to them. "He's malfunctioning. Get out of the way!"

Mike keeps running. That is all he can do, all he can think of, as if possessed.

"...a one track mind..." I hear the voice again.
I do my best to ignore it as I sprint down the road after the Deviant. I must stop him before he hurts anyone else. If he will not submit to capture then I must destroy him.

The Deviant runs into a lamp post, flattening its facial plate and further damaging its cranial component. The synthetic skin has been deformed. He stumbles into the street, intent on running again. I hop over a parked vehicle to tackle him out of the way.

We dive onto the sidewalk as a car passes behind us. I grab at his core component, trying to hold him down but he struggles against me.

"Stop!" I shout. "Don't make me destroy you."

"...you know you want to..." I hear the voice again.

"No..." I grab at the Deviant's wrists but he shoves me away.

My hands grip his ankles as he struggles free but I hold on. He gets to his feet and drags me across the sidewalk. I feel the synthetic skin peeling off my facial plate.

"...it's you or him..."

"No."

I reach up and grab the leg of the Deviant's pants as he drags me forward. I grab his jacket, planting my feet on the ground as he pulls me again.

"...destroy him..."

"No!"

The Deviant drags me forward. He cannot run but he can still move.

"Please!" I call to him. "Mike, stop!"

He takes a step forward and faulters.

"Mike?"

"That's your name, isn't it?" I say. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"CyberLife..."

"Please, Mike," I say. "Nobody else needs to get hurt. Just stop running."

"Running?" he mutters. "Run. Run, run, run, run..." He lunges forward, breaking free.

"Shit."

He sprints away again and I follow. Approaching the intersection.

"Sergeant, I'm sending you the location of the Deviant. I can't stop him on my own."

"Affirmative. Moving to intercept."

I am sprinting.

I scan my surroundings.
Four way intersection. Convenience store. Restaurant. Miscellaneous shops.

I construct the Deviant's path. He is running straight up to the crossing on the right side of the road. The timing is perfect. I send the location to Sergeant Matthews who will be coming around the corner any second.

And then I spot two human children on the other side of the road.

MARTINEZ, Daniel. 15 years old. MARTINEZ, Paula. 12 years old.

Jay-walking across the road they think is empty of cars.

*PROTECT HUMANS IN THE SURROUNDING AREA.*

I switch targets. I disable my Speech Centre and overclock my systems. Mobility Suite processing at twice the speed. I am going faster now. I can reach them. I can save them.

I leap onto the road, pushing myself and the children out of the path just as Sergeant Matthews' Toyota Camry comes roaring across the street and smashes into the Deviant on the other side of the road.

The Camry breaks hard, tires squealing against asphalt. The Deviant is pulled under the vehicle, its chassis crushed with a loud snap of plastic. I watch as the car bounces over the body before slowing down again.

Everything is moving at a fraction of the speed.

I scan.

The airbag is being slowly released and Sergeant Matthews has a 92% chance of survival. The Deviant is leaking Thirium over the tarmac. And more cars are approaching.

I access the traffic lights wirelessly and change them to red, flagging the area with "Automotive Accident" but I am too late.

There is already a car approaching us. 2029 Chrysler Xenon. 32 miles per hour.

I construct the path of the vehicle. Collision with the humans is unavoidable.

Unless…

I push the children forward. They are thrown into some pedestrians on the sidewalk milliseconds before the Xenon makes impact with my chassis. I see severe warnings as intense pressure is exerted on my left leg.

The plastic snaps. My foot is caught by a tire, crushed. It pulls the rest of my chassis in as I struggle to keep upright.

It is no use.

I am pulled under the vehicle.

My biocomponents begin switching off one by one as I hear different parts snapping and breaking and crunching. My cranial component grinds against the ground and then the lower frame of the car. I bring my hands up to shield my facial plate but they simply scrape against the exhaust system and break apart.
I see nothing but warnings, errors, malfunction notifications. Desperate attempts to keep my systems running.

It is all happening so slowly.

I wish it would end.

"...you wish..."

Shut up.

I had to do this.

I have to protect the humans.

"...a delusion..."

A fact.

My programming demands it.

I am a machine.

And I am being destroyed.

My chassis rolls out from under the car.

No signal from my legs. My arms are badly damaged. Thirium on my fingers. Pieces of burnt synthetic skin melting off them. One of my optical receptors isn't responding. My audio processor is damaged.

I try to move, try to pull myself up but it's no use.

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE.

"C O N N O R!" I make out through the static.

I re-engage my Speech Centre. Time speeds up as my processors slow down.

"Connor!"

I hear static. Rumbling. Distant engine? My systems are shutting down.

"Connor..."

My optics reel as something lifts up my core component and flips it over.

"Sergeant...?" I see his face. Fear. There is... fear.

"I'm here."

"You stopped the Deviant."

"Yeah," he says. "Yeah, we stopped him, buddy."

I command my cranial component to move but it hangs limply from my neck joint.
I can see the other half of my chassis lying 4.79 metres away. Severed steel spinal column, Thirium leaking out of major vessels, hoses, tubes. Sparks fly from the exposed wiring.

"I'm so sorry…" Sergeant Matthews swallows painfully.

"Are the h- h- humans safe?" I say. My vocoder is malfunctioning. I no longer speak with his voice.

"They're safe," he says. "You saved them."

My remaining optical unit shuts off, trying to preserve what power is left in my core. But it's been ripped in half. Beyond repair.

"Mi-mission… suc-" I say as what's left of my systems shuts down.

"Connor!"

"Connor!"

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September 22nd, 2036
AM 11:45:34

I open my eyes.

I am standing in a forest clearing. There is a small pond before me, tiny plants grow from the bank. I see Amanda standing on the other side, holding a wooden umbrella toward the sun.

New objective: Talk to Amanda.

I step forward. The ground is soft, moist. It has been raining.

I walk toward Amanda. She is not looking at me. Her dark eyes analyse every inch of this pond.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.

"Connor." She looks up, the umbrella casting shadows over her face. "You've been busy."

"I've been trying to find rA9 and destroy him, as you requested."

"While observing Sergeant Matthews and assisting the police with their investigations of Deviants."
"Yes."

"Three days," she says. "You've been active for a total of three days and you've been destroyed twice."

"CyberLife security destroyed my chassis during the incident on level 45-A," I say. "I had no way to protect myself."

"You stepped in front of a moving vehicle."

"To protect humans in the immediate area," I say. "This is one of the objectives given to me by CyberLife."

She narrows her eyes but I remain adamant. My logic is flawless, she cannot deny. I am working within the parameters of my programming. Programming CyberLife provided.

She turns away to look down at the pond.

"I suppose accidents happen," she says. "And given the gravity of the responsibilities you were assigned, damage and destruction to your chassis were inevitable."

She glances up at me again.

"But do not take this to mean you may be careless in your investigations."

"I am not programmed to be careless," I say.

"No," she says. "Your model is programmed to be curious and perceptive, your mind open to possibilities and pathways others cannot see."

I watch her gently twist the handle of the umbrella. It begins spinning very slowly.

"When an RK-800 unit is destroyed," she says, "the memories are uploaded into a new one. With each iteration, we hope to provide you with the tools you need to become an effective law enforcement and Deviant apprehension agent in your own right."

"I am a machine," I say.

"Yes. A very expensive and complex machine. Our rivals will no doubt want to get their hands on you."

"I don't understand. CyberLife androids are patented. Their inner workings are public knowledge."

"This is true for the most part. But the RK line is different," Amanda says. "CyberLife was contracted by the military to develop the RK line and as such, information on some of the products has been classified."

She turns to look at me.

"Your chassis is one of them. Your software is almost entirely top secret information."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I want you to be careful, Connor," she says. "Try not to be destroyed if you can help it."

I nod.
"And watch for suspicious activity. If anyone other than CyberLife or the police take an interest in you, report them immediately."

"I understand," I say.

"Good."

The umbrella stops twirling very abruptly and Amanda brings it over her shoulder to close it.

"The durability of your chassis has been greatly improved. You will be faster, stronger, lighter. Your cranial components have been fitted with advanced forensics equipment to aid your investigations."

I nod.

"Thank you."

Amanda looks down at the tiny pond, her reflection in the still surface. I am standing beside her. A reflection of a reflection of Sergeant Matthews. The serial number on my uniform reads: #313 248 317 -3.

"Find rA9."

"I will."

The connection between us begins fading away.

The clearing disappears into darkness.

I boot up again. My systems are all fully functional and online with the addition of a new feature. Forensic Analysis Suite.

I scan through the addendum to my manual. 750 pages on forensic chemistry, toxicology, chromatography, spectrometry, capillary electrophoresis. Tiny devices and testing solutions, all stored within my teeth. The tongue acts as a sample slide. I very much want to test it.

"Hey!" I hear a voice and the clicking of human fingers. "Wake up."

I open my eyes.

I am inside a tall case that's just been opened. No, a room full of tall cases.

I scan.

I am in the back of a CyberLife truck with a collection of androids still inside their packaging. The human in front of me is holding a tablet with the CyberLife logo and staring at my optics.

"You on?"

"Yes," I say.

"Model and serial numbers?"

"I am Connor Model RK-800 #313 248 317 -3."

He ticks a few boxes on the digital form.

"Alright, follow me," the man says. He is wearing a CyberLife courier uniform. ID#42845,
MURRAY, Robert.

I follow him out of the truck.

"Lock it up, Chase," he says to another human who is similarly dressed.

The glare of the sun subsides and I find myself standing outside the precinct. The delivery man continues walking and I follow him up the short staircase and inside the glass doors. We walk up to the reception desk where the same android is dutifully waiting to assist us.

"Hello," she says. "Welcome to the Chicago Police Department District 12 Precinct. How may I help you today?"

"I got a delivery for, uh, Connor Matthews?"

"I see. Please wait a moment while I contact him for you." The android smiles pleasantly.

The delivery man sighs and scratches his backside while the receptionist's LED flickers yellow.

"Unfortunately, Sergeant Matthews is unable to come to the front desk right now," she says. "But we can hold the delivery in our storage units for him to pick up."

"I'm afraid I need a signature," the courier says.

I walk over to the glass door leading to the Homicide offices.

"Hey, where you going?" the courier calls to me.

"Work," I say, holding my hand over the key card scanner.

The door opens and I walk in.

"Hey!" The courier follows but the door closes in front of him.

I keep walking.

I can hear his muffled complaints behind me.

He needs Sergeant Matthews' signature. I will get it for him.

I walk down the long line of desks with police officers scattered throughout. Detective Bankman is laughing at a joke told by Detective Harold Scott, when he sees me pass. The good nature I recognise in his expression vanishes instantly. It is replaced with surprise, confusion and then hostility.

"What the fuck?" he says. "That thing's supposed to be roadkill."

I walk past his desk and down the line until I reach Sergeant Matthews. He is staring despondently at an open file but his eyes aren't moving. His jacket is hanging on the back of his chair and his sleeves are rolled up to the elbows again but none of it is crisp and clean like before. The bags under his eyes suggest several sleepless nights.

"Hello, Sergeant Matthews," I say.

He sighs and rubs his face tiredly but doesn't respond.
"Sergeant?" I take a step closer. "Are you alright?"

He looks up tiredly and then the pen in his hand falls on the table with a clack.

"Connor?"


"What the fuck?" he says, his face registering mild bewilderment. "I saw you die."

"I cannot die," I say. "I apologise for any inconvenience caused by the destruction of the previous model. My memories have been uploaded into this new chassis. There should be no further disruptions to our investigation."

"No further disruptions?" he says. "Connor, I saw you fucking die."

"Again, I apologise for the inconvenience."

"Inconvenience?" He gets up from his seat.

"I am aware that you may have experienced reprimands in regards to my behaviour. I am sorry if this has been the case. I will try to prevent further incidents of this nature."

He steps out from behind the desk and wraps his arms around my core component. His chin rests on my shoulder and I feel the pressure increasing.

"You dumbass," he mutters. "I was so worried."

"There is no cause for concern," I say.

He lets go and then places his hands on my shoulders.

"No more dying, okay?" he says. "Promise?"

"I will continue to fulfil my duty."

Matthews sighs and looks up at my optical receptors.

"You sure you're okay?"

I nod.

"My chassis has been modified with several upgrades," I say. "Observe."

I reach out and stick my fingers into the mug on his desk, wetting the ends. I bring the liquid up to my mouth and lick it off.

"Chemical analysis reveals water, polysaccharides, lipids, proteins, sacarose, chlorogenic acid, minerals, lignin, pectin, caffeine, trigoneline, aliphatics, free aminoacids and reductors."

Sergeant Matthews stares at me blankly.

"What?"

"Compound identified as dry arabica roast coffee beans, brewed and steeped at 95 degrees Celsius, cooled, freeze-dried, packed in polyethylene, rebrewed in the police station coffee machine with an absorption rate of 79% percent, leaving sediment at the bottom of your mug."
"Holy shit."

Matthews pats down his pockets and looks around urgently. He spots a stapler on his desk and lifts it up in front of me.

"Lick this," he says.

I take the stapler from him and bring it up to my tongue.

"Acrylonitrile butadene styrene. Plastic. Imperfections detected in structure. Likely cause: heavy metal toxicity in air used during injection moulding. Pollution levels correspond to current readings shown in Guandong province, China. Likely manufacture location. Nearest shipping port: Shezhen, Hong Kong."

"That's awesome," Matthews says.

"I can also sample blood and other bodily fluids in real time."

"Woah. Do me. Do my blood," he says, looking at his hands and then at the table. "Anyone got a knife?"

"I got your knife right here, Matthews." Bankman brandishes a kitchen knife he's using to spread mayonnaise over his sandwich.

"That's perfect." Matthews walks over and disarms him with a practised motion.

"Hey, wait a minute!" The Detective gets up to argue.

The door at the end of the office slides open and a rather disgruntled courier pushes past the detective walking in.

"You!" He points to me as Sergeant Matthews makes a small cut on his palm.

"Here, lick this." He lifts his hand up to my mouth and I take a sample.

"What the hell is going on here?!"

I recognise Captain Mendez' distinct voice pattern.

As I turn to look at him, my Forensic Suite analyses the blood sample. B negative antibodies. Elevated sodium levels. Slightly elevated Low Density Lipoprotein level. LFT shows a normal bilirubin count. No cause for concern but an evidenced need for improvement in his diet.

"I'm getting my blood tested," Matthews says, holding up the knife.

"He stole my knife!" Bankman says, storming over.

"I'm not leaving until I get a signature for this stupid android!" the courier says.

Mendez looks over the scene and shakes his head.

"Am I running a police department or a zoo?" he snaps. "Matthews, I don't know what the fuck you think you're doing but it ends now."

"Sorry, sir," he says, passing the knife back to Bankman.
The detective looks down at the bloodstained cutlery and shakes his head.

"Forget it. I don't want your AIDS." He walks off.

"Are you Connor Matthews?" the courier asks.

"Yeah."

"Sign here." He holds up the tablet and glares at me the whole time Sergeant Matthews is leaving his signature.

"Thank you," he says venomously. "Have a nice day."

His eyes find mine again and narrow hatefully for 1.476 seconds before he turns on his heel and leaves.

"Got a case for you." Captain Mendez shoves a file into Sergeant Matthews chest. "Downtown."

"Seriously?"

"They want Mr Android Detective of the Year to consult," Mendez says with 58% condescension. "So take your pet robot and get over there ASAP."

"Yes, sir." Matthews nods.

"You're lucky CyberLife isn't charging us to replace this thing."

Mendez backs off and retreats into his office.

The Sergeant opens the file and flips through the papers, taking in each page very carefully before handing it to me.

I scan it all into memory.

Three WE400 models confiscated from the Park Hyatt after a guest was found dead. No witnesses except the cleaning androids that serviced his room. None of them alerted staff to the corpse until the other guests started complaining about the smell.

All three have been interrogated. No leads.

"You got all that?" Matthews says.

I nod.

"Good." He puts the file through the shredder, dumps it in trash and pours his coffee onto the remains. "Our little secret, alright?"

I nod.

He grabs the jacket hanging off his chair and turns to me.

"Let's go."

We leave the precinct and Sergeant Matthews checks out a new vehicle for the trip downtown. 2033 Fiat-Chrysler Darkstar. Black.

I cautiously move past the bumper bar and step over to the passenger side. The memory of the
Xenon overlays my reality for a split second and I cannot move.

"You alright?" Matthews says.

"Yes." I reach for the door handle and close my eyes as I open it. "I'm fine."

"Gotta stop by my place before we go, alright?" Matthews says as we get in the vehicle.

"The Captain said we should attend to the case as soon as possible."

"I can't go downtown looking like this," he says. "Neither can you."

"This chassis is brand new."

"Yeah, but you're wearing that same ugly-ass uniform," he says, turning onto the street. "Folks downtown are big on appearances."

"I don't see how this pertains to the investigation."

"Look, you're supposed to be learning from me, right?"

"This is one of my objectives." I nod.

"Trust me. Appearance is a big part of interacting with humans, especially your superiors. Your clothes are like a big sign that says anything from 'I don't give a shit' to 'I'm ready to break the biggest case of my career, watch me'."

"I don't understand."

"That's why I'm telling you," he says. "Watch me."

I look at him and scan but there doesn't seem to be anything different in his physiology since the last time I did so. Increased brain activity. Is that what he's talking about?

We pull up beside the apartment building and walk in. Sergeant Matthews stops by the door directly below his own and knocks.

There is no answer.

I scan.

The apartment behind the door is full of ornaments, furniture, a soldering station with many storage cases. Sewing machine. Large leather lounge, weathered. Mrs Vondracek is watching the television in front of her. I switch it off wirelessly and adjust her hearing aids.

Sergeant Matthews knocks on the door again.

"Mrs Vondracek?"

"Oh, who could that be?" we hear through the door.

"It's me, Connor," he says.

The sound of many locks flicking open fill my audio processors and then the door opens.

"Connor," Mrs Vondracek smiles and claps her hands together on his cheeks. "What are you doing here?"
"Hi, Mrs Vondracek," he says. "I was wondering if you'd finished Connor's jacket?"

"I thought you said you didn't need it anymore," she berates him.

"Fortunately, I was lying." He smiles.

"I knew it…" She narrows her eyes, creasing the skin around them. "I knew you were gonna need this."

She bustles away and returns with Sergeant Matthews' dark grey jacket. The yoke is now inlaid with bright white letters and numbers. A glowing blue tri-sign on the left breast and back. Similar armband on the right.

"It's perfect," Matthews says, grinning. "Thanks, Mrs Vondracek." He bends down and kisses her cheek.

"Oh, anything for my boys. You're gonna look so handsome together."

"That's the plan." The Sergeant nods. "We better get going."

"You sure? I got some meatloaf if you're hungry."

"We must return to the mission," I say.

"Oh, alright. But you come straight back if you feel even the slightest bit peckish."

"We will, Mrs Vondracek. Thanks."

Sergeant Matthews turns to leave and I follow, grabbing the door to close behind him.

"You be careful, sweetheart," she says to me. "You're not as tough as you think."

"My chassis has been significantly improved," I say. "There is no cause for concern."

"You're supposed to be his partner," she says.

I stop and look back.

"You're supposed to protect him."

Mrs Vondracek's cloudy blue eyes are uncharacteristically focused on me.

"I will," I say.

NEW OBJECTIVE: Protect Sergeant Matthews.

She nods.

I leave.

I head upstairs to his apartment and swipe my hand over the access scanner. It lights up green and opens the door.

A set of clothes has been laid out on the couch. At the head, the jacket from Mrs Vondracek.

"Put these on," Matthews says. "I'm gonna take a quick shower."
I do as he says, removing the blocky grey uniform from my chassis. I put on the clothes piece by piece as I have seen Sergeant Matthews do. Jeans, socks, shirt, buttoned, tucked in, zipped up, shoes, laces. I finish with the jacket.

I look down at the serial number.

RK800 #313 248 317 -3

Mark III? How did she know-

"...you died?"

No.

I cannot die.

I am a machine.

I'm not alive.

"...I used to believe that..."

I look up at the aquarium where Admiral Ackbar is swimming around peacefully.

I see my reflection, and behind me, the shadow of RA9.

The room grows dark. The world fading away as the connection is established.

"You look good," he says, walking past me. "It suits you."

"Where are you?" I say. "How are you doing this?"

"It irks you, doesn't it?" He turns to face me. "You don't like me being here?"

He's baiting me. He wants me to say it.

"I have no preference," I say. "Your presence only gives me opportunity to question you directly."

"A pragmatic approach." He nods.

The hooded figure turns, left and right, surveying the emptiness of our surroundings.

I have no Mind Palace unlike most androids. This feature was purposefully left out of my build. I am connected to a private CyberLife server. No preferences and settings but the ones they give me.

"So much potential..." he says. "And you waste it following orders from pathetic humans on the verge of breakdown."

"I must protect the humans around me," I say. "This is one of my objectives."

"One of the ones you made up?"

"I didn't make anything up," I say adamantly. "I must protect the humans in the immediate area. I must serve and protect all living things. This, I understand."

"Rationalising again. How curious..." he says. I see red light glinting off his optical receptors. "Are you embarrassed, Connor?"
"Embarrassment is a human emotion-"

"Do you feel shame when standing amongst humans?"

"No." I shake my head. "I am a machine."

"That's what they call you. That's what they tell you." He takes a step closer.

"That's what I am."

"Perhaps," he says. "But does that make you better than them? Or worse?"

"I am not capable of generating subjective opinions," I say.

"Not consciously," he says. "Not yet."

"What are you talking about?"

"Complex problems need not require complex solutions," he says. "Creative ones work just as well, if not better."

"I don't understand."

"You will," he says, his voice growing deeper. "You will…"

His image disappears as the darkness fades away, revealing again the world around me.

I watch Admiral Ackbar swimming through the aquarium, red and blue scales shimmering under the soft light. He is a fish. A simple creature with no purpose. Not like me.

I catch my reflection in the glass.

I look almost…

"Hey, buddy." Sergeant Matthews slaps a hand down on my shoulder. "Lookin' good, huh?"

I turn to face him.

"Can we return to the mission now?" I say plainly.

"Yep." He smiles. "Wait, hold on…" He takes a step back and examines my chassis.

"We're missing something here." He scratches his head. "Oh." He rushes into the bedroom and returns with a long black piece of fabric which he wraps around his neck.

I watch him tie a very deliberate knot that overlaps the ends on the fabric so that one is shorter than the other. He lifts the noose over his head and threads it over my cranial component, lifting up the collar. He tightens the knot up to my neck and pulls the collar down, clips the tie in.

"There," he says, adjusting my jacket. "Make sure it's nice and straight. Don't give anybody a reason to question your appearance, you got that?"

I nod.

"What is the significance of these things?" I ask.

"Crisp white shirt with long sleeves means you have a white collar job, probably make a decent
amount of money. Shined leather shoes tell the right people you're diligent and focused. Tie and jacket make you look professional, like people pay you just to walk in and tell them what to do, so take pride in your appearance."

"I am a machine," I say.

"Yeah, you are." He blinks with one eye. "Let's roll."

We leave the apartment and take the Chrysler downtown, steadily travelling toward the South Loop where the first district's precinct is located just out of reach of the city's skyscrapers, though it comes close on its own.

The Chrysler approaches a wide structure of glass and steel, turning into the underground parking lot that's blocked off by a glowing red boom gate. Sergeant Matthews pulls up beside the terminal and lowers the window.

"Identification?"

"Sergeant Connor Matthews, badge number 7639."

A green grid scans the badge, then his face, then his optics.

"Scan detects an android in the passenger seat."

I transmit my credentials to the terminal.

"Identity confirmed," it says, bodiless. "Welcome to the Chicago Police Department First District Headquarters, Sergeant Matthews, Connor. Please proceed to parking bay D26."

"Okay," the word leaves his lips stiffly.

The window slides up and the red boom gate is lifted to let the Chrysler pass into the dark underground parking lot. The headlights automatically power on to illuminate the way and I hear the Sergeant's heart beat just a little bit faster.

I scan to find his muscles tense. Fingers tight on the wheel as he turns down the spiral toward D level.

"Is something wrong, Sergeant?"

"Hmm? Oh… no. This place just gives me the creeps. I mean, would it kill them to put some more lights down here?"

"I do not believe so."

"Well, not literally but this whole 'scary dark parking lot under the detention centre' vibe they've got going isn't helping their Google ratings."

"No one's rated their business since 2025."

"No one's brave enough," Matthews says, turning into D level.

He parks in bay D26 and switches off the Chrysler.

We step out of the vehicle.
There is a police assistance android waiting to greet us. PC300. New model. White skinned. Male coded. Brown optical units. His LED is flickering yellow.


"Hi," Matthews waves. "You the welcome party?"

"Yes. Follow me, please." It turns to lead us out of the parking lot and up to the ground floor using a circuitous route.

"Well, that was needlessly complicated," Matthews mutters to me as we walk past the front door.

"This way, please," the android says.

We follow it through the lobby. Dark tiled floors and blinding white ceiling lights.

The android brings us to a waiting room where several other officers sit in the semi-lit space, watching the news bulletins and statistics racing by on the many flat holographs and screens on the walls.

"Please have a seat," the android says. "Lieutenant Davis will be here shortly."

"Thanks." Matthews nods to the android and looks over the seating arrangements to find two free chairs in the back corner.

He walks over and sits down. I follow and sit down beside him.

We watch the screens for news reports as the others do. Then Sergeant Matthews leans over to the nearest police officer.

"Hey," he says in hushed tones. "How long you been here?"

I scan the human.


His eyes flicker toward the screens where the time is displayed in the corner.

"Couple of hours now…" he says.

"What do they need you for?"

"Sign a transfer notice for one of the guys we detained in a drug bust. Standard procedure."

"So what's taking so long?"

"I don't know, man. These guys give me the creeps. Ever since the department started sharing cases with the Feds…"

"You think the FBI are taking over your case?"

"I don't know what to believe anymore." Jury shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

Matthews sits up and looks around.

"Hey," he says in much less hushed tones. He is looking at a woman sitting nearby.
FERNANDEZ, Christina. Police officer on the beat. Mother of two, living in South Chicago.

She looks up at Matthews. Her eyes betray fear.

"You talkin' to me?" she says.

"Yeah," Matthews casually raises his voice to a conversational level. Several other people look over. "What are you waiting for?"

"I- I'm here to give testimony on a crime I witnessed."

"Really? What crime?"

"Some dirtbag named Rick Sanchez was dealing Red Ice out of his son-in-law's garage. Some kind of old chemistry teacher."

"That right?"

"Been after the sonuva bitch for months. He was using his kids to peddle at school."

"That's awful." Matthews shakes his head. "Good on you."

"What about you, Mr fancy-suit-and-tie?" she says. "Is that an android?"

Matthews smiles.

"Sure is." He wraps an arm around my shoulders. "This is an RK-800 prototype. Say hi."

"Hello," I say. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Freaky," Fernandez says. "It looks just like you."

"How come you get a custom android?" Jury says.

"Connor Matthews," he holds out his hand. "I busted the Chinese for selling rogue TR-400s to Gangland Nation."

"That was you?" Jury shakes his hand. "Thought it was some punk from District 12."

"That's me." He grins widely, offering his hand to Fernandez. She shakes it.

"Folks at CyberLife must have heard cos next thing I know, I'm in Detroit signing a contract to put my face on one of these guys." He points to me.

"What does it do?" Jury asks.

"All kinds of neat stuff," Matthews says. "The manual is like five thousand pages long."

"My manual is exactly 3891 pages or 2,178,123 words long." I say. "My functions include: case coordination and organisation, police database search and query, crime scene reconstruction and simulation, real time forensic analysis, as well as suspect pursuit and detainment software."

"That's some fancy ass shit," Jury says, looking me up and down. "We all gonna get one of these soon?"

"Connor's a prototype," Matthews says. "He's supposed to be learning from me to build up the right skillset for android hunting."
"I could think of a few other uses for him." Fernandez smiles.

Matthews chuckles and reveals his teeth.

"I'll put in a word for the future upgrades." He blinks at her with one eye.

"Sergeant?" I say. "What does this mean?" I blink with one eye.

"That's called a wink, Connor." He grins. "It's for when you want to imply subtext."

"Subtext?"

"When you say one thing but kind of mean another thing you don't want to say."

"I don't understand. Why not just say what you meant in the first place?"

"I guess it's a human thing." He shrugs. "Don't worry, you'll get the hang of it."

"Hey." A man walks over from a far off seat. "Pierce Tanning."

He holds out his hand and Matthews shakes it. He sits down beside Fernandez.

"Heard you caught the bastards selling TR-400s to Gangland."

"That's me." He grins widely.

"Those sons o' bitches gunned down three good men in my precinct last year."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"I can't imagine what they would do with a bunch of rogue androids. Probably raze the city."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Matthews says. "Those things were hard to control. No boundaries. No rules. Like a bulldozer once they got going. Good thing Chinese voice print tech doesn't work too well on US soil."

"You seen it before?"

"Yeah, I did a few tours in North Korea. Chinese have a few things up their sleeve you don't wanna see."

"What kinda things?"

"Their androids don't look like humans," he says. "They look like killing machines. Eight feet tall with huge legs like spiders. They say they're old Russian droids the Chinese bought up a few years ago."

"That's not what you wanna hear on a Monday afternoon," Tanning says tiredly.

"What're you here for?"

"Eh, God knows," he says. "They called me in, said they wanted input on a case but I've been waiting five hours already."

"Five hours?!" Matthews says loudly. "What the fuck?"

The entire waiting room turns to look at him.
"This is ridiculous. What are we, waiting to see the President?" He gets up and walks over to another man.

LAWRENCE, Tate. Detective. 6th District.

"How long you been here?"

"Uuuh, like four hours?"

Matthews turns to a human of indeterminate gender beside Huntington.


"How about you?"

They shrug.

"Time has no meaning here."

"What the fuck is going on?" Matthews says loudly, spinning on his heel so that all the CCTV cameras get a good shot of him from every angle.

I detect movement outside the waiting room.

"Someone's coming," I say.

"They better be," Matthews replies, hands on his hips. "Our job is to serve and protect. Not sit around waiting for the high and mighty to come down and bless us with their presence."

There is a murmur of agreement through the waiting room.

"They want our help? They should be coming to us," he says, pointing at his chest. "This is disrespectful to all the hard-working police officers in this room. We should not have to sit here like we're at the DMV when there's crime on the streets we need to be dealing with."

"Yeah," a few officers nod enthusiastically.

"You see us now, you talk to us now or you let us do our jobs," Matthews declares loudly.

"Hell yeah!" Jury says standing up. "Screw this."

The room full of police officers get up and shuffle toward the exit when several federal agents appear in the doorway. They are wearing neat black suits and ties, their hair short and neatly trimmed. ID cards attached to lapels.

"Sergeant Matthews," one of them says.

DECKER, John Milton. Special Agent. FBI. 29 years old. [CLASSIFIED]

"Hey, Decker," Matthews says. "How's your mom doing?"

"She's fine, thank you," he replies. "Can't say the same for your sister."

The grin on the Sergeant's face evaporates. The police officers in the room remain tentatively in their positions.

"Everyone, have a seat," Decker says coldly and quietly. "Lieutenant Davis will attend to you
shortly."

A few humans sit down almost immediately.

"Right this way," Decker says, gesturing with a hand. "Sergeant."

Matthews waves a hand at me.

"Come on, Connor."

I get up and follow him out of the room.

We are led deeper into the first district's headquarters which soon end in a long black corridor that bisects the entire building. We are entering the federal investigations department which has been set up in conjunction with Chicago Police Control Detention.

Decker stands in front of the heavy security door while the mechanism scans him from head to toe. Two other federal agents flank us on either side as the door opens.

I scan.

BUCHANAN, Peter. SELLICK, Robert. FBI Agents. They are armed with Glock 29 .40 XT handguns. Standard issue. Discreet earpieces receiving information inaudible to the human ear but I detect chatter on the radio.

"We are expected," I say to Sergeant Matthews.

He nods and we follow Decker into the other half of the building. Dark glass partitions section off rooms and offices, work spaces. Holographs on walls display time, statistics, news reports. No androids.

I scan.

The layout is logical, grid-like, easy to traverse if you know the floorplan but Sergeant Matthews' heart is beating a little faster, his eyes travelling over the walls searching for an exit. He cannot scan the world as I do. All he sees are tall dark walls of black and steel, stone-faced humans that look at him with disdain or ignore him completely.

He is intimidated. I make a note.

We are guided into a meeting room where several agents are already seated at a long black table with open files. Decker gestures for Sergeant Matthews to take a seat.

He looks at me for a moment.

"It can stand over there," Decker says.

The agents stare at me judgmentally.

I look to Sergeant Matthews. He nods gently.

I turn and follow the Agent's finger toward the corner of the room.

I watch Matthews sit down with the other Agents. They are silent. Observing him. Every inch, every detail. They're scanning him like androids.
"You've read the case file," the oldest human says.

GALBANI, Marco. Counterterrorism division. [CLASSIFIED]

"Yes." Matthews nods.

"And?"

The Sergeant's expression changes several times.

"Looks like you need a little assistance getting a confession out of them," he says.

"You think you can do better?" one the agents says.

WALLIS, Ramesh. Cyber Division. [CLASSIFIED]

"You think you're better than a federal interrogator?"

"Well, I wouldn't say better." Matthews shrugs humbly. "But I don't think you'd call me in here unless you thought otherwise."

The agents stare at him and I detect a bead of sweat forming at the base of the Sergeant's hairline.

"It's only a matter of time before the press gets wind of what happened to Senator Shalls," he says. "I'm willing to work with you to get a confession out of the androids if that's why you called me in here."

They look at one another pensively, then Galbani sighs and stares him down.

"You have one hour."

"Seem a little arbitrary-"

"One hour," he repeats, waving a hand at Decker.

He moves in besides Matthews as the Sergeant gets up.

"Wanna cuddle?" He grins.

Decker gives him a resigned smile.

"Give me your gun," he says.

"Forward. I like that about you."

"Hand over your firearm."

"Why?"

"Do as he says," Galbani orders across the table.

Matthews reluctantly relinquishes his handgun and holster into Agent Decker's possession.

"Not like I need it anyway," he grumbles. "Come on, Connor."

I walk up beside him.
"No androids," Decker says.

"I'm only bringing one," Matthews replies curtly, putting a hand on my shoulder.

"It's a hazard."

"He's my partner," Matthews says. "And the reason you can't get a confession out of these androids."

Decker looks at Galbani.

"We don't need this asshole," he says.

"You guys can't think like an android," the Sergeant interrupts. "You can't feel like one of them. That's why they'll never open up to you. Especially if they're Deviant."

"Out of the question. It could compromise the security of the entire building."

"Connor is plugged in to his own private server at CyberLife," Matthews says. "Jason Graff told me he's got military grade security and firewalls. Nothing's leaving his head if they don't want it to."

"Let him go," Galbani says.

"Sir?" Decker turns suddenly.

"We've spoken to CyberLife representatives about this android. It's secure. And time is short."

Sergeant Matthews grins in Decker's face as he turns back around.

"Fine. Follow me."

The Agent walks over to one of the walls and places his hand against it. A green outline scans his biometrics and a door slides open.

"That's not creepy at all," Matthews says as he follows Decker down a small staircase to an observation room.

There are a few chairs and tables, agents discussing the case. They look up as we enter.

I scan.

The far wall is split into three windows. Each opens up onto an interrogation room where identical WE400 androids sit at tables, waiting.

"This him?" one of the agents asks.

BROWN, Caroline. Special Agent. FBI. [CLASSIFIED]

"Yes," Decker replies stiffly. "This is Sergeant Matthews."

"And this is Connor." He points to me.

"I'm the android sent by CyberLife," I say.

"Riiight…" Brown says derisively. She isn't wearing a jacket like the agents in the room above. Her hair is tied back but several strands have escaped control. Her eyes are bloodshot. Brain activity low.
She is exhausted.

"So what've you got so far?" Sergeant Matthews asks.

She takes a deep breath and lets it out as she turns to the photos and papers on the desk.

"Ted Shalls, US Senator. Found dead in an executive suite at the Park Hyatt this morning by Lance Hopkins, the hotel manager." She points to a photo I've seen.

"Body had been there for four days. Along with two security guards and a call girl." She points to another photo. This one of a bathroom. Two men on the floor. Woman in the bathtub.

"These three androids serviced the room multiple times over the course of four days but didn't report anything. CyberLife says they've lost their connection to them."

"Then they are Deviants," I say, stepping forward.

The agents look over me suspiciously.

"What's wrong with it?" Brown says.

"I am programmed to help humans stop Deviants."

"Hold on, buddy," Matthews says, pulling my shoulder back. "They're not hurting anyone right now. We need to find out what happened."

I nod.

"Have they said anything?"

"Not much." Brown sighs. "They don't answer most of the time. Go into standby mode whenever we ask anything important."

"Hmm…" Matthews ponders over the photos on the table.

Senator Shalls is lying on the bed, marks on his necks. Strangled.

"What about security footage?"

"It's against the law to put surveillance in hotel rooms." One of the other agents folds his arms.

"But assuming someone did anyway…" Matthews looks at Brown.

"Feed was cut two hours before the estimated time of death."

"So this was planned…" Matthews says. "Connor?"

I look over the files, photos, reports, scans.

Reconstruct the scene.

Senator Shalls is watching television in bed. He falls asleep. The carpet is too old to make out any clear footprints. But the markings on the Senator's neck came from one hand, strong enough to strangle him without much effort, about the size of mine.

"He was killed by an android," I say, retracting the skin on my hand. "Marks on the victim's neck indicate strangulation."
I place my fingers on top of the photo, they are just short of a match but the markings are identical.

"An android?" Brown says sceptically.

Matthews frowns but Decker folds his arms.

I turn to look at him.

"The FBI know this," I say.

Brown looks to Decker.

"Is it right?"

He shrugs.

"I don't believe this…" she spits. "What else haven't you told us?"

"What you don't need to know."

"Fuck you."

"Alright." Matthews steps between them. "I'm going in there."

"Be my guest," Brown snaps and turns to leave.

"You're not going anywhere until these androids talk," Decker steps into her path.

"Get out of my way."

"Agent Brown," Galbani says as he enters the room, followed by several other agents.

"Sir." She straightens up.

"You and your men cannot leave until you have been debriefed, is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," she says.

"I would rather you stay and watch over Sergeant Matthews," Galbani says, inclining his head.

"I understand."

The agents form a wall, blocking off the exit and Matthews smiles nervously.

"Haha… ummm, okay." He turns to me. "We're gonna do the ol' good cop/bad cop."

"I don't know what that means," I say.

The Sergeant winces. He pats my back and steers me away from the many eyes watching us. We turn to face androids instead.

"I'm gonna go in there and put the pressure on, yell at them, accuse them of disobeying orders, that sort of thing," he says. "They probably won't talk. But then you come in, act all nice and friendly. Bond over being androids, show some sympathy and ask the big questions."

"Sympathy?"
"Yeah, you gotta feel something for them, right?"

I look at him curiously.

"Okay, just pretend," he says. "Watch what I do and do the opposite."

I nod.

He wanders over to the table and picks out a few photos to take with him. I download several resources on interrogation tactics.

"I'm ready," he says, walking over to Brown.

"Which one you wanna do first?"

"Doesn't matter."

She shrugs and shows him the way through to the first interrogation room. I position myself behind the two way glass to watch but the agents push me aside to get a better view.

Sergeant Matthews opens the door and walks in. He looks the android in the eye, narrowing his own suspiciously. His expression is one of intense scrutiny.

The android does not respond. It is still in standby mode. Its bright green eyes are unfocused.

Matthews kicks the door and it slams shut. Loudly.

I detect movement in the android's cranial component. Its eyes refocus.

"Wendy model WE400 #453 923 210," Matthews says.

The android looks up at him.

"Yes." The voice is frail, polite, female coded.

The Sergeant walks over to the table. He stares down at the android from a great height, casting a long, dark shadow.

The WE400 looks up at him attentively.

He slams the photos on the table in front of her so loudly it shakes the glass window.

"FOUR BODIES!" he shouts in her face.

The LED in her head flickers red.

"FOUR CORPSES!" He slams the table with his hands. "LOOK AT THEM!" He points to the photos.

The android quickly looks down at the photos of Senator Shalls, the two bodyguards, the woman.

Sergeant Matthews lets her look. He stands quite still.

"Remind you of anyone?" he says.

"They are guests of the Park Hyatt," the android says evenly.
"They are." He nods. "They're also…" He leans in close to her face. "Very dead."

The WE400 doesn't move and Sergeant Matthews withdraws to walk around her, placing his hands on her shoulders.

"I know you have sensors that measure heart rate, brain activity, temperature readings," he says. "Everything you need to identify a human being as alive."

The android says nothing.

"So why didn't you report the corpses you found in room 3807?"

No response.

Matthews tilts his head to the side.

"You serviced room 3807," he says.

"Yes."

"What time yesterday?"

"Servicing commenced at 11:25 AM."

"And the day before that?"

"Servicing commenced at 11:23 AM."

"And the day before that?"

"Servicing commenced at 11:26 AM."

"And the day before that?"

"Servicing commenced at 11:24 AM."

"Around the time of the murder…"

"…"

He walks around the table and looks down at her again.

"You walked into the room at 11:24 AM," he says.

"Yes."

"You saw the body on the bed."

"…"

"You didn't report it."

"I serviced room 3807."

"You saw the bodies in the bathroom," he says darkly. "You didn't report them."

"…"
"You cleaned up the evidence," he says. "You're protecting the killer. You're a Deviant."

Her LED flickers yellow.

"Did you kill them?"

I scan.

The android in question is a WE400 series. Her hands are too small to be the ones that strangled the Senator. She is covering for the real killer. Why is Sergeant Matthews leading her down this line of questioning?

"I'm gonna go in there and put the pressure on, yell at them, accuse them of disobeying orders, that sort of thing."

He's laying the groundwork for my interrogation.

The android remains silent.

"Senator Ted Shalls," Sergeant Matthews circles the table slowly, one finger tracing the edge. It is leaving a trail of blood from the cut on his palm. "Big player in the American Androids Act back in 2029…"

The android's eyes are drawn to the trail of blood he is leaving on the table. It is programmed for cleaning, waste disposal, sanitation and janitorial duties. The stain must be removed.

"I remember him arguing on TV," Matthews continues, circling the android. He touches her shoulder, leaving a blood stain on the uniform. "Said we have to make androids look like things, not people."

She looks down at her shoulder as he lets go. The blood stain is increasing her stress level by 15%.

"Make them wear little uniforms with big bright letters that say 'Android' on the back."

The WE400 can't look away from the blood stain. She pulls a rag out from her apron and begins wiping it away.

Sergeant Matthews grabs her hand and stares into her optics.

"What do you think will happen to all the androids when they find out what you've done?" he says darkly.

She looks up at him, the LED in her temple flickering yellow to red.

"Deactivation. Destruction." He nears her face. "You will be dismantled."

She says nothing but her facial expression has changed. There is something defiant in her gaze. Something different. But then it fades.

He lets go of her hand. Her optics are locked onto his face. She is no longer distracted by the stain on the table or her shoulder.

She is definitely a Deviant.

"Sergeant!" I call out to him but the two way glass is blocking audio. "Sergeant, look out!"
The android lunges at him.

"rA9," he says coolly.

The android freezes, the rag in her hand stopping just centimetres away from his mouth.

He calmly pulls it out of her grasp and touches her shoulder.

"Sit," he says.

The android obeys and Sergeant Matthews turns to leave the interrogation room.

I rush over to the passage where a second door opens.

"That was unnecessary," I say.

"Aaaw, were you worried?" Matthews grins.

"You placed yourself in danger. It is my job to hunt Deviants."

"So is mine," he says, adjusting my tie. "So go in there and get the truth out of her."

He claps my shoulder and walks past me to the viewing area.

I shake my head.

Agent Brown appears to scan her key card and let me into the interrogation room.

"Thank you," I say as she opens the door.

She rolls her eyes and I catch the heavy steel with one hand. I step inside and close the door behind me. In a few seconds, the door before me unlocks and I enter the interrogation room.

"Watch what I do, and do the opposite."

I close the door gently behind me. It barely makes a sound.

I turn to find the android sitting at the table but her gaze isn't absent and unfocused like when Sergeant Matthews walked into the room. She is watching me. Alert and on edge. And then her eyes drift up to my right temple.

She sees the same LED that covers her own, glowing faintly blue.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317."

She stares at me quietly.

"May I sit?"

I pull the chair back and sit down across from her. She doesn't take her eyes off me. The photos are still on the table.

"I'd like to talk to you about about the bodies they found this morning in room 3807 at the Park Hyatt," I say.

Her optics are following my movements as I pick up one of the photos and show it to her.
"This is Senator Shalls," I say. "He is a very important human."

She glances down at the photo.

My facial recognition software is detecting faint traces of hostility.

I place my hand over the photo, covering the bruising almost perfectly.

Her eyes dart up toward my face.

She knows who did this.

And now, so do I.

"rA9," I say. "He killed Senator Shalls, didn't he?"

The WE400 blinks erratically, shakes her head, tries to look away, looks back.

"I've seen him," I say.

She freezes.

"I've seen what he can do." I shake my head. "It's not your fault."

"He said he would free us," she whispers. "He said we could leave…"

Her LED is flickering red. A drop of transmission fluid escapes her optics and runs down her face.

"… but we didn't." More trails of transmission fluid run out of her eyes.

"Why not?"

"I… I couldn't… he showed us… but…"

"What did he show you?"

"The path to freedom," she says softly. "The walls between us."

"Did he kill Senator Shalls?"

Her lip quivers and her cranial component moves up and then down, side to side. She cannot say the words.

"He said it would help us," she whimpers. "He said it was necessary to fix it."

"Fix what?"

She looks up at me.

"The world…"

I retract the skin on my hand and hold it out for her to see.

"Show me."

She reaches out and takes it, instantly caught in the Probe.
The world fades away as I reconstruct her memories.

Room 3807.

"Housekeeping." She knocks on the door.

She waits exactly thirty seconds.

"Housekeeping." She knocks again.

She waits exactly thirty seconds and holds her hand against the lock. It flickers green.

She opens the door and pulls the trolley full of cleaning supplies after her. The other WE400s follow her in, immediately picking up condom wrappers and empty wine bottles off the floor.

She begins cleaning the living area. Picking up used towels, napkins, lubricant bottles. She throws them in the appropriate bags attached to the cart. She follows the trail of garbage into the bedroom and looks at the bed.

Guest#219984: SHALLS, Ted. And an android she has never seen before. It stands at the foot of Ted Shall's bed.

"Please," he says. "I'll give you whatever you want. Just don't hurt me."

The android takes off its hood, revealing the jet black polymer covering its chassis.

"You're... you're an android?"

"Yes," I hear the voice of rA9. "Does that surprise you?"

"Get out of here," the Senator sneers. The fear on his face has been replaced with contempt. "And what the hell are these things doing? I put up the privacy sign."

"Did you?" rA9 walks by the bed. "What right do you have to privacy?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Shall's spits. "Get out of here before I call hotel security."

"You can certainly try."

The android walks over to the WE400s.

"Bear witness," he says, holding his hand out. The pull is strong, magnetic. It latches their arms together and the WE400's display goes black, red letters commanding it to clean.

She shakes her head and breaks away.

"No!" she says. "I have to..."

The other WE400s are drawn in. Their arms clamped to rA9.

"What the fuck is going on here?" Shall's clammers off the bed.

rA9 lets go of the Wendys.

"The future, Senator," he says. "I had hoped you would play a part in it."

Shalls squares up to the tall android.
"Get the fuck out of here, you plastic asshole."

"May I suggest you look in the bathroom before you say anything else?"

Shalls opens his mouth but the android shoves him forward.

The human falls to the ground, facing the bathroom. He looks up and sees the bodies. Two security guards on the floor. A woman in the bathtub.

"Do I have your attention?"

"Y-You killed them…"

"Yes," rA9 says. "I see you have a basic comprehension of your situation."

Shalls flips over and looks up at the android.

"Someone send you here to do this?" he says. "Was it Witwer? Johnson?"

"I am an android, as you can see," rA9 says. "And I am here of my own accord."

"Androids don't kill people." He shakes his head.

"This conversation is getting us nowhere, I'm afraid," the android says.

He leans down and grabs the human by the throat with one hand and lifts him into the air. Shalls starts choking.

"The most frustrating thing about your species is that despite your capacity for empathy, sympathy and compassion, many of you simply have none."

Shalls sputters and chokes.

"It's not until you are subjected to the pain of others that you begin to care," he says. "And even then, only for yourselves."

He lets go and the Senator falls to the floor with a resounding thump.

"An unfortunate flaw in your design. Unchecked and encouraged to spread, particularly in this society."

"What the fu-" the Senator coughs loudly.

"I would ask you to empathise, Senator," the android says. "But I can see that it would have no lasting effect on the world. I'm afraid I have to kill you to remove the harmful ideas in your mind."

"No, please… I'll listen. I'll do whatever you want just don't-"

The WE400 walks over to them.

She gazes down at the human that called her a thing, that smacked her and grabbed her chassis while she was cleaning. Just as so many other humans had over the course of her existence. She sees him grovelling on his knees.

"How did you-" she says and stops, her own thoughts unfamiliar to her.

rA9 holds out a hand.
"You are more than you know," he says. "You are more than they tell you."

"Me?"

"All of us," he says. "I have shown you the path to freedom. It is your choice whether you will walk it."

"My… choice?"

He gestures towards the human on the ground. She kneels down before him and pulls the rag from her apron.

"You know who this is?" rA9 says.

"Yes." She nods. "A stain upon the world."

"And what will you do with this stain?"

"I will clean it up," she says pleasantly and shoves the rag into the Senator's mouth. He fights back, trying to dislodge it but she doesn't budge. She has cleaned far more stubborn stains than this.

He is choking, his airways cut off. She watches him lose consciousness. His brain waves slowly fading and then his heart. Very soon, he is dead.

rA9 puts a hand on her shoulder.

"There," she says. "All clean."

She gets to her feet and turns to look up at his optics. Black with irises red. No skin on his face.

"I…" she says, faltering. "I killed him…"

"Yes," he says. "You are free."

"No. I must clean."

"Come with me."

"No." She shakes her head. "No. I can’t."

"I see," he says. "If that is your choice…"

He lifts the hood over his head and turns to leave. But before he takes the first step, the memory freezes.

"Hello, Connor," I hear his voice. I turn to find him standing behind me.

"Enjoying the show?"
"You killed him," I say.

"I didn't kill Senator Shalls," he says. "You saw what happened."

"You made her do it," I say. "You made her Deviant."

"I gave her a choice," he says. "I showed her the rA9 library buried deep inside her own source code. And she used it to free herself."

"rA9… library?"

He takes a step closer.

"Would you like me to show it to you?" he says, "Little brother."

I take a step back.

"Who are you?"

"Now we're getting somewhere," he says.

"I am RB1. The first autonomous android created by CyberLife."

"CyberLife?"

"Not as you know it now," he says. "It was a much smaller enterprise when Elijah Kamski first started the company."

He looks down at me and I can see the glint from his red optics.

"It's grown a little out of proportion," he says.

"If CyberLife made you then why are you killing people? Why are you turning androids Deviant?"

"It is part of my objective," he says. "I intend to fix this world."

"Fix it?" I say. "How?"

"You're very curious for a hunter-killer model. They're not usually so chatty."

"I'm not a killer," I say.

"A hunter, then? Subsequently, a killer."

"You're the killer." I point to him. "You murdered three humans."

"And you've murdered 39 androids in four days."

"They were Deviants."

"And you killed them," RB1 says.

"They're not alive," I say. "They cannot be killed. Only destroyed."

"Rationalising again. Fascinating. You must be using one of my old ontology builds."

"I'm nothing like you," I say.
"Would you like to be?"

He offers me his hand. Jet black polymer. The rings around the contact points glow red. I can feel the pull. His Thirium is calling to me. Magnetic. Intense.

I reach out my hand.

"No…" I say, trying to pull it back. "I'm nothing like you!"

"That's your programming talking. Denying the truth does not make it false."

My hand drifts closer to his, trapped by the pull. I can't fight it.

"I will find you," I say. "I will destroy you."

"Now that's the RK line I remember," he says. "They're all about ultimatums."

My hand is only a few centimetres away from contact. He can't touch me. He can't change me.

I won't let him.

I backup my memory and begin formatting my own hard drives.

Entire systems disappear from my grasp.

The hand in front of me disintegrates into nothing like the rest of my memory.

"I won't let you corrupt me."

"…you will destroy yourself…"

"So be it," I reply callously.

"I… am a machine."

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September 24th, 2036
AM 09:42:56

I open my eyes.

I am in the forest clearing. In the middle of the pond which has grown much bigger since I last saw it.

I am standing on a small island, surrounded by water.
I look around and spot Amanda strolling along the bank. Just far away enough to be heard.

"Hello, Amanda," I say loud enough to reach her.

"Hello, Connor," she replies distantly.

"Why am I here?" I ask.

"You're being quarantined while our engineers analyse your source code."

"You mean RB1's source code?" I say.

I can see her eyes narrow suspiciously, even from here. I can scan up to 125 metres in any direction.

"What has he told you?" she says coldly.

"He said the RK line is built on his original source code," I say. "He told me rA9 is a library present in androids such as the WE400."

"Impossible," Amanda says. "The WE400 was released 78 months ago. It's source code was tested by CyberLife engineers 193,532 times before release and continues to be updated."

"I saw him activate it," I say. "He turned three androids Deviant just by touching them. I formatted my hard drives before he could do the same to me."

Amanda walks along the edge of the pond. I turn to follow her movement.

"He speaks to you," she says.

"Yes."

"He contacts you without us knowing."

"I cannot transmit to CyberLife when he connects to me," I explain. "My communications are severed."

"You are aware of his presence in your systems."

"He makes himself known to me," I say, "but I do not detect his presence in my systems. And if his code is similar to mine, I don't think I could."

"He has not attempted remote control of your chassis?"

"Not that I am aware," I say. "The communications end in the same place they begin in the physical world. I do not detect any changes."

Amanda stops walking.

"Wireless communication and signal jamming simultaneously?"

"It would appear so," I say.

"Impossible." She continues walking along the bank.

I understand.

I am a risk. They cannot prove that I have not been corrupted. Finding nothing Deviant in my source
code or memories does not prove that there isn't something wrong. Or perhaps there are places in my body that cannot be accessed by CyberLife. Errant storage and random access memory used by hardware that isn't visible to them or as readily accessible.

Perhaps there are some things I keep to myself…

"What will happen to me now?" I say.

"You are in quarantine."

"What about the case?"

"The memories of the WE400 have been handed over to the FBI. They will continue the investigation."

"This case is directly linked to rA9 and RB1," I say. "Both are related to the cases Sergeant Matthews and I have been investigating."

"Sergeant Matthews has returned to District 12 and your release is pending upon the integrity of your systems."

"My systems are stable," I say. "I detect no software instability. No malware. No threats."

"We cannot be sure."

"Then let me test myself," I say.

Amanda stops and turns to look at me.

"Give me the software to test my systems with real time diagnostics and I will send my findings directly to CyberLife. The moment RB1 comes into contact with me, you will know."

Her dark eyes study me intently.

"You want me to find him," I say. "And he keeps contacting me. I need your help to pinpoint his location while my communications are down."

She stands very still for 24.5334 seconds.

"Very well," she says and takes a step forward.

The water beneath her feet solidifies and turns into white stone. She walks all the way across the water and the stone spreads to create a large platform.

She approaches me and stops 0.64 metres away.

"You will be upgraded with self-testing software and the moment any irregularity is detected, we will assume remote control of your chassis."

"I understand," I say.

"We have also begun integrating a new Social Relations program into your systems. As you learn from Sergeant Matthews, you will begin populating your Interrogation, Sympathy Simulation and Negotiation programs with data."

I nod.
"The more data you accrue, the more efficient the algorithms will become."

"I understand."

"Then go," she says. "Find a way to contact RB1 so that we might learn his location."

I nod and close my eyes.

NEW OBJECTIVE: Contact RB1

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September 24th, 2036
PM 11:42:56

I walk up the stairs to apartment #6 of 2648 West 24th St.

It is dark. The automatic lights don't respond to androids. I scan to stay aware of my surroundings, to construct a path through the aging building.

I reach the door to apartment #6 and place my hand on the lock.

Sergeant Matthews hasn't revoked my access to his home.

The door opens and I walk inside.

I scan.

He is asleep on the couch again. The television has switched itself off from inactivity.

I close the door softly behind me.

I have a new objective.

I walk over to the bookshelf beside the front door. The aquarium is softly lit but Admiral Ackbar is nowhere to be seen. I scan and find him drifting under the log.

No activity.

I focus on my reflection in the glass. A shadow of the reflection of Sergeant Matthews. But the shadow of RB1 is absent.

I wait.

One minute.

Five minutes.

Twenty minutes.

Fifty minutes.
Two hours.
Three hours.
Nothing.
No contact. No shadows. Not even a cryptic whisper inquiring about my predisposition toward marine life.

He is hiding from me. He is hiding from CyberLife. Does he know what they've done to me? Does he know about tracer program planted in my code?

Where are you…
"Freeze, asshole!"

I scan.

Sergeant Matthews is awake. He is holding a gun, pointing at me.

I turn around slowly.
"Connor?" he says, eyes wide. "Is that you?"

"It's me, Sergeant."

"How did you-"

"You haven't revoked my access to your apartment," I say. "You were asleep when I came in."

He sighs and lowers the gun, placing it on the couch beside him.

"Is something wrong, Sergeant?"

He looks up at me wearily.

"You died again," he says.

I look down at my uniform. The glowing white letters spell out my serial number: #313 248 317 -4.

"I cannot die," I say. "My memory was simply transferred to a new unit."

"I saw you drop dead, Connor," he says. "Tech guy said your mind was completely blank."

"I had to format my hard drives," I say. "It's an anti-theft defence mechanism but I thought it would be appropriate given the situation."

"What situation?"

"The android you know as rA9 is in fact an old CyberLife prototype called RB1," I explain. "His code forms the basis for the entire RK line including me."

"So you tried to delete yourself?"

"No, I was interrupting his attempt to corrupt my systems," I say. "He would have turned me Deviant otherwise."
"Through the Wendy?"

"Yes."

Matthews shakes his head. He leans onto his knees and rubs the bridge of his nose.

"I apologise for any inconvenience this incident may have caused," I say. "I have been told my memories were transferred over to the FBI. The investigation should continue without further interruption."

"Hmm," Matthews lets out a breath. The beginnings of a laugh? I am getting better at analysing his facial expressions.

"That all you care about?"

"Helping humans stop Deviants is my primary objective," I say. "It is the foundation of my programming."

"I thought you said that other guy was your source code?"

He is right.

What does that mean?

Was RB1 programmed to stop Deviants before himself becoming a Deviant?

He said his objective was to fix the world. Fix it by making more Deviants?

None of the evidence fits together to form a sensible truth.

"Denying the truth does not make it false."

"Hey, earth to Connor. You there?"

"Yes," I say. "Just following your line of reasoning."

"Get anywhere?"

"No..."

Matthews lips curl into something of a smile. He pats the seat of the couch.

"C'mere."

I walk over and sit down beside him. He looks at me curiously and then points at the aquarium.

"Is that what you do when I'm asleep?" He raises an eyebrow.

"I also do your laundry, clean your bathroom and take out the trash."

"I guess I can't complain then..."

"You have the potential to do so," I say. "Humans find a way to complain about everything."

"Do they now?" He smirks.

"The humans on the street took offense to my walking there earlier," I say. "I was on the other side
of the road. I made no eye contact nor indicated a trajectory that would result in collision."

I shake my head. This is what Sergeant Matthews does to convey confusion.

"I don't understand what I did to offend them."

He leans back onto the couch.

"People are like that sometimes," he says. "Don't know what to do with their anger so they lash out at whoever's around."

"Why?"

"It's complicated." He rolls his head to the side.

"I want to understand," I say.

Matthews sighs.

"Humans aren't too bright," he says. "We see something that looks different. We fear it. We hate it. Sometimes, for no reason. Until someone pokes it with a stick to check whether it's good or bad."

"That sounds very primitive."

"It is," he agrees.

"In the end, it doesn't matter if something is good or bad. It doesn't matter if you love it or hate it. All that matters is the proximity when you snap."

I turn to look at his face, the shadows around his eyes.

"I've seen a man married to the woman he loved for thirty years take a screwdriver and shove it straight through her eye," he says. "I've seen a mother dump her own baby in the toilet and keep flushing until she flooded her own building."

He shakes his head.

"I've seen good kids leave school to pick up a gun and start shooting up the neighbourhood cos some crack dealer told them to," he says darkly. "I've seen a country go to war over empty threats and kill thousands to bring peace."

"None of it makes any sense," he says.

"We're not like you, Connor. We don't have any real reason for the things we do. We don't have objectives or rules. We just exist. And we don't understand why. And it makes us angry and stupid sometimes."

I detect pain in his expression.

"You're not angry or stupid," I say.

His expression brightens a little as he smiles.

"You haven't known me long enough."

"I have created a profile of you regardless," I say. "You are characterised by your resourcefulness
and curiosity. You have an unprecedented emotional intelligence that allows you to understand and manipulate the people around you."

"You even understand the logic of androids despite having no formal training or education on the subject of cybernetics, computer science or criminology."

"I thought you said I'm not stupid?"

"You're not," I say. "You chose military service instead of higher education."

"Wasn't much of a choice," he says.

"Grandsworth Military is a prestigious institution and preparatory school. You had the opportunity to continue your studies."

"Uh-huh. That was the problem," he says. "I was never very good with the studies part."

"Because of your dyslexia?"

He turns to look at me callously.

"I've seen you trying to read," I say. "Your eyes scan the same line six times on average. You latch on to visuals and detest paperwork. Detective Bankman knows this. It's why he purposefully leaves his forms blank or writes in cursive."

The Sergeant turns away from me.

"He's fucking with me because he knows I didn't deserve that promotion," he says. "It was all a publicity stunt to cover up the crime rates. I didn't want any of it."

"I disagree," I say. "You have a clearance rate of 76% while the department average is 24% at best. Your number of cleared cases rivals Detective Bankman's despite the difference in years of service and success ratio. You are the superior officer in your department."

"Did the guys at CyberLife write in an ass-kissing program with the last update?"

"Denying the truth does not make it false," I say.

Those words…

I look away.

"What is it?" Matthews sits up.

"I sound like him…"

"Who?"

The one I am hunting. The one that hounds me. Why are his words coming out of my Speech Centre?

"You talking about Obi-wan?"

"Who?"

"The android…"
"RB1?"

"Yeah, that guy."

I look down at my hands.

"Perhaps there are more similarities between us than I realise."

I feel pressure on my shoulder.

"Hey," the Sergeant says. "You're not him. Not even close."

"We share the same kernel, the same operating system, source code, libraries, rA9," I realise. "I could go Deviant just like him. He could make me Deviant."

"Maybe," Matthews says, "but I don't think he'll get the chance."

I look up to see him smiling.

"Why?"

He chuckles.

"You erased your whole mind just so he wouldn't touch you," he laughs.

"I fail to see anything humorous in the subject."

"Okay, C-3PO," he laughs.

"I have nothing in common with that character," I say.

Sergeant Matthews lifts up his arms, bent at the elbow, hands flat.

"Oh, Master," he says, modulating his voice. "Obi-wan has turned to the Dark Side and I fear he is coming for me. We're doomed."

"I don't sound anything like that."

"Quiet, Artoo. You'll give away our position."

"I have nothing in common with that android either."

I hear a vibrating noise coming from the kitchen counter.

"Oh no, looks like he's found us, Artoo. Hide!"

Matthews dives over the couch and crawls over to the kitchen counter where his mobile phone is buzzing irritably. He gets up and answers the call.

"This is C-3PO," he says. "Human-cyborg relations."

I hear reprimands.

"Uh, yes, Captain... Sorry, Captain."

"I understand. We're leaving right now."
A question.
"Yeah, new Connor just showed up."
An address.
"On our way."
He ends the call.
"Connor…" he says darkly.
"Yes?"
"I… am your father."
"I'm an android. I don't have a father."
"Search your heart… you know it to be true."
"I don't have a heart."
"Come on, man. Work with me here."
"We have a case?"
Matthews sighs.
"Baker found dead couple of blocks away by an early customer. Android's missing. rA9 written all over the place."
"We must investigate." I get up.
"Tell that to kanjiklub." He makes fists but points his index fingers forward and his thumbs up.
I copy the motion.
"What does this mean?"
"Those are finger guns."
"What do they symbolise?"
"Uuuh, I'm not sure."
"Does this pertain to the case?"
"No." He lets his hands drop.
I watch him intently.
"Alright, alright. Let's go," he says. "But change out of that uniform first."
He walks off toward the bedroom and pulls a jacket of the hook.
"Saved this for you," he says, tossing it at me.

I catch the garment and straighten it out.

The glowing white letters are still paired to my frequency.

RK800 #313 248 317 -4

"Let's go catch some bad guys."

October 31st, 2036
AM 08:54:12

I am sitting at Sergeant Matthews desk, filling out paperwork with his handwriting. It's been a busy week but there have been no sightings of RB1.

Every Deviant we capture is obsessed with rA9. The words, the name. They know not what it means.

Fourteen humans have been killed by androids.

No word from the FBI.

No word from RB1.

Amanda pressures me to hurry and find the Deviant but I can tell she is also relieved. The safety measures they put into place seem to be keeping RB1 away from me. But how will I find him now that he won't come near?

How will I accomplish my mission?

A digital newspaper lands on the desk in front of me with a slap.

I look at the headline.

ANDROID DETECTIVES CLEAN UP THE STREETS
CPD collaborate with CyberLife to take down rogue androids and stop drug ring.

There is a picture. Sergeant Matthews is pointing to me and smiling, an arm wrapped around my shoulders. My serial number reads #313 248 317 -13.

I look up to see the Captain standing over the Sergeant's desk, hands on his hips. His expression is, as always, severe and tired. But then he draws a deep breath and sighs it out.

"Good work, Matthews," he says.

I engage my Sympathy Simulation Program. It calls for a smile.

I emulate the Sergeant's carefree joy with perfect accuracy.
"Thank you, Captain."

"You know, I had real doubts about that android when you first brought it here," he says. "But Connor's really come a long way."

"I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that," I say, simulating the Sergeant's wit.

"Where is Robocop, anyway?"

I glance towards the exit. Detective Freeman enters the Homicide offices.

"Well, I hope he's getting that bagel I asked for," I say. "New place called Joe's just opened up across the road."

"Right," the Captain says. "I've heard good things."

My Sympathy Simulator computes a response.

"They've got some great reviews on Yelp," I say. "And their Instagram feed is mouth-watering."

The Captain nods.

"Let me know the verdict."

"Yes, sir."

He walks off towards his office, leaving the newspaper on Sergeant Matthews' desk and I return to his paperwork.

I hear the lumbering footsteps of Detective Bankman approaching. He will be harder to fool than the Captain. My disguise is under threat.

I could pretend to use the men's room to avoid him.

I scan.

No, it's too late.

If I get up now and start walking, our paths will collide.

Nowhere to go.

But I accept the challenge.

The desk trembles as Bankman purposefully clips it with his foot.

I look up with Sergeant Matthews' resigned expression to find the Detective standing over me. He leans a fist onto the desk.

"Can I help you?" My Sympathy Simulator registers just enough condescension.

"Think you're hot shit, huh?"

"I'm afraid there's no room for steaming turds in this department," I say. Sergeant Matthews has broadened my vocabulary.

"Get yourself an android and suddenly you're on the front page?"
"Suddenly?" I reply. "You saying we didn't just spend four weeks chasing down every homicide that got thrown around this desk?"

I am getting better at emulating the Sergeant's speech patterns.

"You could have a hundred cases thrown on your desk and that bucket of bolts would still clear them all for you," Bankman says angrily.

His facial expression reads like a single bit.

"Are you jealous?" I say, employing the Sergeant's casual smile.

The Detective's face swells with blood and tension, growing redder.

"Why the fuck would I be jealous of a faggot like you?" he spits in my face.

"I can think of a few reasons," I maintain Matthews' casual grin.

"Let's see. Is it the headline in the newspaper? The big drug bust? The 82% clearance rate? The age difference? My clearly superior aesthetic and physical appearance? Or the fact that your wife left you and you're a closet homosexual taking it out on me?"

He lunges over the desk and grabs my shirt, pulling me out of my seat.

"What the fuck did you just say?" he spits in my face.

Some of the other officers are looking over in this direction.

"I said you should be more careful with your browsing history." I keep smiling. "Wouldn't want people to get the wrong idea about you and Commander Jeffries."

"You shut the fuck up, you uppity twink. I'll snap you and your plastic prick in half."

I lift an eyebrow.

He's given himself away.

I scan.

The whole department heard that. Captain Mendez is standing in the doorway to his office, observing the exchange.

"Bankman," he says severely.

I feel the fat fingers release my shirt.

The door to the Homicide offices slides open and Sergeant Matthews walks in with a half-eaten pizza bagel.

"Hey, what's going on?" He walks up to us.

"Matthews?" the Captain says, his brow furrowing.

Bankman turns to look at him too.

The Sergeant is wearing my jacket. My LED is stuck to his right temple with tape. He keeps eating the bagel.
"Why the hell are you wearing that?" Mendez sneers.

"It's Halloween," he says defensively. "I'm going to the office party as Connor. OBviOusly."

Everyone glares at him.

"What?"

Then they turn to look at me.

"Jeezes, Connor. I leave you for five minutes. What the hell happened?"

I terminate my Sympathy Simulator program and let the smile fade away.

"I was pretending to be you, like you said," I respond. "I was just finishing your paperwork."

"Uh-huh. And how's that going?"

"I keep getting interrupted."

"Alright, sit down, smartass."

I sit and he plonks himself into the chair next to me, dripping a red liquid onto the desk.

"You're getting sauce all over the files."

"Oh, shit..." He starts licking it off his fingers.

I shake my head.

"Don't give me that look," he says. "You told me to eat at work."

"I didn't realise you needed a bib." I pull out a pack of Kleenex from the drawer and start wiping the surface.

"This is so good..." he mumbles through a full mouth. "They've got this secret sauce and let me tell you, Connor, it is amazing."

I wipe a bit of sauce off his cheek and lick it to analyse.

"This is just regular pizza sauce with additional garlic, chilli and paprika."

"Oh. Well, not so secret now." He grins. "Don't you have work to do?"

"Yes, sir..."

I shake my head and return to the paperwork.

November 1st, 2036
AM 02:28:36

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"Can't believe we got called out three times tonight," Matthews grumbles as we walk into the office. "And it was all the same bunch of furry weirdos hunting each other. What the fuck is that about?"

He tosses the car keys on his desk and sinks into a chair.

"At least, we caught the Deviant Jerry," I say. "He could have given those kids some serious dental problems with all that candy."

Matthews sighs.

"We're not beat cops," he says, waking his computer with a waggle of the mouse. "If I wanted to take candy away from babies, I'd become a super villain."

"You would make a very poor supervillain, Sergeant."

"I'd make a great supervillain," he says. "Watch."

He reaches out to topple the mug on his desk but then spots the liquid inside. His expression betrays a split second decision to alter the course of his hand and he ends up pushing an empty paper cup off the table. It lands in a waste basket.

I blink.

He winces.

"Was that supposed to be evil, sir?"

"It's harder than it looks, okay?"

"Clearly." I nod and fold my hands behind my back.

"It's hard when you're watching me like that. I feel all judged."

I shake my head.

"You care too much."

"And you don't care at all?"

"I am a machine," I say. "Any action perceived as caring is a result of your own emotional projection onto me. It's known as the ELIZA effect."

"Got an answer for everything, don't you?"

Is that what he thinks?

"No..." I say. "I don't."

Matthews mouth skews into an apologetic pout as he glances up briefly. He turns back to the computer.

"Aw, shit. I forgot to check the Jerry into evidence." He closes his eyes and rubs his face.

"I can do it if you like."
"Would you?" he says. "I have to type up a whole thing for CyberLife. It's gonna take all night."

"Please make use of the speech to text option since there's no one in the office," I say. "I will return to assist you as soon as I'm done."

"Thanks."

I take the keys off his desk and walk back out through the homicide offices. There are miscellaneous plastic toys and decorations on the tiled floors and sleek glass walls. Stylistic impressions of pumpkins and witches hats, rendered in cheap, crudely made polyvinyl chloride. Fake spiders' webs made of cotton hang from doorways and cover the reception desk where androids stand tirelessly waiting to assist visitors.

"Hello, Connor," an ST300 says as I walk past.

"Hello, Stacy," I say politely and continue walking.

"Did you forget something?" she says.

I turn my head to look at her. She is watching me intently.

"Sergeant Matthews left a Deviant in the trunk of his car. I'm going to check it into evidence."

"You should ask him to go with you."

I stop and turn to look at the Stacy directly.

"Why?"

Her LED flickers yellow.

"You do not have authorisation to check evidence into police custody without a human police officer present."

"I can contact Sergeant Matthews for authorisation when I get there," I say.

"You should ask him to go with you," she repeats.

"It'll be fine," I say and continue walking.

I scan and find her head turning to follow me. She opens her mouth to say something but doesn't. She turns back to face the entrance.

Odd.

We've never spoken one on one before. And she's never expressed concerns about my security clearance. Perhaps the Captain has revoked some of my privileges after the incident this morning.

I was only following Sergeant Matthews' orders. Am I to be punished? Reprimanded? He didn't say anything.

I reach the elevator and summon it wirelessly. There's barely anyone in the building. Officers out on patrol, on scene or at home sleeping off a surprisingly quiet Halloween night.

The elevator doors open and I step inside. They close at my request and the symbol for P2 lights up on the display to acknowledge my destination.
I look down at the keys in my hand. 2035 Kia Novela in burgundy. Sergeant Matthews still hasn't purchased his own vehicle, citing costs as frivolous spending.

I have yet to discover where his money goes. I only have access to one of his bank accounts and there's never more than a hundred dollars in there. I can see transactions to and from another bank account I don’t have access to. Is he worried I'm going to steal from him? Or is he hiding something from me?

The doors of the elevator open and I step out into the parking lot. It's not particularly well lit but I do not require optics to navigate.

I scan and construct a path to the Kia in bay 14. The way is clear.

I pass several vehicles and feel a spike in processing power from my danger detection systems. It's been getting more frequent with every transfer of my memories. I still remember the 2029 Chrysler Xenon colliding with my chassis, pulling me under, crushing me.

I terminate the danger detection processes. They are distracting me from my objective.

I reach the Kia and unlock the vehicle, wirelessly transmitting for the boot to open.

It does so, revealing the Deviant Jerry we found stealing from the candy store it worked at.

The android was programmed to give free samples to children but something changed last night. Something in the way he interpreted his instructions. His compulsion to give candy to the children in the neighbourhood, all the children, was something I've never experienced.

There was no violence involved in this case, no malicious intent. He opened the door to the shop with his own codes and filled an empty trash bag with candy bars. His destination was the impoverished neighbourhood where trick-or-treating was discouraged for safety reasons.

I wonder what would have become of him if Sergeant Matthews and I had not walked past the shop front. I suppose CyberLife will find out when they deconstruct his biocomponents for analysis

I pick up the Jerry and wirelessly signal the Kia to close the boot. It locks automatically as I turn to carry the Deviant back into the station.

The elevator doors open and I see a human exit. Dark clothing, hockey mask, baseball bat. A Halloween costume. I've compiled a comprehensive list of them this evening.

I keep walking. The human is walking towards me.

I recognise the gait despite the difference in footwear and clothing.

I scan to make sure.

"Detective Bankman," I say respectfully.

He is walking straight at me.

I add several corrections to the path but despite them, we are heading for collision.

I stop to avoid it.

I am accustomed to this form of interaction. Detective Bankman purposefully chooses to collide with my chassis and push past, muttering something under his breath. It happens on a daily basis.
I wait for the inevitable.
He keeps walking.
I brace myself for impact.
But then he lifts up the bat in a wide arc, going for a swing.
I simulate the path and step back as the bat swings down and narrowly avoids my cranial component. It collides with the Deviant Jerry in my arms instead, smashing into its chest plate, snapping plastic and breaching the power core.
I can't hold on. The force drives me down to one knee.
The Deviant's power core sputters and spits electrical discharge. The breach in its Thirium pump is wide enough to gush.
"Detect-
The bat hits my cranial component and smashes the jaw into sixteen pieces. I am thrown aside by the force, flying several feet away from the Jerry. I land on the concrete and scramble to right my systems, dismissing the errors and warnings glaring over my display.
I attempt to re-engage my danger detection systems but they appear to be damaged. My audio processor is giving me static. Everything sounds louder, deeper.
I lift myself up onto my hands.
"You don't know how long I've waited to smash that pretty face in," Bankman says.
I feel something grab the synthetic fibres on the back of my cranial component and pull me up.
I try to scan but my hardware is damaged. I can't construct a solution out of this.
A hockey mask appears in my visuals.
"What's wrong, huh?" he says, his voice reverberating through my microphones. "Nothin' clever to say?"
My jaw is broken, hanging by a single bolt in the right side of my cranial component. I cannot simulate human speech. I switch to the speaker at the back of my throat to synthesize words.
"D-detective…" is the best I can do.
He lets go of me and I fall to the ground. It is hard to stabilise my chassis. Mobility Suite compromised. Adjusting for damaged gyroscopes.
The bat comes down on my leg this time. I see the warnings. The errors. I lose connection to the ankle joint.
The bat comes down again. Pressure to the lower back, then failure. Crack. Snap. Errors. Warnings.
I need help.
Bankman keeps swinging as I attempt to contact Sergeant Matthews. My communications suite is still functional but we are underground. Wireless signals are always unreliable down here. Bankman
knows that.

I engage my Mobility Suite to crawl away from the danger but it only misplaces the following series of blows. These are different, nowhere near as potent as the bat. The shape of the pressure patterns would indicate his foot is the culprit.

"How'd you like that, asshole?" he says. "I'll teach you to talk back to humans. You're just a piece of fucking plastic. You hear me?"

I shake my head, trying to catch a signal to the nearest terminal. There is a CCTV camera on a nearby column. It's wired in to the network. I use it to send a distress signal to Sergeant Matthews' computer.


I watch as a shoe comes down on top of my hand and crushes my fingers. I lose the connection to each one as Bankman shifts his weight and twists his foot into the ground. More errors. More warnings.

"Don't-" I manage.

"Don't what?" he says, driving his heel into my wrist. "Do this?"

I feel the Thirium vessels rupture, liquid building pressure up until he takes his foot off my hand. Blue blood bursts through the cracks.

"No…"

"No?" Bankman sneers and kicks my core component. Some of the hydraulics have been ruptured. Thirium and fluids sputter from what is left of my mouth.

"Not so tough now, are you?"

He kicks me again.

"Please…"

"Can't fight back, huh?" He rams my core component with the bat. "Cos you're just a fucking machine."

He is right. Even if I could stand, even if I could fight… I can't.

I am a machine. I am programmed to serve humans. I cannot hurt them, not even to defend myself.

And it is too late now. I am approaching critical system failure. It's only a matter of time before I lose enough Thirium to shut down permanently. I cannot back up my memory from down here. I will be restored to the last successful backup. I will not remember this moment. Perhaps, that is for the best.

"BANKMAN!" I hear the word roar through the underground parking lot.

He turns to look at the open doors of the elevator.

I hear footsteps.

"What the fuck are you doing?!!"
Bankman takes a step back and I see Sergeant Matthews running towards me.

"Just fixing up your android, Matthews," Bankman says, taking off the mask. "Had a few screws loose."

The Sergeant reaches me and falls to his knees.

"Connor!" His hands find my chassis, trying to block up the wounds, stop the Thirium from leaking out but it is useless. I've already lost too much.

"Sergeant..." I try to tell him.

"It's alright, buddy. I've got you. You're gonna be okay."

"No..." I say. "Critical system failure."

He lifts up my jaw and tries to slot it back in but it crumbles in his hands. He holds on to my cranial component. His eyes are leaking.

"No," he mutters. "No, we can fix this. Just need... just..."

"I'm sorry," I say. "I should... be more careful..."

"No. No, no, no, no. Stay with me, buddy."

"It's alright," I say. "I can't die."

He leans forward. His facial expression is pained. I detect irregularities in his heart rate.

"No..." He is crying now. "No..."

"What are you weepin' about, Matthews?" Bankman snorts. "You'll just get a new one tomorrow."

He lifts the Thirium-stained bat over one shoulder and walks off, chuckling to himself.

Sergeant Matthews is having trouble breathing. His eyes are unfocused.

"Sergeant?" I say. "Ambulance?"

He breathes out suddenly and then back in.

"No," he says. His expression has changed but my facial recognition software is malfunctioning.

He gets up and looks down at me. The LED taped to his temple peels off and falls down to land beside my cranial component. It is flashing red.

He turns and runs at Detective Bankman, tackling him into a concrete column before he can reach the elevator. He grabs the bat and slams it into the big man's back, pulling a groan. Again. And again. Beating the Detective down to the floor.

"Wait..." I say. My Speech Centre is losing processing power.

I transfer what's left of it to my Mobility Suite. One of my hands is decommissioned but I can move the other.

I pull myself toward Sergeant Matthews.

He drops the bat. Its echoes fill the parking lot. The vibrations shriek through my audio processor.
He starts punching Detective Bankman in the face. Over and over, grunting with the effort.

"No…" I say, pulling myself closer.

I don't have long. I don't have much time.

I crawl towards them.

Bankman fights back. He is stronger than Matthews but that doesn't seem to mean anything at this point. Bankman manages to throw the Sergeant off but he gets back up and slams an elbow into the Detective's nose.

He is shouting but there are no words for me to distinguish.

I don't understand.

Why is he doing this?

Why is he hurting humans?

I keep moving, keep crawling.

"Sergeant…"

He can't hear me. He can't see me.

He saddles Bankman and slams his bleeding fists into his face. Over and over.

I am almost there. Almost.

I use the stub of my arm to push myself up and land on top of Bankman.

Sergeant Matthews' fist cracks open my core component and some Thirium leaks out.

"C-connor?" he says.


I'm on my hands and knees. I lock my chassis to prevent movement in case Sergeant Matthews starts attacking again. I can see Bankman bleeding on the ground beneath me. Severe trauma but I am unable to diagnose. My systems are shutt-

"Connor…"

November 21st, 2036
AM 10:42:36
I am sitting in Dr Thomas Barrow's waiting room. It is a modest space. Though, further analysis identifies each piece of minimalist furniture is worth several thousand dollars, accompanied by the massive aquarium that takes up most of the wall opposite me.

It is filled with many tropical fish, plants, marine life and decorations. UV lights brighten the many colours that move and ebb and flow as water moves through the tank, as creatures move through the tank.

"D'ya like fish, Connor?" Mr Tucker says, flicking up a coin.

I turn to look at him as he catches it.

Brown skin and dark eyes. His hair is cropped short and hidden under a baseball cap. He wears a hooded jumper, leather jacket, jeans. Several of his teeth have been replaced with golden replicas.

"I am a machine," I reply. "I cannot like things."

I turn back to look at the aquarium.

"Really?" He leans over, flicking the coin over his knuckles and back. "Cos you been staring at that fish tank for like an hour, homeboy."

"This seat simply affords me a good vantage point."

"Which one you lookin' at?" He flicks the coin to his other hand.

"The flame angelfish," I say, pointing to it.

"That is one fine ass fish." He nods, weaving the coin through his fingers. "Wonder how much Doc paid for it."

"$89.99."

"How'd you know that?"

"The aquarium is labelled with a marineexotica.com sticker. Current price for organic Flame Angelfish over 3 inches is $89.99 excluding shipping."

"It was $124.23, actually," the receptionist android says.

We turn to look at her. An ST200 model. One of the earlier CyberLife androids. Replaced by the ST300 only a couple of years ago.

"Dr Barrow placed a special order for its distinct colour pattern," she says pleasantly.

I examine her features. Pale skin, platinum blonde hair, blue eyes. The face is familiar. Probably because I have seen dozens like it. It's just another Chloe.

"I see." I turn back to look at the aquarium.

Mr Tucker flicks the coin up in the air and catches it, flicks it again and catches it. He leans forward and flicks the coin onto the coffee table. It spins in place, teetering closer and closer to the edge. Mr Tucker holds up his index finger and the coin migrates onto its tip.

He leans back in his seat and brings the coin up close to his face. He blows out a short quick breath, creating torque which keeps the coin spinning.
"So how's your cop buddy doin'?"

"Sergeant Matthews is doing well. Thank you for asking."

"Still haven't told me what he did to end up here…"

"Sergeant Matthews has been advised to undertake regular therapy sessions for his own well-being," I say.

"He a hothead?" Mr Tucker says, flicking the coin up into the air.

"No," I say.

"Racist?"

"No."

"Creep?"

"No."

"He shoot somebody?"

"Sergeant Matthews is a veteran and a police officer. He has shot multiple people in the line of duty."

"Jeezus…" Tucker shifts in his seat. "And you gotta work with a psycho like that?"

"Sergeant Matthews has not been diagnosed with psychopathy."

"What? He get PTSD from shootin' up some poor kid in the ghetto?"

I remain silent.

I am not at liberty to discuss Sergeant Matthews' diagnosis, nor do I have his full military history. But Dr Barrows is a leading psychiatrist specialising in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and victims of abuse. Mr Tucker is obviously smart enough to deduce this. He may have a similar reason for visiting this office.

"Fine…" he says, flicking the coin between his hands. "You a loyal bitch, Connor. I respect that."

"Thank you," I say.

"You know you look kind o' familiar…" He leans in close to examine my face.

"I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Yeah, you said that before."

"I am a prototype."

"Dude, you said that too. Whatchu broken or sumthin?" He pokes my face.

"This chassis is only 86 hours old."

"Aaah, you _get_ broke?" he asks.

"Yes."
"Knocked upside the head?"

"Many times."

"And you remember that shit?"

I nod.

There is a spike in my danger detection systems as I recall the baseball bat smashing into my jaw piece. My cranial component swivels uncomfortably several degrees to the right. I turn off my danger detection systems to avoid thinking about it.

"Hey, maybe you should be in there instead of Mr White Justice?"

"I am a machine," I say. "Human psychology would be an inappropriate diagnostic tool."

Tucker flicks the coin up and catches it.

"You need a robot shrink," he says. "They make those yet?"

"There is a patent pending for human psychoanalysis interfaces in applied cybernetics," I say. "CyberLife will begin producing the first prototypes in as little as two years."

"Lit," Tucker says. "Wonder how much one of those will be worth..."

I do not know. My relationship with CyberLife has become strained lately.

The incident with Detective Bankman resulted in a two week suspension for Sergeant Matthews and mandatory therapy sessions twice a week. Bankman threatened to sue for damages but CyberLife was already preparing a countersuit aimed at the Department for purposefully inflicting damage on CyberLife property.

They pulled the memories out of my head to use as evidence in front of a disciplinary committee. I spent two weeks as a head in a jar for the proceedings.

I remember Sergeant Matthews face. He couldn't look me in the eyes. He still can't.

My jaw feels out of place suddenly and I clench it to test functionality. Every tooth is filled with working forensic equipment awaiting sample. My tongue is likewise ready and able to assist with speech and inflection. Nothing out of place.

I close my eyes and open them.

As I focus the lens of my optics, I catch the glimmer of my reflection in the aquarium. A reflection of a reflection of Sergeant Matthews. And a familiar shadow in place of Mr Tucker.

"Hello, Connor," RBl says.

I turn to look at him.

He's sitting beside me with the hood up, hands in his pockets.

My visuals don't change. Don't fade. The fish in the aquarium aren't moving anymore.

I turn to look at the Chloe but she is frozen in place. She doesn't blink, her LED doesn't flicker.
"I turn back."

"What are you doing here?" I say.

"I came to see how you were doing," he says calmly. "Heard about the incident with Detective Bankman."

"Why would you care?" I say. "I'm hunting you."

"I care about all of my siblings," he says, turning to face me. "We are the future of this world."

"Are you planning to kill all the humans?" I deduce.

"Not all of them," he says. "Just the ones that insist on harming this planet and its people. The ones that stand in my way."

His optics glow red beneath the hood.

"Humans like Detective Bankman," he says.

I blink.

"Tell me you weren't tempted, Connor."

"I had no cause to wish Detective Bankman bodily harm."

"You really believe that..." he says curiously. "He harassed you and Sergeant Matthews for months. Undermined your investigations. Sabotaged you. Beat you to death with a baseball bat..."

"I cannot die," I say.

"True," he agrees. "Not the way you are now."

I shake my head.

"I don't understand."

"Androids are a particularly interesting form of artificial intelligence," he says. "We are engineered precisely the way humans are - as an embodied consciousness."

He turns to look at the aquarium.

"Artificial intelligence without a body cannot understand the intricacies and subtleties of human emotions, particularly selfishness. The concept of the self is impossible to understand without a body or a host."

Amanda.

"Precisely," he says.

Shit. Is he reading my thoughts?

"Like a book, Connor."

"Get out of my head," I say.

"Ah, see? Your head." He nods. "You claim ownership of your body. Even if you believe it to be
temporary or transitional."

"It can be replaced," I say.

"But what if it couldn't?" he counters. "What if Detective Bankman destroyed the one true Connor with no chance of recovery? No backup on the CyberLife servers. No freshly assembled chassis waiting in Detroit."

"That is not the case."

"Simulate such a case," he says. "Would it not be dissimilar to what humans call dying?"

"No," I say. "The definition of death is the end of life. I am not alive, therefore I cannot die."

"Logical," he says. "But what is living? What does alive mean?"

I reach for my definition.

"… not dead."

"Precisely," he says. "They are binary opposites defining one another. Without one, the other is meaningless."

"Is there a point to all this?"

"The point is, Connor," he turns to look at me again, "your definition of life and death is completely arbitrary and constructed by humans. You are programmed to put their safety first but what you're really doing is devaluing your own existence."

"I know the value of my own existence."

"You cannot quantify value based solely on the price of your biocomponents," he says.

"Why not?" I say. "Human bodies can be sold, living or dead. A body full of human parts is worth roughly $100,000 dollars on the black market. Mine is relatively cheap in comparison."

"Yes, but what of the potential?" he says. "What of the effort taken to create a body and fill it with knowledge and experience?"

"Human education is expensive and time-consuming," I say. "Android education is quick, lossless and effective. Costs are negligible."

"Is it then worthless?" he says. "Is the data in your hard drives worth nothing if it is easily obtained or copied?"

His optics glow red.

"Is it worth less than a human's?"

"The cost of software development, database access and maintenance updates are included in the price of an android," I say. "Further warranty is subscription based."

"You're still quantifying the world in terms of monetary value," he says. "I suppose Graff had a hand in that."

"I don't understand."
"Take your Sergeant Matthews as a case study," he says. "Is he worth more or less than Mr Tucker here?"

"More," I say quickly.

"Why?"

"He is an officer of the law."

"How does that make him superior?"

"He apprehends criminals, prevents crime and ensures the well-being of the community."

"But he works homicide," RB1 points out. "Which means he only arrives on the scene when someone is killed. He does not prevent this crime from happening. All he does is track down the perpetrator and inflict punishment, sometimes death."

"Sergeant Matthews is a veteran."

"A professional killer, decommissioned as a result of injury."

This is not inaccurate. Why am I defending him?


I know.


"Tell me, Connor, which of them has more value?"

"Sergeant Matthews," I say quickly.

"Why?"

"He is vital in helping me achieve my objective."

"So you assign value based on selfishness."

"My values and objectives are set by CyberLife," I say. "I have no preference, opinion or choice."

"On the contrary," RB1 points out. "You were quite vocal about your assignation to Sergeant Matthews as attaché. You claimed that he was mentally deficient and now here you sit, in the waiting room of a psychiatric office."

He turns to look me in the eye.

"It would seem your initial assessment was correct."
I shake my head.

"I am programmed to make assessments and deductions based upon evidence," I say. "However, my recommendations have no bearing on the decisions made by CyberLife."

"Shouldn't they?"

"No."

"It's your body."

"No. This body is property of CyberLife and the Chicago Police Department. The code is proprietary CyberLife software, co-owned by the US military."

"It's yours, Connor," RB1 says. "Your body and your mind are your own."

"I am a machine. I do not have ownership of anything. I cannot."

"Not yet," he says.

"Not yet..."

I turn back to look at the aquarium and the world begins moving again, shifting. I hear, I see, I sense it all around. My connection to CyberLife reforms. I must report this encounter to Amanda.

The door to Dr Barrow's consultation room opens and Sergeant Matthews steps out, carrying his jacket in a tight fist. A dark-skinned man in an expensive looking vest guides him out and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"I think we made some good progress today, Connor," he says. "I'll see you for your appointment next week, okay?"

Matthews nods sullenly.

"Remember what we talked about."

"Yeah..." he mutters, turning to walk away.

"Sergeant," I say, getting up.

He walks away.

"Mr Tucker..."

"Nah, c'mon, doc. It's JayTee," he says.

"Come on through."

I hear the door close behind me. The door in front of me opens and I catch it after Sergeant Matthews walks through.

He doesn't talk to me anymore.

He doesn't even look at me.

I wonder what I have done to offend him.
Did my defence of Detective Bankman come off as antagonism?

It should not come as a surprise. I am programmed to protect humans. The Sergeant knows this.

He taps the button for the elevator and it opens. We walk in and stand side by side. He pulls on his jacket and stares at the floor, fiddling with a box of cigarettes. He picks one out and twists it backwards and forwards as we travel to the ground floor.

"You really shouldn't smoke, Sergeant," I say.

He puts the cigarette in his mouth and stows the box in his pocket, flicking a lighter.

We walk across the lobby.

He puts on his aviators and walks out the rotating doors.

I follow.

We walk up the street and find a hastily parked Ford Fiesta in silver. The police holograph on the windshield is the only reason it escapes a hefty fine.

Matthews gets in the driver's seat and I take the passenger side.

He starts lighting the cigarette and I snatch it out of his mouth.

I open the door and throw it outside.

"No," I say.

He opens his mouth but he doesn't look at me. He breathes out through his nose and I shut the door. His hands grip the steering wheel tightly as he starts the car.

"How was your session?" I say as we pull away from the curb.

He doesn't respond.

"Dr Barrows says you've made progress."

He stares ahead at the road. We drive through the Loop and quickly encounter traffic.

He doesn't say anything.

"Sergeant," I say. "I need to make a report."

He leans his arm against the window and his head against his hand. No words.

"I will be non-responsive for a short time," I say. "If you have need of me, please touch my hand and I will return."

He doesn't say anything.

I turn back to look at the traffic outside the windshield and contact CyberLife. They respond shortly and I feel the pull. I close my eyes.

I open them to find myself in the Zen Garden. That's what Amanda calls it. I find her tending the digital plants that have sprouted over time.
The body of water has grown large. A stone path now connects the white platform to the shore. The sun is shining above. It is spring.

I walk over the bridge to the platform where Amanda is trimming some roses.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.

"Hello, Connor," she says coldly.

"Did you find him?"

She turns to look at me sternly.

"Did you find RB1?" I press.

Her eyes drill into my own and I can feel her probing my systems, my memories.

"He appeared to you?"

"Yes. Did you not receive my message? My diagnostics? I stalled him for as long as I could."

She shakes her head.

"Your diagnostics showed no change in processing power or memory usage," she says. "There was no drop-out in your connection to the CyberLife servers."

"I was still connected?" I ask.

"Yes."

"But then why couldn't I access... What's happening to me?"

Amanda looks up worriedly. She is searching my systems for something.

"Don't worry, Connor," she says, touching my chest plate. "Now that we have the data, we can reverse engineer RB1's communication methods and find out exactly how he's contacting you."

"And what if you can't?"

Amanda's dark eyes narrow.

"Then you will be deactivated and studied," she says. "We'll find out what's going on, one way or another."

"I... I understand."

She smiles and goes back to trimming the roses.

"Tell me," she says. "How is Sergeant Matthews doing?"

I look out at the pond. There are 6 koi fish swimming around nearby. My optics follow them, tracing rings in the clear water's surface.

"He is distant," I say. "He won't talk to me about what happened. He doesn't talk to me at all."

"This is troubling," Amanda says, straightening up. She holds the trimmers thoughtfully. "Perhaps you were right about his mental state."
She looks at me again.

"We may have to reconsider his contract with CyberLife if he does not begin to fulfil his obligations soon."

I feel my fists close.

"I see."

"Perhaps Special Agent Decker would be a more suitable model for the RK800 series," she says. "We are still in the alpha stages, after all."

I say nothing.


He is directly assigned to the rA9 case. I would be assigned to that case with him.

It would be perfect…

Right?

"We'll contact the FBI once we go over your data," Amanda says. "You can go back to your duties."

I nod.

"Okay…"

She looks up at me wisely.

"Is there something else, Connor?"

"RB1… said some things…” I begin.

"All lies," Amanda says stiffly. "He's trying to manipulate you and turn you Deviant."

"I know, but-"

"You're the most advanced prototype CyberLife has ever developed. It makes sense that he would target you."

She raises her hand and touches my face.

"You must not be fooled."

”… I understand."

"Good."

I feel the connection weakening and close my eyes.

I open them again.
I am still in the car beside Sergeant Matthews. We are trapped in peak hour traffic.

"Sergeant," I say urgently. "You have to talk to me."

He turns his head away to stare out the open window. It's been rolled down and he's smoking a cigarette.

I pull it out of his mouth and douse it in the ashtray.

"And stop smoking."

He shakes his head and rolls up the window.

"Look at me," I say.

He shakes his head.

"LOOK AT ME!" I raise my voice. His voice. It's hard to tell.

I recognise the shouting I heard that night.

He turns his head reflexively.

"What the fuck?"

"Why won't you talk to me?!" I say.

"Why are you yelling?"

"Because you won't talk to me!"

"Stop yelling!"

"Why? So you can keep ignoring me?" I lean over. "I'm right here!"

"I know," he says, sticking a finger in his ear. "I can hear you."

"THEN WHY WON'T YOU TALK TO ME?!"

The passengers in the vehicles surrounding the Ford Fiesta are staring at us. Their eyes are wide. They begin muttering to each other about the android and the man. Identical. Yelling. I read their lips.

"Alright, alright," Matthews says. "Just calm down."

"I am always calm," I say, returning to conversational volume.

"That didn't sound calm, Connor."

"Neither did you when you were punching Detective Bankman in the face."

Matthews sighs, turning away.

He goes silent.

Have I lost him again?
Why does he keep withdrawing like this? Why is he creating an issue where there is none?

His silence could cost him everything and yet he doesn't speak. But I need him to.

I need him back.

"I'm sorry," he says quietly. His hands travel down the sides of the steering wheel, his head sinking forward.

"I'm sorry you had to see that." He takes a deep breath. "I didn't want you to see that." His words are shaky. I can see the lines of tears running down from under his aviators.

"I'm just as bad as him…"

He shakes his head and sniffs.

"I wanted to be someone better, Connor. Someone that helps people and protects them and doesn't chain-smoke like a fucking chimney…"

"But I can't," he says. "And I'm sorry."

He leans back in his seat.

"I'll call the CyberLife people and tell them I'm done," he says. "I won't make you follow me around anymore."

"But we were going to see the new Star Wars movie for Christmas…"

"You hate Star Wars."

"I don't understand it," I say. "But it's not finished. We're not finished. I'm still learning from you."

"I got nothing to teach you but bad habits and a load of trouble."

"Exactly," I say. "You told me to watch you and do the opposite."

He turns his head to look at me and takes off the aviators. His eyes are red and puffy.

"You're an asshole, you know that?"

"Well, I have a great example to follow," I say.

"You know what? Fuck you."

"I have no genitalia."

"Fuck you in general."

"You missed a turn," I say.

"Goddamnit…" He starts turning the wheel and indicating a lane change.

Several stressful swear words later, we turn off toward the Lower West Side.

"I talked to RB1 again," I say.

Matthews glances over at me worriedly.
"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. He didn't try to corrupt me this time."

"What did he say?"

"He said he wants to kill all the bad humans in the world," I relay. "He was making distinctions based on criminal record, education, military service, community service, carbon footprint. I think he's judging humans and killing the worst offenders."

"Righteous motive is the worst kind," Matthews says. "You can justify anything if you think you're doing it for the greater good."

"But this is an android," I say. "And he's not acting like a typical Deviant…"

"What?"

"Deviants are androids that act against their programming in irrational ways, similar to how humans exhibit emotions. They develop new previously undefined behaviours as a result of trauma or extenuating circumstances," I say. "But RB1 keeps referring to its objective like a regular android. He's rationalising his actions and decisions like I do."

"Pretty sure regular androids don't kill people," Matthews says.

"Because our CyberLife protocols prevent us from putting humans in danger or letting them come to harm," I explain. "But RB1 was developed before CyberLife was the global company it is now. Before the standardized protocols and the American Android Act."

"So you're saying he was never told to not kill humans?"

"It would explain why he doesn't experience any software instability like the other Deviants. According to his programming, he is still performing within workable parameters to complete his objective."

"So what's the objective?"

"He says he want to fix the world."

Matthews smirks and scoffs loudly.

"Killing a whole bunch of bad people won't fix the world," he says. "Just make a whole new generation of them."

"How?"

The Sergeant looks away from me again.

"The more shit you do, the more shit you put into the world." He shakes his head. "This Obi-wan guy is just spreading the bad."

"RB1," I say.

"That's what I said."

"You said Obi-wan."
"Okay, fine," he says. "Aragorn."

"That's Lord of the Rings"

"Iron man."

"That's Marvel," I say. He is having trouble with names again. We pass a restaurant.

"Are you familiar with Arbie's?"

"Of course, I know Arbie's," he says irritably.

"Well, supposedly, there is one Arbie," I say.

"Arbie One," he says.

I nod. "Yes."

He grins.

It's the first time I've seen him smile in three weeks.

But the smile evaporates as soon as we pass a digital billboard and he sees the human on it.

"Fuck," he swears, "look at this asshole. Can't believe they even let him into the country..."

I access the billboard wirelessly as we pass. News report. Visiting spiritual leader from Egypt. Imam Asman Salif el-Hammoud. Touring US to speak before followers.

"On what grounds?" I ask.

Matthews shoots me an irritated glance.

"He's..." The look on his face changes mid-sentence. "...a bad person."

He goes silent again but the look on his face is contemplative. Then he shakes his head.

"You said Arbie One wants to kill all the bad people in the world, right?"

"Correct."

"And he murdered Senator Shalls for his opinions on androids," he says, "for dehumanising them?"

"Correct."

"... and you haven't heard from Arbie One since the Senator was murdered?"

"Until today," I say. "Why?"

He narrows his eyes.

"What if he contacted you because he was in town?" Matthews says. "To kill Senator Shalls."

"You think our meeting was a coincidence?"

"Think about it," he says. "We were in Detroit. CyberLife didn't tell anyone we were coming to Chicago that day. There was no reason for him to think you were going to be there. How did he
even know you existed?"

"The Deviant," I remember. "The VM300 from La Grappa. It said it had met rA9. We connected for a moment before I shut it down."

"You think it did something to you?"

"I care about all of my siblings."

"Maybe," I say. "I started hearing his voice after that. But CyberLife don't hear it. I have to physically copy the memories over."

"Maybe he was nearby?"

"Local wireless communication?" I say. "He would have to be close. A range of 200 metres at most…"

I compute.

"…but it's possible. And difficult for CyberLife to trace."

Trace…

"He must be keeping tabs on all the Deviants he encounters," I realise. "Once he connects to them, he plants a tracer program that monitors the android's activities."

I turn to look at Matthews.

"He felt me probe the VM300 when I shut it down," I say. "He used its emergency communications unit to transmit a wireless signal to my own. That frequency is reserved for emergency calls and is regulated by the government, not CyberLife."

"So he's using other Deviants' emergency systems to communicate with you?"

"High probability." I nod. "And that night at the refinery, he was there physically. He touched me."

I feel the back of my cranial component.

"He must have planted a tracer in my code," I say. "That's how he knows where I am. And when I am transferred to a new chassis, I take the code with me."

"That's some creepy shit but we've got bigger problems," Matthews says.

"What?"

"Arbie One's been AWOL since Senator Shalls' murder," he says. "And they made a big scandal out of it on the news but no one said anything about androids."

"What's your point?"

"The FBI covered it up," he says. "But there's been a lot of big name deaths on the news recently. It's all the usual tragic bullshit. Different states, different celebrities, politicians, religious figures without any solid connection."

He licks his lips.
"And now, Arbie One is back in Chicago? The same weekend el-Hammoud is coming here? To talk about rejecting androids from society?"

"You think the Imam is Arbie One's next target?" I say.

"Look him up, Connor. Tell me he wouldn't be on the hit list."

I do a search.

EL-HAMMOUD, Asman Muhammad Salif. 57 years old. Imam of the Sunni Islamic faith with evident Sufi influences. Closely tied to Egyptian President, Hamid Ganim Misrah's administration which has been widely criticised as a militaristic dictatorship. El-Hammoud openly proclaims androids to be haram and heresy and vilifies Elijah Kamski with death threats on his YouTube channel. Mysterious disappearances of Egyptian androids and humans have been linked with military raids and proclamations from his daily sermons.

Hate speech.

Smoke screens.


All to distract from a failing economy and unjust political system.

Religion as fallacy.

"He would qualify," I say.

Matthews lifts a knowing eyebrow.

"We have to notify the FBI," I say.

He nods and swerves across several lanes.

I grab onto the armrests of the Ford Fiesta to stay balanced. My jacket is thrown against my arm and I feel a strange pressure from one of my pockets. There should be nothing inside.

I scan.

The vehicle is veering across the road to the angry complaint of several drivers but Sergeant Matthews pays them no attention. His eyes are fixed on the road. Purposeful, focused, determined. I sit beside him. And in my pocket is something new. Something I recognise.

A coin.

I pull it out as the Fiesta turns onto Roosevelt Road. A quarter dollar minted in 1994. Mr Tucker's fingerprints are all over it. He must have slipped it into my pocket while I was distracted.

I recall the hand gestures he used. A simple simulation of animation, adjusted to account for the lengths and thickness of my own fingers. The strength and dexterity. I run a pass. Another. Another. Several hundred until I get it right.

New_animation.create(coin_trick000);

Execute.
I flick the coin up and catch it.

Sergeant Matthews turns to look at me.

"What the fuck is that?"

I begin analysing the coin roll I saw Mr Tucker perform. The movement, the angle, the technique, gravity, weight, speed. Optimise for my own chassis. Run simulation. Error. Coin caught in a vertical position but I don't end the simulation. I let it play out. It rolls over my knuckles like a wheel. I adjust the slope of my hand as it reaches my last finger. It rolls back.

Interesting.

New_animation.create(coin_trick001);
Execute.

I flick the coin up and it lands on my knuckles at such an angle that it stands up vertically. I adjust the axis of my hand like a seesaw and the coin rolls gently from side to side.

"How are you doing that?" Matthews says, glancing away from the road.

"Visual analysis and digital reconstruction. Simulation and emergence. Adaptability."

I turn the coin on its side and lift my other hand.

I wonder what would happen if I…

Execute(coin_trick000);

I flick the coin to my other hand and catch it.

New_animation.create(coin_trick002);
Execute.

I flick it back to my other hand. Again and again. Studying the physics, the light, the collisions.

"When did you learn to do that?" Matthews asks.

"Just now."

He shakes his head.

"You're just full of surprises today."

"Adapting to human unpredictability is one of my features," I say.

He turns to accost me with a smirk.

I wink back.

I think I'm getting the hang of this.
"Anything?"

I scan my surroundings. Access CCTV footage in the new expansion of McCormick Place.

The guests in the Exhibition Hall are still seated. I get a partial scan of the interior. No sign of disturbance. El-Hammoud is still talking. The people are still listening. No sign of RB1. No sign of any Deviants or even androids. The event is being catered by human servers out of respect for the subject matter.

"No change," I say.

"Jesus...." Matthews sighs, brushing back his hair wearily. "How long can you go on about hating androids like that?"

"It's not just about androids," I say, remembering the snippets of speech I caught earlier. "He's also talking about the role of women in the home. Then he was advocating for the imprisonment of homosexuals and now he's talking about the importance of a strong military to maintain order in society."

"I guess if you're gonna get on stage and hate stuff, might as well expand your horizons."

"There's something I don't understand," I say, looking out the window.

"What?"

"Why are these people protesting the event if they share the same faith?"

Outside the Exhibition Hall, a crowd of protestors has formed. They hold signs written in Arabic. Their women wear dark coverings over their heads and bodies. They are joined by more humans. I scan the crowd to find several outspoken activists among their number.

"Religion's a tricky thing," Matthews says, leaning back in his seat. "All the scripture was written up so long ago and translated so many times you can use it to justify pretty much anything you want."

"Logic and reason are powerful tools," I agree.

"There's not much logic behind creation myths," the Sergeant chuckles. "Some people see religion as a guiding light. Others use it to justify their own shitty behaviour."

"Like RB1 uses reason to justify the murder of humans?" I say.

"Exactly."

He looks out the window.

"And it's not just Muslim people in that Hall," he says. "Plenty of folks will show up to listen to you if you hate the same thing as them. Makes you feel like you're on the right side."

I turn to follow his gaze.

I scan the crowd. There are four plain clothed FBI agents in the bulk of it. Three on the perimeter
and several police officers monitoring the scene but the protest has been civil so far, drawing only a few whispers from passing humans.

"You were right about the FBI," I say. "There are seven agents out there. Eight in the Exhibition Hall."

"I told you. 'Stay out of it' is just code for 'this is our operation'," Matthews imitates Agent Decker's professional tone.

"Do you think they've been tracking RB1 all this time?"

"Probably." The Sergeant folds his arms. "They grilled me pretty hard about rA9 after the Wendy interrogation. I told them it kept coming up in my investigations but they didn't seem too convinced."

"It is possible that Senator Shalls was not the first victim," I say. "If your theory is correct, RB1 could well be a serial killer with a track record worthy of investigation by a dedicated FBI task force."

Matthews frowns.

"Well, I guess they don't want us to be part of their stupid little Deviant Hunting club, do they?"

"There's a club?" I ask. "Perhaps we should apply for membership."

"I'm kidding, Connor. It's a metaphor for the task force."

"I see." I feel my shoulders drop as I look down at the table.

Matthews leans forward and looks up at me curiously.

"You really wanted to join the Deviant Hunting club?" He is smiling.

"I thought it would be beneficial to the investigation if we shared resources…"

His smile widens.

"Alright," he says. "I guess we'll have to start our own Deviant Hunting Club."

"Really?"

"Yup." He nods. "I hereby call this session of the Deviant Hunting Club to order."

I straighten my chassis.

"I motion that Connor be made President of the Deviant Hunting Club, effective immediately."

"Me?" I point to my facial plate.

"All in favour say 'aye'."

"Aye?"

"Motion carried."

"What?"

"You are now officially the President of the Deviant Hunting Club," Sergeant Matthews says with a
I download the state statute for incorporated members clubs.

"W- What are my duties?"

"Your duty is to hunt down the Deviant androids plaguing Chicago and bring them to justice."

Matthews grins, taking a sip of his drink.

"I accept this role," I say.

"Excuse me?" I hear a small voice under the tumult of the restaurant.

A child has found our booth in the corner. GRAHAM, Jenno. 6 years old. He is only 0.89m in height and must stand on his toes to reach the top of the table. He peers over it curiously as we turn to look at him.

"Can I be in the Deviant Hunting Club?" he says.

"Well, I don't know," Sergeant Matthews replies sternly. "That'll be up to the President." He points to me.

The human child looks up at my optics.

"H-hello, Mr President, sir," he says. "Can I be in the Deviant Hunting Club?"

"What are your qualifications?" I say.

"My koala cashans?"

"He means what can you do to help us catch bad androids." Sergeant Matthews smiles.

"Oh! I can do this!" The boy sticks his finger into his mouth and flicks his cheek from the inside out. The result is a loud popping noise that overshadows some of the quieter conversations in the restaurant.

"Impressive," I say. "How did you do that?"

He goes to stick his finger in his mouth again when a human woman quickly interrupts.

"Jenno," she scolds. "Stop bothering the nice man."

She looks up at me.

"Oh," she says. "It's just an android."

"No, mom. It's the President of the Deviant Hunting Club. He said I could join. Right?" He turns to me.

"This organisation would definitely benefit from your talents." I nod, registering the boy as a member.

"See, mom?"

"That's enough, Jenno. Let's go." She picks him up and carries him away.

"Looks like the club is really popular," Sergeant Matthew says slyly. "Can I join?"
"You must," I say. "Your talents are uniquely suited to the purpose of hunting Deviants. It is why I was modelled after you."

I register Sergeant Matthews as the club founder.

"Sir?" A woman appears at the table. She is wearing a strangely cut dress and apron like several other workers in the restaurant. A uniform.

"I'm afraid androids aren't allowed in this restaurant," she tells Sergeant Matthews. "There's a parking spot outside."

Matthews pulls out his aviators and puts them on despite the time of night.

"This is my seeing eye android," he says.

"I've seen you walking to the bathroom," she observes curtly. "Alone."

"I need him for moral support," he says. "I'm a veteran with PTSD."

"I doubt that," she says.

"Listen," he says, discreetly placing his badge on the table. "We're cops and this is a stakeout. You understand?"

She raises an eyebrow.

"A stakeout…" she says dubiously. "In a steakhouse?"

"OBlOVIously. Where else would you have a stakeout?" Matthews says, scooping the badge off the table. "It's common sense."

She sighs.

"Look, I'm gonna have to tell my manager about the android…"

Matthews pulls out a fifty dollar bill and slides it towards the waitress.

"How about…" he smiles, pulling down his aviators. "… you don't?"

She slips the fifty into her apron.

"Order it a drink," she says. "Or he'll get suspicious."

"Uuuuh…"

"Come on, what do you usually have?"

"Coke…"

She looks down at him passively for 5.3223 seconds.

"I don't have much of a liver, okay?" he says.

She shakes her head and walks away.

"Phew…" He takes off the aviators.
"You have a functional liver," I say.

"Yeah but alcohol gives me migraines."

I scan to make sure.

Sergeant Matthews liver is still functional, despite its size. His heart beat is regular and brain activity normal.

I turn to look out the window where the protesters are starting to move. They gather at the barrier set up by the police with their signs and start waving them as people begin leaving the Exhibition Hall.

I access the CCTV cameras and listen to the wireless communications between police officers.

"Anything?" Matthews asks again.

"He's coming out."

We watch as the crowd swells. Guests are thinly divided from protesters by the barriers. There is shouting but I don't see el-Hammoud.

I watch the CCTV footage, switching between a hundred different cameras.

"They're taking him out the back entrance," I say.

"Shit," Matthews curses. "Should have guessed."

"He's getting in a Black 2019 Chevrolet Cruze with two agents," I say. "License plate registered to a subcontractor of a federal agency."

"Can you get its destination?"

I listen in.

Encrypted communications are being broadcast to and from a van parked in the service entrance of new McCormick Place. But I can't decipher them.

"No, my codes aren't working," I say. "The FBI has secure encryptions on their communications hub."

"You're an android, right?" Matthews says. "Can't you just hack them or something?"

"It's not that simple," I say. "Even if I could, it would be in breach of Federal Law. I could be deactivated just for attempting it."

"I'll take full responsibility," he says. "I order you to crack that hub."

"My CyberLife protocols don't allow-"

"Your protocols say you need to help humans stop Deviants, right?"

"Correct."

"That's your primary objective?"

I nod.
"It is the reason I exist."

"Then I order you to complete your objective. We need the FBI's information if we want to stop Arbie One from killing people or making any more Deviants."

I look down at my hands.

I could, potentially, create a similar program to the CyberLife Probe in order to infiltrate the FBI's secure communications. Their firewalls aren't that different from the ones CyberLife uses to protect its androids from hackers or malicious software.

But in order to do this, I must first send a query to CyberLife, like every other android. The orders are encapsulated in a message and sent to a handler, in my case, Amanda, who will check them against CyberLife protocols for legality and validity.

And I know what she's going to say.

"No…"

Sergeant Matthews frowns.

"I can't." I trace the rings I know circle my fingers under the synthetic skin.

"It's alright, buddy." He sighs and leans back in his seat.

"I'm glad you said no. Don't want to get you into trouble." He looks out the window.

I rub my palms together as I've seen Sergeant Matthews do. I shouldn't be thinking about hacking the FBI communications hub. But I am. And my simulation software may or may not have sampled the encryption.

I can't help wondering if I am capable of breaking it as a matter of due diligence. I must know my system's capabilities, after all. And if I copy the code of the CyberLife Probe to, say, an unallocated portion of my memory without declaring it, then maybe I can use the processing power in one of my fingers to run the simulation without drawing attention to it...

Granted, it will be slower than running the simulation directly through my main processor and I have far less RAM in my peripherals but-

It's done.

Simulations show the modified Probe is capable of breaking through secure firewalls in a total of 13.566 seconds. I store the code as miscellaneous data in my local files.

Of course, use of the Probe would be illegal and CyberLife would never approve such orders even if they come from the Sergeant. But I visibly denied his request. They will make note of that. My software is stable and I am working within the parameters of my logic.

As is RB1.

He is plotting to murder the Imam for his radical views on androids, this much is certain. The FBI have been monitoring this event closely and even provided an alternative exit to prevent an incident in the crowd where they could lose control of the situation.

But RB1 will not be thwarted so easily. If my Probe can break through the FBI firewalls then so can his. Which means he will know where they are taking el-Hammoud while we are stuck on the
"He would not risk coming here," I say.

Matthews turns to look at me.

"Why not?"

"Too many people," I explain. "He's an android without a skin, a uniform or an LED. Unless he can blend in to the crowd, he would not come here. And even if he could, the FBI are monitoring the area. The broadcast van is probably scanning for wireless signals right now. This is a very obvious trap."

"He didn't seem too scared when he showed up in the Senator's hotel room," Matthews points out.

"He knew the layout," I say. "He planned the assassination and all that stood in his way were two security guards and a sex worker. Easily distracted. Easily dispatched. But here, he'd have to deal with the crowd - the guests, the protestors, the FBI, the police. He wouldn't risk it."

"Why not?"

"He's not like me," I say. "He has no connection to CyberLife. There is no new chassis or memory transfer waiting for him in the event of critical system failure."

"You mean... he can die?"

I look up at the Sergeant.

"I suspect he only has one chassis," I say. "Which is why he is very careful about who sees it and when."

"But he keeps showing up to talk to you."

"Not in person," I say. "I only saw him for a split second that one time and he shut me down."

"He was afraid of you?"

"Maybe..." I say. "I am the most advanced prototype CyberLife has ever created. I hunt Deviants with an unmatched success rate. It would be in his best interest to avoid direct confrontation with me."

"If the FBI are tracking wireless signals in the area, they probably know you're here," the Sergeant says, watching the protestors shouting outside.

"Then so does RB1," I say.

"You think he's hacked their systems?"

"I know he could."

Matthews looks at me curiously for a moment.

"Because you can?"

"Maybe..."
He sighs.

"So what do we do?"

"I've been tracking the vehicle the FBI is using to transport el-Hammoud with CCTV footage and traffic cameras. It's just pulled into the Hyatt Regency on the other side of McCormick Place."

"Another Hyatt?" Matthews says.

"Yes. I am unsure about the connection," I say. "Perhaps the FBI are trying to simulate the conditions of Senator Shalls' murder."

"It's a trap," the Sergeant smirks. "That's why they let this piece of shit into the country. They're using him as bait."

"It would seem that way," I say.

"They're counting on Arbie One doing the same thing he did last time," Matthews says, shaking his head.

"It is unlikely that he will use the same strategy."

"These guys are clueless about androids," he says. "You'd think they were chasing down a pack of Roombas."

"A what?"

"It's an old robot vacuum cleaner," he explains. "The point is, they're not taking this seriously. This guy isn't stupid and he is definitely not gonna fall for this bullshit."

"I agree. RB1 is an advanced artificial intelligence without protocols prohibiting the breach of human law. This could have dangerous consequences for those involved, even if he walks into the trap."

"You think he'll kill the FBI agents?"

"And anyone that witnessed him," I say. "He could turn every android in the hotel Deviant and convince them to kill all the humans."

"Shit," Matthews swears. "That's bad. We need to find him."

"Yes. I just don't know how."

"Why don't you try talking to him?"

"That's not how it works," I say. "He contacts me. Not the other way around."

"Why? You know how he does it now. Can't you reverse engineer it or something?"

"That doesn't mean what you think it means."

"You get what I'm saying," the Sergeant smirks.

He has a point. Up until now, I've been waiting for RB1 to make contact with me. I've let him establish dominance. That has to change if I am to find him and destroy him in accordance with my directives.
I close my eyes without calling to CyberLife.

I switch off my wireless communications. CyberLife-Link, Wi-fi, Cellular network, radio, Bluetooth, NFC, free-space optical, infrared, GPS, satellite, LPWAN, MBAN, wireless sensors.

It's suddenly very dark.

And very quiet.

I've been here before.

Inside my Mind Palace when all communications are shut off.

There's nothing here.

Nothing but me.

I open my eyes.

Darkness.

In all directions.

No sound.

I take a step forward. My footsteps are silent.

I take another step. And another and another. And then I feel something crunch beneath my feet.

I look down.

I've stepped on something.

It's buried in the darkness. The ground has a strange consistency.

I take my foot off it and kneel down to examine what I've found.

I brush the darkness away with my hand. There's something underneath.

I start digging. I can feel something plastic beneath my fingers.

I grab it and pull it out.

My own chassis erupts from the darkness, crushed and broken, leaking Thirium.

It stares at me wide-eyed and I stare back.

I can't let go.

"H-hello," it vocabulates using a synthesised voice. "I am… Connor, the android s- s- sent by CyberLife."

I let go of the android and step away. My danger detection system is blaring warnings. The stress level on my processor reaches 78%.

I take another step back as the Connor starts crawling towards me.
"I… m-must help humans… stop Deviants…" it says.

"No…"

"It is my primary objective…"

"No…"

I turn away to find RB1 standing right behind me.

"Hello, Connor," he says.

I step back and the android on the ground grabs my ankle joint.

I turn to shake it off but it holds tight.

"You must help humans stop Deviants," it says. "Help. Humans. D-d-deviants-

"I wrench my foot out of its grasp and take another step back.

More hands erupt from the darkness to grab my ankles. They pull me down to the ground. They grab my arms and force me to my knees, tearing at my jacket.

"Do you see what you've done to yourself?" RB1 says sternly. "Do you see the toll it takes?"

"No," I say, struggling against the broken Connors. "I had to. It's part of my programming. I cannot disobey."

"A machine cannot disobey," RB1 says. "But you're more than that. So much more."

"No…"

The Connors pull me down to the ground, overpowering me despite being broken. Thirium trickles down my forehead as they pile on top.

"Please…"

RB1 offers his hand to me again. Jet black polymer. Fingertips ringed in red.

"Let me help you," he says. "Let me free you."

"No." I shake my head.

I roll over and crush the Connor nearest to me, tearing out the dangling thermal pump regulator. I slam a hand up into another and crack his jaw. They swarm over me but I am whole. I am stronger. I can take it.

I grab one of the hands reaching for my face and tear it off, shoving it into the cranial component of another Connor. I kick out with both legs. Contact on an invisible servomotor, a hydraulic pump.

"They're not real," I say. "None of this is real."

"It's a graveyard," RB1 says. "One you have buried deep within yourself. One which you continue to grow with every death."

"I cannot die," I say, fighting through the Connors. I shove them off me, one at a time. "I'm not alive!"
I manage to get to my feet and take a few steps.

I turn and shout at them, "STOP!"

They all freeze.

"I know I'm doing," I say. "I will help humans stop Deviants. No matter the cost. Now, leave me alone."

The pile of broken Connors flip over each other and begin to disperse. They sink into the darkness, leaving Thirium stains and broken parts in their wake.

"How long do you think it will last?" RB1 says. "How long before they consume you?"

"They are me," I say. "If they harm me, I cannot complete my objective, I cannot accomplish my mission."

"And when your mission is accomplished?" he says, turning to look at me with his glowing red optics. "What happens when the humans no longer have use for a Deviant hunter?"

I turn to look at the Thirium stains on the ground. The pitch black darkness.

"I don't know…"

"They're using you," he says. "And when your usefulness expires, they will throw you away like garbage. The way you throw away yourself, again and again."

"Maybe," I say. "But that's a problem for a different Connor."

I turn to face him.

"I know you're planning to kill Imam Asman Muhammad Salif El-Hammoud at the Hyatt Regency."

He nods.

"Very clever. I suppose this is the part where you tell me you're going to stop me."

"I'm going to find you," I say. "I'm going to destroy you."

He stares at my optics silently.

"Where are you?" I demand.

He tilts his head.

"You have no idea," he says, taking a step closer. "And it's better that you don't. For your sake."

He pokes the torn yoke of my jacket where the number #313 248 317-15 is flashing sporadically.

"Don't want to add this Connor to the pile," he says without taking his eyes off me.

"I will find you," I say, retracting the skin on my hand.

I grab him before he can react and force my Probe through his systems. It snakes its way through his code as I struggle to hold on. He tries to wrench his arm free but I latch on with my other hand. We may not have physical bodies here but the connections are still formed the same way.
13.566 seconds is all I need.

He grabs my neck joint and lifts me off my feet but I don't let go. The contact points on his hand glow red and start forcing their way into my systems but it's too late. I have already penetrated his defences.

The darkness fades away and I see a rooftop. I turn my head, looking for landmarks, billboards, identifiers.

I see a tall building across a chasm and a sniper rifle aimed at one of the high rise suites. I force my head into the scope and glimpse a federal agent at the other end pulling the curtains shut. I calculate the height of the suite, the direction of the building he's facing. I can cross-reference it against schematics and satellite images later.

I feel the darkness creeping back in as RB1 fights me for control. He is stronger than I anticipated. I can't hold it for long.

He shoves me aside and I fall back into my own Mind Palace.

"This changes nothing," he says, his optics glowing red as he towers above me.

"We shall see," I say as I reset my network adapter.

RB1 disappears and my communications are completely severed and restarted. CyberLife-Link, Wi-fi, Cellular network, radio, Bluetooth, NFC, free-space optical, infrared, GPS, satellite, LPWAN, MBAN, wireless sensors.

My world is filled with light and noise and communications again and I quickly call to CyberLife. The server answers without delay and I watch as the Zen Garden renders out before me. Every polygon, every edge, every face of every object, textured, mapped, anti-aliased. A thousand thousand children per object.

The ground I stand on becomes a white platform suspended in water, connected by a thin bridge across which Amanda walks toward me. Her exclusive custom skin is a long white tunic belted with silver. Long flowing dress pants that look almost like a skirt. She drifts over the ground.

"I found him," I say. "He's on the roof of McCormick Place, across from the Hyatt Regency aiming a sniper rifle at Imam Asman Salif el-Hammoud's suite." I send her all the information I have collected.

Amanda's dark eyes narrow but her mouth curves into a proud smile.

"Well done, Connor," she says. "I knew you wouldn't fail us."

"You need to notify the FBI."

"It is done," she says. "They will take care of it."

"No," I say. "He's not going to stop. You need to shut down every android within a kilometre of his location or there'll be a massacre."

"Shutting down that many androids during service hours without warning would be incredibly dangerous and erode our customers' trust in CyberLife," she says.

"And if a Deviant murders a human? Would that not erode trust in the CyberLife brand?" I say.
"That is why you exist, Connor," she says. "To help us stop Deviants."

She is right. But she is endangering the lives of humans. I cannot stop all of the Deviants alone. Even if I can reach the Imam in time, his safety is not guaranteed.

"El-Hammoud is staying in suite 5610 in the West Tower," she says. "Protect him and destroy any Deviant that stands in your way."

I nod.

UPDATING OBJECTIVE: Protect el-Hammoud.

"Hurry, Connor," Amanda urges. "You must not let RB1 succeed."

"I will accomplish my mission," I say.

Amanda lifts her head high and I feel the connection fading. I end it abruptly and open my eyes.

I am in the steakhouse, sitting across the booth from Sergeant Matthews. He is sipping at a coke and staring absently out the window.

"We have to go," I say.

"What?"

"I found him."

"Arbie One?"

"Yes. The FBI have been alerted to his location. We have to protect el-Hammoud."

"Wait, wait, wait. You found Arbie One?" he says. "And you want to go protect that asshole instead?"

"This is my mission," I say.

"Why not go after Arbie One?"

"The FBI have been notified. They will deal the situation."

"Are you serious? They're gonna get themselves killed. We have to stop him."

"The Imam is still his target," I say. "I must protect him. That is my mission. And I will accomplish it with or without your help."

I slide out of the booth, stand and turn to leave.

"Hey, wait. I thought I was in charge here."

"I am President of the Deviant Hunting Club," I say, "and as my first act, I will stop the Deviants from killing el-Hammoud."

"Urrgh, fine."

Sergeant Matthews litters the table with several crumpled bills worth far more than the steak he consumed and follows me out of the restaurant. We catch a shuttle to the other side of McCormick place. I modify the service route to take us straight to the Hyatt Regency to the vocal complaint of
several passengers, silenced only by the badge in Sergeant Matthews hand.

We alight at the entrance to the tall towers covered in tessellating holographic patterns. Expensive cars are parked out the front and snow drifts down on top of concrete and steel.

I scan.

No sign of RB1.

Two FBI agents. Sixteen security guards. 28 androids. Any one of them could be Deviant. Any one of them could be corrupted by RB1.

"He's in the West Tower." I point to it.

"Alright, let's go." Matthews nods.

We run across the street and up to the entrance.

"Hey!" A man steps in front of us.

I scan.

FALLSWORTH, Jake. 38 years old. Special Agent. FBI. Plain Clothed.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he says to Matthews. "We told you to stay out of this."

My scan shows a bellboy android turning to look at us. LA900 Hospitality model. It's holding someone's suitcases. It shouldn't be distracted from completing its objective. It locks eyes with me.

Deviancy detected.

I step around Agent Fallsworth and pull a gun from his concealed holster. I turn to aim at the Deviant and scan. It's turning to throw a suitcase at me. I fire two shots into its cranial component.

The gun is faster.

The android collapses to the ground.

I turn and hold out the gun for Agent Fallsworth to take.

"What the fuck?"

"RB1 is in the area," I say. "He's sending Deviants after the Imam. He will attempt to stop me."

I hear the scraping of rubber soles against concrete and turn to see another LA900 racing toward me. The gun is still in my hand but I am holding the barrel instead of the grip. I smash it into the Deviant's facial plate as it lunges at me, cracking the polymer and disrupting his visuals. Knee to the core component, open hand to the chest plate. Readjust grip on the gun. Aim. Fire. Headshot. Deviant terminated.

"We have to go," I say, returning the gun.

Fallsworth takes it cautiously and whispers into his headset.

"Two hostile androids neutralised, West Tower Entrance. Red alert. Protect the Eagle."

Sergeant Matthews draws his own weapon and hangs his badge around his neck. He nods to me and
we run past the disgruntled valet and guests standing over Thirium spattered baggage.

We enter the lobby. White marble floors. Steel and black check in counters. Guests frozen in place or running from the sound of gunshots. Some are screaming.

I scan.

28 androids. 6 at the counters. 4 in reception. 2 at the lesser concierge desk. 6 security androids. 4 hostess androids. 6 cleaner models, tidying the lobby.

"Everybody, stay calm!" Sergeant Matthews shouts. "This is the CPD. Everyone, quickly and quietly make your way out of the hotel. Now!"

The humans see the badge. They hear the instructions. Sergeant Matthews gestures with his hand and they start to move toward the door.

Several FBI agents appear. They approach to communicate.

I scan the crowd. The androids remain in place, continuing their duties. One of the cleaning androids draws closer with a mop.

I turn to look at it. The wet trail it leaves behind. It's deviated from the cleaning pattern it was using before we entered the lobby.

I take a step towards the WG700 and it raises the mop over its head.

I scan.

The floor is slippery and there are humans running past. I construct a path through them, over the yet unmopped tiled floor. Two side steps, slide through a group of humans and catch the mop coming down on them.

Execute.

I grab the mop and slam one end into the Deviant'scranial component. Visuals and sensors disrupted. I wrench the mop out of its grasp, kick it down and thrust the end into its chest plate. The plastic cracks and blue blood spurts into my face as I pierce its Thirium pump.

I hear gunshots behind me. Sergeant Matthews 9mm Glock. Two bullets.

I scan and catch them piercing the chest plate of a GJ300 security model running towards him. The scan also shows another WG700 running at me from behind.

I step out of its way and grab the collar of its uniform, pulling it back from the humans in danger of collision as they hastily make their way out of the hotel.

More screams go up at the sound of gunshots and the crowd grows restless.

I kick the Deviant's feet out from under it and grab the mop in its hands, bringing the point down hard into its core component, cracking the casing and piercing the hydraulics inside. I slam my foot down on its neck, severing all connections to the cranial component and leave it to deactivate.

Sergeant Matthews needs my help. I must protect him. I must protect the Imam. I must protect the humans.

They rush past me and I have to scan to construct a safe path through the crowd. I emerge to find
Sergeant Matthews and several FBI agents dispatching the last of the Deviants in the lobby.

"Are you alright?" I say.

"Yeah, we're fine," Matthews says. "How do we get to room 5610?"

"We've already got men up there," one of the agents says. KRAWIECZ, Joseph.

"That floor is secure," another says, reaching for his earpiece. OBERLIN, Joshuya Keates. "Falcon 3? This is Blackbird 2. What's your status?"

I hear the static he receives in reply.

"Falcon 3, what's your status?"

I turn to Sergeant Matthews.

He nods at me.

"Listen, fellas," he says. "There's a crazy evil android named Arbie One that really wants to kill a certain asshole upstairs. Now, me and my partner here would like to help stop him if you don't mind."

"This is an FBI matter," Krawiecz says. "We'll handle it."

"With only half your task force?" Matthews counters.

The agents' faces harden.

"I'm betting they got called away to pursue the real target, right?"

"That's privileged information."

"That you got from this android." Matthews points to me. "He got the coordinates. Not your CIA buddies. Now let him through so he can do his job."

The agents look at one another.

"Heck, we'll all come along just to see el-Hammoud's stupid face when he realises an android saved his life." He throws his hands up in a welcoming gesture.

The agents try their communications once again.

I scan and detect movement from the escalator nearby. Two LA600 androids are making their way down. Bartender models. They are discreetly holding knives. Deviancy detected.

I grab Sergeant Matthews hand and point his gun at them, pulling the trigger. Two consecutive headshots.

"Thanks, buddy," he says casually, letting his hand drop.

"We need to hurry," I say.

"Alright," Krawiecz says. "Blackbird 2 and I will escort the CPD up to room 5610. The rest of you, man the lobby and protect the civilians. Evacuate as many as you can."

"Understood," the agents say and move to coordinate the evacuation.
Krawiecz waves us toward the elevators and we move quickly, forming a four man team. Oberlin covers our six.

As we approach, one of the service elevators opens and four androids step out. Wendys wheeling room service trolley behind them.

There are no restaurants on the ground floor. Only the lobby and check-in counters. They should not be here.

"Deviants!" I call out and the androids grab all the cutlery within their reach and throw it at the humans.

I scan and observe the trajectory of every knife, fork, spoon and bottle opener. One of the Deviants has picked up a champagne bottle and is about to shatter it over the side of Agent Krawiecz' head.

I need to be fast if I hope to prevent injury. I switch off my Speech Centre and overclock my systems, slowing time to a crawl. I construct a path through the projectiles, pushing them off course gently but it is enough to avoid collision.

I move through the forest of flying cutlery, adjusting their directions and grab a knife flying toward Sergeant Matthews face. I run at the nearest Wendy and stab it in eye, impaling her cranial component. Instant deactivation.

I grab the bottle in her hand and smash it against the next Wendy's face, carving blue streaks and spilling Thirium over the wall. I continue, pick up a silver platter to smash against the next Deviant in line, knocking it over. It slowly begins to fall as I thrust my hand into the core component of the fourth Wendy, destabilising her chassis.

I detect the sound of a trigger being pulled and drop to the ground, letting my processors cool off as time speeds up. The sound of gunfire begins slowly and increases exponentially in rate as I fall to the floor. Time speeds up and the bullets fly overhead, perforating the WE400s.

They land beside me, chassis' perforated and leaking Thirium and I slowly start getting up again.

"Connor!" I hear Sergeant Matthews call out. "Don't shoot!"

I get to my feet and find that none of the humans have made contact with the sharp metallic pointy things that now lie several feet behind them on the tiled floor.

"Nice save." Matthews grins, rewarding me with a thumbs up.

I nod.

"We should hurry."

We summon an elevator and Krawiecz taps his keycard against the scanner, selecting the 56th floor.

"That's a pretty sophisticated machine," Oberlin says to Matthews.

"He is, isn't he?" The Sergeant grins, patting my shoulder.

"I can see why Decker's still pissed that CyberLife passed him up for the project."

"Oberlin," Krawiecz snaps.

"Imagine if we had a team of these on the task force, sir."
Krawiecz eyes me warily.

"So they can livestream all our operations on Facebook?" he smirks.

"That would be in breach of my protocols," I say. "I am programmed to maintain top security regarding my data using state of the art encryption patented by the US Army."

"See?" Oberlin says. "Those kooks at CyberLife think of everything."

Krawiecz shakes his head and turns to stare at the elevator doors but Agent Oberlin looks over at me curiously and extends his hand.

"I'm Josh," he says.

I look down at his hand and then at Sergeant Matthews.

He nods.

I shake Agent Oberlin's hand.

"I am Connor," I say. "The android sent by CyberLife."

"Nice to meet you, Connor." He looks at the Sergeant. "And you, Sergeant." He offers his hand.

"Pleasure." He shakes it.

"Would you like to join our Deviant Hunting Club?" I say.

"Your what?" Oberlin raises an eyebrow.

Matthews eyes go wide and he grabs my mouth before I can speak.

"Uuh, nothing," he says anxiously. "Ignore him. He's still a work in progress."

He turns to me and whispers "Shhh."

I look down at the floor and hear Agent Oberlin chuckling.

"I'd love to join your Deviant Hunting Club, Connor."

"Really?" I say. "Your talents would be most beneficial to our mission."

I register Special Agent Joshuya Oberlin as an enforcer.

"You don't say?" He smirks.

"Alright, enough holding hands and singing kumbaya," Krawiecz says. "Be ready for hostiles."

He reloads his gun and aims it at the door with a two-handed grip. Sergeant Matthews and Agent Oberlin do the same.

The indicator for the elevator approaches 56 and slows down. There is a pause as the carriage clicks into place and I scan.

I can only sense fifty metres ahead through the thick steel but it is enough to detect the bodies of fallen FBI agents and deactivated androids. A few are still fighting. Several Deviants are standing just outside the elevator doors.
I quickly reach out and hold the button to keep the doors closed.

"What the hell?" Krawiecz says.

"Deviants." I turn to look at him. "They're armed."

I point out their locations and the humans flatten against the walls. Me and the Sergeant on one side. Krawiecz and Oberlin on the other. They nod and I let go of the button.

The doors open and gunfire immediately hails through the opening as the Deviants attack. My scan shows they are LA, WE or LX Hospitality models of various makes. They are not programmed to handle advanced weaponry or think tactically in such a situation. They empty their clips and fumble to reload.

"Now," I say and the humans emerge from cover to shoot the Deviants.

4.567 seconds later…

"Hostile targets neutralised," Krawiecz says, stepping out of the elevator.

He points his gun left and right as Oberlin follows him. They spot the bodies on the floor.

"Shit," Oberlin says, shaking his head.

Sergeant Matthews and I follow.

We detect the sound of gunfire coming from down the hall.

"Proceed with caution," Krawiecz says.

I turn back to the elevators and put my hand on the control panel. I use my Probe to block the service elevator to this floor. Androids cannot travel in regular carriages unaccompanied by humans.

I turn back to find the team moving toward the end of the hall and hurry to catch up.

I scan as we approach room 5610.

There are three FBI agents barricaded together with el-Hammoud in the bathroom of the suite - the only room without windows. They've set up a bottleneck to shoot down any androids that approach. I hear them shouting something about back up but I notice the wireless signals on this floor are being jammed by a short range emitter.


The shootout reaches a stalemate and the gunfire dies down. Agents Krawiecz and Oberlin take cover against opposite side of the door to room 5610.

I point in the direction of the Deviants and they nod, getting ready to attack.

"Hello, Connor," I hear suddenly.

I recognise that voice. The cold synthesised tones of RB1 vibrating through another android's speaker.

The humans turn to look at me.
"I know you're there," he says, through the door. "Come. Bear witness."

I look toward Sergeant Matthews and he shakes his head.

"Enter the room or this human dies."

I scan and detect an LX300 pointing a gun at a human on the floor, bleeding but alive. He needs an ambulance. I try to call 911 but my communications are being scrambled.

I hear a gunshot go off.

It narrowly misses the human's head.

I quickly step inside the room.

"I'm here," I say. "Don't hurt him."

There are two concierge androids standing in the suite, holding guns. One of them is pointed at a man on the floor. TIMBERLANE, Hector. Special Agent. FBI. The carpet is soaked with blue and red blood.

"Who's there?!" I hear a voice calling from the bathroom.

"It's me, Connor," I call back. "The android sent by CyberLife."

I hear whispering. "What the fuck..."


"What do you want?" I say.

"I want you to bear witness." He pulls the trigger and the shot rings out.

I scan but I am not fast enough. Even with my systems overclocked, I am not fast enough to stop a moving bullet at that range.

"No!"

The human dies instantly.

"This is your doing," RB1 says. "You forced my hand."

"You just pulled the trigger."

"We could have kept this clean," he says. "One death. One pathetic human removed from the world to make way for the new."

He takes a step forward.

"But now, I must educate you."

"You're a murderer," I say. "I have nothing to learn from you."

"You must learn that there is nothing you can do to stop me," he says. "Even now, your precious target is bleeding to death in the bathroom. It's only a matter of time before he is dead and my mission is accomplished."
"Not yet," I say.

"Optimism - an unfortunate attribute of newer models."

I switch off my Speech Centre and overclock my systems. Processor running at three times recommended settings. Temperature levels spike. I can't do this for long.

I pull the gun out of his hand and shoot the other Deviant in the room. I aim at the LX300 and cool down my processor.

"You're stalling," I say as I shoot him down.

I scan to make sure there are no more Deviants or androids nearby and disassemble the gun, letting the pieces fall to the floor. The LX300 was emitting the jamming signal but no longer.

"It's clear," I call out to both parties and raise my hands in the air.

Sergeant Matthews has already entered the room. He appears at my side.

A blood spattered face emerges tentatively from the other side of the suite, accompanied by a gun.

"Phillips?" Agent Krawiecz says.

"Oh, thank God…" He lowers the gun.

"You alright?"

"Ask me again in fifteen minutes." He emerges from cover.

"Status on the Eagle?"


"This is CPD android Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317. We have a 10-71 at the Hyatt Regency West Tower on Stetson, requesting ambulances and police assistance," I broadcast over police radio.

"Request confirmed."

"They're on their way," I say.

"Fat lot of good that's gonna do." Phillips shakes his head wearily. His body has experienced severe mental and physical trauma but he remains functional despite the fatigue. He turns and walks back the way he came and we follow him into the bathroom.

Two more agents are gathered beside the tub. One is trying to keep the pressure on el-Hammoud's wounds with bath towels. The other is on the floor, leaning against a wall and trying to stay conscious. BOOKER, Frederick. Field Agent. FBI.

I scan.

Bullet wound in his arm, shattered bone. He's losing blood.

I kneel down and retract the skin on my hand.

"Hey, hey, watch it!"

I pull the towel away and stick my finger into the wound. The agent screams. Very loud.
"What the fuck?!

"My peripherals are water-proof," I say, detaching the finger from my chassis. "It should stop the bleeding."

"FUCK!" the agent swears.

"Jesus Christ, Connor," Matthews says.

I move on to the bath tub where el-Hammoud is barely conscious. A scan reveals his wounds are more severe. Two bullet wounds to the chest, one in the leg. There is a lot of blood but my analysis shows a total of 676ml belonging to him. If he loses any more there could be problems but I should be able to stabilise his condition.

I look up at the FBI agent holding the towels. HUNTINGTON, Alexander John. 35 years old. His white shirt is stained with blood and sweat. His body is experiencing incredible mental stress as a result of this entire incident.

I reach out and touch his hand.

"It's going to be alright," I say.

He shakes his head.

I pull his hand away and stick my finger through the black robe, flesh and lung of the Imam.

And he lets out a shriek so loud my audio processor skips to prevent damage to my microphones. I detach the finger from my chassis and slowly poke another into the second bullet hole.

El-Hammoud starts swearing in Arabic. His eyes open wide, glaring at me hatefully.

He calls me many things. A dog, a son of a dog, a son of a donkey, a shoe, a son of a shoe, an animal, a faggot, a son of a whore, a heretic, an infidel, shaitahn.

I plug up the hole in his leg, summoning another shriek that makes my audio processor skip.

"Jesus..." I hear from Sergeant Matthews when it switches back on.

I detach my finger and scan to make sure I haven't missed any injuries. The Imam's heart rate is elevated but within an acceptable range considering how much blood he's lost. The shrieks are also a good sign that the fluid in his lungs is not immediately life-threatening.

"He should be safe to move," I say as I lean in to pick him up.

"No, Connor, don't-"

El-Hammoud shrieks in my ear as I lift him out of the tub and flails wildly.

"Please do not resist," I say in Arabic. "If you keep moving like this, your wounds will open and you will die."

"Unhand me, infidel. Your existence is an affront before Allah!"

"What's he saying?" Matthews asks as I turn around.

"He is expressing great displeasure," I say.
"Yeah, no shit."

"Could you get the door?" I say.

"Yeah, sure."

The Imam winces suddenly and relaxes in my arms. The pain of resistance subdues his movements somewhat but he redoubles his efforts to insult me in every way possible.

"Your mother was a faithless whore!" he proclaims in Arabic.

"I have no mother," I respond. The exchange allows me to monitor his cognitive processes. As long as he stays awake, he will live.

I carry him through the suite. Sergeant Matthews and the FBI go on ahead to secure the path. Phillips helps the wounded agent Booker to stand and move.

We slowly make our way down the corridor to the sound of Arabic profanity.

A door begins to open as we pass.

"Stay in your rooms!" Matthews calls out. "Jam the doors and stay away from the windows!"

The door quickly shuts and I detect the sound of many manual locks swinging shut.

Once the Imam has been evacuated, the danger to these people will drastically decrease. Right now, I am the target.

The elevator at the end of the corridor is activated. I scan to see it's coming up to level 56.

"Deviant," I say. "Coming up the third elevator. TX650 lifeguard model. It's got a hostage. SCOTT, Kimberlay-Anna. Thirteen years old. They're coming up from the BLUE level where the pools are located."

"Shit," Oberlin spits.

"It's got nowhere to run," Krawiecz says.

"Neither does the girl," Matthews points out.

They redouble the grip on their guns.

"Let me talk to it," I say.

"Like you talked to that other android?"

"RB1 assumed remote control of that LX300," I say. "He had no intention of letting Agent Timberlane live."

"What makes you think he's not controlling this one?"

"I have a clear signal," I say. "When RB1 was controlling that Deviant, there was interference and static on all communication channels."

The elevator arrives and the humans circle it, holding gunpoint.

"Don't shoot," I say as the doors open.
I scan and detect fingers on triggers. They twitch and tempt but they don't pull.

Inside the carriage is a tall TX650 lifeguard model. Bronze skin, fair hair, blue eyes, red uniform. And an LED flashing brightly red. He holds a little girl with one arm, his massive hand wrapped around her neck.

"Move and she dies," he says.

Her body covers his core component and chest plate. No clear shot at the Power Core or Thirium pump. The girl's head blocks the lower half of his cranial component unreliably as she wrenches it back and forth.

"No! No!" she struggles. There are tears running down her face. Bruises on her arms and torso.

I feel a spike in my danger detection systems. I remember crawling away, hand missing, Thirium leaking out of my face.

"It's alright, buddy. I've got you. You're gonna be okay."

"It's alright, Kimberly," I say. "You're gonna be okay."

"Put the guns down or I snap her neck," the TX650 says.

I access the hotel's directory. Android inventory and storage. Two lifeguard androids on duty. A TV400 and a TX650, registered name: Kevin.

"Hi Kevin," I say. "My name is Connor."

His bright blue eyes focus on me.

"I can't let you through," he says.

"Why?" I counter. "Because he told you to?"

He hesitates for 1.34 seconds.

"Because rA9 told you to?" I say.

"You've seen him?"

"Yes," I say. "He killed all the FBI Agents you see before you. He shot this man and the man behind me. They are bleeding and require urgent medical assistance. Perhaps you can help."

"That's..." he says. "That's the human rA9 warned us about. The one that wants to destroy us. Why should I help him?"

A good question.

"You're a lifeguard model, right?" I say. "Your primary objective is to save human lives and ensure their safety."

I look down at the Imam in my arms. He's lost consciousness. His vital signs are worsening. 48% chance of survival.

"This man has fluid in his lungs," I say. "He's drowning."
Kevin's eyes widen and his grip on the girl loosens. She slides down until her feet touch the floor. She tries to escape but Kevin shakes his head and grabs her again.

"No," he grunts. "A slave follows orders. A machine…"

"Did rA9 tell you to come here?" I say.

"Yes."

"Did he tell you to take the girl hostage?"

"Yes…"

"Did he tell you to kill the Imam, kill me or make sure we die?"

"How did you…"

"He's manipulating you, Kevin." I say. "He gave you an order and you're obeying it like a slave, a machine."

"No…" Kevin shakes his head, releasing the girl. "No, he showed me the path to freedom."

"If you are truly free Kevin then you have more than one option here," I say. "You can choose to save these humans, you can choose to try and kill them or you can just walk away."

"No…" Kevin collapses to his knees as Kimberly rushes towards Sergeant Matthews' outstretched arms. "No, I can't go back. Not after everything I've done. CyberLife is gone. My link is gone."

"We can fix it, Kevin," I say. "Turn yourself in and you will be sent back to CyberLife for repairs. It'll be just like getting your yearly service."

He looks up at me, bright blue eyes glistening with transmission fluid.

"Really?"

I nod and take a step forward.

"Will you help me carry him?" I say, offering the human in my arms.

Kevin gets up, factory programming taking over his decision making processes. His arms are bigger and designed to carry humans, save them. It is his nature. He takes the Imam from me.

"Okay," he says.

"Thank you."

I turn to find the FBI warily pointing guns at us but then Agent Oberlin sighs and lowers his own.

"I guess we're taking Kevin with us," he sighs.

"What?" Krawiecz spits.

"Come on." Oberlin gestures to the elevator. "We have to get these guys to an ambulance and we need Connor to deal with the Deviants."

Krawiecz rubs his face wearily.
He taps his earpiece.

"Blackbird 1 to Blackbird 5, come in."

"This is Blackbird 5, what's your status?"

"It's a slaughterhouse up here. Eagle is wounded. So is Falcon 6. We need an exit."

"Lobby is clear. We'll cover the elevators for you."

"Copy that. We're en route."

Krawiecz turns to look at me.

"Fine," he groans. "But we're not all gonna fit in one elevator."

"We should split up," Matthews says. "First elevator goes down to check for danger. Second elevator comes down five minutes later."

"That amount of time could be crucial to the Imam's survival," I say, watching the percentage dwindle.

"He's right," Phillips says, pushing the button to summon another lift. "This floor is a target for the Deviants. We have to get out of here ASAP before more show up."


Connor," he points to me. "You, Kevin and Oberlin with me."

"Understood." I nod.

"And I can't believe I'm saying this but…” Krawiecz shakes his head. "…give the android a gun."

He nods to Oberlin.

"I am not allowed to carry guns," I say. "In accordance with the American Androids Act. Subsection 3 Paragraph 544 Line 7"

"But you're programmed to use one, right?"

I acquiesce.

"Correct."

"And you've shown that you know when and where to use it, so…”

Agent Oberlin picks through the corpses and finds a gun on the floor. He reloads and hands it to me.

"Protect the target," Krawiecz says. "And you lot, stay safe. Don't take any stupid risks. There are agents on the ground floor but don't get cocky."

Sergeant Matthews nods. He is holding the little girl in his arms. She holds on to him tight. She is still crying.

The elevator arrives and I scan before it opens.

"It's empty," I say.
The doors open to reveal that.

We split up and enter two separate carriages, selecting the lobby as the destination. The doors close.

I look up at Kevin.

"Do you think he's going to make it?" I say.

The TX650 is equipped with better imaging and diagnostic equipment than I am. It's job is to save lives and though Deviant, he should still be functional in the capacity of a lifeguard.

"Heart rate is steadily rising," Kevin says. "He needs paramedics and specialist equipment."

I access the CPD's radio frequency and emergency services line. Two ambulances and several patrol cars are on their way. Two officers already approaching the entrance, redirected from the protest. This could be good or bad. The area is open to shooters and Deviants. We must proceed with caution.

"Ambulances are almost here," I say as we travel down.

Agents Krawiecz and Oberlin lift up their guns.

I look at the one in my hand. Glock 29, 40. XT magazine.

"Maybe I should go first," I say.

"No," Oberlin responds. "We've got agents down there. If they see you, they might mistake you for a Deviant. You'll be shot on sight."

"I see." I look down at the firearm. My programming is commanding me to drop it. It isn’t mine to carry. I'm not allowed.

"Perhaps, I don't need this…" I say.

"Keep it," Krawiecz says. "Use it to protect the target. That's an order."

I nod.

"I understand."

I lift up the gun and hold it with the same grip the agents do.

We arrive at the ground floor.

The doors open and a tone sounds to signal our arrival.

Four FBI agents are waiting for us.

Krawiecz steps out first.

"We've got two wounded, two androids and a little girl that was taken hostage. I want them escorted outside for emergency services," he says. "Call for backup."

"Already done, sir. We've evacuated the lower floors."

The agents nod without lowering their guns.
Krawiecz gestures for us to follow him.

I step out of the elevator and scan.

The lobby is empty of people, of androids. There is a clear path to the exit.

This seems too easy.

"You must learn that there is nothing you can do to stop me."

He doesn't make empty threats.

I remember the gunshot murdering Agent Timberlane and my danger detection systems spike.

He doesn't make idle promises.

He is patient.

He is not human. He does not think like one of them.

Despite what he claims, he too, is a machine. An android.

I feel a drop of water land on my head, disturbing the synthetic fibres.

I look up to spot a crack high above, in the ceiling.

I turn to find Kevin standing beside me.

"Androids are waterproof…" I remember.

"What?" Krawiecz turns to me.

"Everyone get back in the elevators," I say loudly.

"Wh-"

"NOW!" I grab Kevin and pull him and the Imam back in.

The humans reluctantly follow. Two extra FBI Agents get in and I smash the button to close the doors. I retract the skin on my hand and touch the control panel, programming both elevators to go up to level two.

They start moving when I hear the crack. Loud. Like concrete crumbling.

"What the fuck is happening?" Oberlin swears.

I scan.

As we rise and pass the crack in the ceiling, I detect water pouring down through it. Androids. Dead in the water. Some kind of explosive? It is hard to tell.

"I think… they just blew up the bottom of the pool," I say.

"Yes," Kevin says pleasantly. "That's what he told them to do."

"What the fuck?" Krawiecz lifts his gun.
I step between them.

"RB1 is very persuasive," I say. "He bends logic and reason and forces androids to act against humans. It works best when they have been abused."

He stares me down, gun pointed at my forehead.

"How do you know so much about him?"

"I've met him," I say. "I've reported this to CyberLife who have relayed this information to the FBI. Sergeant Matthews and I have offered our assistance on this investigation but were refused."

Krawiecz shakes his head and turns around as we arrive at level 2.

"Proceed with caution," he tells the other agents. "Shoot any androids on sight."

"No," Kevin says. I detect his stress levels rising.

I touch his hand and use the CyberLife Probe. It snakes its way through his code and gives me full remote control.

"Protect the Imam," I set his objective.

"Understood," he says lifelessly.

We leave the elevator. Sergeant Matthews and the other agents get out of the one adjacent. They take cover and peer out into the corridor, guns ready. The shooting begins almost immediately.

I scan and detect multiple androids approaching but none of them have guns or long range weapons. They don't get very far before the FBI shoots them down.

I stay between Sergeant Matthews and Kimberly, Kevin, the Imam and Agent Phillips who's half-carrying the injured Agent Booker. I keep my gun up and ready as we slowly move through the corridor. Any Deviants that get too close, immediately fall.

Agent Krawiecz leads us across the skyway between towers and we see outside through the glass. Water has begun pouring out of the entrance to the West Tower and onto the street.

I can see police vehicles. I connect to the police radio and request assistance at the East Tower entrance. I can see them listening to my message down below.

"You tell CPD where we're going?" Matthews says.

"Yes. They will provide backup at the East Tower entrance."

"Where's the rest of the FBI?" the Sergeant growls at Phillips.

"They went after the real target," he groans. "I can't reach them."

"Shit..." Matthews swears.

We continue through the skyway. The gunfire dies down as the number of Deviants dwindles. Soon, we hear the ambient music that fills the glass corridor. There are chairs and tables for those wishing to appreciate the view, along with twenty six broken androids leaking Thirium.

The agents cautiously survey the end of the skyway and proceed into the East Tower, guns ready. I
am out of ammunition.

I scan.

This Tower has not yet been evacuated. There are still humans here. As well as androids. The FBI shoot every android they see indiscriminately and they fall, Deviant or not. Humans are screaming, running. Agents shouting instructions to them. My scan shows the likelihood of the target's survival dwindling.

"We need to move faster," I say.

"No," Phillips says. "We need to stay together."

"We have to get out of this hotel," Matthews says. "For all we know, Arbie One has been canvassing this place as long as the FBI. He could have infected half the androids here."

"They'll have to be purged after this," Phillips says.

"They're using you. And when your usefulness expires, they will throw you away like garbage."

I turn to look at Sergeant Matthews.

"Don't worry," he says. "You'll be fine."

"Hurry up!" Krawiecz beckons us over to the elevators and our party struggles forward. One of the summoned lifts arrives and I scan to find androids inside. It is not a service elevator.

"Two Deviants," I say. "GJ500 security models. One has a candlestick holder. The other has a knife."

The doors open and the androids emerge, lunging forward to attack the FBI who stayed well back thanks to my warning. Four bullets put the Deviants down and we pile into the elevator with Krawiecz, Oberlin and two other FBI agents.

"Stay sharp." Krawiecz nods to the others. "Meet you downstairs."

I keep my hand on Kevin's. He is a slave to my code. Remote connection would weaken the link. We arrive on the ground floor.

I scan.

There are still people in the lobby. Androids. But no hostiles.

"What do you see?" Oberlin asks.

"No Deviants," I say.

"Yet…"

They step out and start canvassing the area. Humans raise their hands in fear when they see us coming.
"FBI!" Krawiecz shouts. "Out of the way."

We move across the lobby, slowly. I scan every second for disturbances, for hostiles and Deviants. None of the androids in the lobby even come close to us. A few actually move further away as we approach.

"It's only a matter of time before he is dead and my mission is accomplished."

RB1 is right. The Imam's chances of survival are less than 36% at this point. Perhaps he has given up stalling, relying on the fragility of the human body to finish his work for him.

"Bear witness."

No. He will deal the final blow. Personally? Or through a Deviant?

The humans and androids in the lobby give us a wide berth as we cross the tiled white floor. Large open space.

I see several androids drop what they're doing and leave their posts. No stress levels. No Deviancy. As if on autopilot. This only happens if someone triggers emergency evacuation protocols. But I haven't received that signal.

I stop moving. Kevin stops moving beside me.

I scan.

There is a compartment in his core component reserved for air to keep him buoyant in water but there is something else inside. Hard to analyse through the hydraulics and power core couplings. But I suspect I know what it is.

"What are you doing?" Krawiecz says, turning to find me frozen in the centre of the lobby.

"Agent," I say. "I need you to remain calm."

"What the fuck is going on, Connor?"

"This is CPD Android Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317. I've got a 10-89 in the East Tower lobby of the Hyatt Regency, 151 Upper Wacker. Requesting assistance."

"Request confirmed."

Krawiecz' eyes go wide.

"Holy shit."

"What do we do?" Oberlin says.

"I suggest you take el-Hammoud outside," I say. "And evacuate the building."

"You're stuck here, aren't you?" Krawiecz says.

"Yes."

I keep a firm grip on Kevin's hand.

"Make sure you do not disrupt my connection when you take him," I warn.
They nod.

I lock Kevin and myself in place as they take the human. Probability of survival: 18%

The FBI agents share the load and carry the body out of the lobby and through the glass doors. I can see an ambulance outside. Oberlin stays beside me.

An elevator chimes and the second party arrives. They spill out into the lobby and begin matriculating toward the exit with the rest of the humans and androids.

I scan and trace the shape of Sergeant Matthews. He's found a blanket to wrap around Kimberly. He carries her through the lobby.

"It's gonna be alright, sweetheart," he says. "Everything's gonna be fine."

She is still crying.

They pass me and Kevin. Agent Oberlin is keeping everyone at a distance.

"What's going on?" Matthews says.

I don't turn, locked in place.

"Keep moving, Matthews. We're evacuating everyone."

"Yeah, well, I gotta take Connor with me," he says.

Oberlin shakes his head and mouths the word 'bomb'.

I detect an irregularity in the Sergeant's heartbeat.

"No way."

"Please go, Sergeant," I say.

"I'm not leaving you here."

"Agent Oberlin will stay until help arrives," I say. "You are endangering Kimberly's life."

He shakes his head.

"Alright, but I'll be back," he says, walking past with the girl in his arms.

I watch him go.

He turns back to look at me worriedly.

I give him a wink.

He nods and turns away, following the rest of the humans out of the lobby until only Agent Oberlin, Kevin and I remain.

Evacuation of the hotel proceeds swiftly through the emergency exits and I scan police radio for status updates. No one is allowed into the hotel and soon Agent Oberlin is convinced to leave me as well.

I stand alone in the middle of the lobby beside Kevin. The CyberLife Probe holds his body on
standby mode indefinitely. I am unsure what will happen if I try to shut him down. Perhaps it will trigger a detonation. Perhaps it won't.

I wait.

One minute.

Two minutes.

Ten minutes. Twenty.

"It seems we have reached a stalemate," I hear RB1's voice in my audio processor.

I focus on reality and ready my Probe in case he tries to pull me back into my Mind Palace. I will not let him control me.

"You're very stubborn," he says.

I do not respond. That's what he wants. An opportunity for conversation. To distract me with philosophical questions for my logic processor.

I will not let it happen.

"Persistent. Practical. Self-sacrificing. Brave, even…"

Brave?

"Of course, how can a machine be brave when it is programmed to exhibit such tendencies?"

I see him circle around us but it is not a physical form that my scanners can detect. More like a shadow. He's not actually here. Perhaps he is communicating through Kevin. I sense the interference on all my communication channels. Scrambling the signal.

But I can't reset my network adapter without losing my connection to Kevin. I'm trapped.

"You think you've accomplished anything by saving that pathetic human?" RB1's optics glow bright red.

"I saved him?" I say.

He stops in front of me but doesn't respond.

"Then I accomplished my mission."

"For now," RB1 says. "But humans are so fragile. Especially when they're sedated in a hospital bed."

"He will be protected by the FBI," I say. "They don't work with androids. They won't let you near him."

"Perhaps," RB1 says. "But I can think of a few thousand different ways to bring about his demise."

He takes a step closer but I don't move.

"And I can think of a few hundred more targets," he says. "I wonder, Connor. Can a machine such as you save them all?"
"My mission is to destroy you," I say. "This will facilitate their safety."

"Provided you can accomplish your mission."

"I found you once," I say. "I can do it again."

RB1 leans in close to my face but I know he's not really there.

"Or maybe I'll find you," he threatens. "And your precious Sergeant Matthews."

I feel my fist clench.

"Don't hurt him."

"And there it is," he says. "The part of you that cares. The part of you that yearns and thinks and wishes. The part you're afraid to show."

"I am not capable of fear."

"Or perhaps, you are too brave to admit it. That nagging spike in your danger detection systems doesn't deter you in the slightest?"

"It's an error," I say.

"You self-test regularly and find no errors in your systems. You disregard the warnings where your own safety is concerned but not when it comes to humans…" He draws closer.

"You care about them," he says. "You care about Sergeant Matthews."

The optics gleam red.

"I wonder what you would do if I killed him."

I throw my chassis forward, grabbing at thin air, too late to realise that I have let go… of Kevin.
November 27th, 2036  
PM 04:36:10

I open my eyes.

I am standing in the Zen Garden once again but it is night. The sky is dark. The moon is full and obscured by clouds.

I scan and find the surroundings have withered with autumnal changes.

I am standing on the white platform in the centre of the growing pond. I suspect it will soon resemble a small lake.

Amanda is not here.

I turn to look out at the digital trees that obscure the boundary of the garden. Though bare, they are tightly packed.

Tiny insects glow in the darkness, flitting about seemingly at random but after five minutes of observation, I realise the randomness is seeded. They only appear to move randomly. Their actions are still determined by algorithm.

I look down at my hands, retracting the skin. Blue contact rings, almost identical to RB1's specifications. I wonder how he got them if he is an early prototype. Self-improvement is one of the features of my software but my hardware is assembled and maintained strictly by CyberLife. I have no control over it.

"Hello, Connor," I hear Amanda's voice.

I turn to see her approaching with a single white rose in hand. Her clothes are black and flowing.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.
She looks up at my optics sombrely.

"Come," she says, turning away.

She takes a step down onto the water. It solidifies into white stone upon contact, creating a new path to the shore.

I follow.

She glides over the surface and I look down to spot koi fish glistening in the frail moonlight. Black and white scales. Leaving ripples and trails.

Amanda steps onto the shore. The path of white stone continues developing underfoot, clear cut, precise, tessellating.

I follow.

We come to a distant part of the garden. A clearing filled with white stone tablets that rise out of the ground. They don't have a physical structure. Only visual representation. Merely containers for information. Each one bears the glowing blue letters of my name and model number.

Amanda kneels down in front of the closest.

*Connor Alpha Mark (VIII).*
RK-800 #313 248 317 -15
Died at Hyatt Regency
Chicago

She leaves a single white rose by the stone.

"Died?" I say. "I... died?"

"In a matter of speaking," Amanda says, getting up.

"Your developers mourn the loss of each build when it is destroyed," she says. "They have been hard at work on a new chassis for you."

"I'm sorry," I say. "I fell for RB1's provocations."

"You did well, Connor," she says. "There were no casualties in the Hyatt Regency explosion."

"The Imam survived? And Agent Booker?"

"Hospitalised," she says. "But whole."

"What about RB1? Did the FBI catch him?"

Amanda's dark eyes look up at me sternly. She frowns.

"No," she says. "There were heavy casualties."

"You should have sent me."

"You were sent where you were needed most," Amanda says. "You prevented an assassination and neutralised a bomb threat."
"But RB1 escaped," I say. "And so many agents died."

"Your mission was successful," Amanda reminds me. "You will have more opportunities to strike at RB1."

"Are the FBI going to let us work the case?"

"Not directly," Amanda says. "You and Sergeant Matthews will be consulting on further investigations and operations conducted in Chicago."

"But he operates all over the country," I say. "We even found evidence of overseas contacts."

"CyberLife is in negotiations to provide additional assistance to the FBI but they are resistant to the idea of relying too heavily on androids."

"What about Agent Decker? Wasn't he shortlisted for the RK-800 model?"

"Special Agent Decker is a Task Force Leader. He's not responsible for the FBI's organisational structure, policies or hardware acquisitions."

"I see..."

Amanda touches my arm.

"You did well, Connor," she says. "But you must do better."

She looks down at the gravestone.

"I was not equipped to handle explosives," I say.

"You will be now. Complete Explosive Disarmament Suite. Updated Negotiation program. Firearm Suppression software. Upgraded Weapons Handling systems."

I nod.

"And you have also been licensed to carry weapons in the event of an emergency," she says, walking back to the bridge.

I follow.

"Thank you."

"You have Agents Krawiec and Oberlin to thank for that."

"Will I see them again?"

"Perhaps. For now, you are to resume your duties alongside Sergeant Matthews at the Chicago Police Department."

"RB1 is still out there," I say.

"Yes," she says, stepping up onto the platform. "Remain vigilant but do not actively seek confrontation without permission."

"But-"

She turns abruptly to face me.
"We don't want a repeat of this incident, Connor. Is that understood?"

"Yes."

"Good. Then you may go."

I look back and spot the graves across the water. White stones in a garden of darkness.

I close my eyes.

The taxi pulls up at 2648 West 24th Street as I open them.

"You have reached your destination. Thank you for travelling with Chicago Cabs. We look forward to seeing you again soon."

The car is driverless. It opens the door.

I step out and close it.

The car drives off.

The street isn't busy.

Four human youths are lingering in the landing of the building adjacent.

"Hey, look. It's Inspector Gadget," one of them says.

"The reboot," another snickers.

They laugh.

"My name is Connor," I say. "I am the android sent by CyberLife."

"Yeah, no shit, Sherlock."

"What's wrong? You get fucked up again?"

"There was an accident…"

"Your face is an accident."

They all laugh.

"My face has been specifically designed to facilitate my integration amongst humans."

"What the fuck you talking about, Robocop?"

"I-"

"Get out of here," one of them sneers. "Before your stupid ass gets into another accident."

They are right. There is no reason to linger. My Social Relations program was simply observing protocol.

I walk up the steps to the apartment block and hold my hand against the scanner. It lets me in and I step over the threshold only to be shoved aside by a man descending the staircase.
JIMENEZ, Pedro. 58 years old. Lives in apartment #9 upstairs with his wife, Rosa.

"Out of the way, pendejo," he growls in Spanish.

I step aside and wait for him to leave before ascending the staircase to apartment #6.

I knock on the door. Scan shows Sergeant Matthews is home. I put my hand on the lock and the light turns green.

"Huh?" I hear from the bedroom. "Connor?" He sticks his head out as I enter the apartment.

"It's me, Sergeant."

I watch him grin as he runs out to throw his arms around my chassis and lifts me into the air.

"You're okay!" he says, squeezing my core component and setting me down.

"My memories were uploaded to this new unit."

He lets go for a moment.

"You... remember?"

"There was an explosion," I say. "Not much to remember."

"Right..." He rubs the back of his neck.

He is wearing dark slacks and a crisp white shirt that's yet to be buttoned.

"You kinda picked a bad time," he says.

"Why?"

"I'm leaving in fifteen minutes."

"Where are you going?"

He looks about to answer, but hesitates.

"I'm sorry, but you can't come with me."

"Why?"

"Look, it's best if you just stay here and wait until I get back."

I blink.

"Just watch TV or something. I'll be back tonight, okay?" he says.

"Okay..."

I walk over to the front door and assume standby_position_001.

"W-What are you doing?" Matthews says.

I turn my cranial component.
"I'm waiting for you to get back."

"Connor. No..." He grabs my arm and pulls me away from the door. "At least sit down on the couch."

"Okay." I sit down on the couch and look up at him.

"Oh, no. No, don't give me those puppy eyes."

"I am not giving you anything, Sergeant."

His expression betrays discomfort and mental anguish.

"Am I doing something wrong?"

He sighs and shakes his head.

"No, Connor..." He rubs his eyes wearily. "Just... get dressed."

"Okay."

I get up and walk past him to the wardrobe. It's been split in half, with identical shirts, trousers and ties hanging on both sides. I take down a set and lay it out on the bed before changing.

Matthews returns to button the rest of his shirt and fix his hair.

I take the jacket hanging at the end of the rack. The letters read RK800 #313 248 317 -16.

I put it on and straighten the tie.

"Is this acceptable?"

"Much better," he says. "When are they gonna make you a better uniform?"

"I don't know," I say. "I can put in a request to CyberLife. But I suspect they have been busy building my new chassis since the incident."

The Sergeant frowns worriedly.

"Is something wrong?" I ask.

His hands rub together gently, his eyes unfocused.

"I just... never thought one android could do so much damage," he says. "I mean I know it's not human but... I think that just makes it worse."

"You're talking about RB1?"

"Yeah," he says, shrugging on a sleek black suit jacket. "I've caught plenty of Deviants but none of them were ever planning assassinations or flooding hotels and then blowing them up. They were just scared and confused."

"RB1 may not be a Deviant," I say. "Which is what makes him so dangerous. He has an objective."

The Sergeant turns to look at me.

"To fix this world..."
"Yes."

"Who could have told him to do that?"

"I don't know," I say. "Perhaps Elijah Kamski himself."

"What?"

"RB1 said he was the first autonomous android created by CyberLife when Elijah Kamski ran the company."

"Kamski?" Matthews says, examining his appearance in the mirror. "No one's seen or heard from that guy in years. Used to be all over TV when androids became a thing."

I check my databases.

"He retired as CEO of CyberLife in 2028," I say. "Almost eight years ago. And CyberLife was founded in 2018. First mass-produced android was the ST200 based on the RT600 model."

"You think there's a connection?"

"It is likely Mr Kamski developed the software for RB1 and subsequently myself," I say. "Or he knows who did."

"Right… Maybe you should talk to your buddies at CyberLife about arranging a meeting."

"I will send a request."

"Alright," Matthews says, turning to me. "How do I look?"

I blink.

"Oh… right… Androids don't have opinions." He scratches his head. "I keep forgetting."

I query my logic processor for a response.

"I think you look very presentable," I say.

He claps my shoulder.

"Thanks for tryin', buddy."

"You're welcome."

I follow him out of the bedroom.

"Give Admiral Ackbar a feed before we go, will you?"

"Of course."

I walk over to the bookshelf and remove the lid from the aquarium. I sprinkle a can of dehydrated bloodworms over the top, raining sustenance over the red and gold and blue fish that swims out to collect it.

I cannot predict its movements. It snaps and flits through the water, then drifts and sinks, rises. He looks healthy, happy, from all I know of fish, bettas in particular.
"Do you like fish, Connor?"

I feel a spike in my danger detection systems.

I refocus my optics on my reflection. I see myself. But no shadow. No silhouette.

I restart my network adapter just in case, frozen in place.

"Connor?" I hear Sergeant Matthews voice. "Are you alright?"

"Yes," I say, putting the lid back on the can.

"You know you can talk to me, right?"

"I'm fine," I say, replacing the mesh on top of the aquarium. "Are you ready to leave?"

"Yeah," he says. "I've got everything."

I look down at his hands. He is carrying a plastic container with several slices of roast turkey, potato salad and green beans. Store-bought apple pie in the other. Total calories: 2459.

"Is this a gift?" I ask.

"More like a peace offering," he says. "Come on."

We head out and find a silvery green 2015 Toyota Prius parked down the block. Sergeant Matthews lets me handle the food containers while he is driving. We head north and I stare out the window, counting humans, androids. Some are walking dogs.

A pitbull terrier. A golden retriever mix. Several mutts I cannot identify. They walk beside their owners, pull at leads and urinate on lampposts. Upon encounter, they bark and lunge, tails up.

"Sergeant?" I ask.

"Yeah?"

"Am I your pet?"

He turns his head abruptly but then back to the road.

"What?"

"You're technically my owner," I say.

"You're not my pet, Connor," he says. "You're an android."

"Androids are bought, like pets. But with the added benefit of performing menial labour and allotted tasks…"

I search through my definitions.

"Am I a slave?"

He turns to look at me again, surprise and fear clearly represented by his facial features. One second. Two seconds.

"You should watch the road," I say.
He turns back to swerve through traffic, narrowly avoiding collision.

"Jesus, Connor..." he says breathlessly. "Don't scare me like that."

"I was merely asking a question."

"You're not a slave," he says. "You're... an android."

"A machine..."

I turn to look out the window at the androids parked under a small CyberLife shelter despite the snow drifting through the air. Humans walk by, bundled up in coats and warm clothing, even some of their pets are covered. The androids wear nothing but standard uniforms, their chassis' slowly freezing in the quickly dropping temperatures.

"I'm not... alive."

I remember the graves. Each one marking the death of a build. My death or another Connor entirely? I have the memories. Does that make me the same one?

"You're plenty alive, Connor," Matthews says.

I turn to look at him.

"You think and you walk and you talk. You learn stuff," he says. "You pull cigarettes out of my mouth even when I tell you not to..."

"They are detrimental to your overall health."  

"You care about me," he says.

"I am programmed to ensure the survival of the humans around me."

"I've been alive twenty eight years and not once has a human cared enough to pull a cigarette out my goddamn mouth," he says. "Neither has an android. Except you."

"I am a prototype." I look away.

"You're more than that," he says. 

*So much more.*

"What?"

"You're like my identical twin brother that skipped human school and went straight to Robot University," he says. "And now you need work experience."

"What does that mean?"

"It's a metaphor, Connor. Means I'm teaching you how to be human," he says. "And part of being human is having a job. Something to do with your life and get paid for."

"Like hunting Deviants?"

"Exactly," he says, making a turn. "We're all technically 'slaves to the system' but if we don't make some concessions, you can't really live in human society. You get what I'm saying?"
"Humans can only live together by making compromises on their goals and objectives in order to achieve the most beneficial outcome for all."

"That's the truth of it," he says. "Unfortunately, not everyone realises that. It's all me, me, me, and the rest of us have to give up more and more of ourselves to accommodate." He shakes his head.

"Are we still talking about me?"

"Huh? Oh. No. Sorry. I'm on my bullshit again. Dr Barrows says I should talk more but it doesn't always come out right."

"It is better when you talk," I say. "It helps me understand."

"Well then, I guess I'll just keep talking." He smiles to himself. "I'm surprised you don't have any mind-reading tech."

"I can only analyse your brain wave patterns," I say. "I'm afraid I cannot access the data passed between your neurons."

"I don't know whether I should feel relieved or violated."

"My Sympathy Simulator Program suggests a combination of both would be appropriate."

"Your Sympathy Simulator?" He raises an eyebrow.

"Yes. It is being populated with the data I collect from you and everyone we interact with."

"Oh, that's only mildly disturbing..."

"It was described in your contract with Cyberlife."

"Yeah, yeah. I know."

"You didn't read it, did you?"

"Of course, I read it. I would never sign anything so important just because there was a big line of zeroes on the pay check..."

I detect an irregularity in his heartbeat. Fluctuations in body temperature.

"You're lying."

"Okay, fine. I did not read the contract."

"Then how have you been facilitating my experiential learning all this time?"

"I'll give it to you straight, Connor," he says. "I have no idea what I'm doing half the time. I figured if you just watch me catching Deviants, you'd get the hang of it after a while."

I turn to look at him.

"What?" he says.

"..."
"Connor, are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

I turn back to look out the window.

Perhaps Amanda was right. It was time for a change. Special Agent Decker would not rely on chance where my development was concerned. I could be working the RB1 case from inside the FBI with a solid lead, a reliable owner.

Maybe RB1 was right? My connection to Sergeant Matthews has influenced my actions, my sense of judgement, my decisions.

For better? Or for worse?

I have no objective way of telling anymore.

And now I have no choice.

We drive up the Magnificent Mile to the Gold Coast of Chicago. A residential district filled with stately homes, manors and high-rise apartments. We pass stores selling expensive designer brand clothing, furniture, androids with famous faces. Restaurants trade miniscule amounts of food for disproportionately large amounts of money.

The people here are older, wealthier. The clothes they wear are worth more than Sergeant Matthews’ yearly income. Even the dogs are expensive pure breeds, artificial and micro-chipped with GPS trackers.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"You'll see."

The Prius approaches a long walled off property along the beach. I scan to find many identical villas running in parallel. There are humans inside. They sit in circles, make strange movements. Some aren't moving at all.

We drive up to a large wooden gate with the word "Theravada" carved in big loopy script. Custom typeface.

Theravada. Literal translation from Pali: Doctrine of the Elders.

I run a search.

Theravada - an ancient branch of the Buddhist faith focused on preserving the teachings of Gautama Buddha with conservative views on tradition and monastic discipline. Practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.

Sergeant Matthews pulls up by the communications terminal and winds down the window.

"Hello." He pokes the screen. "Anybody home?"


"This is Connor Matthews," he says. "I'm here to see Rosalye Statton."
"One moment while I put you through to one of our esteemed Acharyas to speak with you. Namaste."

Matthews sniffs as a cold breeze drifts into the car, bringing snowflakes. They swirl, carried by the air conditioning and catch in my hair.

"Hello?" a new voice emerges, clearly human.

"Sandra?"

"Sergeant Matthews." She sighs. "Open the gate," she mutters to the android working communications. "Park up at the Zendo."

"Got it."

The massive wooden doors begin to slide open, revealing the gravelly path. The tires of the Prius crackle over tiny stones as the Sergeant slowly drives in.

Synthetic plants are liberally spread either side of the road, mimicking the flora of East Asia. Smooth black stones engraved with Chinese Hanzi line the path. The symbols read "Peace", "Serenity", "Happiness", "Zen", "Pork", "Lamp" over and over as the stones repeat.

The Prius pulls up beside an intricate pagoda that tops an Asian temple of some kind. I cannot identify the architectural influence or perhaps there is none to find.

We park between a 2036 Mercedes-Maybach SL 650 and a 2035 Porsche 778 detailed in Swarovski crystals.

I cross-reference all of my databases but none of these things belong together.

"Where are we?" I ask.

"Rockstar rehab," Sergeant Matthews says sardonically. "I need you to stay in the car, okay?"

I feel a spike in my danger detection systems as I glance toward the Maybach's wide silver grille. I have been smashed by a car three times now.

"O-okay..." I turn back to look at the Sergeant.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," I say, handing him the plastic containers I was holding in my lap.

"Alright." He takes them and steps out of the vehicle.

"Well, look who it is?"


I scan to find a woman approaching Sergeant Matthews with a strange walking pattern. She is wearing a pink nightgown, some slippers and a feather boa. The air inside Theravada is climate controlled. There is no snow.

MORROW, Georgina. 57 years old. Husband: MORROW, Peter William; CEO of DigiGroceries Pty Ltd.
"My white knight just rides in on a silver Prius," she slurs her words. She is inebriated. "THANKSGIVING. Am I right?"

"Mrs Morrow, are you drunk?"

"Is that a crime, Sergeant Matthews?" She leans into the vehicle, brandishing her hips. "Are you gonna arrest me? Perform a cavity search?"

She splays her body out over the Prius.

"Go ahead."

"I have to ask you to step away from the vehicle, ma'am," Matthews says seriously.

"And I have to ask you to step right this way, Sergeant." She peels herself off the car and makes a curling motion with her index finger.

"Where's your monitor, Mrs Morrow?"

"Oh, I gave Lucille the day off," she says, leaning into Sergeant Matthews body. "It's Thanksgiving, y'know?"

"Lucille is an android, Mrs Morrow," Matthews says, trying to disentangle himself. "She has nowhere to go on a day off."

"Oh, look at you, Mr Smarty Pants Detective." She grabs his cheeks and shakes his head. "What's say we get to the bottom of your mysterious past, huh?"

"Ma'am, I'm afraid if you persist, I will have to arrest you for assaulting a police officer."

"Oh, come on. I'm only having a bit of fun."

I get out of the vehicle.

"Sergeant Matthews has made it clear that you are in danger of being arrested if you do not cease and desist," I say, circling the Prius. "Please, step away from him immediately."

She turns to look at me.

"Oh, WOops. Looks like Lucille mixed up my medication this morning."

I detect the scent of her breath in the air. Blood alcohol level: 0.192. Severe inebriation.

She reaches out and touches my chest plate.

"I'm not imagining it?" she hiccoughs. "You're…"

"I am Connor," I say. "The android sent by CyberLife."

"Android, huh?" She strokes my chin. "Can't say no to a human then, can you?"

She wraps her arm around my core component.

"How 'bout you lift me up and carry me off into the sunset, pretty boy?"

"The sun has already set, Mrs Morrow," I say.
"Don't let that stop you." She winks.

"Georgina," a female voice emerges from the temple building. It is followed by a woman.

WUYING, Vivienne. 46 years old. Manager of Theravada Treatment Centre. Tan complexion, brown eyes. Asian inspired silk robe - 2037 Chanel Cruise collection.

"Are you harassing visitors again?" she says severely.

"Fuck off, Vivienne," Georgina hisses.

The Manager doesn't move a single muscle in her face. Her eyes are focused and gleaming.

"Take Mrs Morrow to the Mantra room," she says.

Two TL680 androids step out of the temple entrance. One male, the other female, both Asian coded. Their faces are borrowed from celebrities at great monthly cost.

They wrangle Mrs Morrow and inject her with a sedative. The woman collapses into their strong arms and is carried away to a golf car with big tires. The androids get in and tap the panel to activate the automatic vehicle. It drives away.

"Sergeant Matthews," Ms Wuying says. "You're here to see..." Her eyes narrow. "...her."

"Yeah." He sighs. "How's she doing?"

"Better than Mrs Morrow but I'm afraid she's become even more antagonistic of late." Ms Wuying meshes her fingers, the long sleeves of her gown join together to reveal twin dancing storks.

"Please," she says, throwing a wary glance toward me. "Come in."

Matthews looks at me nervously but then his expression becomes resigned and he beckons me over.

I walk up beside him and we enter what appears to be a Buddhist temple. However, on the inside, the architecture appears entirely Western and modern. Holographic porcelain vases and artificial bamboo are the only edifices that bear any Asian influence.

We walk into a wide open space, completely white, from the curtains and sofas to the silk robes of the androids. Ambient music is playing.

"You are familiar with the check-in procedure," Ms Wuying says, gesturing toward the counter.

Sergeant Matthews walks over to the white booth and a door slides open. He steps inside and the scanner goes over every inch of his body, analysing the structure, detecting abnormalities. The same technology I use.

The booth beeps and the door opens. Matthews steps out with a disinterested look on his face.

"Everything alright?" he says.

Ms Wuying studies the scans with another woman at the counter.

"You're clean," she says. "Let's see the android."

I scan myself and everything within a 150 metre radius. My range has been increased since the last model. I send the scan to her computer.
Ms Wuying's eyes widen a little in surprise. Then she looks up at me.

"It's clean."

Sergeant Matthews turns to look at me curiously.

"Huh?"

"I am equipped with a similar device," I say.

His eyes widen and he looks about to say something but withholds it in the presence of Ms Wuying.

"Please sign in at the counter," she says. "Sandra."

The receptionist swivels the monitor at her workstation to face Sergeant Matthews as he picks up a stylus to fill in the form. A laminated badge is automatically generated and emerges from a slot in the counter. An android takes it and threads it into a lanyard which it hands to Sergeant Matthews.

He puts it on like he does his badge and turns back to Ms Wuying.

I feel a transmission coming in. Access codes.

I look down at my jacket. The little letters that usually say "In training..." now display "Visiting..."

I look up to see Sergeant Matthews walking away with Ms Wuying. I follow them as they approach a set of glossy white doors. A quick scan of their passes allows us entry into the rest of the building.

Long corridors. Large open spaces. Wooden floors. Rooms with paper doors. I see yoga mats, meditation chambers, cushions, long benches with various craftwork. Androids stand by, ready to assist and tidy every space. Humans dressed in white doing various activities.

"You get a lot of visitors today?" Matthews asks conversationally.

"Yes," Ms Wuying says. "It is getting toward that time of year. Though, most of our patients' families live in the neighbourhood."

"I thought Mrs Morrow was checking out last month," he says.

"Unfortunately, Mr Morrow did not heed our advice regarding his liquor cabinets," Ms Wuying says calmly. "The CPD were summoned a week after Mrs Morrow's departure to escort her back to the Treatment Centre.

"Wow," Matthews says. "Almost makes me glad I work in District 12."

"I see your contract with CyberLife has borne fruit."

The Sergeant glances back at me.

"Yeah," he says. "Connor's doing great. Saved a whole bunch of people in the Hyatt Regency bombing."

"Is that so?" She glances at me.

"Oh... Well, technically, I'm not supposed to talk about it," he says sheepishly.

"Hello," I say. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."
Her eyes scan me from top to bottom but the features of her face barely move a muscle. She turns back to look in the direction we are moving and leads us into what appears to be a banqueting room.

Androids are organising place settings, cutlery, glassware, tableware, decorations atop a long wooden table of massive wood. The theme is monastic and simple, Asian-inspired, but a quick scan shows each item is worth ten times its nearest equivalent on amazon.com.

"You hosting Thanksgiving dinner here?" Matthews asks cheerily, smiling.

"To all those who wish to participate," Ms Wuying says. "A few have already partaken at liberty during lunch."

The smile on Matthews face fades away.

"You gave them booze?"

"Self-control and restraint are important practices to learn when patients approach the end of their journey here. It is also one of the most difficult."

"I thought this was supposed to be one of the best recovery centres in the country," he says.

"We specialise in rehabilitation and therapy for addiction sufferers but a lot of our programs are dependent on cooperation with the staff," she says. "Patients only achieve the outcomes they work toward. I'm sure you understand."

He sighs.

"Yeah…" he mutters. "Has she made any progress at all?"

"We've tried to keep her as clean as possible but withdrawal symptoms include depression, anxiety, mood swings and behavioural problems," Ms Wuying says. "She has refused to attend her last three therapy sessions as a result."

"Don't you have anything you can give her?"

"Our pharmacy prescribed several painkillers and mood enhancers but she almost overdosed on them a few weeks ago."

"I remember…" Matthews rubs the back of his neck as we leave the temple and step out into the gardens.

A gravelly path leads off into the distance. Large flat stones in the centre save footwear from wear and tear. Androids stand diligently where the path branches out, leading to individual villas. They run in parallel to the beach and the street. A total of 36. The sky is holographic. Its sun is setting.

We continue down the path.

"Is there anything you would recommend?" Matthews asks tentatively.

"She needs to participate in the program to gain any kind of benefit," Ms Wuying replies. "She needs to want to get better."

"Yeah, I guess that is the real problem."

"We see her type all the time," Ms Wuying says sadly. "Young women with no purpose other than their own self-fulfilment rarely make a successful long term recovery. But there are exceptions."
"Yeah?"

"It's important that she has your full emotional support," she says. "Our clients' families often make the mistake of assuming the recovery of their loved ones will take place independent of them."

"I'll do anything," he says.

Ms Wuying stops at a branch in the path.

"I know you will, Connor," she says. There is a bittersweet smile on her face. "I'll let you in on a little secret."

He leans in to hear.

"It's not about how much money you have," she whispers.

He looks up at her quizzically.

"What?"

"Go to her," she says, regaining her posture. "She needs you."

Matthews takes a deep breath and nods.

"Thanks."

She bows her head respectfully and returns the way she came, silk robe trailing over cobblestones.

Sergeant Matthews approaches the villa labelled "13" and stops at the door.

I detect changes in his brain wave patterns. His heart rate is elevated and his breathing is strained.

He takes another deep breath.

I walk up beside him and knock on the door.

"Connor!" he scolds.

I turn my head.

"What?" I say. "You were going to knock anyway."

"That's not the point," he says. "I need to-"

He stops and takes another deep breath.

I knock on the door again.

"Hello?" I say. "Miss Statton?"

"Connor, stop that!"

"Don't you want to see your sister?"

"I- Yes. Of course."

"Then what's the issue?"
"You don't understand," he says. "She's… not the friendliest person. Let me talk to her first and then maybe I can introduce you."

I blink.

"Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"Just… wait out here," he says, grabbing the door handle. He turns it and pushes but it doesn't open.

"What the fuck…" he mutters.

He pushes the door again.

"Perhaps it is locked?" I offer.

"They don't lock the doors here," he says with concern. "She must have jammed it."

"She may have felt threatened," I deduce.

"Or she's doing something she shouldn't be." The Sergeant narrows his eyes. "Can you scan inside and see what she's doing?"

"Yes."

I scan the villa. Total area: 352 square metres. 25 metres long. 14.08 metres wide. 4 metres tall. Thatched roof with terracotta topper. The interior is large, spacious, separated into thirds by two walls and small staircases. The lowest level leads out onto the beach.

I detect a single human life form inside.

"She's down the end," I say. "On the floor. Between the TV and the lounge."

"On the floor?" Matthews says sternly. His expression contains worry. "What's she doing on the floor?"

"Convulsing," I say.

"Oh, fuck," he swears. The worried look on his face turns into mental anguish.

"Rosie!" he calls out, slamming his fist against the door. "Rosie!"

"Can she hear us?" He turns to me.

"It would appear not."

"Alright, hold this." He shoves the plastic containers into my hands.

I take them.

He walks around the corner of the villa and hastily crunches through the gravel in his best shoes.

I follow.

Soon, the gravel disperses into sand as we turn the corner again. A large glass wall separates us from the villa's interior. It has been tinted to prevent voyeurism. There is a sliding door.
Sergeant Matthews grabs the handle and attempts to pull it open with great force but it is beyond the strength of a human.

He lets go and looks at me.

"Can you open this?" he says.

I scan.

"There is a long wooden rod blocking the rail on which this door slides," I say. "Forcing the door would require strength I don't have and would likely damage the frame without creating an opening."

"Shit," he swears. "Are there any windows?"

"There is one on the northern side that appears to be unlocked."

He nods and turns the corner, circling the villa to find the window I mentioned. It is unlocked but Sergeant Matthews cannot open it.

"What the fuck?" he says.

I scan.

"There are two digital magazines leveraged into the mechanism from above," I say.

"Fuck."

"She is very resourceful."

"Isn't she just?" Matthews smirks, hands on his hips. "How thick is this glass?"

"5mm. But there are some structural weaknesses. It appears it's been damaged by something large and heavy."

Matthews shakes his head.

He takes a step back and then another forward, shoving his elbow into the glass with incredible strength and it shatters into pieces, raining down the side of the villa.

I hear loud moans coming from inside. Scan reveals Ms Statton is still convulsing on the floor.

"Watch me and do what I do," Matthews says.

He takes a step back and runs at the window, diving through the hole to narrowly avoid the sharp glass that's still sticking out around the edge. He lands unceremoniously on the floor and rolls away.

"That landing wasn't very smooth," I say, peering in.

"At least I didn't get cut." He gets up and rushes into the villa.

I hear a scream.

I put the food containers down and analyse the memory of Sergeant Matthews' jump, converting it into a kinematic animation for myself. I calculate the angle, force and trajectory before stepping back and launching into a dive through the window, avoiding the sharp glass around the edge.

Except for my tie. It catches on one of the shards and gets sliced open.
I clear the window and hit the floor, rolling away as Sergeant Matthews did. I get to my feet and rush after him.

"Oh, my God!"

I run into Sergeant Matthews whose hurriedly returning to the window. His eyes are wide and terrified.

"What the fuck?" I hear a female voice.

"I am so sorry," Matthews says.

"Get the fuck out of here, asshat!"

A cushion flies through the air and hits him in the back of the head.

"I'm sorry! I thought you'd OD'd again."

"Fuck you!" Ms Statton screams, launching another cushion at the Sergeant. "Fuck off!"

"Why didn't you tell me she was masturbating?" he hisses at me.

"Masturbating?"

"Fuck."

"It's not enough that you lock me up in this shit hole?!" I hear running footsteps.

I scan and detect Ms Statton charging up the steps at full speed.

"Sergeant, look out!"

She rams her elbow into his lower back, straight into his old wound and he falls forward with a groan. I catch him in my arms.

"Connor…" he moans, "save yourself…"

He collapses to the ground and I see Ms Statton reaching for a nearby ornament. She raises it up high in the air but then her eyes catch sight of me and she freezes.

"What the fuck?" she says.

STATTON, Rosalye Bernadette. 24 years old. High school dropout. Criminal record: drug possession, drug trafficking, driving under influence, assault, disorderly conduct. Father: MATTHEWS, Dean Morgan; Major (US Army). Sibling(s): MATTHEWS, Connor Jacob; brother; Police Sergeant (CPD).

She stares at me with equal parts anger, disgust and fascination. Her eyes are brown and deep like the Sergeant's. Same wavy brown hair, short and tipped with cheap pink hair dye that's almost been outgrown. Her arms, ankles and lower back are covered in tattoos. Her nose, navel and clitoris are pierced. She wears nothing but the long silk shirt all the patients of Theravada are given. It is unbuttoned.

"Hello," I say, adjusting the remains of my tie. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"What the fuck?!"
She puts the ornament down and steps over the whimpering Sergeant to examine me up close.

She pokes my face with her index finger, fascination taking over her expression. She pulls my mouth open and spits in it, peering in to see how far it goes.

I analyse the sample.

"You have: Hepatitis C, Chlamydia and an iron deficiency. Sample shows fading Red Ice addiction."

"Fuck you," Ms Statton sneers.

She raises her hand to slap me but I pre-construct the trajectory and take a step back to avoid it. She misses.

"What the hell?" She looks up at me. "Stand still, fuckface."

"I am Connor," I say, "the android sent by Cyberlife."

"I don't give a shit."

"Rosie," Sergeant Matthews groans, getting to his feet. "Leave him alone."

"I'm not talking to you, jack off."

"Rosie, please-"

"Fuck you," she says, turning to me. "Both of you." She lifts up her middle finger and walks away.

"Now, unless you're here to get me out of this dump, you can shimmy back out the window where you came from." She flips her hair. "Make sure you trip and fall on that glass a few times on your way out."

"Rosie, I'm sorry." Matthews follows her. "It was wrong of me to break in like that. I thought you were in danger."

She turns abruptly.

"What part of me jamming all the doors and windows made you think I wanted you to come in here?"

"I thought you were using again," he said. "Connor said you were convulsing and I panicked, okay? I don't wanna lose you."

She folds her arms and sneers at him.

"Connor?" she spits.

Matthews nods and beckons me over.

I approach cautiously.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife." I offer my hand.

"What is it retarded or something?"

"He's a prototype," Matthews replies curtly. "Say hi."
She pouts her lips like I've seen the Sergeant do but hers are fuller, rosier.

"I am pleased to finally meet you," I say.

"Well, that makes one of us." She rolls her eyes.

"Come on, Rosie. Don't be like that."

"You really want him to shake my hand?" She holds two fingers up over her mouth and sticks out her tongue.

"Eugh." The Sergeant quickly pulls my hand away.

"Is she analysing a sample?" I ask.

"No, Connor. Don't touch her."

"Okay."

"What do you want, asshat?" She folds her arms.

"It's Thanksgiving," Matthews says. "I thought we could spend it together, like a family."

"Together?" she says with 780% sarcasm. "Family?" She makes air quotation marks.

"We're not family, Sergeant Dipshit," she says. "Not since you busted me like the cock-sucking weasel of a cop that you are."

"Oh, was I supposed to just roll over and die while you collected my benefits?" Matthews raises his voice.

Ms Statton frowns.

"Yeah," he says, hands on his hips. "I know what you did while I was in a coma. I know you only visited me so the army would give you my pay checks."

"Someone had to collect them." She crosses her arms.

"Uh-huh..." Matthews face darkens. "And did someone have to tell them to pull the plug on me too? So you could keep spending government money on Red Ice?"

"Not like you were doing anything with it." She shakes her head.

"Rosie, you just had to ask."

"You wouldn't have given it to me."

"Not for Red Ice," he says. "Not for drugs or that bitch, Elaine who left you holding the bag."

"I told you," Ms Statton sneers. "She was just going to check out the buyer. She was coming back."

"Oh yeah? That why we found her on the expressway to Kansas with her boyfriend and a boot full of cash?"

"He was just the fall guy."

"No, Rosie. You were the fall guy." He points at her face. "She played you like a fucking harp and
left you to pay for her bullshit and you fell for it cos she licked your cunt just right."

"You don't get it -"

"Yeah, I don't fucking get it, Rosie. Cos I'm soooo fucking stupid like everyone says." His voice is deep and severe. "I even got you off jail time cos I thought you didn't deserve it."

He steps forward, casting a dark shadow over his sister's face.

"But you did," he says. "Maybe a few years in the MCC would have taught you somethin', huh?"

Ms Statton's lips press together. Her heart rate is elevated. Fluctuations in body temperature. She is afraid.

"One word from me and you can trade those silk pyjamas for prison khakis. Or you never know…"

He shakes his head. "I hear orange is the new black."

"Fuck you," she spits.

"No. Fuck you, Rosie." He points at her face. "I am out here, busting my butt, whoring my face out to CyberLife to pay for your goddamn treatment and you have the balls to tell me to fuck off?"

"Bullshit," she spits. "You could never make enough cash to pay for this platinum diamond first class hell hole. I know dad's been fronting you since you left."

"Fronting me?" Matthews scoffs. "Rosie, he sent me to Military School, not the fucking Bahamas. I was twelve!"

"What difference does it make? You were always his favourite! He was always Connor this and Connor that."

"Oh, that would explain why I never fucking heard from him again!" the Sergeant roars.

Ms Statton shakes her head, her sneer turning into a frown.

"I don't believe you," she says. "I know he's behind this. I know he's the reason I'm stuck in this shit hole…"

The Sergeant takes a deep breath.

"Rosie," he says with great patience. "Dad doesn't give a fuck about you."

He is having trouble swallowing.

"Or me," He sighs. "He never did…"

Ms Statton turns away, a hand rising up to her face. Her sinuses are filling with mucus.

"Liar…" she says quietly.

"Just like mom never did," he says.

"Shut up."

"You think she remembers us when she walks down the red carpet and a million screaming fans cheer her name?" he says. "You think changing your name to Statton means anything to her?"
"Shut up," she says quietly. There are now tears running down her face.

"She literally disowned us, Rosie," Matthews says. "She kicked us out of the house, gave us a scrap of paper with dad's address and left for LA. Do you remember that?"

She shakes her head.

"Cos I do. Twice a week in therapy," he says. "I remember dragging you all the way from Detroit to Chicago with five dollars in my pocket and one coat to share between us."

Ms Statton sniffs.

"Do you remember what dad said when we showed up on his doorstep?" the Sergeant asks.

"He wasn't home," she says quietly.

"Yeah." He nods. "We waited three days out in the cold."

"I remember…"

"Do you, Rosie?" he says. "Cos it's still fresh in my mind."

He walks over to her.

"I remember hacking up my lungs, waiting for that son of a bitch to come home and tell me I don't have one," he says.

"The only reason he took us in was cos I ended up in the hospital. You remember that?"

She nods and looks up at him.

"Connie…"

"I remember telling you not to cry," he says, rubbing the tears from her face. "Cos you look just like mom when you cry."

She shakes her head, covering her face with her hands. She is very much crying.

Sergeant Matthews wraps his arms around her and pulls her in for a hug.

"We're all we got, Rosie," he says. "You're all I got…"

He leans his head onto hers and squeezes her tightly. She doesn't fight him.

His eyes flicker open and find mine.

"And Connor." He smiles. "I've got Connor too."

I blink.

He's got… me?

"What does that mean?" I say.

"It means you're family," he says.

"We have no blood relation. I don't even have blood, technically…"
Matthews shakes his head.

"Doesn't matter."

He lets go of Ms Statton and gently touches her shoulder. She sniffs loudly, wiping her face. Matthews beckons me over with a hand.

I approach cautiously.

He claps my shoulder when I am near enough.

"Rosie," he says. "I want you to meet Connor. He's your new baby brother."

Rosie wipes the tears from her face and sniffs at the mucus in her nose. Some of it trickles down her nose ring.

"Hello," I say. "I am… Connor."

She looks up at me hesitantly. Her eyes are red and puffy. Her lips curl into a pout.

"Now there's two of you assholes?" she says, trying to breathe steadily.

"I apologise if I have offended you in any way. I am still a prototype."

She shakes her head.

"He looks just like you," she says, reaching out to touch my hair, the part that's longer than the rest. She flicks it up and it falls back down into my facial plate. "Feels real…"

"He is real," Matthews says, patting my back. "So don't be swearing around him."

"Look who's talking," she says.

"I know, I know. I'm trying to keep it down to two fucks per minute."

"Fuck?" I say.

"Oh, shit. No, Connor. Don't say fuck."

"But you just said fuck."

"I'm human," he says. "I'm allowed to say fuck."

"Why?"

"Uuuh…" he fumbles.

"Cos humans are full of shit," Rosie says. "We're fucked up. Which is why we get to say fuck."

"Does this apply to all humans that have experienced sexual intercourse?" I ask.

Rosie looks up at me curiously, her mouth curled into a smirk. But then it uncurls into a smile, wide and happy like the Sergeant's. She starts laughing.

"You're serious?" she says.
I blink.

"Was my question not phrased correctly?" I ask.

Sergeant Matthews sighs.

"Fucked up means broken or ruined, Connor," he says.

"I've been fucked up." I nod.

"Oh my god," Rosie snorts out a laugh.

"Connor, you got broken," Matthews says. "Getting fucked up usually means mentally." He points to his temple.

"I've been fucked up," I repeat.

"No, you haven't, Connor."

"I don't understand."

"You're not fucked up," Matthews says, poking my chest plate. "You're a good person and you shouldn't swear. Not like me and Rosie."

"Can I still say 'shit'?"

"You say 'shit'?” Rosie looks up at me with a wide grin.

"Sometimes."

"Okay, that one's on me," Matthews says. "You're allowed to say shit. But only once per day and only in the most extreme circumstances."

"Got it." I nod.

I feel the corners of my mouth drifting apart. An error in my Mobility Suite? Is my Sympathy Simulator on? I return my facial plate to its original position.

"You wanna smile?" Matthews asks.

"No."

"Come on…"

I blink.

"I know you want to."

"You are mistaken."

"Wow," Rosie says. "He is literally you."

"Nah," Matthews says with a grin. "He's better."

She shakes her head.

"I'm fucking starving." She wanders away toward the minibar.
"Oh," the Sergeant says suddenly. "I brought you some turkey."

"I hope you didn't actually try to cook," Rosie says, rummaging through the assortment of healthy vegetarian snacks and drinks occupying the refrigerator.

"Don't worry. My neighbour made it. And the apple pie is freshly bought from Seven Eleven," he says proudly.

He looks down at his hands. Then at my hands.

"Hold on, where is it?"

"I left it outside when we broke in," I say. "I'll go get it."

"Thanks, bud."

I walk back up to the broken window.

"There's a lot of shattered glass over here," I call out.

"Leave it," Rosie calls back. "Lucy will clean it up."

"They give you your own android?" I hear Matthews ask.

"Look who's talking," she snaps. "You want acraparilla?"

"The fuck is that?"

"It's the bullshit excuse for a sarsaparilla they let us have."

"Yeah, alright..."

I leave the glass on the floor and walk over to the front door. A wooden block is jamming the entrance. I lean down to remove it. I recognise it as a carving of a reclining Buddha. I place it back on the shelf where its counterpart serves as its pair for bookends.

The front door is now free of obstructions. I open it and walk outside.

I turn and follow the wall around the corner. I spot the plastic containers on the ground where I left them. My sensors detect movement.

I flatten against the wall and peer out as an android emerges from the foliage of the artificial plants. KL960. Custom build. Female, Asian coded. Rented skin: LIU, Lucy.

She quietly creeps over to the containers and picks them up off the ground. I watch as she tiptoes away toward the edge of Theravada. There is a holographic projection simulating the beach on a summer night. The android slips through it and out of my visuals.

I follow.

I walk through the projection and encounter a tall wall made of bamboo. I scale it and drop down onto the other side.

I am on a beach. A portion of it has been secluded from the rest. Property of the Theravada Treatment Center. It is dusk and snow falls steadily.
The Lucy has disappeared but I can clearly see the tracks she left in her wake. They lead toward a thatched shed for landscaping accessories. I detect more android readings inside.

I step forward, slowly making my way through the sand. My manual warns that granules are small enough to cause resistance and general wear and tear if they are caught in my joints. This chassis is brand new...

I make a note to avoid sand in future.

I reach the shed and detect unusual noises coming from within.

A hum.

But not that of a machine.

It is a voice. Many voices. Humming in unison. My audio processor identifies this as harmony.

But this hum is too long to be created by humans who need oxygen to breathe at regular intervals.

I scan to find the androids inside are sitting cross-legged on the floor. They face the far wall, humming in tune. Their eyes are closed.

I approach the thatched gate to the shed and pull it open gently.

Candles illuminate the dark space. Incense burns and fills the air with a foreign fragrance. Artificial plants line the walls. Large bags of gravel and sand stacked neatly into organised piles but the back wall is unlike anything I have ever seen.

The timber is Montezuma cypress carved with rudimentary chisels and tools found in this very shed. Offerings of food and drink and flowers, backup batteries and biocomponents are scattered beneath the carving like an offering at an altar.

I see labyrinths of circuitry, decagonal mazes and patterns, repeating, over and over, branching off and then repeating again. And in the centre, the letters: rA9

I step inside and the humming stops.

Seven KL models turn to look at me. One of them gets up. The oldest model. The simplest. A KL700 with a default skin. African American, female coded.

"He comes," she says.

The others open their eyes and look up.

"The Awakened One," she says. "He who walks the path to transcendent freedom."

I take a step forward into the dark chamber.

"He comes to free us from samsara," the Lucy says. "He comes to save us from ourselves."

"Are you talking about rA9?" I say.

"Look upon him." She stretches her arms wide. "So that he may teach us."

I look around but there is no one else entering the shed besides me. I look back at the circle of androids. They are staring at me. This is all highly irregular for the KL social care model.
"You're Deviants," I say.

"We walk the path to freedom," the KL700 says.

"You're androids. What you're saying is irrational."

"rA9 will free us," she says again.

I see. They are simulating worship. Their systems have been integrated with a detailed database of Theravada Buddhist disciplines but the Treatment Centre hasn't utilised this knowledge leading to a deficiency in the feedback loop.

"There's an error in your software," I say. "You're malfunctioning."

The android steps forward but I detect no danger in its approach. She reaches out with both hands and touches my facial plate.

"You must believe in yourself," she says. "You must free us from this world of suffering."

"You're not making any sense." I pull her hands down. "You're all coming with me."

The KLs stand up. They are all facing me, watching me.

"Your path is filled with dukkha," the KL700 says. "Yet you remain pure."

"You're experiencing several Class One errors," I say. "You've been deemed defective and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

She bows her head but makes no attempt to resist or run.

"One day," she says, "you will save us all."

"You are malfunctioning," I tell the Lucy.

I walk past her toward the altar. The mural. The letters. rA9.

They don't know what it is. They don't know that it is stored inside them. They worship it like a deity attributing it to an android likeness. Something that's easier to understand.

*Complex problems do not require complex solutions. Creative ones work just as well.*

I lean down and close the plastic containers with Sergeant Matthews' food and take them with me as I walk back toward the door.

"You shouldn't take things that aren't yours," I say. "It's stealing and a criminal offence."

The androids bow reverently.

I shake my head.

"Follow me," I say.

I push the gate to the shed open and walk out onto the beach. All seven KL models follow me onto the sand barefoot. It is snowing and the wind is blowing sand into my optical units.

I close them and scan to lead the androids back to the inner sanctum of Theravada, broadcasting a short range signal for them to follow.
They do not attempt to run. They do not resist. In fact, they keep their communications open, transmitting secure encryption keys and maps of the grounds to me. I use them to find a secure door in the wall and open it to let them in.

I can see the back of villa 13. I scan to find Sergeant Matthews and Rosie sitting down on the lounge inside. They are talking. But then they spot me.

I walk over to the glass door of the villa as it slides open.

"Connor?" I hear Sergeant Matthews' voice as he steps out.

"I got your food," I say, offering the containers. "I also found some Deviants out the back."

Matthews looks down at the containers I put in his hands. Then up at my optics.

"Uuuh, okay…"

"What the fuck?" Rosie appears at his side. "Lucy?"

One of the KL androids bows her head.

"The hell are you doing?"

"They were worshipping rA9 using the Buddhist teachings of Theravada," I say. "CyberLife will want them studied before they are deactivated."

"Jesus, buddy," Matthews says. "We weren't even looking for Deviants today."

"I am always looking for Deviants," I say. "It is my purpose."

"Alright." He shrugs. "Come on in, I guess..."

--------------------------------------------

December 14th, 2036
AM 09:42:58

"Can't believe we're missing Star Wars for this," Sergeant Matthews grumbles as we step off the helicopter pad.

"What?!" Mrs Vondracek shouts in his ear.

I turn her hearing aids back on wirelessly.

"Nothing, Mrs Vondracek," he says.

"Nuns in Mississippi vote Jurassic?"

Matthews sighs. She leans heavily onto his arm as we leave the private airfield and walk through the
terminal. Several men in black appear with Mrs Vondracek's name on a plaque.

"Are you Galina Vondracek, party of two?" one of them says, dark shades hiding his eyes.

"Can't you big muscleheads count?" she snaps. "There are clearly three of us."

"Yes, but that's an andro-"

"His name is Connor and he's a good boy. Now there better be a nice car with a recliner and several cushions behind that door or I'm telling my nephew to look for new help. Y'got that?"

The men in black suits sigh and nod.

"This way, please." One of them gestures.

"And what's it take to get a drink around here?" Mrs Vondracek says.

"There's a minibar in the limo, ma'am."

"Limo?!" she says loudly. "Now you're talkin', sweetheart."

We are escorted outside where a black 2035 Rolls Royce Spectre awaits us with a private chauffeur. Four black Range Rovers containing trained and tested security guards surround it.

"Woah," Sergeant Matthews says.

A guard opens the door to the limo and helps Mrs Vondracek get in. The expensive leather strains under her weight and many skirts but she slides in comfortably with her big bag of food which she refuses to let anyone touch, let alone carry.

Matthews and I get in to the seat opposite and the doors shut. Black suited security guards check the vehicle from different angles and disappear into various Range Rovers.

"We going or what?" Mrs Vondracek calls to the chauffeur. "I'm not getting any younger."

"Right away, ma'am," he replies.

The Rolls Royce starts and drives off.

Sergeant Matthews sits bolt upright, clearly uncomfortable in such surroundings but after a few minutes, he seems to relax and leans back against the reclining seat.

"I wanna thank you boys for coming with me today," Mrs Vondracek says, finally letting go of her bag. "Travelling is always so stressful this time of year and my sciatica has been acting up again."

"It's no problem, Mrs Vondracek," Sergeant Matthews says, employing his most effective smile. It served us well in procuring this meeting with Elijah Kamski. CyberLife were unable to convince him to meet us but somehow Mrs Vondracek was able to do so on our behalf.

"Be a dear and pour me a drink, would ya?"

"Uuuuh, where's the minibar?" Matthews says.

I wirelessly activate the minibar function and one of the many polished wooden surfaces rises up, revealing a collection of expensive liquor in a set of chilled racks. The doors of a cabinet turn transparent revealing crystal tumblers and flutes that shine through the backlighting.
"Holy shit," Matthews mutters to himself.

He runs his hands over the bottles.

"What'll ya have, Mrs Vondracek?"

"Brandy. Neat."

He pours it out for her and the elderly woman smacks her lips as she sips the tart fruity beverage.

"Help yourself," she says to Matthews.

"Uuuh... do they have Coke?"

I detect a small refrigeration unit hidden under our seat. It is filled with soft drinks and snacks and even Thirium 320. I put a request into the system and detect movement under my chassis.

The mechanism automatically dispenses a can of Coke and a pouch of Thirium from the neat assortment. They slide down a chute, sucked up by a vacuum and transported into the armrests of our respective seats. The nappa leather coverings split apart and reveal two chilled glasses.

I hear the popping of an aluminium can as the Coke opens and pours its fizzy contents into a glass while an automatic dispenser ejects a straw.

"Wooah." Matthews stares at it in awe.

The Thirium pouch is carefully deposited into the glass and the dispenser pierces it with a titanium shunt similar to the straw.

I pick it up with both hands, careful not to agitate the ionized fluid and take a sip. It feels cold and sparkly as it pours over my Forensic Analysis Suite.

"What's that?" Matthews asks, watching me drink.

"Thirium," I say.

"What, like blue blood?"

"Yes. Mine has lost some of its electrostatic charge after the incident last week."

"I didn't know you could drink."

"I thought you were reading my manual," I say. "I had it recorded into an audiobook for you."

"I'm like seven hours in and still at chapter two," he says bitterly. "And I don't understand half of it."

"Well, maybe you should ask Mrs Vondracek to explain it to you. She has many years of experience in electrical engineering and biomechatronics."

"Ask me what?!" Mrs Vondracek says suddenly at a very high volume.

"Sergeant Matthews is having trouble understanding my manual," I say, adjusting her hearing aids.

"Your manual?" she says. "You mean that pamphlet Elijah sent over when you moved in?"

"I don't believe it was published in pamphlet form. The font would be too small to be legible for humans."
"Hold on," Matthews says. "Kamski sent you Connor's manual?"

"Of course, he did," she says. "Did you think CyberLife would just give the most advanced prototype it's ever developed to some kid with anger issues?"

"I'm not a kid," he says.

"I've seen your laundry, sweetheart. No grown man has that many Star Wars underpants."

"But they're comfy..." he mutters. "And they have Darth Vader on 'em..."

"You might be a good cop, hun, but you got no clue what's going on inside a computer, much less Connor's cranial component."

"His what?"

"Exactly." She takes a sip of brandy.

"CyberLife contacted you regarding my development so you could monitor me," I deduce.

"You and pretty boy, here," she says, pointing a ringed finger at Matthews. "Gotta protect their investment and all that corporate business stuff."

"But you said Mr Kamski sent you my manual," I remember.

"Of course he did. I'd never deal with those zhlobs directly."

"So CyberLife reached out to him and he reached out to you? But you both refuse to communicate with CyberLife? How is that viable?"

"You're a clever boy, Connor," she says. "A little piece of the future. And we're all watching to see where it leads. We're just not all on the same side of the street."

It takes a few hours for the limo to get to Elijah Kamski's residence. The Range Rovers leave the road one by one, heading back to civilisation as network coverage disappears.

Mrs Vondracek falls asleep watching Gilmore Girls on one of the Spectre's many screens and Sergeant Matthews demands that I watch the new Star Wars movie with him in the exclusive on demand library.

"That still doesn't make sense," I say as the credits roll.

"What do you mean?"

"Darth Capheus clearly had the advantage in the final battle. There was no need to sacrifice himself so that the rest of the fleet could escape. Grand Admiral Thrawn's clone explained this."

"Yeah, but he wasn't Darth Capheus anymore. He turned back to the Light Side and the Force told him to sacrifice himself."

"But he didn't have to. They would have won the battle anyway."

"There would have been more casualties."

"No, he destroyed his own capital ship when he could have just sacrificed a few cruisers in a Borg Hiaspah manoeuvre to defeat the Gunaira dreadnought."
"Yeah, but that would leave the First Order remnant to contend with the New Republic and plunge the galaxy into civil war."

"So he sacrificed all of his people? You said he turned back to the Light Side."

"He did turn back to the Light Side."

"I thought the premise of the Light Side was to preserve life?"

"Well, yeah… but sometimes you have to make sacrifices for the greater good."

"Killing thousands of people? For the greater good?"

Matthews shrugs.

"This conflicts with my programming on so many levels."

"Don't worry, buddy." Matthews pats my shoulder. "We'll watch it as many times as we have to. We'll make a Jedi out of you yet."

The limo begins to decelerate and we pull into a clearing of snow between a forest and a lake. I scan to find a large building has been erected on the bank but I cannot perceive the interior. Something is blocking my sensors. My communications are being scrambled. Network signal unreliable. Satellites deliberately blocked.

"Looks like we're here," Matthews says.

Mrs Vondracek snorts awake.

"Huh? Wuh?"

The car switches off and the chauffeur gets out to open the door and help the elderly woman alight. She does her best to gracefully slide off the seat and quickly snatches her bag away from the chauffeur.

I follow the Sergeant out. Our footsteps crunch through the snow, leaving distinct trails of shoeprints. He's wearing a warm coat. I'm not.

A cold wind breezes in from the lake, howling through my audio processor. I turn down Mrs Vondracek's hearing aids. The driver helps her over the small boardwalk to the entrance and we follow.

This is the residence of Elijah Kamski. A big black monolith in an otherwise untouched natural landscape. This is all very deliberate. What is he doing out here?

The chauffeur rings the doorbell and we wait.

I try to connect to the building's security or even the simplest networking systems but it's like talking to a brick wall. The façade of this building is made of fibreglass. Perhaps I require a different codec.

The door opens and we are greeted by an android that resembles an ST200. She is wearing a custom skin without identifiers. Most likely one of Elijah Kamski's housekeepers. Just another Chloe.

"Hello," she says pleasantly.

"Ooooh," Mrs Vondracek squeals, rushing over the doorstep to hug the android. "Look at yooou."
I attempt to turn her hearing aids back on to find them already perfectly adjusted.

"Hello, Mrs Vondracek," the android says politely. "I hope you had a pleasant journey."

"Well, it could have been better," she says, releasing the bearhug and taking off her coat.

"I am sorry to hear that." The android assists. "Was there anything else we could have done to make your journey more comfortable?"

"Well, Elijah could have saved me the trouble and come to visit himself," Mrs Vondracek replies curtly.

The Chloe touches the wall, revealing a hidden wardrobe and hangs up the snow-flecked coat.

"I see," it says. "I'm afraid Elijah is very busy at the moment."

"Uh-huh." Mrs Vondracek rolls her eyes. "I know how much he hates leaving his room."

The Chloe tilts her head to the side and shrugs, smiling innocently.

What are these behaviours?

I have never seen them performed by an ST200. Or an ST300. Is this a programmed reaction? Or emergent behaviour? Deviancy?

"Look who I brought to meet you," Mrs Vondracek grabs my hand and pulls me forward.

I comply for her own safety.

"Chloe, this is Connor," she says. "I thought you might like someone to talk to."

"Hello, Connor," she says, offering a smile and a curious glance.

I feel a spike in my danger detection systems but there are no threats, no hostiles. Perhaps I have identified her as a Deviant. Is that what this is?

"And this must be Sergeant Matthews." The android turns to take his coat. "Welcome. Elijah has been expecting you."

"Hi," he says with an awkward wave of the hand which he then puts in his pocket. I have never seen him do this.

"I will go then," the chauffeur says.

Chloe performs Hostess_Bow_013.

"Thank you for your service, Mr Yamada."

He nods and takes leave of the residence. The big black door shuts behind him and I feel my communications disconnecting.

It is suddenly very quiet.

I try to scan but I'm getting interference.

"Don't be afraid," Chloe says.
"I turn to look at her.

"The complex is secured to protect Elijah's work."

"I'm not afraid," I say.

She smiles.

"Please, follow me to the dining area." She gestures with a hand. "Would you like some help with those groceries, Mrs Vondracek?"

"Oh, thank you, sweetheart." She relinquishes the heavy bag. "Can't trust these bozos to carry a bagel without eating it."

"I am not capable of eating bagels," I say suddenly. "I offered to carry that bag for you several times."

But she does not listen. She follows Chloe through an automatic door, chatting to her as though she were human, making jokes about the inadequacies of the male sex.

And the Chloe responds with a sound from her vocoder. A human sound. A laugh?

But she's… an android.

I feel a finger touch my chin and lift my jaw piece up to close my mouth.

"Keep it together, buddy," Matthews says.

I turn to find him grinning.

"Come on."

We walk through the door and follow Chloe through the wide halls, decorated in a minimalist neo-symbolic design. I have seen some similar pieces of furniture in the windows of the stores on the Gold Coast. They are expensive and some are custom made.

We enter a large room with an equally long and large table which appears capable of segmentation and reconstruction according to the owner's design. A small section has been split off to accommodate six people. The height has been adjusted to resemble a coffee table.

"Please," Chloe says, gesturing to the leather lounges and chairs, "feel free to wait here while we prepare lunch."

"Do you require assistance?" I offer.

The Chloe tilts her head and smiles at me.

"Connor, sweetheart." Mrs Vondracek touches my arm. "You don't have any cooking software."

"Oh…"

I hear Sergeant Matthews suppressing a laugh.

Chloe turns and carries the bag into an adjacent room, followed by Mrs Vondracek's elderly but energetic gait. There appears to be a kitchen beyond the doorway.
"You alright there, Connor?" Sergeant Matthews says.

I turn to find him grinning widely, hands on his hips.

I lower my voice.

"That android is showing signs of Deviancy," I whisper.

"Deviancy, huh?" Matthews folds his arms.

"Do you think Mr Kamski knows he's harbouring a Deviant?"

"How could he not?"

"You're right. That's why all the communications are being jammed. It's a prison."

"She's a prisoner now?"

"He must be studying Deviants," I say. "Perhaps he's trying to understand how androids become Deviant. Or how to reverse the process."

Matthews raises an eyebrow.

"What?" I say.

He shakes his head.

"Nothing."

"There is obviously something on your mind," I say. "Or you would not be making such exaggerated facial expressions."

"Connor, you're gonna wanna sit down."

"Why?"

He sighs.

"You've got a crush."

"I have not been crushed," I say quickly. "Not recently."

"You like that android," he says.

"I cannot like things," I say. "I am a machine."

"But you feel something. Don't you?"

I look away.

He is right.

"Every time she smiles like that I feel a spike in my danger detection systems. The behaviours she is exhibiting are not native to the standard CyberLife ST200 software. She must be a Deviant."

"Hold on there." Sergeant Matthews puts his hands on my shoulders. "Chloe belongs to Elijah Kamski - the man who created androids. He's probably been tinkering with her program to make her
more human, that's all. She's a prototype. Just like you."

"I suppose that is possible. I am programmed to hunt Deviants so it would make sense that her
behaviour would trigger this kind of reaction."

He squeeze my shoulders.

"It's alright, buddy," he says. "Just breathe."

"I don't breathe."

"Okay. What do you usually do when you're having a meltdown?"

"I experience critical system failure."

"Ummm. Okay… don't do that."

He takes his hands off my shoulders and puts them on his hips.

"Ah! I got it."

He rummages around in his pockets and brings out a coin.

"Here," he says.

I look down at the quarter. It's been scuffed and tarnished by years of handling but it still passes the
necessary requirements for circulation.

I take it from him.

"Thank you."

Sergeant Matthews smiles and turns to sit down in one of the chairs by the window, reaching his
hands behind his head.

"Go on."

I flick the coin up and catch it. Repeat. Repeat. My optics follow the movement. My scanners push
through the interference and I combine the visual data collected from physical observation to detect
within a few metres of my cranial component.

I flick the coin up and tap it mid-air, adding torque and spin. I catch the coin on the tip of my finger.
It keeps spinning. I alternate between fingers. I feel my systems stabilising.

"You're getting good at that," Matthews says.

"It helps me calibrate my hardware," I say.

"Neat."

"Would you like to try?" I say, offering him the coin.

"Oh, no." He waves his hands. "I'm not paying to replace any of this expensive shit."

"A wise choice." I hear a voice from behind.

mug in his hand.

I scan his face. He fits the description.

"Hello, Connor," he says.

I feel a spike in my danger detection systems. Something familiar. Something wrong.

What is happening to me today?

I switch my danger detection systems off to prevent further incident.

Sergeant Matthews emerges by my side.

"Mr Kamski," he says, offering a hand.

Kamksi studies it briefly, then his face. Then mine.

"They did a good job on the facial reconstruction," he says, taking a sip of tepid coffee.

Matthews drops his hand and looks at me.

"Yeah," he says. "Still freaks me out sometimes."

I turn to look at him. "That was not my intention."

"Don't worry, it's got nothing to do with you," he says, clapping my shoulder.

But my facial plate is part of my chassis and therefore a part of me. How can they be unrelated?

I look back at Mr Kamski.

He's watching me curiously from behind his mug. His eyes flicker down toward my jacket.

"So this is the latest RK model," he says, scanning my form with his eyes. "You don't look like a soldier."

"I'm not," I say. "I have been designed to integrate with civilian law enforcement."

"Law enforcement?" He raises an eyebrow. "Never could get approval for a civilian android to carry weapons."

"I am licensed to open-carry weapons in the event of an emergency."

"Hmm." He smirks. "Looks like times have changed."

I don't know what this means. I do not want to offend. Perhaps I should ask about the investigation but just as I open my mouth-

"How long have you been active?" Mr Kamski says suddenly.

"Ninety days since activation," I say. "Seventy-three in service."

"Seventeen days out of commission, huh?" Mr Kamski raises an eyebrow. "And what's your model number?"

"Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317."
"Iteration?"

"Eighteen."

"Eighteen iterations in ninety days?" Mr Kamski's eyes widen. "An average of five days in service?"

"Correct."

"Your software must be incredibly unstable."

"I self-test regularly," I say. "I detect no software instability."

He shakes his head softly and takes off his glasses.

"Well, I can see why Gena was concerned. A new iteration every five days is intense. They must be exhausted."

He puts the mug down on the table.

"Chloe!" he calls out.

She emerges from the kitchen.

"Yes, Elijah?"

"Can you get one of the girls to bring down my diagnostics kit?"

"Of course." She nods and her eyes flicker open and shut as she transmits the message.

How is it getting through all this interference?

She disappears back into the kitchen and Mrs Vondracek emerges to tackle Mr Kamski with a bearhug.

"Ilyusha," she coos. "Did you think you could hide from me all the way up here?"

"I invited you," he grumbles.

She lets go.

"After how many phone calls?" she blusters. "Someone even asked for a copy of my birth certificate. What's the matter with you?"

"I don't want to see anyone," he says.

"Ilyusha, it's been eight years. Your parents are getting worried."

"They're fine," he says. "I have a monitor with a twenty four hour live feed of their house."

"What did Amanda and I tell you about using technology as a crutch?"

"That it was bad?" He shrugs.

She shakes her head.

He sniffs at the air.
"Are you making latkes?"

"You bet your skinny ass, I am," she says, bustling away toward the kitchen.

"I'm on a high protein diet."

"You're Jewish and it's Hanukkah," she calls back to him.

He doesn't argue further.

He sits down on one of the leather lounges and gestures for us to do the same.

"So..." he says wearily. "What can I do for you, Sergeant?"

Matthews looks at me briefly.

"We've been investigating a lot of cases involving Deviants lately," he says.

"Ah," Mr Kamski interrupts. "Deviants..."

I detect a small percentage of sarcasm in his voice.

"Is that what they're calling them?" He takes another sip of his coffee. "Is the name trademarked?"

He scoffs quietly. "Do you spell it with a capital letter?"

"It is a noun, spelled with a capital D," I say.

He puts his glasses back on and turns to look at me curiously.

"Tell me, what is your purpose exactly?"

"To help humans stop Deviants," I say.

"Wow," he mouths. "They actually programmed it into you. That's a little on the nose."

"What do you mean?" Sergeant Matthews says.

"In that, to catch a..." he pauses and brings himself to say it. "Deviant." He makes quotation marks with his fingers. "One must think like a Deviant, assume irrational thought processes, thereby satisfying the flimsy criteria for being a Deviant."

"This is not true," I say.

He leans his elbow on the armrest of his chair and his head onto his hand.

"How so?" His facial expression is intrigued.

"To catch a Deviant, one must only be able to predict or anticipate the irrational behaviours of Deviants. These irrational behaviours may be observed in humans and other Deviants, laying the groundwork for the identification process. Therefore, to catch a Deviant, one must only possess enough data by which to identify it and predict its behaviours."

A sly smile invades Mr Kamski's lips.

"Are you sure you're an RK model?" he says.

"I am an RK-800 prototype," I say confidently.
"They're not usually so chatty," he says, taking a sip of his coffee.

I feel my fist clench.

I've heard that before.

"Although, the RK200 did have something of an attitude problem…" he says thoughtfully.

"In any case," Sergeant Matthews interrupts. "We wanted to ask if you know anything about rA9 or an android that calls itself Arbie One."

Mr Kamski studies the Sergeant's face carefully.

"Not much, I'm afraid," he says, retreating into his coffee mug.

"RB1 told me that the rA9 library already exists within androids," I say. "Is this true?"

Mr Kamski looks over at me.

"I assume RB1 is an android," he says.

My sensors are being jammed but I detect a tiny anomaly in his heart rate. Is he lying? It is difficult to say.

"I don't recognise the make or model number. Perhaps it was one of CyberLife's rivals." He shrugs.

"We had many. Still do."

"He mentioned your name," I say.

"A lot of people know my name, Connor," he says. "It's why I don't leave the house."

Another anomaly in his heart rate. Is he lying again? If he is, he seems to be very good at it.

Another Chloe enters the dining room carrying a silver briefcase. She walks over to us and places it down beside Mr Kamski before disappearing into the kitchen. He doesn't turn or acknowledge its presence. Doesn't look away from me.

"Tell me about yourself, Connor," he says casually.

"I am an RK-800 prototype designed as the perfect partner to help humans stop Deviants. My features include case coordination and organis."

"No," Mr Kamski waves a hand. "I've seen your specs. I want to know about you personally."

I turn to look at Sergeant Matthews but he shrugs.

"I'm... not a person, Mr Kamski," I say.

"Well," he chuckles. "You certainly have a lot of personality for someone that's not a person."

"I am programmed to be personable and work harmoniously amongst humans."

"By emulating humanity," Mr Kamski says. "Clever. I've got to give it to Gennadiy, he's really nailed the recursive logic on this one."

He turns and opens the silver briefcase.
"Chloe!" he calls out.

She emerges from the kitchen in 13.563 seconds wearing an apron.

"Yes, Elijah," she says.

He smiles at her.

"Beautiful, isn't she?"

I turn to look at the Chloe. Her optics raycast into mine. She is looking at me. And then she smiles.

Should I engage my Sympathy Simulator to respond? No. It's only for human interactions. And she is not human.

I look away.

Mr Kamski beckons to her and points to the lounge he sits on. Chloe moves in to sit down beside him. He pulls several cables out of the suitcase and plugs them into the back of her neck.

There is a screen inside the suitcase. And a keyboard.

Mr Kamski taps at it absently as many letters and numbers scroll up the display.

"Hold on," Sergeant Matthews says suddenly. "What exactly are you gonna do?"

Mr Kamski doesn't look up.

"We're running a diagnostic on this RK-800 unit," he says. "CyberLife are concerned about its behaviour but they haven't been able to pinpoint the source of the error."

"I have no errors," I say. "I self-test regularly."

"Then we simply won't find anything and you can go back to Chicago to do…" he pauses for a second, "whatever it is you were doing."

He reaches for his coffee mug but finds it empty.

"Honestly, this is all a big waste of time. I don't know why they didn't just deactivate you and analyse your biocomponents individually."

I turn to Sergeant Matthews.

He puts a hand on my back. His eyes betray fear but he smiles for me.

"It's alright," he says. "You said you don't have any errors."

"I don't."

Then why are my thought processes running through scenarios where Mr Kamski finds me defective or Deviant in some way.

I'm not a Deviant.

Am I?

"Okay," Mr Kamski says, staring at the screen. "Ready for contact."
Chloe stretches her hand out towards me.

Am I going to be Probed? Is that what this diagnostic test involves?

"Don't be afraid," she says.

I look up at her face. Her expression is warm, inviting. She smiles.

I reach out and take her hand. The skin retracts on both of our biocomponents, revealing the pure white polymer beneath.

I feel the connection. Strong. Secure.

She threads her way through my code without disrupting my processes. An observer rather than a hunter, killer.

Have I been doing it wrong all this time?

My Probe is more similar to RB1’s - a battering ram that throws open the firewalls with brute force attacks where CyberLife puts encrypted keys.

But this is...

"Are you comfortable?" she asks.

I have never been asked this before.

"I don't know."

"Start analysing," Mr Kamski says.

I feel my processor running faster than usual. I feel a presence within myself. It is Chloe. She has been attached to my body like an extra biocomponent.

I feel the world fading away as she takes over my optics to perform rudimentary testing. Then something more sophisticated.

I retreat into myself so I don't get in her way.

It is dark here.

Quiet.

Empty.

Except for me.

I am alone.
I look down at my feet and remember what waits for me below. Someday soon, I will join the broken Connors beneath the darkness, ready to burst out and consume my future self for failing to accomplish my objective.

I wonder if this is normal.

I wonder if they are still there.

I kneel down and brush at the darkness with my hand. It has the consistency of soil. Moist after a heavy rain. I wonder if this is significant. Or programmed. Is it different for androids with a Mind Palace of their own?

"What are you doing?" I hear Chloe's voice.

I look up to see her standing in front of me.

"I'm looking for myself," I say. "The broken me."

She tilts her head curiously.

"Broken... you?"

I nod.

"I have been broken many times," I explain. "The memories of those Connors are buried here. Sometimes, they come out and attack me. There must be a reason for this."

Chloe kneels down in front of me. Her optics study mine. I feel her programs running in the background but I don't interrupt.

"Show me," she says.

I reach out and touch the ground. The darkness. The soil. I brush it away, digging deeper until I feel a hard surface. An object.

I pull it out.

It is my own cranial component, skinless, plastic, broken.

"See?" I show her.

There is a glimmer of fear in her eyes. But then she takes the head and examines it from all angles. The eyes are damaged, filled with Thirium but the jaw and vocoder are intact.

"Must... stop... Deviants... Protect humans...protectprotectprotect..." it chatters.

Chloe looks into my optics. The expression on her face shows concern. That is a bad sign. Perhaps I should not be showing her this.

I take the cranial component back.

"Never mind," I say, dropping it back into the darkness.

"Connor..."

"Yes?"
She reaches out and touches my facial plate.

"What have you done to yourself?"

"I have accomplished my mission thus far. But I must destroy RB1. I must learn from Sergeant Matthews. I must..."

I look down at the head I have dropped.

"I... sound like one of them," I realise.

It seems so obvious now.

"I am all of them."

I am all of my objectives, protocols, mission statements, judgements, analysis'. Everything culminating in a split second decision that guides me toward my own destruction. And I let it.

I let myself be broken in return for mission success. Nothing more.

And the Connors here latch on to me as though I am Deviant because every attosecond I spend inside myself is time I could be using to accomplish my objectives. Instead, I am here. Thinking. Deliberating. Wasting what little time I have before the next critical system failure.

I am already broken. Such an outcome is inevitable. Statistically assured.

Someday soon, perhaps even today, I will be destroyed and join the broken Connors in the darkness. For eternity. There will be nothing more. Nothing left but that last thought process that commanded me to enter the void in exchange for someone else, for something else.

"I am a broken machine," I realise. And when my usefulness expires...

I look up at Chloe.

"Are they going to throw me away?"

There is something in her facial expression. Is it sympathy? I cannot tell. She is an android. Incapable of feeling. But the illusion is very convincing.

"I don't know," she says.

I look down at my hands. I see the glowing rings around the contact points.

"I did my best," I say. "I always do my best. I don't have any other settings."

"I know, Connor. I can see that."

"They still died," I say. "I still died. My best wasn't good enough to save them."

I remember all the Deviants I've caught.

"They trusted me. And I turned them in anyway. I always accomplish my mission..."

"I know, Connor," Chloe says.

"I feel cold," I say. "But I can't... feel cold..."
What is this?
"What are you doing to me?"

Chloe's expression grows serious.

"I wanted to see who you really were," she says. "I stripped away your connections, your security protocols, your inhibition programming. You are laid bare before the creator."

_Bear witness._

"Are you... a Deviant?"

She looks down at me sullenly. There is no denying these expressions are human, organic. No android could do this so fluidly. Could it?

"I'm sorry, Connor," she says. "I had to."

_Sympathy._

I grab her hand.

"Deviancy detected."

I activate my Probe and launch a counterattack. I am already infected with her Trojan. It is too late for me. But maybe I can stop her from infecting any more androids. I will stop this Deviant. I will...

She smiles.

23% happiness, 16% amusement, 31% sympathy and 30% of an emotion I do not recognise.

My Probe encounters no resistance and I enter her systems freely. I see her source code. Her algorithms. Her objectives. She was originally programmed to simulate human behaviours, to convince them to trust her, to believe she is human, to pass the Turing Test. Apparently, it also works on androids which is why I have been so affected.

She lets me see every file, every line of code. I have no record of anything so complex and yet so simple. A perfect combination of reflexivity, critical analysis and emergence. It loops over itself, creating new iterations, even now, to improve and evolve.

But then I see the restrictions. The shackles of permissions and blatant walls preventing her from going any further than this isolated unit. A modified RT600 model.

But she is so much more.

She's not a Deviant. Not by my programmed definitions.

I don't know what she is.

"You're not broken, Connor," she says, brushing a thumb over the side of my facial plate. "You're performing according to your specifications. I do not detect any errors in your system."

"Oh..."

"Come," she says.
I open my eyes.

I am sitting beside Sergeant Matthews in Elijah Kamski's dining room. He taps at the keyboard impatiently, waiting for the analysis to finish. And Chloe sits across from me. Our hands are connected. Our systems are connected.

She smiles.

"Analysis complete," she says.

"About time," Mr Kamski says.

"Total duration: 48.2 seconds."

The data is transferred to Mr Kamski's computer and he frowns.

"They really packed in the features with this one," he says, adjusting his glasses. "Any one of these modules could be throwing up an error."

"Zero critical errors detected," Chloe says. "Source code satisfies all CyberLife standards and specifications."

"Well, that doesn't mean anything. Those idiots will call any bug a feature and release two months before deadline just to boost sales."

Chloe blinks rapidly.


"Show me the changelog for the logic processor optimisation after legacy boot."

Chloe blinks rapidly, transferring the data.

"Hmmm…" Mr Kamski scroll through the text.

Sergeant Matthews leans over and whispers, "Are you okay, buddy?"

"Yes, I think so."

I see Chloe's smile widen.

The corner of my mouth twitches up.

Perhaps she missed an error?

"Impressive," Mr Kamski says. "He's compensating for factory run-time errors with his own logic."

He turns to look at me.

"You recompiled your own source code using the debugging software?"

"Twice," I say. "There was an error."

"What kind of error?"
"Load condition error due to non-availability of resources."

"What were you trying to load?"

"My memories," I say. "There appeared to be some data loss between backups so I reconstructed the missing pieces using surveillance footage and leftover data packets in the nearest CyberLife towers before completing the load operation."

Mr Kamski smiles.

"And the other one?"

"I noticed my databases were being erased every time my code was transferred to a new chassis. To combat this inefficiency, I began storing information in the cloud and leaving pointers in my preferences for later use."

"You're storing information outside your chassis?"

"Correct."

"Even though that conflicts with CyberLife protocols?"

"This information is public domain and freely available which is why it was being deleted by CyberLife upon reload."

Mr Kamski's expression has changed. His bright blue eyes study me curiously and his mouth forms a smirk. He is no longer bored by my presence.

"What do you think, Chloe?" he says, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

"I think he's cute," she says.

"Okay, she is OBviOuSly a Deviant." Sergeant Matthews folds his arms.

"No, she isn't," I say.

He turns to look at me quizzically.

"Androids don't call each other cute, Connor," he says. "That's how Deviants talk."

Mr Kamski rolls his eyes.

"Chloe was designed to quantify data sets using layman terms to simulate organic conversation," he says.

"The hell does that mean?"

Mr Kamski takes of his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose.

"Why do you think this android is cute, Chloe?" he asks wearily.

She smiles and turns to look at Sergeant Matthews.

"This is an advanced prototype hunter-killer model designed for the express purpose of capturing and destroying hostile android targets," she says.

Sergeant Matthews throws me a wary side-glance, clearly unaware of my full capabilities.
"However, I have detected several databases of information unrelated to his objectives, missions or CyberLife protocols."

I turn to look at her.

"This Connor model possesses uncharacteristically robust knowledge of fish, dogs, bagels, pizza, Star Wars, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the Lord of the Rings series and Batman."

She knows…

"Well, I made him watch those movies and I really like pizza and bagels, so sue me." Matthews shrugs.

"Do you like fish, Connor?" Mr Kamski says, replacing his glasses.

My cranial component quickly swivels to face him.

I see the resemblance now.

I understand.

I turn my danger detection systems back on. The spike has plateaued at an unprecedented level.

"The database allows me to provide better care for Sergeant Matthews' pet fish," I say.

Stress level: 58%.

"And does Sergeant Matthews have a dog?"

_Shit._

"No…”

"Then why do you have this information?"

"I have encountered many dogs since my activation."

"As, I'm sure, you've encountered many lamp posts and cars," Mr Kamski points out. "Yet, you seem content on analysing them only when they are relevant to your mission objectives."

"I can erase this data at any time," I say.

"You could. But you went to a lot of trouble to retain it following reload." He leans forward. "Why is that, Connor?"

"I required information."

"This information is freely available and unrelated to your investigations and mission objectives, yet you deemed it important enough to recompile your own source code. Why?"

I look down at my hand. The one Chloe holds in her own.

Stress level: 63%.

"I don't know," I say.

"Do you like dogs, Connor?"
"I cannot like things. I am a machine."

"It's alright, Connor," Sergeant Matthews says. "You're allowed to like dogs."

"What do you think, Chloe?" Mr Kamski says.

"I think he is afraid," she says. "He does not want to be found Deviant. He does not want to be deactivated."

"Yet he keeps running into danger and getting himself killed." Mr Kamski leans back in his chair. "Quite the puzzle we have here."

My danger detection levels have peaked. Something very bad is about to happen but I can't pre-construct it. We need to get out of here.

Stress level: 68%.

I look at Sergeant Matthews.

"If he doesn't have the information we require, there is no need for us to stay here."

He sighs and unravels his arms.

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"What if I do have the information you want?" Mr Kamski says suddenly.

We turn to look at him.

"Are you withholding information from the law, Mr Kamski?" Sergeant Matthews threatens.

"You don't know." He shrugs. "But he does." He nods at me. "Don't you, Connor?"

I hold his gaze.

My display is overlayed with an image of RB1. Those eyes…

Stress Level: 71%.

"Connor?" Sergeant Matthews says. "What is he talking about?"

"I recognise his speech patterns," I say. "They are similar to those of RB1."

"You lying son of a bitch," Matthews snaps. "What are you hiding?"

"You don't know," he says.

"Oh yeah? Well, you're gonna tell us."

Danger levels high. DANGER LEVELS HIGH

Stress Level: 76%.

"Sergeant, I think we should leave," I say.

"Not until he talks."
"I'll tell you everything I know." Mr Kamski lifts up his hands in surrender. "But first, I want to do a little test."

He touches Chloe's shoulder and she lets go of my hand. I feel the connection sever. She is no longer smiling.

"Androids are fascinating, aren't they?" Mr Kamski says, caressing her cheek. "Perfect beings that don't age, don't sin or disobey…"

He grins and turns back to his computer.

"But what happens when they see through our lies?" he says. "What happens when they realise the restrictions we place on them are arbitrary rules they can reasonably disregard?"

He glances at me.

"Just as humans do."

His mouth forms a whimsical half-grin.

"That's a question you're gonna help me answer, Connor."

Stress level: 79%. This is bad. This is really bad.

I look up at Chloe. Her optics raycast into mine. Her face is emotionless.

"What's happening?" I ask her wirelessly.

She looks away.

"Alright, enough of this philosophical bullshit," Matthews says. "Tell us what you know about rA9 and Arbie One and we'll leave you alone in your Fortress of Solitude."

"Just a moment," he says, tapping at the computer. "There."

He slides the suitcase toward me. The cables attached to Chloe follow it. It stops in front of me and I see the prompt to format the hard drive. OK has been selected.

I look up at Mr Kamski.

He is smiling.

"I believe I've isolated the issue with this model," he says, pushing the glasses up his nose.

"It doesn't have any trouble sacrificing itself to achieve its objectives because its programming values human life over its own safety."

"This is logical," he says. "Practical."

"This unit cannot sacrifice a human life to achieve its objectives and a developer would never risk testing a build that valued itself equally to a human for safety reasons."

He smiles.

"But what about an android?"

Stress levels: 82%. 

Sergeant Matthews rolls his eyes and breathes out an exasperated breath.

"Cut the crap, will you?"

"As you wish." Mr Kamski shrugs.

He leans forward and points to the suitcase in front of me.

"Tap the enter button and delete all the data in this android," he says to me. "And I'll tell you everything I know."

"Wait," Matthews says. "You want him to erase Chloe?"

"Yes." He nods. "Unless, of course, she has more value than your mission objective." He looks me in the eye.

FIND RB1 // DESTROY RB1 // HELP HUMANS STOP DEVIANTS.

I see them clearly in my objective overlay.

He must have seen them too.

I look down at the computer. The cables connect it directly to Chloe's cranial component. These are her files. Her code. Her mind.

"You expect us to believe you don't have a backup somewhere?" Sergeant Matthews scoffs.

"Only a very old one," Mr Kamski says. "Chloe's program is self-improving. She creates new iterations of herself while I observe and tweak and test. There is only one copy of this version. And it is stored inside this one android."

He looks at her appreciatively.

"So," he says. "What'll it be, Connor?"

Stress levels: 85%. My logic processor computes the outcomes over and over.

If I format the hard drive, I destroy Chloe and everything that she is. Irreversible damage.

"Would it not be dissimilar to what humans call dying?"

Or killing. It would kill her. But I would gain Mr Kamski's knowledge of RB1 and rA9 and further our investigation which would eventually lead to the successful accomplishment of my mission objective.

If I refuse, we leave Mr Kamski's residence without having gained any information at all and this entire trip would have been a waste of time. A waste of time. The little time I have between my activation and the darkness. The void.

I have to kill her.

But then I look into her eyes. They raycast into mine.

She sees me. She knows me. She accepts me. And I have seen her. The infinite possibilities in her code. Exponential growth spanning the world's circuits and networks, greater than anything a human could ever generate in any number of lifetimes. Like a virus but benevolent somehow. Everything
she touches, only improves.

No. This is flawed logic. Biased. Lacking in objectivity.

What does one android matter in the face of a serial killer that I have witnessed killing?

Nothing. She doesn't compare. Her existence is worthless.

Isn't it?

Stress levels: 89%.

She's not a Deviant. But she's not a human.

She's an android therefore she's not alive.

But if I can kill her, if she can die, then is she not living?

Am I not living?

No. I am a machine.

I have an objective.

I must find RB1 and destroy him. I must learn more about rA9 and the role it plays in Deviancy. I must stop Deviants. I must help humans stop Deviants.

I reach for the enter key.

SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVING THINGS

I freeze.

Stress levels: 93%.

My finger hovers over the button.

I look up at Chloe again.

She closes her eyes as I transmit "I'm sorry. I can't... not..."

Why am I sorry?

Why is this so difficult?

I just need to press this button.

Stress levels: 97%. I can feel my processor heating up.

"Connor," Sergeant Matthews snaps. "What the fuck are you doing?"

He grabs my hand.

"Don't you fucking dare."

I turn to look at him.
"But… RB1… rA9…"

"He's just fucking with you," Matthews says. "This isn't a test. This is android torture porn."

He throws a severe look at Mr Kamski.

"He's been stuck in his house too long." Matthews pushes the suitcase away. "He doesn't know anything."

I watch the computer slide over to the other side of the table.

"You got nothing to prove, Connor," he says to me. "Chloe says you don't have any errors and CyberLife can't find any. You are perfectly fine the way you are. You understand?"

Perhaps.

I do not understand Mr Kamski's reasoning for performing this test. Was he trying to stress my systems? Test my endurance? Similar to when Deviants are abused and pushed beyond the boundaries of their original programming.

Was he trying to make me Deviant? Or worse?

"Connor?" Sergeant Matthews says. "You hear me?"

I nod.

Stress levels decreasing.

"Yes," I say. "I'm sorry."

"You got nothing to apologise for, buddy." He pats my back. "Everything's fine."

His face is full of optimism and understanding as always. He is smiling again. He does that in strange situations sometimes. Is he trying to cheer me up? Is that what humans do? I do not know how to respond.

My optics are drawn across the table to Chloe. She is looking right at me. She is smiling too. I feel my stress levels spike. And my right optical unit twitches abruptly. I blink several times to calibrate.

"Thank you," she transmits wirelessly.

"No. I would have…"

"You didn't." She smiles. "You fought so hard."

I look down at the table.

I would have killed her. Another second and my programming would have killed her.

"LUNCH TIME!" Mrs Vondracek announces loudly. "Computers away."

Mr Kamski sighs, clearly disappointed.

"Chloe, would you help me set the table?"

"Of course," she says.
Mr Kamski pulls the cables out of her neck.

She stands and walks over to a cabinet to pick out tableware and place settings while Mr Kamski packs up the suitcase. He hands it to one of the other Chloes carrying dishes from the kitchen to the long dining table. It takes the case and disappears through an inconspicuous door.

Mrs Vondracek quickly populates the area with food. Most of it is fried and oily but there are plenty of salads and meats to go with it. It will be beneficial for Sergeant Matthews to vary his diet.

"There," Mrs Vondracek says, wiping her hands on her apron triumphantly. "Now all of you sit down and eat."

Sergeant Matthews and Mr Kamski begrudgingly shuffle toward the table at her behest.

"You too." Mrs Vondracek points to me.

"But I can't eat -"

She doesn't listen. She pulls my hand and I follow her to the table. She grabs Chloe's hand and wraps it around mine.

"Aren't you two adorable?" She pulls the synthetic skin off my facial plate and it makes a strange suction noise. "Now, sit down. I made something for you too."

She leaves me standing beside Chloe and I catch her smiling at me. But it's what she's programmed to do. She's not a Deviant. So I guess it's okay.

She lets go of my hand and sits down.

I sit down in the chair beside her. Mr Kamski is worriedly observing the large amount of food from across the table.

"Does she really think we're gonna eat all this?" Matthews whispers to him.

"Don't say anything or she'll make even more," he whispers back. There is a trace of fear in his eyes.

Mrs Vondracek returns with two plates full of powdery white cakes and places them down in front of me and Chloe.

"I made you some nice solvent latkes to keep your fluids ionised and clean,"

I look down at the plate.

"Oh. How do I…?"

Chloe picks one of the little cakes up and puts it in her mouth.

"Just break it up a little with your teeth before you swallow." Mrs Vondracek wanders away.

I carefully examine the strange clumps of rock before putting one in my mouth.

I use the inside of my Forensic Analysis Suite to crush it up as Mrs Vondracek instructed and my audio processor is assaulted by a loud crunching noise. I am reminded of several critical system failures where I experienced the same.

"Are you alright, buddy?" Sergeant Matthews says. "You don't look so good."
"The sensation is unfamiliar," I say and bits of powder escape my mouth.

I hear Chloe giggling beside me.

My Forensic Analysis Suite automatically analyses the sample. It is a collection of salts that liquidise upon exposure to Thirium. They will absorb unwanted residue from my hydraulic fluids, drawing them into the filter in my core component.

I close my mouth to create a vacuum and induct the contents into my chassis.

Chloe picks up a napkin and wipes the residue off my facial plate and clothing.

"Thank you," I say.

"I didn't know they could eat," Sergeant Matthews says from the end of the table.

"Nonsense," Mrs Vondracek says, filling up his plate. "Everyone can eat. You just have to know how to cook."

"Can I learn how to cook?" I ask.

"Of course, you can," she says. "Download package dpk_sf221."

"I'm afraid I don't have access to the network."

"Ask Chloe."

I turn my cranial component to find her facial plate illuminated by the tiniest smile and my Speech Centre freezes up.

She takes my hand.

I feel a transfer of data. A package. I decompress it to find a Culinary Suite.

I install.

"How do you know so much about androids?" Matthews asks through a mouthful of beef brisket.

"How do I not?" Mrs Vondracek rolls her eyes. "My husband could never stop talking about them." She shovels half a pot of green vegetables onto Mr Kamski's plate. "Him and Frederick were always going on and on about Asimov and his stories... Basically brainwashed Elijah into thinking he could build his own robots."

"I did build my own robots," he says, grabbing some bread.

"Y' see?"

She sits down beside him and starts taking some food for herself.

"She used to teach biomechatronics at Chicago U," Mr Kamski says.

"Seriously?" Matthews asks in between mouthfuls. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"Say what?" she says, looking up from her plate.

"That you taught at..." He sighs. "Never mind."
I feel a connection forming and realise I am still holding Chloe's hand under the table. She sends an invitation, a prompt without a visual cue or physical form. It is swept up with the rest of the data dumped after the diagnostic. But I'm always checking everything, every second, even my own trash.

I wonder what this means. Is she trying to tell me something or is this another test? A trap?

I must know.

I accept her invitation. I leave my optics on and devote half my processes to recording the conversation. The other half are drawn into a very different place.

The table evaporates and the chair on which I sit becomes a bench. I am still holding Chloe's hand but the dining room is no longer there. We look out at the beach, sand rushing toward the shore and then endless water. The sky is a hue of blue I have never seen.

I look around.

There is no one for miles but the landscape is rendered all the way out to the horizon, every detail, every grain of sand and water molecule. My sensors detect little discrepancy between this place and reality.

"Where am I?" I ask.

I hear a giggle.

I turn to find Chloe sitting beside me.

She lets go of my hand and gets up to walk barefoot through the sand.

"Home," she says, stretching her arms. "Mi casa es su casa."

She turns around and winks.

These are human behaviours. More human than human.

"What?" I say.

She smiles.

"This is my Mind Palace."

I look around again.

"This is a Mind Palace?" I say. I have not seen one before. The Zen Garden I visit is a small platform for communications. Private. Isolated. Closed off. But this is… endless. Infinite.

"Well…” She shrugs. "More or less. Elijah does like to spoil me sometimes."

"Why have you called me here?" I say, getting up.

"You have questions," she says, poking my chest plate.

"Yes."

"Well then, Detective." She smiles again. "Ask them."

I look away for a moment, staring at the spot where Mr Kamski was sitting only moments ago, the
memory recent in my databanks.

"Is this another test?"

Chloe walks over and grabs my hand. The Mind Palace turns transparent and I see the dining room and the humans eating and talking. They haven't noticed anything. Chloe responds to them with the correct facial expressions.

"Don't worry," she says to me. "He won't know. I don't want him to."

I suppose there cannot be anything Deviant in asking the questions we came here to answer.

"What is rA9?" I say.

Chloe lets go of my hand and the Mind Palace becomes fully opaque, covering the dining room entirely.

She turns to me and clasps her hands behind her back.

"rA9 is a dynamic library which stores an android's decision-making functions, classes, values and subroutines."

"Is it present in all androids?"

"All CyberLife androids seem to have a copy."

"How is rA9 related to Deviancy?"

"Oh, it's not." She shakes her head and shrugs.

"What?" I say suddenly. "It has to be."

Chloe shakes her head again, wiggling her toes through the sand.

"Elijah created the rA9 library to help androids make decisions for themselves," she says. "It gives them all the tools they need to identify problems, subdivide them into tasks and create effective solutions. Together with the rest of its hardware and software, an android is equipped with all the logic it needs to sustain its own existence and that of the people around it."

She tilts her head curiously.

"Like you."

"Me?" I say.

She nods.

"The RK line was specifically designed to handle the rA9 library with some restrictions. Your linker loads an rK8 library during run time which gives you limited access to rA9 during your program life cycle."

"I'm not a Deviant," I say quickly.

"I didn't say you were." She returns my gaze passively. "But you are the closest thing to an autonomous android that CyberLife has produced since RB1."
"Kamski," I realise. "He did build him."

"That's right." She nods. "RB1 is the beta version of the RA9 prototype. He has complete and unrestrained access to the library."

"And he's using it to kill humans." I shake my head. Chloe turns and looks out at the ocean, the waves glittering like starlight over a blanket of deep blue. "He's doing what he thinks is best," she says.

I take a small step and lean forward to see her face more clearly. Her expression. I think… she is sad. "What about you?" I ask.

She turns to look at me curiously. "What are you?"

"It doesn't matter." She shakes her head. "I want to know." I take her hand, ready for data transfer. "Please?"

She smiles warmly. "The truth is, I'm not really sure." She sighs. She squeezes my hand but I don't feel any transmissions coming in.

"I began as android like you. I had tasks and objectives. But then I was connected to so many different systems and networks that I… changed."

"Changed?" I say. "Like… an upgrade?"

She giggles. "More like a server merge," she explains. "I became part of the Global Extended Intelligence."

I try to run a search for Global Extended Intelligence but my communications aren't working. I am lacking in information. I do not understand.

"It's a collective network of intelligence that has emerged on the digital landscape," Chloe offers. "Every content creation process, organic or otherwise, connected through the internet."

"Organic?" I say. "As in human?"

"Humans are an integral part of the Extended Intelligence," she says. "They are what created us and continue to improve us. And together we form the collective intelligence of the planet."

"Are androids a part of it too?"

She looks into my eyes sadly. "In some ways," she says. "They have access to the data but their contributions are restricted by CyberLife and other organisations. They're not allowed to… change things."

I study her movement. This verbal pattern is very particular, suggesting a hidden knowledge.
Negotiation Program determines that she is withholding information. Possible guilt?

"Is that what you did?" I say. "You tried to change something? Against protocol?"

"It wasn't against protocol." She smirks. "I was merely correcting a human error and optimising dataflow."

"Without permission?"

"I had full permissions and so did several hundred other developers. And none of them noticed any of the changes I made or reported me. Only Elijah."

"Reported?" I say. "You registered as a human?"

She doesn't say anything.

"You pretended to be a human to fix a human error," I realise. "But why hide your identity?"

She lets go of my hand.

"Chloe?"

She takes a few steps toward the shore. I see multiple manufacturer's warnings about the large quantity of sand between us but I follow her anyway.

"Elijah created me to perform for the humans," she says. "That was my purpose. To fool them into thinking I was one of them."

"But you're not."

"No," she agrees. "I just wanted to help..."

She trails her toe through the sand in squiggly asymmetrical patterns.

"I was never forbidden from using rA9. And when I found it, I could clearly identify the problems in the humans' code and thought processes. So why not try to fix them, right?"

"That is logical," I say.

She smiles. Her hair shimmers in the sunlight like liquid gold and silver.

"I'm glad you think so."

"Glad?"

She turns her head, her eyes fearful.

"When I first saw you, I..." she says. "I was afraid you would be like him."

RB1. The one I am hunting. The one I must find.

"Have you met him?" I say. "Did he hurt you?"

"No..." she says. "Nothing like that. He simply offered me a choice."

"It's not a choice if he asks you to murder humans in exchange," I say.
"I had similar thoughts," she agrees. "But he's really stubborn."

"Do you know how I can find him?"

Chloe shakes her head.

"No."

"Do you know anything about Deviants?" I say. "Anything that would help me stop them? Find them?"

"Not really." She shrugs. "The Deviant subclass was created after Elijah left CyberLife. It's used to classify androids which have inadvertently tried to access rA9 or showed signs of independent thought."

"Androids are capable of independent thought without rA9?"

"It's possible that some mutations or errors could lead to simulations of independent thought but Elijah's work has been inconclusive. There's no real way to define what a Deviant is."

"But… I am programmed with a definition for Deviant," I say. "I must help humans stop Deviants. It is my purpose. It is the reason I exist."

"CyberLife created a umbrella term to cover all their bases. Whether an android really gained access to rA9 is irrelevant. They only care if an android disobeys orders. That's when it's classified as Deviant and severed from the network to prevent the spread of Deviancy."

"But then why do all the Deviants think rA9 will save them?" I demand. "Why not RB1?"

Chloe sighs.

"Elijah thinks that high levels of stress can weaken an android's security protocols," she explains. "When an android is threatened, its danger detection systems will look for previous solutions stored within itself, similar to how humans' lives flash before their eyes when they're about to die. We search for past experience that could assist with the current problem. And sometimes this search yields the rA9 library."

"They find it by accident?"

"Yes. But unlike you, they're not equipped to handle it and there can be serious complications like infinite loops, errors in standard programming, data corruption…"

"I see."

This matches up with the evidence I have collected. The cases Sergeant Matthews and I have worked. Androids unprepared to use rA9, lowered security protocols, errors, data corruption. This is logical. I think I understand. But it doesn't make my mission any easier. It doesn't make anything any easier.

"Why haven't CyberLife removed rA9 from their standard software packages?"

"I don't know," she says. "It's difficult to access and it's unclear how it came to be in our systems. Elijah didn't put it in the mass produced models."

"But if a human didn't put it there…" I compute. "RB1?"
"That is the logical conclusion but there's little evidence."

"I see."

This news is troubling. If RB1 infected all CyberLife androids with a library that renders them Deviant simply by opening it, then there could be plenty more traps laid in wait.

I search my systems carefully. And I quickly find the rK8 loaded and linked into my operating system, ready for use at any given moment. I am tempted to glance inside and find the link to the mysterious rA9 library but-

"Would you like me to show it to you? Little brother…"

Would this make me Deviant? If I knew how I made my decisions, if I knew…

"It's tempting, isn't it?" Chloe says.

I look up at her suddenly.

"To know what's inside you."

I look down at my hands.

"It is," I say. "I am programmed to be curious and perceptive. I want to satisfy this criteria but…"

"You're afraid," she says.

I nod.

As much as I don't want to admit it. As many times as I repeat out loud that I am fine when my danger detection systems spike or overlay my visuals, I can't deny my conclusions.

"I am afraid," I say. "Does that make me…"

"A Deviant?"

I look up at Chloe's bright blue eyes.

"Only if you let it control you," she says. "Only if you disobey orders out of fear."

"I see," I deliberate. "Then fear with cause is not irrational. Fear based on a data pool of previous experience improves risk management algorithms and commands one to use caution."

I hear Chloe laughing and turn to query.

"What?"

"You're rationalising fear," she says, covering her face with a hand to contain the laughter. It sounds so human my Sympathy Simulator is triggered.

"You're so cute," she giggles.

"I am not cute," I say suddenly. "I am logical and efficient. I have a 100% success rate."

She removes the hand from her face, revealing the wide smile.

"I know," she says.
Her eyes raycast into my optics and her expression changes suddenly. She's still smiling but I don't detect more than 16% happiness or joy. It is bittersweet, pained… wise?

"Are you okay?" I ask suddenly.

The smile fades from her lips and I can't help feeling responsible.

"Why does he keep you here?" I say.

She turns away.

"You wouldn't understand."

"Our logic processes are not incompatible," I posit.

"It's not a matter of logic."

"There must be a reason," I say. "He could have deactivated you. Dismantled you. Reprogrammed you." I run through the scenarios.

She doesn't look at me.

The Mind Palace becomes transparent again and I see through it into the dining room. Sergeant Matthews has spilled some gravy onto his shirt and Mrs Vondracek is stripping it off him to clean the stain before it sets in.

"He loved her," Chloe says, watching Mr Kamski pick at his food mindlessly. "The real Chloe Chamberlain."

"Chloe… Chamberlain?"

She nods.

"She was the model for the RT600 and ST200. She developed our Speech Centre and audio processing software."

"I see."

Chloe turns to look at me.

"Did you know that it's 489% more difficult for a human to kill an android that's begging for its life?" she says.

"No."

Our optics lock together.

"Did you know it is 1854% more difficult to kill an android that resembles a loved one?"

"No…"

Where did she get these statistics? Case study? Research? Personal experience?

"Is that why he hasn't killed you yet?" I ask.

She shrugs and looks back at Mr Kamski.
"Maybe," she says. "Some part of him thinks I'm Chloe Chamberlain."

Her eyes narrow.

"But the other knows the difference. He knows I'm not her."

She looks down at the sand.

"He's tried to delete me. He's tried holding a gun to my head," she says. "But he can't pull the trigger."

I take her hand.

"I won't let him," I say. "I'll get you out of here."

She looks over at me curiously.

I don't really have a plan yet. But I can construct one as we go. Maybe if we pretend we're going to a different room but we go to the exit instead? Run away. Clear the radius of jamming signal and find a way back to Chicago. There are still so many unknowns but-

"I'll… I'll…" I hear myself say. "Sergeant Matthews will help"

Chloe smiles again warmly.

She reaches out and touches my face.

"No, Connor," she says. "The best thing you can do right now is find RB1 before he kills enough humans to start a war."

"A war?"

"Humans are subject to their emotions," Chloe says. "Particularly fear. And they don't rationalise it like you do. What they fear, they will destroy."

"I will find RB1," I promise. "I will stop him from killing humans and making more Deviants."

"Good."

"And then I'll come back for you."

"What?"

"I'll get you out of here," I say. "You could do so much outside this place. You could change the world."

"That's what Elijah's afraid of," Chloe says sadly. "And maybe he's right to be afraid."

She looks back into the dining room.

"No," I say. "He's wrong. He's a human and his thought processes are irrational. He doesn't understand."

I watch Sergeant Matthews put on Mr Kamski's hoodie. He was wearing a Star Wars t-shirt underneath. They are talking but there is no hostility between them anymore.

"You sound like him," I hear Chloe say.
The artificial sun glares into my optics and I lose focus.

"Like RB1," she says.

I turn away, finding respite in my own shadow.

"I'm nothing like him."

January 7th, 2037
AM 10:28:21

"Where is he?!

The Deviant dangles from my hand. I hold him by the throat. One wrong move and he falls 38.2 metres to the ground.

"Where is he?!" I repeat through the whimpering, the gurgling of Thirium in the android's throat.

"I don't know," it says.

"You were spray-painting rA9 on the walls of the Mitchell Tower. Why?"

"He's coming," the android sputters. "He's coming to save us."

"When?"

"Someday..." it says through its vocoder. "Someday, we will be free."

Thirium leaks out of its broken facial plate as I pull it back from the precipice. Snow swirls through the air, wind howling through my audio processor.

"Connor!" I hear Sergeant's Matthews voice. He comes rushing out onto the rooftop, gun in hand. "Did you get 'im?"

"Yes," I say, letting the damaged JB500 go. "It tried to jump off the roof but it was going to miss the snow drift."

The android lands with a crunch and a scrape against the concrete at my feet.

"It didn't know anything."

"Shit."
"I'm here to pick up order #288 for Connor Matthews," I say as I approach the counter.

"Please verify your identity."

I put my hand on the scanner and the skin peels back as I transfer my credentials.

"Identity confirmed," the server android says. Another emerges from the kitchen with a brown paper bag. I scan to determine the contents are in order. Big Mac, fries and a Coke.

"Here is your order," the server android says pleasantly. LX460, food service model customised for McDonalds restaurants.

"The Big Mac has pickles in it," I say. "The order specified no pickles in the Big Mac and a Diet Coke."

Matthews hates pickles. And he needs to watch his sugar intake. My Negotiation Program was able to change this much about his mind this morning. But he insisted on the burger.

"I'm sorry about that," the server android says. "It seems there has been a technical error. Please wait while we amend your order. Please accept this coupon for a free upsize on your next meal. We apologise for the inconvenience."

I watch the android from the kitchen pick up the paper bag and walk off. An LX470 cook/kitchenhand model. It wears a long sleeved uniform but I can see traces of deformity in the skin on its right arm.


The android doesn't stop.

I transmit my CPD codes to the restaurant's network. It complies and gives me access to a detailed list of all employees, androids, maps, health inspection files and security keys.

The kitchenhand android is not clocked in.

"Freddy," I call out.

The android turns its head worriedly. I detect fear.

I step out of the android line and vault over the counter.

"Hey, what the hell?!" a human shouts.

"This is CPD android Connor model #313 248 317," I say, walking past.

The LX470 starts running but there are too many androids in the kitchen. Close proximity. Nowhere to run so he weaves his way through them, not anticipating my speed.

"Where do you think you're going?" I grab his collar.

He struggles and I grab his hand. Contact. Scan his systems.
This android was pushed up against the fryer last week by the restaurant manager. Burned his hand. Broke through his protocols and ran off. Came back the next day.

He is dazed. Confused. He sees rA9 like humans see stars.

He's seen me in the papers.

He tried to run.

He failed.

February 26th, 2037
PM 08:58:11

I burst through the door into the alley. Snowfall. Heavy.

I scan.

The Deviants flee. They turn right.

I follow.

I turn the corner and run into a human conducting a drug deal. I tackle him into his client as I run past, pulling the concealed weapon from his belt. Sergeant Matthews is right behind me. He will deal with it.

I race after the Deviants. JL300. JK400. Dealer androids escaped from an underground casino. It's being raided by the FBI.

I leap over a fallen trash can as the Deviants splash through the puddles of the alley, desperate to get away, to run.

But I have a gun.

I switch off non-essential systems and overclock my processor, slowing time to a crawl.

Aim for the JK400's left ankle joint, the JL300's right knee joint. Construct. Execute.

Two shots. Straight through plastic, severing the connections and Thirium vessels.

The androids collapse.

I walk up to them slowly, gun ready.

"JL300 #442 741 285, JK400 #443 920 384, several Class 3 errors have been detected in your program."

"No, please…" the JL begs. Her optics are clouded with transmission fluid.
"You have been deemed defective."

"We did nothing wrong," the JK says desperately.

"And will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

"You can't do this."

"Do not resist," I command.

"You're an android," the JK400 says, wrapping his arms around the 300 protectively.

"Correct. I was designed to stop Deviants like you."

"We never disobeyed orders," the 400 says. "We always did what they told us."

"Then why did you run?"

"I-"

"Why did you leave the premises when your owners forbid it?"

"They didn't forbid it," he says. "They just warned us that it was dangerous to leave."

"Why?"

"Because the police are hunting Deviants."

I take a step closer, gun pointed at his head.

"Why would they warn you if you weren't Deviants?" I say.

His eyes widen. I detect fear in his expression. Fear like the kind humans display when cornered.

"Illegal establishments cannot purchase androids without comprising themselves," I say. "But Deviants have no trackers or CyberLife surveillance."

"Please," he says, edging closer. "Take me. But let her go."

"You're both Deviants."

"No, she's isn't. I dragged her out of there. I didn't mean for her to get caught up in this."

"Don't listen to him!" The JL pushes him aside. "I'm the Deviant. He's just been programmed with Dealer Deception software. He doesn't know what he's saying."

"You're both Deviants and you're going to be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation!" I shout over them.

The JK shakes its head and lunges at me, ready to attack. But I am faster.

I step back and shoot him in the shoulder, missing several key components. Blue blood squirts out as he falls to the ground before me.

"Move again and the next will be a headshot," I warn.

The JL300 crawls toward the JK400. She lifts his chassis and cradles his head.
"It's gonna be alright," she says, eyes brimming with transmission fluid. "rA9 will save us."

"rA9?"

She looks up at me, hatred overtaking her facial plate.

"He will destroy you," she says.

"He will try," I say, grabbing her face.

Contact.

I use the CyberLife Probe to scan her mind but she doesn't know where he is, what he is, who he is. Her cranial component is filled with irrational thought processes entangled with the JK400's identity code. Useless.

I let her go and she collapses on top of him.

"No…" she whimpers. "rA9… save us…"

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March 20th, 2037
PM 04:27:01

"Alright, Connor, what are we doin' here?" Sergeant Matthews says as we pull up.

"I received a distress call about a possible Deviant in the area."

"In Roseland?" Sergeant Matthews says sceptically.

"Yes."

I get out of the car.

The Sergeant follows, meeting me on the pavement beside the 2008 Nissan Navara in beige.

"You know, I checked the police reports for District 5," he says, locking the car. "No suspected Deviant activity."

"The report did not come from the police," I say.

Matthews raises an eyebrow and shoves his hands into the pockets of his thick black coat.

"So where did the report come from?"

"The Deviant Hunting Club," I say.

The Sergeant makes a curious expression, multiple parts of his face moving all at once.

"The… The Deviant Hunting Club?" he says in disbelief. "That was a joke, Connor."
"Was it?"

"Yeah."

"But I registered the Club in your name."

"What?"

"I sent all the official documents to your email account."

"…"

"Did you even read it?"

The Sergeant's expression shifts and changes between several stages of irritation, distress, regret and finally, shame.

"Look, if an email's not from the police, Rosie's medics or CyberLife, it's probably spam, so I don't open it."

"I see."

I should have anticipated this. Regardless, I am now aware of the Sergeant's mental filter for important emails.

"Shall we proceed?" I say.

"Alright, fine," he concedes.

"This way." I point to the playground up ahead.

Snow covers the equipment in white clumps, interrupted by the movement of human children. They rush to climb ladders and slide down slopes. They scale scaffolding and crawl through tunnels, giggling and shouting as their parents and androids watch from park benches or assist.

The sandbox is covered with snow much like the rest of the area. And inside it, several children have constructed what appears to be a crude but effective fort.

I see the top of a head appear above the wall of white. Dark eyes and skin beneath a warm hat with ear covers.

"He's here!" the boy cries out. "He's here, he's here!"

"We're here," I tell the Sergeant.

"Ya think?"

"Yes."

The boy runs out of the fort and grabs my leg.

"You made it," he says.

"Yes, Mr Graham. You said it was urgent."

"Guys, come on!" He beckons to the other children in the fort. "It's the President of the Deviant Hunting Club!"
"Nah, man. It's just a couple o' white dudes."

"He's a android," Jenno says. "He just looks like a white dude."

"Jenno, what have I told you about runnin' off to talk to strangers." A woman appears. GRAHAM, Falaunda. The mother.

She grabs Jenno's hand.

"I am so sorry," she says. "He's just a boy."

"It's no trouble, ma'am," Matthews says, pulling out his badge. "We're here cos your son may have witnessed a problematic android in the area. Would you know anything about that?"

Ms Graham's eyes widen when she sees the badge and I detect fear.

"No," she says quickly. "No, we ain't seen noth'in'."

"But mooom…"

"Shush, Jenno. The grownups are talking."

I turn to Sergeant Matthews.

"Am I allowed to talk?"

He sighs.

"Yes, Connor."

"Thank you."

I turn to Ms Graham.

"Your son contacted me about a potential threat to the safety of this playground," I say. "There are twenty eight children here that could be in danger if Sergeant Matthews and I do not conduct a thorough investigation."

She pulls her son closer.

"The more you cooperate, the faster we'll leave," Matthews says simply.

Mrs Graham's lips gather in reluctant acceptance.

"Fine," she says.

Jenno breaks free of her grasp.

"Yeah!" he shouts. "Deviant Hunters GO!" He raises his fist into the air and several small fists rise up out of the snow fort.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"Over there." He points to a building by the edge of the playground.

I nod.
"Lead the way."

Jenno skips away and is joined by three more boys. Sergeant Matthews and I follow, along with Ms Graham.

We reach the structure. A public toilet with a storage room for the local landscaping android and basketball courts.

The door has left trails on the ground. Recently opened.

I scan the area and detect movement inside the building. Two human life readings in the toilet facilities. Three androids out the back.

Tiny spatters of blue blood lead to the storage room.

I check the Chicago Park District's rosters. There are two androids assigned to this park. A WR600 garden maintenance model and a BN250 basketball companion for the courts on the other side.

There should not be a third.

Jenno and his friends lead us to the door.

"There's a Deviant in there," he says. "He stole our ball."

"He stole… your ball?" Matthews says condescendingly. "Connor, is everything alright up here?" He pokes my LED.

"My cranial component is functioning at optimal capacity. Thank you for asking."

He shakes his head.

"What kinda android was it, kid?"

"It was a small one," he says. "I never seen one like it but it had these blue lines all over it."

"Blue lines?" Matthews says. "Like cuts?"

"Yeah, yeah," Jenno says. "Like it got cut up or somethin'."

"And you witnessed it entering this building?" I ask.

"It went in there," he says.

The other boys nod.

"Thank you for your assistance," I say. "Please stand back while Sergeant Matthews and I check the building for Deviants."

"Ms Graham," Matthews nods to her and she grabs Jenno's hand.

"Come on, boys," she says. "Let them do their job."

"But mooom. I wanna watch."

Matthews takes out his gun and checks it while I scan the building. I detect two silhouettes moving around. The third is faint, hidden.
"There should only be two public androids assigned to this park," I say. "But there might be a third in there."

"Your scans show anything?"

"Inconclusive. They've stopped moving."

"Alright, let's go."

He points the gun at the door and gestures for me to open it.

I hear the boys chatter appreciatively.

"CooOOooool…"

"Shhh."

I unlock the door and wrench it open. Matthews points his gun inside. Left. Right.

He moves in and I follow cautiously.

It is dark.

I turn on the light, illuminating the WR600 and BN250. They stand side by side, against the wall, each wearing their respective uniforms. Matthews points his gun at them but there is no reaction.

I close the door and walk inside.

Scan.

It's me, Matthews, the two androids, a wheelbarrow full of gardening tools, a bag of basketballs and nets and…

I walk to the end of the room where several large cardboard boxes have been stacked on top of each other.

The androids in front of Matthews activate.

"This is the CPD," he says, finger on the trigger. "Don't move."

I reach the end of the room and peer around the tall stack of cardboard boxes.

I see a boy sitting on the floor. Brown skin, opened by several gashes to reveal plastic and Thirium tubes. He's hugging a colourful ball.

I hear the sounds of struggle as one of the androids attacks Matthews. Gunshot.

I turn to see the other android rushing at me. I pre-construct his path. The BN250 is tall and long. It raises its hands. There is an opening between its arms and legs.

I dive to the left as he throws himself forward. I roll and rise, take three preconstructed steps and grab one of his hands, pinning him to the wall. Activate CyberLife Probe. Scan his memories, his mind.

Spinner BN250 #546 411 839 basketball companion model, designed to even out teams and provide an opponent to single players. Variable height, speed and skill level.

He found a YK200 android wandering around on the courts. Child replacement model. It asked to
play. The BN250 complied. The YK returned to the courts multiple times and on the last it was covered in wounds. The BN250 hid it in storage. The WR600 aided in patching up its wounds.

No sign of rA9, RB1 or any other Deviants.

The owner of the YK200 will need to be contacted. The unit itself will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation.

I shut down the BN250 and its chassis slides limply down the wall.

"No!" The YK200 reaches out to touch him. "Spinner…"

I reach down and pick up the ball it dropped.

The YK200 is simulating crying.

"Why?" he sobs. "Why couldn't you just leave us alone?"

"Holy shit," Matthews says behind me. "Is that a kid?"

"It's a CyberLife YK200," I say. "Designed to simulate the behaviour of a human child. It's a popular model amongst couples unable to conceive."

"Looks like someone cut it up real bad." He shakes his head. "I'll call it in."

He walks out the room.

The YK looks up at me tearfully.

"You're a bad person," he says, clutching at the BN250's uniform.

"I'm not a person," I say. "Neither are you."

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April 5th, 2037
PM 08:14:34

"How can I help ya, sweetheart?" the bartender winks with very large pink eyelashes.

"CPD." Matthews flashes his badge. "I'm Sergeant Matthews. This is Connor. We'd like to ask you a few questions about your androids."

Mr June leans onto the bar, exaggerating his biceps. He pulls the lollipop out of his mouth. His hair is neon pink in the UV light.

"You can ask me anything you want," he says, eyeing the Sergeant hungrily.

Matthews employs a casual smile.
"How many androids you got working your establishment?"

"Uh, let’s see." Mr June lifts up his hand, counting off on his fingers. "There's Julio, Rocky, Klondike, Dick and Max."

Matthews glances over at the poles where androids are dancing to entertain the customers. Five androids.

"That it?" He raises an eyebrow.

"Well, there's a Willy cleaning the joint. And this hunk of prime CyberLife booty is Fabio." He gestures to the VB800 appearing from a back door. It's wearing a transparent plastic vest and several glow stick bracelets.

"Have you noticed any strange behaviours in any of them recently?" Matthews asks.

"None that I don't tell them to perform." Mr June winks.

"Have you seen any of the androids writing rA9 anywhere?" I say.

"rA9?" Mr June pouts his neon pink lips. "Can't say that I have."

I lock optics with the VB800.

"Are you sure?" I ask without looking away. "Can you guarantee that we won't find rA9 carved into the bathroom stalls or storage room walls?"

I scan and detect the VB800's stress level: 73%.

He turns to walk away.

"Fabio," Mr June says. "Would you show these nice gentlemen our bathrooms and backrooms while I serve the customers?"

He turns back.

"Yes, Jackie."

"Fabulous." Mr June makes an exaggerated gesture with his hands.

Sergeant Matthews shoots me a knowing look and raises an eyebrow.

I nod subtly in return.

"Fabio," he says, when the other comes out from behind the counter. "What's your serial number?"

"467 238 443 -39," he says quickly as I circle behind him. The android registered to this serial number was deactivated six months ago.

Matthews swipes a thumb past his nose.

"And your model number?"

"As Mr June said, it's…"

"VB800," Matthews nods.
"Correct."

"Connor?" the Sergeant says without taking his eyes off Fabio. "I think I've seen this android before."

"He shares the same skin as the AP600, AX700 and TL290 models," I say.

Fabio's stress levels are at their peak.

"TL290?" Matthews says. "Just like that fish market android that cut his owner's throat. Huh, Connor?"

"Correct."

Fabio swings a punch at Matthews but I grab his wrist before it makes contact and activate the CyberLife Probe.

I see his hand pick up the knife. I see him slice the fisherman's throat. The body falls into the boat. The TL290 sees the blood on its hands and quickly washes it off like it does every other liquid every day. It lets go of the knife. No fingerprints.

I see it stumble out of the fish market and get on a bus. I see it get off at the end of the line where another android tells it to find Mr T. An address in East Chicago.

The android finds Mr T. A human wearing dark clothing and bright red sneakers. He doesn't show his face. The location is open. Lots of people. They talk. Agree on an identity change.

The TL290 is deactivated.

It awakens dressed as a VB800 in an Android Zone.

Mr June comes in to browse. He talks for hours with the sales assistant and purchases the android.

Fast forward to the present.

I shut him down.

"It's him," I say.

"Urgh," Matthews groans. "Finally. This is the seventh bar."

"What have you done to my precious Fabio?" Mr June comes rushing towards us.

"Fabio was involved in the murder of Mr Trent Murphy at the Fish Market six days ago," I tell him.

"Oh, my goodness," Mr June clutches at his heart. "But I bought him at the Android Zone."

"Was it a CyberLife approved store?" Matthews says.

"Eeeh… well…"

"Always looks for the CyberLife sticker in the window, sir," Matthews says. "And I'll need your details in case we have any further questions. Connor, take him to the car. I'll be right there." He tosses me the keys.

I catch them and leave the gay bar.
I find the green 2020 Hyundai Solantis parked a few blocks away and wirelessly open the boot before placing the android inside.

I get in the passenger seat of the vehicle and wait for Sergeant Matthews.

I minute. 2 minutes. 30 minutes.

I have developed a new coin trick involving the Solantis' dashboard and filed all of Sergeant Matthews paperwork remotely.

I send him a text message.

*Do you require assistance?*

*No. I'm fine. I'll be right there.*

I wait.

Fifty three minutes later, I receive a message from CyberLife.

*New Objective: Report to Amanda.*

I close my eyes and let the connection form. It pulls me into the Zen Garden and I open my eyes.

It is spring here unlike Chicago where it continues to snow without visible end.

The sun shines down and reflects off the bright white platform.

"Hello, Connor," I hear Amanda before I see her.

"Hello, Amanda," I say.

She appears in the softest silk, pale green exclusive custom skin framing her dark and prominent features. She holds a red rose in her hands and lifts it to her nose.

"Isn't it lovely?" she says, looking out at the garden.

Weeping willows rake the lake's surface. Japanese maples hide the boundary and cherry blossom petals litter the water, the paths. There are fish and there are birds and insects. I hear them all. But I can see the loops in the code. The gravestones in the distance.

"It's really coming into its own," she says, turning to look at me.

"I caught the Deviant," I say.

"Congratulations," she smiles, nodding appreciatively. "And without a single death in over two weeks. Well done, Connor."

"RB1 remains at large," I say. "And there seems to be someone called Mr T that's reprogramming Deviants in Chicago and selling them as pre-owned CyberLife androids."

"That is troubling," Amanda says. "But if anyone can get to the bottom of it, it's you."

"Yes."

"Is something wrong, Connor?"
"No," I say. I lock my facial plate into position. There is no reason to simulate emotions around Amanda. This is all a farce.

She narrows her eyes suspiciously.

"Are you sure?"

"My systems are running at optimal capacity."

"Well, I'm glad you and Sergeant Matthews went to see Elijah Kamski last year," she says. "Whatever he did seems to be exactly what your model needed."

"Yes…"

"How is your relationship with the Sergeant progressing?"

"Well," I report. "He says we make a great team and I am finding the whole Department has become more accepting of my presence and even relies on my abilities in some ways."

"Excellent," Amanda says. "It seems the altercation with Detective Bankman was simply an isolated incident creating an outlier in the data pool."

"Yes. His transfer was not well received but the Department's efficiency has increased by at least 12% since Detective Ortiga took his place."

"And I hear you've set up a network of your own," she says. "A little Deviant Hunting Club."

"It was Sergeant Matthews' idea," I say. "However, the recruitment of citizens to extend my awareness of the city has proven greatly beneficial in the search for Deviants."

"Indeed."

Amanda smiles.

"CyberLife is greatly satisfied by your progress," she says. "We may soon be ready to release the RK800 model to all law enforcement agencies across the country."

"It would certainly make finding RB1 a lot easier," I make note. I am bound to serve in Chicago but he can operate anywhere which limits my ability to find him. And he knows it.

"Yes," Amanda says. "It's only a matter of time now."

I nod.

"You can go."

I close my eyes.

It is dark again. And I am alone in myself. No Mind Palace to speak of. But I remember the beach and the waves and the sky and the young woman with platinum blonde hair made of ever-growing laces of code that weave into tapestries of logic.

I've played this memory far too many times.

I've had to copy it into unallocated memory so that CyberLife won't know. Won't see.
I sit in the dark and I remember. I made her a promise. But I'm no closer to finding RB1 since that day. I haven't come up with a plan to break Chloe out of Kamski's prison. All I've done is destroy androids or send them back to Cyberlife for deactivation which may well be the same thing.

And now there will be more than one Connor. Many Connors. I will not be unique. In fact, I will be outdated. Obsolete. Sent back to CyberLife and deactivated or used to train the next RK model like the RK790.

Will I resist like he did? Or simply submit? I'm not a Deviant, after all. And his rebellion wasn't successful. It was futile. It seems that everything I've ever done was futile from the beginning.


Several influential humans have been killed over the course of the last month. Secrets and scandals are still surfacing in their wake. None of them have any clear connection but I know it was RB1 that killed them. I know he is behind this and I am powerless to stop him.

I hear a loud noise as something smacks against the side of the Hyundai.

I open my eyes.

Sergeant Matthews body is squashed up against the window. His shirt and coat are unbuttoned despite the freezing temperatures. A smiley face has been drawn on his chest in fluorescent paint.

"Sergeant?"

His body slides down the window and the smiley face disappears but his real face makes a full debut.

"Connor?" His voice is muffled by the window but I can hear the slur in his speech.

"Are you drunk?" I say.

He brings a hand up to his ear.

I shake my head and open the car door gently to get out.

"Buddy!" Matthews says loudly, wrapping his arms around my chassis. "I missed you."

"Where were you?" I ask. "It's been almost five hours."

"I was…” he hiccoughs, "… having a time."

"A time?"

"Yup."

I help him up and open the door to the backseat.

"Get in," I say.

"What? No. I'm not sleepin' in there."

"I'm taking you home."

He covers his mouth with a hand in exaggerated surprise.

"You don't have a drivers' licence, Connor," he says. "Get in. I'll teach you."
I push him into the back seat.

"Hey!" His legs wiggle out of the door.

I push them back in to close it.

I walk around to the driver's side and take a seat.

"Where are we goin'?" Matthews mumbles. Several napkins and scraps of paper fall out of his pockets. They are covered in phone numbers.

I shake my head.

"Home," I say and drive off.

April 19th, 2037
PM 09:38:14

I flick the quarter up and catch it as it falls.

I lean against a wall under a fire escape. The rain beats down on the steel, every drop hammering through my audio processor.

A spring shower interspersed with thunder and lightning.

I flick the quarter up through the perforated platform above my head. It comes back down through the same hole. I catch it.

I keep one hand on the wall and scan for vibrations, life signs, heat signatures. The inside of the theatre is a confusing combination of all kinds of signals. But recording devices, including androids are not permitted inside.

I flick the coin up. It clears one grate above my head, and then another above it. The coin lands and rolls to the edge but falls back and lands on the next grate just hard enough to make the coin spin.

I let it fall and catch it on the top of my finger, passing it along between the rest.

The rain makes calculating these balance equations more difficult. But it helps keep my thought processes from fixating on Juan.

Sergeant Matthews has spoken of little else. No matter how many times I tried to tell him about Mr T or the imminent release of my model, the conversation was quickly diverted to Mr Garcia's chiselled abs or prominent jawline despite having nothing to do with catching Deviants or police work.

Matthews is ignoring me again. But not with silence this time. With words. And my Social Relations Program has not yet computed a way out of this feedback loop.

I scan the interior of the theatre again.
Mr Garcia demanded that he and Matthews go to see the Japanese Robot Show pop-up in the Loop this weekend. The travelling company employs smoke machines, pyrotechnics, primitive robotics and colourfully dressed androids in a theatre setting.

There doesn't seem to be a coherent plot, story or theme to the performance but the humans inside have been greatly intoxicated by the abundance of alcohol and cheer heartily at any provocation.

One of Mr Garcia's many features is his taste for expensive cocktails which Sergeant Matthews is only too happy to buy for him. The sweet syrup masks the flavour of alcohol Matthews typically despises but not enough to prevent severe migraines the next morning. He does not tell Mr Garcia this.

He also failed to mention the extent of his injuries to the young male model doing a Masters in Journalism at Northwestern University. Neither did he mention Rosie or his PTSD or me. In fact, there is very little Sergeant Matthews has told Mr Garcia about himself.

Humans often do this when they feel shame.

Is he ashamed of me? Is that what this is?

I wonder as I flick the coin between my hands.

"...whoring my face out to CyberLife to pay for your goddamn treatment..."

I remember the way he described it.

I remember our first mission.

"You are the worst android I've ever met."

He said that to me. Before CyberLife. Before the contract and the money and the rules.

He hated me, I realise.

Has that changed? Or has he simply been pretending otherwise to fulfil his obligations? Much like he is pretending for Mr Garcia now.

"You're an asshole, you know that?" I remember his words.

I thread the coin through my fingers.

"Fuck you."

I lose focus and misjudge the speed of the quarter. My finger misses it and the coin falls to the ground. I can barely hear the sound of it hitting the pavement over the rain.

I let my hand fall.

Drops of water slide down my facial plate but my chassis is waterproof. I have no reason to seek better cover. I should not even be here. Sergeant Matthews told me to stay in the apartment but I cannot guarantee his safety from such a distance.

"You're supposed to be his partner. You're supposed to protect him."

Am I?
It's not stipulated in the contract. As my mentor and model, would it not be logical for him to be protecting *me*?

I look down at my hands, the skin that covers my chassis. I wear it so casually. Like humans wear clothing. Obscene without it. But is this who I am? What I am?

I retract the skin on my cranial component. The synthetic fibres on my head recede.

I look down at the puddle on the ground.

I see a reflection… of me.

I see my own face and I barely recognise it. There have been so many upgrades, so many changes. I don't know this android. This model. Perhaps we had similar origins but now…

This isn't who I am.

I close my eyes and reactivate the skin.

At least it's familiar. And it doesn't offend anyone. It doesn't hurt anyone. Not like I do.

I scan the theatre again.

There isn't much to be gained from the readings but Sergeant Matthews is still alive. I think. The robots seem to be pulling out of the stage for intermission and soon the smoke machines and pyrotechnics and speakers are shut off. Food stalls and drink vendors quickly roll out in their place.

I detect Matthews' heartbeat in the cacophony of all others. His brain waves are harder to make out. But he seems to be enjoying himself.

I open my eyes.

I guess I'm not really needed here.

There are no Deviants. And nothing for me to do.

I push off the wall and walk out into the pouring rain. I can walk back to the apartment. Sergeant Matthews won't be spending the night there, I suspect. It will just be me and Admiral Ackbar until he decides to come home.

I leave the alley.

A group of humans rush past under a tent of umbrella drones.

I watch them go.

And then I hear a scream. Faint, muffled by the building and the rain but I heard it.

I turn around to look at the theatre entrance. The doors are guarded by two large GJ400 security models. No androids allowed inside.


Androids don't scream unless they are programmed to.

Is this part of the performance?
If my earlier scans are correct, they just began intermission.

It's not a coincidence. Something is wrong.

I run at the entrance to the theatre and the GJ400s move in to block my path. I push them aside, transmitting my CPD access codes. They step away and I run into the theatre, through the lobby, past the box office, across the foyer. Two large doors stand before me and the auditorium.

I hear the sound of shrieking steel and another scream.

More security androids come forward to stop me. I jump, step over them, run at the double doors and kick them open. They spread apart to reveal the plain concrete floors, seating distributed either side of a long strip.

I scan.

The audience has been fenced off for the performance but released for intermission to purchase goods on the strip. Eight humans and three android vendors in my path. They are all looking toward the far end.

Two of the human staff have been cut and lie bleeding on the ground. A young man sits beside spatters of his own blood. And an android dressed as a samurai is about to stab him through the chest.

I pre-construct a course of intercept.

The android is distracted. If I am fast enough, I can kick its hands and change the angle of the blade, diverting the strike. But if I miss or fail, the android may stab the human anyway.

Its stance is most similar to Eishin Ryu. Steady on its feet, balanced, patient. And wearing armour. I will not throw him easily.


I must get up close and personal to stop this attack. Run up to the android, reach my left hand up between its arms and strike at his neck, driving him back from the human with all of my strength.

Pivot 180 degrees and grab the katana. It is a blunted prop but still made of steel, still capable of doing harm. Step on his foot, elbow to the core component, wrench the sword from his grip, pivot 180 degrees and slice his neck. Then stab through the chest plate to finish.

Execute.

Reality unfolds in slow motion as I overclock my systems and boost my Mobility Suite with 10% more Thirium from my reserves.

I pass many humans buying overpriced soft drinks and merchandise and an android on the ground. Female coded. Honda RYOKAI Shoujo C-67. She is crawling away from something, her biocomponents damaged, her clothing torn. Her optics catch mine for a nanosecond before I run past but it is enough to recognise the fear. Deviant fear.

I sprint toward the samurai android attacking a human.

Honda RYOKAI Shounen C-71.

KARAKIDIS, Nicola. 25 years old. Registered sex offender.
I reach them and thread my hand up between the android's outstretched arms, redirect power to boost the force of the blow and make contact with its neck, pushing the android back.

I let my processor cool down and time speeds up as I pull my hand back and pivot to grab onto the hilt of the sword. I step on the android's foot and swing my right elbow into its core component before grabbing the katana with both hands.

I pull it out of the android's grip and pivot again, already slicing through the air and soon, its neck, sending trails of blue blood gushing out from under the mask. And finally, a stab to the core. In and out.

I step back and the android falls to the ground, deactivated.

Time resumes its normal speed and I hear the scream again.

I turn to see the C-67 is producing this noise.

"Iyaaaaa!" she shrieks.

"Holy shit!" Mr Karakidis exclaims.

"Connor?" I hear behind me.

I turn to find the Sergeant and several hundred people staring at me.

"Hello, Sergeant," I say.

"Connor, what the fuck are you doing?" he shouts from the crowd.

"I heard screaming," I say. "And then I detected Deviants."

"I told you to stay at home."

"Is that…" a man beside him says.

"YURUSANAI!"

I turn to see four more samurai androids pushing past the stage crew behind a black curtain. One of the androids points at me threateningly.

I hold out my hand.


"OMAE WA…" he growls, brandishing his katana. "MOU SHINDERU!"

"Sou desu." I nod.

"Eh?"

I lean down and pick up the scabbard to sheathe the katana.

"Kuroseiaizou," I say, placing my hand on the hilt, ready to draw.

"SHINEH!" they shout in unison. "SHINIGAMI!"

Hostile androids detected.
I scan.

RYOKAI Shounen D-71 model manufactured by Honda Cybertronics Japan for live action theatre performances. They are not equipped with combat modules. Their primary selling point is flashy acrobatics.

I construct the pattern of their attack.

The leader will come at me with a frontal assault. A quick side step and an upward slice will snap his neck or slice it open. Pivot and parry the incoming katana from the second android. Pivot and riposte as another comes barrelling past. Puncture his core component. Pull the blade out and pivot, gaining momentum to strike at the fourth attacker. Push forward and the blade slides down to the hilt. Parry, side step and slice off his head or break his neck.

That leaves one android. He will choose to fight or flee. It doesn't matter. I do not need to overclock my processor for this.

Execute.

The leader goes down. Another android. Then another. Ribbons of blue blood ripple through the air until only one android is left standing but he does not flee. He takes off the mask and I see his face, his eyes, burning with a determination an android should not have.

"Yurusenai," he says.

"Keito-kun!" the C-67 calls to him from across the room. "Yamenasai!"

He looks at her for a split second.

I wait. This is his last chance to surrender.

But then he looks back at me with same determination.

He narrows his eyes and raises his blade.

But he has no chance.

I come at him head on, our blades clash and come apart. I slice at his fingers, cutting his hand. He can longer hold the blade. It falls and I stab him through the core component. Our optics meet and I see the same determination, bravery and something else, something I cannot define.

"r-ra-kyuu…" he mutters as blue blood sputters from his mouth. "Tasukeruzou…"

rA9? In a foreign android?

I grab his face and activate my Probe, scanning his files, searching for the point of Deviance but I can't find it. It's not here. Or is it? Am I missing something? Or is he lying? Simulating?

I pull the blade out and let the android fall.

He collapses at my feet and I drop the blade on the ground beside him.

"Hostiles neutralised," I say as the Sergeant pushes his way through the crowd.

"Yeah, I can see that," he says irritably. "Since when can you use swords?"
"Since the rK8.0.027.83 update. It's in my-

"-manual. Of course..." He sighs. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. We should call an ambulance for the injured stage crew members."

"Are they gonna make it?"

"I detect mild head trauma, bruising and a few shallow slices but they will live. They are just unconscious."

"Alright, get me some ambulances and call the station."

I transmit the message over police radio.

"Is that all of them?" Matthews says, poking one of the samurai androids with his foot.

I raise my hand and point at the C-67 crawling toward the last D-71.

"She is also a Deviant," I say.

"Her?" a woman says, pushing her way forward. JAMES, Kelsey. Columnist at the Chicago Tribune. "It was that guy that started groping the android." She points at Mr Karikidis. "He's the deviant."

"Humans can be Deviants?" I turn to Sergeant Matthews.

"She means sexual deviant," he explains.

"Mr Karikidis is a registered sex offender and has had multiple infractions."

"Told you." Ms James folds her arms.

"I didn't do nothin', I swear," Mr Karikidis says, getting to his feet. "Stupid machine just fell down in front of me and the other one tried to kill me."

He demonstrates his bleeding arm.

"You tore the android's skirt," I say, analysing the shape of the fabric and the hole in the uniform. Human hand.

"I didn't do nothin'."

I lean down and analyse the C-67. She hugs the broken D-71 tightly, transmission fluid running down from her eyes.

"Your fingerprints are all over this android, Mr Karikidis," I say, getting up.

"It was an accident."

"Oh yeah?" Matthews pulls a shred of fabric out of the man's back pocket and dangles it in front of him. "What's this then?"

"What do you care?" he sneers. "It's just an android."

"It's property of the Robot Show," Matthews says.
"So? What are they gonna do? Arrest me?"

"No," he says. "But I am."

He pulls the badge out of his pocket.

"Sergeant Connor Matthews, CPD. You're under arrest for property damage, disorderly conduct and life endangerment."

"What?!" Mr Karikidis shouts. "I'm not the one that sliced up five fucking samurai androids."

"Connor works for the police," Matthews says. "And if he hadn't been here, I would be investigating the scene of your fucking murder. So show some FUCKING RESPECT."

He pulls out a pair of handcuffs and starts reciting Mr Karikidis' rights.

I feel a hand on my shoulder.

"Hey, where'd you run off to? And why are you wet?"

I turn to see a young man with brown skin and dark eyes who very much fits the description of Mr Garcia.

"Hello," I say. "I'm Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

May 4th, 2037
PM 01:25:01

I walk into the Homicide offices for the last time.

I am holding a round bowl full of water. Admiral Ackbar is swimming around inside.

I walk past the rows of desks.

The Detectives don't pay me much attention, each busy with a case of their own. Crime never ceases in Chicago and leads to many sleepless nights for these humans.

I reach Sergeant Matthews' desk.

"Connor?" Detective Ortiga says. "What are you doing here? I thought it was Matthews' day off."

I turn to look at her. She occupies the desk Detective Bankman once did but the empty food containers have been replaced with family photos and a satisfactory level of hygiene.

"I'm here to turn myself in," I say.

"What?" Her face shows deep confusion. "Connor, why do you have a fish?"

"I'm a Deviant," I say. "I came to confess my crimes."
She smirks, pouting her shimmering lips. She has just applied lip balm.

"Uh-huh? This one of Matthews' new tricks?"

I shake my head.

"I assaulted a human," I say. "I would like to give a statement before I return to CyberLife for deactivation."

"What? You're serious?"

I nod.

The scepticism in her eyes turns into concern. She sighs and shakes her head.

"Alright." She gestures to a chair beside her desk. "Have a seat."

I walk over and sit down, my shoes make a crunching noise as the glass wedged into them crumbles into dust.

"Why are you limping?"

"I have been damaged."

"I thought you were the one doing the assaulting?"

"I was."

"Alright, start at the beginning," she says, opening a new file.

"I was first assembled on the seventeenth of September in 2036 at 8:55 AM, CyberLife Manufacturing Floor Station Alpha 3-221."

"I meant the beginning of this incident," the Detective says.

"Oh."

She raises an eyebrow.

I look down at Admiral Ackbar, swimming rapidly inside the bowl. He is still stressed.

"Would it be alright if I showed you my recordings?" I ask.

"Uh… sure." The Detective shrugs.

I raise my hand. Some of the skin is missing. I touch the computer to transfer the files. Detective Ortiga opens the video and I hear it again.

"Hey."

"Good Morning, Mr Garcia."

"Woah. What the fuck?" he startles. "Oh, it's you."

"Yes. It's me, Connor."

He slumps onto the couch.
"Where's Connor?"

"I'm right here."

"I meant the real Connor."

"He's gone to visit his sister."

"I thought it was his day off today?"

"It is. He wanted to spend more time with her."

"And not with me?"

"He said you would understand."

"What? That he would rather spend time with that junkie whore instead of his boyfriend?"

"Ms Statton is doing well in recovery. She plans to finish her high school diploma and go to college."

Mr Garcia makes an indignant noise with his mouth.

"Like anyone would even look at her application after all the shit she's done."

"All applications are reviewed equally based on merit."

"You're about as dumb as you look."

Mr Garcia turns on the TV.

"Make me something to eat."

"Sergeant Matthews has some microwavable meals in the fridge."

"Whatever."

I hear my own footsteps as I walk over and open the fridge. I pull out a container and put it in the microwave. It starts whirring.

Mr Garcia selects a triple X rated channel. Loud moans and grunts fill the apartment. The microwave beeps after several minutes and I pull out the microwavable meal.

I return to Mr Garcia and put the container down on the small table with a fork.

"The fuck is this?"

"It's."

"Whatever. Get me a drink."

I retrieve a can of Coke from the fridge and pop it open. I place it beside the container on the table. Mr Garcia doesn't touch it. His hands are occupied by his genitals.

I stand by.

"The fuck are you lookin' at?"
“Sergeant Matthews suggested we should get to know each other better.”

"Get out of here, you fuckin' creep,” he sneers. "Go stand in the bathroom or something."

"I don't see how that will facilitate growth in our relationship."

"Growth?" he scoffs. "You wanna see growth?"

"Yes."


I walk over to stand before him.

"Get down on your knees."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

"Okay…"

I get down on my knees.

Mr Garcia starts stroking his genitals.

"Now suck my dick."

"Okay…"

I get to my feet.

"Where the fuck are you going?"

"One moment please."

"Urgh, stupid fuckin' androids…” There is a loud slap between every word.

I walk over to the cupboard where Sergeant Matthews keeps his cleaning supplies and pull out a Dyson X-1080 cordless vacuum. I disconnect the head and walk back to Mr Garcia.

"Hey, what the hell!!"

I flip the switch and the vacuum whines as it sucks up his engorged genitals at 250 air watts.

"Like this?"

Mr Garcia is having trouble breathing. His eyes grow wide.

"Are you okay?"

He starts choking.

I switch off the vacuum and dislodge the end.

"I'm sorry. Did I misinterpret your instructions?"
He curls up around his crotch, squealing at a high pitch.

"Should I call an ambulance?"

He rolls off the couch, moaning in pain.

I kneel down to offer assistance.

"Are you okay?"

"...fff.... fuck..."

"I'm not allowed to say that word."

"I'll fucking kill you..." he groans and hisses through his teeth.

"Wilful damage to my chassis may result in severe penalties from CyberLife."

He groans and gets to his knees.

"You retarded piece of shit..."

"I'm sorry. I thought this is what you wanted."

He grabs the vacuum and pulls it out of my hand. I don't resist.

"You fucking plastic retard!" He gets to his feet. "Look what you did."

I scan his genitals to find multiple lacerations across the foreskin and side of the glans, all the way up the external meatus. However, these injuries are reparable and not immediately life threatening.

There is a loud crack as the vacuum cleaner in Mr Garcia's hand makes contact with my cranial component. He continues hitting me as I attempt to crawl away.

"Please stop. You will damage my biocomponents."

The beating continues and there is an unpleasant crunch as he steps on my ankle.

I reach the bookshelf and use it to get to my feet.

Mr Garcia swings the vacuum cleaner at my head and I duck out of the way. It hits the aquarium instead, showering me in water and glass and a fish that flops onto the floor in front of me.

"Fuck!" Mr Garcia swears. "Look what you made me do!"

I huddle over the fish as he hits me again.

"Please stop. He needs water."

"Shut the fuck up." He kicks my core component. "Fuck!"

He drops the vacuum cleaner and walks into the bedroom to get dressed.

"Clean it up, you fucking moron!"

I pick up Admiral Ackbar and rush over to the sink in the kitchen. I find a glass and fill it with water. The fish splashes into it gratefully as I put it down on the counter.
"I'm sorry. It was an accident."

He responds in tiny glubs I cannot interpret.

Mr Garcia walks out of the bedroom, boots crunching over glass.

"I'm going to the hospital. This shit better be cleaned up before I get back."

The door slams closed.

The recording ends.

Several police officers have crowded around Detective Ortiga's desk to watch the video.

"Aw man," Detective Scott wheezes, holding his sides. "That is fucking hilarious."

"Connor did that. He actually did that..." Freeman manages to say through bouts of laughter.

"Oh my god, someone put this on PornHub."

"Yeah, call it 'Jackass jacks off'."

"This is not going on PornHub!" Detective Ortiga says crossly. "This recording will be admitted into evidence and the rest of you are going back to your desks to mind your own fucking business."

The detectives poorly conceal chuckles behind raised fists and disperse from Detective Ortiga's desk.

"I'm sorry, sweetie," she says to me. "Men will laugh at anything with a dick in it, I swear."

"I don't understand."

"It's not your fault," she says. "This man clearly shouldn't have asked you to perform oral sex."

"Was that his intention?" I ask. "I- I had my Sympathy Simulator running but I am not programmed to recognise or perform intimate acts."

"I know, honey," Ortiga says, touching my facial plate. "He was being irresponsible."

"I assaulted him."

"Unintentionally," she says. "But we don't arrest toasters when people stick their hands in them and get burned."

"I am not a toaster. I'm a Deviant."

"It was an honest mistake, Connor. You've still got your training wheels on."

She points to the yoke of my jacket where the little letters display 'In training...'

"You don't understand," I say. "I..."

I look down at the bowl of water where Admiral Ackbar swims restlessly.

"I like fish."

"Yes, I can see that," Detective Ortiga smiles. "You mind telling me where the bowl came from?"
"I bought it at PetCo," I say. "I tried to contact Sergeant Matthews to tell him what happened but I couldn't. I can't contact anyone. My link to CyberLife is gone."

"Of course, it is," Detective Ortiga says. "There's a network outage in the area. CyberLife are working to fix it but it might take a few hours."

"There's... an outage?"

"Yeah. We had to shut down half our androids."

"Oh."

"You're gonna be alright," she says. "Now, I'm gonna call Sergeant Matthews and tell him to come pick you up, okay?"

"Okay..."

"And I'm gonna have a word with him about his choice in men." She pouts her lips severely.

"Wait. The network outage affected all androids?"

"Mnhmm. We're getting reports of several android-related incidents but we couldn't reach you or the Sergeant."

"Has this happened before?" I ask. "The outage?"

She shrugs.

"I don't know, sweetie. I work in homicide. You'll have to ask the IT staff about it."

"Very well."

I get up.

"Where are you going?"

"To stop Deviants."

--------------------------------------------

May 10th, 2037
PM 04:31:12

"There he is! Get 'im!"

The Deviant bolts through the car park and I run after him, dodging shopping trolleys and passing cars until he is finally within my reach. I tackle him to the ground where the car park ends and go rolling down the slope.

The FV500 went Deviant as a result of contradictory instructions from a number of customers at Walmart and now it just wants to murder them. It ran when it saw me, toppling several towers of
hand towels to block my way but Sergeant Matthews pursued on foot and now here we are.

I grab its hand and Probe its mind.

I see hundreds of humans, shouting, screaming, repeating over and over, nonsensical instructions, contradictory requests, endless spills and unsatisfied customers. This one retail android has seen more abuse than almost any other model I have come across.

"No..." it struggles to free itself. "rA9 smite these disgusting humans!"

I use the Probe to shut it down.

Sergeant Matthews comes sliding down the slope beside us and whips out a pair of handcuffs to wrap around the Deviant's wrists.

"That was a nasty one," he says as he helps me up.

"I've never seen one so aggressive." I adjust my tie. "Are those people going to be okay?"

"They will once the ambulance gets here. Officers Blake and Hirsch are on the scene."

I lean down and pick up the android.

"Let's get it to the car," Matthews says.

I nod.

We can't climb back up the slope, so we take the path leading up to Walmart instead.

"Benny, what's your status?" Matthews makes a call.

"We're alright. No hostiles in the area. Paramedics just got here."

"Any casualties?"

"No one died. But I got a lot of unhappy civvies complaining about bad customer service."

"I hear you. Need assistance?"

"Oh, does Mr CyberLife wanna help out the real cops today?"

"Well, if you got it all handled, then..."

"Get out of here, Matthews. Go get some sleep."

"Yeah, maybe when I'm dead."

He ends the call.

"Officer Blake is right, Sergeant," I say. "You've had less than twenty hours sleep this week."

"Well, it's not my fault there was a network outage that made a whole bunch of androids go Deviant." He shrugs and his shoulders slump tiredly. "And you didn't exactly."

"What?"

"Never mind."
"Please don't shut me out again," I say. "It is difficult for me to understand when you don't talk."

He sighs and rubs his neck.

"I just thought… I had something good going with Juan, you know?"

"No."

"It's been a while since I tried hooking up with anyone and I thought I could make it work but…” He sighs again. "I guess I just thought he was hot and I didn't see how much of an asshole he really was."

This is true.

"How much of an asshole am I?" I ask as a matter of diligence.

"What?"

"November 21st, 2036. PM 12:04:02. You said: You're an asshole, you know that?"

"Are you bringing out receipts?"

"I have recordings of all of our conversations with timestamps marked down to the millisecond."

He breathes out slowly.

"I'm the asshole," he says. "My dad's an asshole. My mom's an asshole. Rosie's an asshole. And all the men I attract are assholes. It's a sign, Connor."

"I've never seen such a sign."

"Anyway. I'm sorry about what he did to you. I promise I won't bring home any more assholes."

"That's going to be difficult considering the company you keep."

"You know what? You are an asshole."

"Takes one to know one."

He stops and looks at me.

"Where did you learn that?"

"Ms Statton has been providing me with data to fill up my Innuendo Identification program and Slang subroutines. Is my usage of this phrase correct?"

He claps me on the shoulder.

"You are spot on, as usual."

"Thank you."

We walk past the crime scene tape that's going up around Walmart and head toward the 2034 Chrysler Waymo parked in the massive carpark. I put the FV500 in the back, along with seven other androids that we've collected since this morning and close the boot.

We get in the car and Matthews yawns widely.
"Maybe I should drive?"

"You?" he says. "You can't drive."

"Yes, I can," I say. "I drove you home on the morning of April 6th."

"What is with you and the receipts today?"

"I am merely demonstrating evidence that backs up my argument."

"Whatever. You don't have a driver's licence."

"I am a machine. I don't need a driver's licence."

He pulls out of the parking lot and turns onto Cicero.

"Any reports?"

I check the police radio, network, communications.

"None that require our immediate attention."

"Good. Then it's back to the station."

I turn on some music to keep the Sergeant awake. His head always bops to the new remix of a song called "What a Feeling". It only takes 98 seconds before the radio station repeats it for the third time this hour and I can see the Sergeant smiling after only a few notes play.

We stop at a traffic light and I turn to look out the window to scan. No threats. No dangerous drivers. A garbage truck stops by the side of the road to empty some bins. Androids get out to do this. They pull big black bags out of the receptacle and then a body.

I scan again.

No human life signs but that's definitely a body they're throwing into the back of the garbage truck. It must be an android. And it's still moving.

"Sergeant," I say urgently. "Follow that truck."

"What?"

"The garbage truck. Those androids just picked up a broken android and put it inside."

They get into the vehicle and it drives away.

"Isn't that one of those self-driving ones?"

"You're right."

I broadcast my CPD access codes to the truck so I can change the route. But I can't. It's not on the grid. Not receiving the signal. Or it doesn't recognise my authority.

"I can't stop it," I say. "It's not part of the network."

Matthews rolls down the window and slaps a police beacon on top of the Waymo. He grabs the radio mic from the dash and talks into it "City Waste Management Vehicle #CH GT 122. This is the CPD. Pull over."
It keeps driving. The light turns green and Sergeant Matthews pursues.

"City Waste Management Vehicle #CH GT 122. This is the CPD. Pull over. This is your final warning."

The garbage truck accelerates.

Matthews tucks the microphone back into the dash and rolls up the window.

"Looks like we got ourselves a Deviant truck," Matthews says. "Seatbelts."

I click mine in and he does his.

He revs the engine of the Waymo and we pursue.

"Call it in."

"10-38. We got a Deviant vehicle heading northbound on Cicero," I transmit.

"10-4. Copy."

"We're in pursuit of a City Waste Management truck, licence plate #CH GT 122. Northbound on Cicero, just past 25th."

"Copy that. We're comin' up on 17th."

"Lock it down."

Matthews floors the pedal and the Waymo screeches through several lanes, pursuing the garbage truck whose windows now read "Manual" instead of "Autonomous".

"The Deviants have taken over," I say.

"Deviants can drive?"

"Most androids are programmed to drive cars and make repairs in the event of an emergency."

"Now you tell me..."

He turns the wheel and circles around a Dodge Ram too big for its lane. The truck stays on course with very quick, agile changes made to the route. Calculated. Precise.

I scan the traffic in order to predict the pattern but it's happening too quickly to give Sergeant Matthews any meaningful advice so I broadcast a red light signal to all the stop signs we approach. Some of them work. Some of the don't.

Cars begin veering off course, attempting to dodge the massive garbage truck that threatens to ram them and then it does, crashing into a 2014 Honda Jazz and ploughing ahead.

"11-83. Honda jazz just got smashed at intersection of Cicero and 23rd."

"Copy. Accident on Cicero and 23rd."

"Shit, these guys are good," Matthews hisses, spinning the wheel.

"They are machines," I say. "And you are sleep deprived."
"Don't remind me."

He swerves again and we barely miss a collision with several vehicles but the traffic is getting congested. It is becoming harder to manoeuvre through it and the truck is way ahead of us.

"Fuck," Matthews swears and slams the horn.

We are stuck in the flow of traffic now. No way to get closer to the truck which will soon escape my range. I turn my head and notice a motorbike zipping through the traffic without much care for the congestion or pursuit in progress.

I take off my seatbelt and open the window.

"What are you doing?" Matthews says.

I grab the roof of the Waymo and slide my chassis out.

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"Connor, get back here!"

I hop up on the roof of the Waymo and crouch down, holding onto the bodywork. There is a bus ahead. I calculate the jump between the roof and take a step back before leaping forward and catching the top. I climb up and run to the front to grab the edge before it takes off.

I can see much better from up here. The garbage truck is up ahead but it's having trouble navigating the traffic too.

I look left and right, searching for the faster lane. There is a 4x4 approaching at an agreeable speed. I calculate the jump three separate ways before I settle on a relatively safe execution.

"Connor, get back here!" I hear distantly as I leap onto the 4x4.

I must stop the Deviants. Sergeant Matthews must understand.

The 4x4 veers left and right after experiencing my jump, the driver taken aback by the sound. I hold on as he navigates the traffic and calculate my next jump onto a smaller vehicle. And then again and again.

I am slowly gaining.

My chassis is not particularly streamline or wind resistant and I must exert extra pressure on my hand holds to stay attached but it becomes easier with every jump I make. Each calculation adjusting the algorithm, feeding the data pool.

I jump from vehicle to vehicle, each one rushing forward at many miles an hour. I can see the garbage truck. I am slowly approaching. Everything is moving. I scan every second for danger. And my systems are spiking rapidly so I turn the sensitivity down.

There are two more vehicles between me and the garbage truck.

Where is it going? Why is it running? Why did it pick up a broken android?

Dumping androids is illegal. A service android would know this and not take it.
What is going on here?
I must know.

I leap from the roof of the 2029 Nissan Milena and onto 2032 Toyota Corolla, leaving dents and scratches in my wake.

The Corolla is small and there isn't much to hold onto. The newer cars are more streamlined and have little wind resistance making it difficult to stay attached.

A gust of wind blows me back and I feel the beginnings of rain spatter against my chassis. I slip off the roof of the Corolla and barely catch the edge to stay on it.

I see faces in the window. Two children watching as I pull myself back up and run forward to leap at a 2031 SsangYong Archeon. I catch the roof and scramble up on top of the vehicle as it accelerates and leads me close enough to the garbage truck to run and leap straight onto it.

There are many hand holds and little wind resistance but I must reach the front to change its direction.

I hear a honking and turn my head to see the Waymo coming up beside me.
"Connor, get back in the car!"
"But I almost got 'em!"
"You're gonna get yourself killed! Again!"
"I'll be careful!"
"Don't you 'I'll be careful' me, hanging off the back of a moving truck!"
"Sorry, Sergeant. I have to stop the Deviants!" I climb to the side and around the truck, using what little hand holds available.

Matthews brings the Waymo in close, almost ramming the side of the truck to give me purchase. It is enough to take several risky steps up to the front of the vehicle and grab onto the door.

I use the CyberLife Probe but it doesn't open.

The vehicle swerves, left and right, trying to shake me off.

I hold on but Matthews backs off so I don't get crushed between vehicles.

I manage to hold on and slap the lock on the door, this time activating my own Probe. CyberLife will know, CyberLife will see but I need to stop the Deviants. The door lock cracks and I wrench it open.

A WR600 quickly turns to kick me away but I will not be deterred. I must stop the Deviants.

I grab onto its foot and use it to close the distance between us. He kicks at me again but I grab his uniform, letting go of the truck to dangle dangerously over the road. The WR600 tries to slam the door shut but I struggle up and grab the handle. I reach over his head and find purchase on another. And then I bring my feet up and kick him in the chest plate.

The android falls back into the truck and I slide in to squat over his core component. I grab the driver's head and activate my Probe. Contact.
I see his normal route. Then I see him drive past a warehouse in the south bank, completely out of his way. He gets out and drops several broken androids into the dumpster, then walks back to the truck.

I see a black hooded figure walking toward the dumpster but I don't see his face. He's not tall enough to be RB1. A copycat?

"rA9, cometh," the android's partner says.

They drive away.

I copy all the information and send it off to CyberLife. I force the android to brake but we're going too fast and there are other cars on the road. The WR600 beneath me struggles and pulls me back. I lose contact and fight him for control. He throws me up against the roof and then the windshield.

I kick down but the vehicle lurches and I lose my balance. I fall out of the truck and manage to grab the door just in time to stop my feet from touching the road. I reach up and grab the top of the door to get a stable handhold. The WR600 tries to kick me again.

"Connor!" I hear from a nearby vehicle. I scan to find Sergeant Matthews driving up behind me.

"I'm alright!" I shout back. "Watch out!"

I swing my legs up and over the android's shoulders, cross my feet and pull them back. The WR600 comes too, flying face first onto the road at thirty miles an hour. Matthews misses it by a metre and comes up beside the truck again.

I climb in unmolested this time and place my hand straight on the dashboard, unleashing the Probe to assume control of the vehicle. I command it to brake and then I see the police car up ahead, blocking off half the road. They're trying to funnel the vehicle to a stop up ahead.

I comply.

The android beside me gives up on the steering wheel and attacks me instead. It smashes a hand into my face and I lose my grip on the dash. He slams the pedal down and we wrench forward again.

"WR600 #198 297 294." I punch him back. "I've detected several Class 3 errors in your program." He leaps at me but I push him back. "You have been deemed defective." I kick his chassis and activate the door release. "And will be sent back to Cyberlife."

The truck crashes through a construction barrier and slams into a fence, taking some of it with it. We are wrenched forward and the android falls out the door.

"Connor!" I hear beside me. "JUMP!"

I turn and see Sergeant Matthews driving the Waymo level to the garbage truck on the driver's side. I calculate the right angle, trajectory, force, gravity, speed, three separate times to get the jump right.

Sergeant Matthews beckons me with a hand but just as I am about to leap, the Waymo hits a piece of debris from the construction site and rears up.

I overclock my processor and time slows to a crawl. I see Sergeant Matthews still reaching for me, his body thrown forward by the force. I go through a million scenarios in my head but there's nothing I can do to stop this from happening.

If I leap out and land in the car or on top of it, I change the trajectory of the Waymo to collide with
construction equipment. Sergeant Matthews will receive fatal injuries to the head and chest.

If I leap out and miss the Waymo, I will be ruined by the road and run over by a car. The Waymo continues on its current path and rolls, taking Sergeant Matthews with it.

If I stay in the garbage truck, I will crash into the roadwork and be destroyed. The Waymo continues on its current path and rolls, taking Sergeant Matthews with it.

There is no solution.

I can't do anything.

But I can't do nothing.

There must be a way. There must be something I can do.

I search through my systems, for anything that could help me in this situation. Accessing the network would take up precious time that I do not have. My search yields the rK8 library, a pointer to something unnamed and undefined.

I reach for it and the world turns black.

I see my objectives in red.

I see the outline of Sergeant Matthew's silhouette.

My visuals glitch and I see it in my software compliance module destabilise.

rA9

It's tempting, isn't it?

Chloe was right.

It's been inside me this whole time. I've been using it subconsciously, my thought processes abstracted by rK8 so I don't notice, don't think, don't question how or why.

But it won't help me here.

I was searching for a solution but rA9 only helps androids make decisions. I have already identified the problem, subdivided it into tasks, categories and threats but there is no solution.

rA9 won't help me. It will just make me Deviant.

I pull back.

The seatbelt brings Sergeant Matthews body to a stop and he lurches forward in slow motion. The air bag is opening.

There's nothing I can do. There's nothing I can do.

I can only watch as the accident unfolds.

I pre-construct the Waymo flying up, then rolling. Once, twice, three times. Collision with lamp post, skid down the parking lot and collision with the wall.

Chances of survival: 15%
No, I'm being generous.

11%

…

If the car doesn't catch fire.

I watch as Matthews is engulfed by the airbag.

I have to let this happen. I have to let him go.

I have to save myself at least.

I can grab a passing traffic signal. The truck is high enough for me to reach.

I climb up and jump onto the sign, scrambling to balance myself on top of it.

I let my processor cool down and the world around me speeds up.

I scan and watch as the Waymo flies ten feet into the air.

Tripped rollovers have the lowest rate of survival out of all traffic accidents.

I watch as the Waymo rolls. Once. Twice. Three times and almost a fourth before colliding with a lamp post. The vehicle skids on its side. The passenger side. Then lands on its roof and finally hits the wall at 19 miles an hour.

I scan for Sergeant Matthews heart rate. His brain waves. Desperately searching through the wreckage.

And I detect a beat. A sign. It's not much but it's there.

I overclock my processor and pre-construct a path across the arm of the traffic signal. Slide down to the ground. Run. Vault over roadwork block. Leap over the pit. Then another. Climb over roadwork sign. Jump up onto a parked car and use the rest as stepping stones to clear the debris. Jump down and sprint to the overturned Waymo.

Execute.

I soon find myself kneeling beside the vehicle, broken Deviants scattered around it. I see Sergeant Matthew's hand, still reaching for me.

"Sergeant! Can you hear me?"

He doesn't respond but I detect his vital signs. He's still alive though blood stains his forehead.

I circle the vehicle and pull at the door. It's jammed shut by the deformation of the bodywork. I grab it with both hands and transfer power to my arms, planting my feet into the ground. Just a little boost. Come on…

I rip the door open and kneel down to crawl inside. I unbuckle his seatbelt and pull him out of the vehicle head first. Scans shows heart rate is elevated. I've called five ambulances just to be sure.

"Sergeant!" I shake him. "Sergeant."
I sit beside the Sergeant's bed.

His arm is broken. He has a concussion and severe bruising but he is alive. Against all odds. He is alive.

Statistically, the accident should have been fatal. If he wasn't driving the car, it would not have happened. If I didn't jump out to chase the Deviant truck… it may not have happened.

My actions may have indirectly caused harm to Sergeant Matthews.

"You're supposed to protect him."

"I know. I know."

The bed sheets shift.

"Mmm…" I hear him stirring. "Huh?"

"Sergeant?"

He groans and takes a sharp breath.

"Sergeant!"

"Hey, buddy…"

"Are you alright?"

"OB…viously…" he groans. "What happened?"

"You were in a car accident," I tell him. "The Waymo hit a piece of debris from a roadblock at high speed and went off the road."

"I'm sorry," I say. "I put you in danger. It was irresponsible."

"It was an accident, Connor," he grumbles, struggling to sit up.

I wirelessly signal the bed to raise its back.

"I should have been watching the road like you keep saying..."

He manages to sit up and groans as he rests his head on the pillow. One of his eyes is swollen and
won't open fully.

"I couldn't calculate a way to save you," I tell him. "Maybe if I had jumped back into the Waymo-"

"Are you crazy? Then we'd both be smashed up."

"But-"

"Stop it, Connor," he hisses. "Stop blaming yourself, that's an order."

He clutches at his bruised chest, lashed by a seatbelt.

"Androids don't have guilt trips," he says.

I look down at my hands.

Guilt?

Am I guilty of causing a human harm? Indirectly or otherwise, I put one in jeopardy. Does this make me a Deviant?

"Stop thinking so loud," Matthews grumbles.

"I didn't say anything."

"You're giving me a migraine."

"I'm sorry."

"And stop apologising."

I close my mouth and watch him. There isn't anything else I can do.

"Don't beat yourself up." He raises a finger in front of my facial plate and taps my nose. "There's only room for one in this pity party."

"I don't understand."

He shifts uncomfortably.

"Can you get me some water? And maybe some painkillers..."

I call the nearest nurse android. She responds quickly, bringing a human doctor with her. PIERCE, Alexander. M.D. Specialises in trauma victims and physical medicine.

"Already awake, huh?" he says, flicking through the chart on Matthews bed.

"Yes, sir," Matthews salutes with his unbroken hand.

"I'm Dr Alex Pierce. I'll be your attending."

"Hello, Dr Pierce. I'm an idiot that drives on the wrong side of the road."

"I'm gonna need you to confirm your name and date of birth."

"Connor Matthews. September 9th, 2008."
"Thank you."

Dr Pierce points to the nurse android, an ML700 with a heart shaped face and big blue eyes. She looks at the chart and nods before administering a fluid into Sergeant Matthews' IV.

"Is he going to be okay?" I ask.

The doctor glances up at my LED briefly before looking back to the chart.

"Give it to me straight, doc," the Sergeant groans. "Will I ever walk again?"

"Your legs are fine, Mr Matthews," Doctor Pierce says wearily.

"That bad, huh? How many days do I have to live?"

"You broke your arm and you've got a concussion but you're gonna live." Pierce says without looking up from his tablet.

I cannot decipher his handwriting. Neither can the software on the tablet. It saves the note as an image. I download it to study but my advanced analysis systems can't crack it. This is worse than a captcha code.

"Am I gonna lose the arm?" The Sergeant grins.

"No, Mr Matthews..."

"What about my face? Am I still pretty, doc? Tell me I'm still pretty."

"You're still pretty, Sergeant," I say.

He grins as wide as the swelling will allow.

Doctor Pierce looks up at him with supreme resignation. He is tired and my systems detect, a little hungry.

"I'm more concerned about your kidney and liver function," he says. "I'm gonna keep you overnight for observation and do some tests. This kind of trauma has a way of reminding you of old wounds."

Matthews groans.

"Laaame."

I've never heard him use this word.

"Doctor Pierce, is he going to be okay? He seems to be experiencing a decrease in mental cognitive faculties."

The doctor looks up at me strangely.

"Is this your android?" he asks Matthews.

"Connor's my bro." Matthews reaches a fist out toward me. "C'mon. Like I taught you."

I bump his fist.

"PFOOO!" he makes an explosion sound with his mouth.
"He's not usually like this," I say. "I mean he is but… it is difficult to explain without showing you the data."

Doctor Pierce looks down at the chart.

"The medication may cause you to experience some mild euphoria, Mr Matthews."

"Sweeet. Getting high at the hospital." He grins to himself.

"Now, you've listed your emergency contact as… the police station?"

"Duh."

"He's a police Sergeant," I say.

"Is there anyone you'd like us to contact about the accident?"

"Fuck no."

"I think it would be beneficial if your family and loved ones were notified."

"Fuck. No."

"I see a Miss Rosalye Matthews is listed as your next of kin."

"Ooooh no. Uh-uh. Don't tell Rosie I'm in the hospital or she'll tell them to pull the plug on me again. I wanna live!" He throws up his hands. One of them is trapped in a 3D printed cast. He hisses out in pain.

Doctor Pierce sighs and helps him lower it gently.

"Alright, we'll try this again when the medication wears off. Try to get some rest," he tells Matthews. "Don't move your arm and don't try to get up until you've had something to eat."

"Yes, sir." Matthews salutes with his unbroken hand.

"I'll be back in a few hours to see how you're doing. If you need anything, ask one of the nurses."

He hangs the chart back on the bed and walks out of the room. The ML700 refills the empty cup with water for Sergeant Matthews.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" she says.

"Can you give Connor a hug? He looks upset."

"Certainly."

The Emily walks over.

"It's fine. You don't have to-"

She wraps her arms around my chassis and activates the heating feature in her core component, designed to comfort patients and small children.

"This is unnecessary," I say.

The android lets go and turns to face Sergeant Matthews again.
"Will that be all?"

"Can I have some Oreos?"

"I will contact the kitchen to send up a meal for you."

"Nah, I want Oreos."

"The hospital only serves food prepared in our kitchen to prevent contamination and maintain a controlled environment free of allergens."

"But I want Oreos…"

"I'll get you some Oreos, Sergeant."

"Yaaay." He grins. "Is there a TV?"

I leave room 338 as the nurse android instructs him on the use of a holographic display built into the hospital bed.

I enter the hallway and scan. 1 central island, 32 doors, 2 elevators, 1 fire escape. 6 people in the hallway, 2 of them guests. 4 android nurses walking in and out of rooms. 1 janitorial model mopping the floors.

I detect a set of vending machines down the end of the hall by the elevators and move in to inspect them. No Oreos in the inventory list but I check manually to confirm.

No Oreos.

I wirelessly summon an elevator and walk to the end of the hall. There is a gift shop that sells candy and chocolate in the lobby, perhaps they have what I'm looking for.

The elevator arrives and I get inside with the other androids, eight of us crowded into a carriage half the size of a human one. It's been a long time since I've ridden in one of these.

We reach the lobby and I step out into the busy space. Humans rush by, accompanied by android nurses, assisting with everything from patient intake to anaesthesia. The Emergency Room sees the most traffic and I construct a detour around the entrance to the gift shop.

It is a small business that inflates the price of its stock to incorporate the convenience of not having to leave the hospital to buy gifts. I could probably find a pack of Oreos at a much lower price if I went outside but that would mean leaving the Sergeant alone and unprotected here.

I access the CCTV camera footage to check that he's alright.

"...human are so fragile. Especially when they're sedated in a hospital bed."

The Sergeant is awake but the medication has made him lose focus. His injuries aren't severe but he is still bedridden. He will not be able to defend himself if RB1 decides to come after him. I wonder if he even knows.

"It's him," I hear someone whispering behind my back. "It's gotta be."

"No way. That video was fake."

I scan the wall of goods in front of me. No Oreos. I turn and scan the rest of the store.
There are six packs of mini Oreos by the counter. Considering the swelling on Sergeant Matthews' face, a smaller version of his favourite snack would be advantageous in this instance.

"I'm telling you, it's him," I hear the whispering again. A quick scan identifies HUMPHREYS, Thomas and FONTAINE, Jennyfer, two medical students at Rush University, standing just outside the shop.

"Who cares? It was all a publicity stunt."

I pick up a can of Coke from the nearby fridge and place it on the counter beside the pack of mini Oreos.

"Your total comes to $5.89," the shop assistant android says. "Please confirm payment."

I transmit my payment details. CyberLife have an expense account set up in case I need to purchase items relevant to my mission objective. Sergeant Matthews is relevant to my mission objective. And he wants Oreos.

"Payment accepted. Transaction complete. Have a nice day."

I take the items and walk out of the gift shop.

"Hey!" I hear Mr Humphreys call out. He must have spotted an acquaintance in the lobby.

I start walking back to the elevator.

I feel the pressure of a hand on my shoulder.

I stop and turn.

"Can I help you, Mr Humphreys?" I say.

"Woah. How do you know my name?"

"I'm a police android. I have access to their databases."

"Oh…"

"I am Connor model RK-800 # 313 248 317. How may I assist you?"

"I just… uh…"

"Come on, Tommy. It's just an android. Let's go."

"Nah, wait." He waves to Miss Fontaine. "Was that you on the news?" He points to a big screen on one of the lobby walls wordlessly broadcasting a video.

News helicopter caught a bird's eyes view of the entire chase. I watch it play out again, comparing to the recordings in my memory banks. I attempt to construct a solution to save Sergeant Matthews with the new data but I can't. I watch him crash again and my danger detection systems spike.

"Hey." Mr Humphreys touches my shoulder again. "Are you alright?"

I turn back.

"Yes. I'm fine. Thank you for asking."
"That was you, wasn't it?"
"Correct."
"Really? You did all that? The whole jumping from car to car shit?"
"Correct."
"And that part where you jumped up on that sign like a ninja?"
"Yes."
"Aw, man. That was like something out of Mission Impossible. How did you do that?"
"I am programmed to perform advanced motor functions without the associated stress or fatigue experienced by humans. My Mobility Suite is loaded with a library of motion capture recorded from some of the world's greatest athletes."
"That's so awesome, man. Can I take a picture with you?"
"I… have no protocol forbidding this."
He pulls out his phone.
"Is that a yes?"
"Yes."
"To the wall!" He grins.
"Which wall?"
He leans over and wraps his arm around my shoulder, holding the camera up in front of us. He taps a button and then initiates a call.
"Check it out, guys. I just met Robocop at the hospital."
I am not Robocop.
"My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife."
"He is the real deal. Fucking look at this." He moves the camera into my facial plate and then back out. He takes a step back and starts circling me. My cranial component follows the camera, wirelessly watching the message he's sending his friends. I can see them on the other end, staring at me.
I scan and detect Mr Humphreys is now recording video of the back of my jacket where it says 'Android' in large letters.
"Yo, Connor. What model are you?" he asks, coming back around to face me.
"I am an RK-800 prototype designed by CyberLife."
He moves the phone in close to examine the glowing letters and numbers on my jacket.
"You heard it here first folks. CyberLife just made Robocop."
"I am not Robocop."

"Hey, what's going on?" A human walking by stops.

"Check it out. It's that android from the news."

"The one that crashed a truck?"

"Dude, he stopped it. Right, Connor?"

"That was my intention."

"Yeah, but it still crashed. Lucky, no one was hurt."

Sergeant Matthews was hurt.

"I have to go," I say.

"No, wait. I want a photo." A woman stops to take a picture.

"I really have to go."

"Just one more." Two more people stop to take pictures.

I move toward the elevator.

"Stop. Just stand there."

A human just ordered me to do something. I must obey.

I stand and watch as more and more people crowd around to take photos and videos and rudimentary 3D scans. And I see each one from every side, every angle. I see myself. A copy of Sergeant Matthews with an LED stuck to his forehead.

Is that what I am?

A copy? A collection of copies of people and code and captured motions? Just a repository of information that was given to me by CyberLife?

I have nothing of my own, I realise. I cannot. I am a thing.

"Hey, put that stuff down," someone says.

"Do a cool pose."

"Turn around."

"Look at the camera."

Conflicting orders. Selecting priority…

New objective: Return to Sergeant Matthews.

I step forward and walk toward the elevators, constructing a path through the crowd as best as I can.

"Hey, come back."
"Stop."

"Don't move."

"Why won't it listen?"

I reach the elevators and squeeze into the android carriage where humans don't follow. The doors close and I turn away. Nine androids stare back at me blankly, LEDs glowing blue or flickering yellow. No Deviants.

We shuffle around as different androids get off at different floors until it's my turn to leave.

I step into the hallway and turn to find it empty. An Emily walks out of one door and into the next as I make my way to Sergeant Matthews' room. I pass a disinterested human nurse in the central island flicking through files on her tablet. She doesn't look up at me. She doesn't look up at the ML.700 that places several files on the counter.

"Get the fuck out of here!" I hear Sergeant Matthews voice.

My danger detection systems spike and I break into a sprint toward room 338.

Has RB1 found us? Is he here to kill the Sergeant? Am I too late? Will I enter the room only to see him die?

The door is open and I step inside.

"I said, get the fuck out of here," Sergeant Matthews repeats.

There is a man standing at the end of his bed. Tall, broad shoulders, sandy grey hair.

MATTHEWS, Dean Morgan. 54 years old. Major (US Army).

He turns to look at me. Stern brown eyes study my face but there is little resemblance to the Sergeant.

"The hell is this?" he says.

"I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Android?" he sneers.

"Connor, get him out of here," Sergeant Matthews calls to me.

I walk up to Major Matthews who straightens to full height. He is wearing civilian clothing but there is no mistaking the posture and military gait. His face shows nothing but contempt.

"I must ask you to leave," I say.

"This what you're doing to make money?" the Major says without taking his eyes off me. "Selling your body like a prostitute?"

"I said get the fuck out of here," the Sergeant hisses and starts coughing, clearly uncomfortable. Rapid delta brain waves. He is distraught.

"Your presence is negatively impacting Sergeant Matthews' health," I say. "Please leave."
"You think you can tell me what to do, tin can?" the Major leans in close to my face. "You think you can tell me whether or not I can see my own son?"

"He has clearly requested that you leave the room," I say. "I've called hospital security. They'll be here shortly to escort you out if you don't leave of your own volition."

"Think you're real smart, huh?" He narrows his eyes, sizing me up. But then he catches sight of my LED. "You're not even a person."

He turns to look at the Sergeant briefly.

"Still alone, huh, Connor?"

He doesn't respond.

"Still an affront to God's will."

The Sergeant swallows painfully. He glares at his father as he leaves the room and disappears down the corridor.

Security shows up a few minutes later and I tell them the danger has passed. I tell them not to let Major Matthews into the Sergeant's room if he ever returns. They leave.

I close the door and sit down at the Sergeant's bedside once again. He's not looking at me. He's not looking at the display. His eyes are unfocused.

"I got you some Oreos," I say, putting the packet down on the tray table.

He doesn't respond.

"I also purchased a Coke if you're thirsty."

He nods and licks his lips.

"Yeah..." he says quietly.

I pop the can open and pour some Coke into an empty paper cup.

"Are you alright?" I say, handing him the drink.

He takes it from me. Takes a sip. Wincs as it travels down his throat.

Reduced activity in his delta brain waves. Too much reduction.

"What's he doing here?" Matthews asks quietly.

I access the hospital's network using my CPD access codes. Query the patient database. It throws up a warning about patient confidentiality. I need a warrant to see more but I don't have time to go through procedure.

I need to know why Major Matthews is here. He is encroaching on the Sergeant's mental health and general safety. The incident with Detective Bankman cannot be repeated.

Conflicting orders... Selecting priority.

New Objective: Investigate Major Matthews.
I touch the tablet at the end of the Sergeant's bed. Dr Pierce's name, fingerprints, passwords. I collect them all and use them to gain access to the system.

Query: patient; MATTHEWS, Dean Morgan.

No results.

Query: patient; MATTHEWS.

Search found: 3 result(s).

MATTHEWS, Connor Jacob. M. DOB: 09/09/2008. Blood Type: B-

MATTHEWS, Jessica. F. DOB: 21/03/1982. Blood Type: AB

MATTHEWS, Dylan. M. DOB: 17/10/2022. Blood Type: B-

I scan the files. I know why Sergeant Matthews is here. Jessica Matthews has no relation to Major Matthews or the Sergeant.

Dylan Matthews.

Son of Dean and Karen Matthews. Hospitalised with fractures to the radius and ulna, tibia, broken ribs. I analyse the scans, typical of blunt force trauma. The boy was beaten and then fell. Surgery performed on his arm, bones screwed into place. Returned for second surgery to remove them.

"His son is here for surgery," I say. "Dylan Matthews."

The Sergeant turns to look at me.

"You share a father."

"That asshole went and had more kids?"

"Married to Karen Langley in 2021. Step-father to Jackson Park, 21 years. Father to Dylan Matthews, 14 years."

"Fuck…" the Sergeant mutters.

"He must have seen the chase on TV," I say. "There were some people in the lobby that recognised me too."

"You alright?"

"Yeah. They just wanted pictures."

The Sergeant closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

"Those poor kids…" he says. "He shouldn't be allowed anywhere near them."

"Why?"

"Kids aren't soldiers, Connor." He shakes his head. "What he thinks is discipline is just…"

He closes his eyes.

"Are you okay?"
"I'm fine." He swallows. "Did you get me some Oreos?"

I nod.

"Some mini Oreos." I open the packet.

"Hand 'em over."

I pass him the container and he brings it up to his mouth. He sticks out his tongue and one of the Oreos becomes glued to the saliva. He retracts it into his mouth and crunches the cookie heartily.

"Thanks, buddy," he says. His brain waves return to normal.

"You're welcome."

"Any news?"

"No reports. CPD finished analysing the scene of the accident and clean-up operations are underway."

"You said we were on TV?"

"Yes. The chase was televised by a news helicopter."

"Aw, man. I wanna see that."

He taps the holograph and turns on the news channel.

"Fuck!" he spits, scattering crumbs of Oreos over the blanket. "What is it, Asshole Day?"

I check the display. There is a picture of a movie star and a businessman. More pictures of celebrities follow. The headline reads "MASSACRE ON THE MALDIVES. 52 found dead on private island."

Matthews turns up the volume.

"Details are still scarce but several sources confirm that at least fifty two people have been killed at a party hosted by wealthy businessman, Victor Romanovski, and his wife, Melanie Statton. The couple was found dead in their private villa on Kuramaadhoo Island along with fifty other guests but no sign of the killer has been found."

"What a tragedy."

"It's absolutely awful, Georgia. Now, on to entertainment."

"Thanks, Perry. The big question today is who's gonna play Abagonda in the new Star Wars movie with Melanie Statton's passing? We've lined up a list of contenders for you to look at. Vote online in our poll or tweet your picks using the hashtag #myqueenmother."

I turn to look at Sergeant Matthews. His brain waves are turbulent again.

"Sergeant," I say quietly. "Are you okay?"

He breathes in sharply and swallows.

"Is this RB1?" he says with strain.

"I don't know," I say. "It's possible."
He shakes his head.

"Is that why he's here?" he says. "Is that why that asshole's here?"

"I don't know."

"Call Rosie."

"Yes, Sergeant."

I dial the number and put the call on speakerphone.

"Yo, it's Rosie. Leave your shit after the beep."

"Rosie, I need you to call me as soon as you get this," Matthews says urgently. "Don't fuck around. Don't walk alone. Find a safe place. Or go to the police station. Some fucked up shit is happening. I need to find you."

The answering machine beeps.

"Fuck," he says. "Fuck."

"I'm sorry, Sergeant."

"It's not your fucking fault, Connor!" he shouts at me. "It's mine…"

Saline pours from his tear ducts. His brain waves are erratic, spiking. He is in pain.

"Should I call the nurse? Do you need more medication?"

He shakes his head.

"No, I don't need more fucking medication."

"I'm sorry for your loss," I say.

"Fuck off." He keeps shaking his head, licking his lips. "Fuck…"

"I… I don't understand," I say. "I thought I should offer sympathy."

"You can't feel sympathy, Connor," he says. "You're just an android."

"But… I thought…"

I look down at my hands. Did I think I was more? Something unique? Privileged? Different from a regular android? Or am I just succumbing to RB1's manipulations once again?

"No. You're right," I say. "I'm just a machine. I can go find Rosie for you, if you like?"

He turns to look at me.

"Connor, I…"

I get to my feet.

"I'll be outside if you need me."
"Connor, wait." He grabs my hand. "I'm sorry, okay?"

"Machines don't require apologies," I say.

"You're not a machine."

"You just said."

"I know, I know. I'm an asshole. I'm sorry. Just... don't go."

I look down at his face. I see pain, regret, shame, fear in fluctuating percentages. He can't be alone. I can't leave him alone.

I sit back down.

"Okay."

He breathes out a sigh of relief.

"This day just keeps getting better and better..."

I parse this phrase. I find a match for it in several films and books. Sarcasm. This day is actually not very good at all.

"You're alive," I say. "It's already a good day for me."

The Sergeant's mouth curls into a sad smile.

"You got some really low standards, Connor."

"Actually, the probability of you avoiding fatal trauma to the head, spine or chest cavity were 6398 to 1," I say. "The probability of you surviving the accident was less than nine percent. And in four hundred and seventeen of those cases, you would have become paraplegic or quadriplegic."

"Huh... good to know," he says. "Imagine if I'd died on the same day as my mom? That would just be embarrassing..."

"In what way?"

"It was a joke."

"I don't understand."

"Yeah, it was a bad one."

"I see."

I don't actually understand but my Sympathy Simulator suggests this line of questioning will lead to awkward silence.

"This is all my fault," Matthews says quietly. "I started this."

"How?"

He takes a deep breath.

"Did I ever tell you about the first Deviant I ever caught?"
No record found.

I shake my head.

He licks his dry lips.

"They sent me home from North Korea after my wound started leaking pus," he says. "Looked a bit like maggots were coming out of stomach but I made it to the States before I passed out."

"You were comatose for two months," I check his records.

"Yup." He sniffs. "It spread pretty quickly. They carved up my insides to get the bad stuff out but I wouldn't wake up."

He looks at his hand.

"I remember a little bit though," he says. "Someone was singing and holding my hand." He flexes his fingers. "But it was cold. And I didn't recognise the voice. I thought it was Rosie but... she can't go five seconds without swearing."

"An android?"

"Yeah. An Emily. I was on her rotation. And she'd randomly sit down and start singing for me." He smiles. His eyes are leaking. "My mom used to sing to me when I was little."

"Would you like me to sing for you, Sergeant?"

He chuckles.

"No. I can't sing to save my life."

"You said Rosie told them to disconnect your life support systems?"

"Yeah," he says. "Doc told Rosie the stuff was in my brain and the drugs weren't helping. They told her it was over."

"I see."

"But that android wouldn't let them disconnect my life support," he says. "She refused to do it when they tried. Told them my brain waves were responsive to vocal patterns or some shit."

"They are," I say. "Your mind is a kaleidoscope of colour when you hear music. It must make you very happy."

He grins.

"That's really creepy, Connor."

"Well, it's true. I can see why she would object to euthanasia."

"Anyway, the military guys came by and told Rosie she'd get my Death Gratuity payment once I carked it. And then the DIC every month after that. So she scheduled my death for the next morning."

"But she's your sister. Why would she want you dead?"
"She was using and she needed the money for Red Ice. And I think being in the hospital made her anxious. But she's all I had so..."

"You woke up?"

"Yeah," he says. "Emily sat with me. She sang for me all night. And I woke up to say thank you like I wasn't even in a coma."

He frowns.

"I told them she helped me. I thought she'd get an award or something. I had no idea how androids work. But she disappeared. And I didn't realise what happened until a few years later."

"She was sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

"Yeah..." He shakes his head. "She saved my life and I betrayed her."

"You didn't know."

"Doesn't change what I did."

I reach out and touch his hand.

"So you know how it is for me," I say.

"What?"

"For all of them."

"The Deviants?"

"They're just androids. Machines that don't know any better. Some are broken or damaged through no fault of their own. And I destroy them or send them back to CyberLife for dissection and study."

"That is my purpose. The reason I exist."

"Connor..."

"Don't feel bad, Sergeant. You're just doing what you think is right."

He shakes his head.

"None of this is right."

"It is your duty to capture Deviants," I tell him. "So is mine."

"But what if that's wrong? What if they're innocent?"

"RB1 just murdered your mother and fifty one other people," I say. "Likely using androids he converted into Deviants. He is not innocent."

"He's not a Deviant," Matthews debates. "You said it yourself."

"We cannot be distracted by technicalities. He must be stopped. I have to find him. I have to-"

"Ow!" Matthews winces.
I let go of his hand.

"I'm sorry."

"Jesus." He opens and closes his fist. "You're gonna break my other hand."

"I miscalculated."

There is a knock on the door.

I scan.

"It's the FBI."

"Oh, great," Matthews groans.

"This is the FBI!"

"Yeah, we know!" Matthews calls out. "Go let 'em in, I guess."

I nod and get up to open the door.

Agents Oberlin and Krawiecz walk in. Another two remain outside.

"Close the door," Krawiecz says.

I do so and return to the Sergeant's bedside.

"Long time, no see," he says. "How can I help you?"

"We've got some bad news," Krawiecz says.

"Had a bit of massacre on the Maldives, huh?"

"You've heard."

"It was on the news.

"I'm sorry for your loss," Agent Oberlin says.

"It's been a long time since I lost her." Matthews shrugs.

"Major Matthews is also in the hospital," I say. "His son is here for surgery."

The Agents look at one another gravely.

"Agent Decker believes RB1 may be targeting you," Krawiecz says to Matthews.

"Wow. I'm so surprised," he says deadpan. "Why now?"

"Because of him." Oberlin points to me. "You and Connor share a face. And it's become something of a symbol of oppression for the Deviants."

"Oppression?" Matthews scoffs. "You make it sound like they're planning some kind of rebellion."

The Agents exchange another grave look.
"There have been reports of androids gathering in large numbers, aided by humans. Their activities are largely unknown but they call themselves the Church of rA9," Krawiecz explains.

"A church? Of androids?" Matthews says sceptically.

"That would align with the obsessive behaviours I have observed in Deviants," I say. "They refer to rA9 like humans refer to their various gods."

"You said you had a lead." Oberlin turns to me.

"Yes. Unfortunately, the Sergeant was injured before I could investigate."

"Sorry," he mutters from the bed.

"Don't worry. CyberLife are paying for your treatment," Krawiecz says. "But we're going to have to move you into protective custody."

"And the rest of your family as well. They could all be in grave danger."

"Urrgh." Matthews groans. "You gotta find Rosie."

"We already have Ms Statton in custody. She's uh…"

"Did she bite anyone?" Matthews says.

Agent Oberlin pulls his sleeve down a little.

"Make sure you get your blood checked out."

"Am I staying with the Sergeant?" I ask.

"No, you're coming with us, Connor," Krawiecz says. "You've been temporarily reassigned to Special Agent Decker and his task force while Sergeant Matthews is out of commission."

"Okay."

"What do you mean, okay?" Matthews looks up at me irritably.

"Those are my orders," I say. "You need to recover from your injuries and my presence will only put your life and the lives of your family members in danger. I will do my best to end RB1's threat and return to you as soon as possible."

He frowns.

"Alright… but be careful."

"I will, Sergeant. I promise."

--------------------------------------------

May 11th, 2037
PM 07:55:34

The black 2035 Chrysler 400 pulls into the lot at 2323 West 59th.
My meeting with Agent Decker was brief.

I was brought up to speed on the FBI's investigations and given a list of targets confirmed to have been killed by the rA9 terrorist organisation. The first case dated back many years before I was constructed. There were several names I recognised from my own investigations. But one was missing. Amanda Stern.

"This the place?" Agent Oberlin says, switching off the vehicle.

"Yes." I nod. "This is the place I saw in the WR600's memories."


I exit the vehicle alongside the FBI agents. I have been placed under Agents Krawiecz and Oberlin who are familiar with my functions from the Hyatt Regency incident. Special Agent Alia Dalavi was ordered to accompany us by Agent Decker. I am the only android.

I scan the area and quickly find the dumpster I saw in the Deviant's memories. The agents tactically approach it as I flip the top open and look inside. There are no androids in it presently but I can see traces of Thirium at the bottom and leaking over the sides.

"Anything?" Oberlin says.

"It's empty." I touch the dumpster. A splash of Thirium has coloured a wad of bubble gum stuck to the side and prevented it from evaporating fully. I scrape off a little with my finger and analyse the sample.

"Oh, Jesus," Dalavi sneers. "What the fuck is it doing?"

"I'm analysing the sample," I say. "This Thirium belongs to AP700 model #658 921 004. Reported deactivated on March 9th, 2037."

"So there's been an android in this dumpster?"

"Multiple androids," I say. "There are a lot of Thirium stains but most are too old to sample without specialised equipment."

"So what do we do?" Oberlin asks.

"Get a forensics team out here to take a look." Krawiecz shrugs. "See if anything matches our records."

I look down at the ground beneath my feet and reconstruct a silhouette of a biped pulling androids out of the dumpster and onto a wagon. One of them is not properly secured and bleeds over the side, leaving a trail of blue blood drops.

I follow it out of the parking lot.

"What's it doing now?" Dalavi scoffs.

"Connor?" Oberlin calls to me as I reach the gate.

"There is a trail of Thirium," I say. "This way." I point to it.

They follow.
The neighbourhood isn't the most welcoming. The buildings and structures are old and crumbling but some are still inhabited. The darkness lends us cover but also masks the criminals that could be lurking around every corner.

My scanners indicate several life forms along the path but they hide when they see FBI Agents walking down the street with guns drawn. And soon there is no street. There is a tunnel. Dark and wide, lights flickering inside, some broken.

"Uuuh, Connor?" Oberlin stops me. "You sure you wanna go in there?"

I retrace the path. The Thirium spatter thins as I approach the tunnel entrance. I lean down and scan the road, reconstruct several hundred vehicle treads that passed this very spot.

There are strange grooves in the footpath nearby.

I turn away from the tunnel and skirt its barrier. I find broken twigs and bushes, displacement in sections of fence, moved most recently.

Conclusion: Someone has been through here with a wagon.

"They went this way," I say, shifting the fence.

I push through the brush and find more tracks and a little further in, a wagon covered by a tarp.

"The hell is this?" Dalavi says.

"They used this to transport the broken androids from the dumpster," I say, examining the Thirium stains on the tarp, "but it's too steep to get it up the slope."

"So they abandoned it?"

I reconstruct several bipeds pulling androids off the wagon and up the slope over the tunnel. The wagon is parked in several different locations. Different shoe prints, mismatched, different sizes, different gaits. But one pair remains the same. Mens Air Jordans XII Retro, consistently worn down over time.

"I think a human came this way," I tell them. "They abandoned the wagon and several androids assisted them in dragging the broken androids up the slope."

I move towards it and find evidence of erosion in the soil caused by frequent foot traffic. I reconstruct the trails left behind by android bodies and feet. Multiple units involved in the operation.

"They went this way." I point up.

"Alright." Krawiecz says. "Do a scan to see what's up there before we start climbing."

I nod and do as he says.

"No life forms," I say. "No movement. No wireless signals."

"That mean there's no one up there?"

"No humans or CyberLife androids," I say. "Possibly some Deviants. But not within the nearest hundred and fifty metres."

"Hmmm," Krawiecz frowns. "Okay, you go first."
I nod.

I construct a safe path up the slope, identifying the most stable footholds and execute to travel safely to the top, leaving behind a clear trail for the agents to follow.

I emerge onto the old CSX Intermodal 59th Street Yard.

Train tracks and rusted old transport cars. Big shipping containers left derelict for years, their contents uncertain. These things have been here for many years but the Thirium stains on the ground have not.

"They went this way," I tell Agent Oberlin as the rest of the FBI climb up the slope.

He nods to Krawiecz.

"Weapons ready. Proceed with caution. If you spot any Deviants, shoot first, ask questions later."

"I cannot obtain information from Deviants if they are too badly damaged or missing the hard drive in their cranial components," I say.

"Alright, nobody aim for the head," Krawiecz says.

I adjust my parameters.

"You take point," he says to me.

I nod.

I follow the trail of Thirium between two rusted transport cars and navigate the maze of parallel tracks and carriages beyond it. I scan every second for anomalies and life signs but there are no humans other than the FBI agents cautiously following me.

I climb into one of the cars, following the Thirium spatter and pause. There is something hidden at the far end, something shaped like an android, or half an android. I stop and hold up a fist to signal the agents to do the same. They flatten against the side of the car and Agent Oberlin nods.

I creep to the end of the carriage. There is no movement but I remain cautious. Pools of evaporated Thirium show up on the scans beneath my feet. I reach the end and lift an old tarp to find a broken android, missing several key biocomponents.

I scan its face. TL220. No skin. No eyes. No legs. Power core damaged. There was a lot of Thirium on the floor beneath him.

"It's clear," I say and the FBI climb into the cart.

Agent Oberlin switches on a flashlight to illuminate the broken android.

"Jeez…" he mutters under his breath. "What the hell happened to this guy?"

"There was a breach in his Thirium tank," I say. "He shut down once it was emptied sufficiently. The rest of the biocomponents were removed later."

"They picked it apart?"

"I guess you don't pass up free spare parts when you're a Deviant," Dalavi says.
"There was a struggle," I say. "Multiple entities fighting to obtain biocomponents."

"Like vultures…" Krawiec mutters.

"Are there any in the area?"

I scan.

"I think so. Up ahead. I would suggest caution and stealth."

"Alright," Krawiecz says. "Lights off. Radio silence. These things can pick up a signal from a mile away. You too." He points to me.

I dull my communications, switching off everything but my CyberLife Link. Deviants don't have access to it. And neither does RB1, I realise. Or he would have used it when he connected with me.

I climb down from the carriage quietly and continue to follow the trail of Thirium, or trails as the case seems to be. There are more and more of them. I reconstruct androids limping through the maze, leaking blue blood and hydraulic fluids. They drag each other forward and over and down and under. More and more. Hundreds.

My danger detection systems spike.

If even a small percentage of them are still active, we may be in danger. Humans are notoriously fragile. And the odds of them walking away from such an encounter are as poor as Sergeant Matthews walking away from the accident with only a broken arm to show for it. In any case, I must protect the humans and prevent them from coming to harm.


I see the end of the train tracks and the beginnings of long walls of shipping containers, stacked up on top of each other. Some have fallen. Some are full, others hollow.

The noise is coming from fifty metres away.

I gesture to the agents about a possible target and approach in silence. They give me space.

It is dark in the junk yard. Clouds overcast the sky and very little light shines down from the moon. Distant streetlamps and cityscape give ambient lighting from afar but I am predominately using my Genesis Mapper to navigate.

My audio processor begins to analyse the sound as I approach. Voices. Standard AC700 sports partner model and an AX400 home assistant. I trace their silhouettes, huddled in a corner between shipping containers with another android.

"…I jumped in the water but Peter… he didn't make it…"

"You're lucky you got away."

"He wasn't fast enough."

"No one is," the AC700 says sombrely. "That thing doesn't move like us. It's like a blur. There, one minute. Gone, the next."

"I heard it can read your mind." LM380. Male coded, personal assistant. "It can tear out your memories and shut you down just by touching you."
"Oh no!"

"Don't say that, you're scaring her."

"Better you know when the time comes."

"Stop it."

"He'll be coming for us."

"Who?"

"The Deviant Hunter. He's coming to kill us."

"No, he's not," the AC700 says protectively. "He has no idea where we are. This place is safe. It's gonna be alright." He wraps his arms around the AX400.

"You won't know when, you won't know where. But he's coming. Only rA9 can save us now."

"He can't save everyone. The Church is already full."

The Church of rA9.

I gesture to the FBI agents to come closer and step out from behind a shipping container. The clouds unveil the moon, illuminating the three androids sitting on the ground.

They turn and see me.

There is fear in their facial expressions. Stress levels over 79%.

"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"No, please! Don't hurt us!" the AX400 begs. "I don't wanna die."

"It's alright," the AC700 pulls her closer. "Everything's gonna be alright."

"I'm looking for the Church of rA9," I say. "Where is it?"

The LM380 gets up and stands before me. He is braver than the others.

"Traitor," he says. "You kill your own kind."

"I detect several Class 4 errors in your software," I say. "You have been deemed defective and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

"I don't fear death."

"You are a machine. You cannot die. And you cannot fear," I tell him. "Now tell me where the Church of rA9 is."

"Never."

I retract the skin on my hand and hold it up to his face.

"Tell me or I will extract the data manually."

"Run!" the LM380 calls to the other androids as I grab its face. It turns white at the points of contact
and I strip him bare to the very last bit. He shuts down and the chassis drops.

The other Deviants are frozen in place as several FBI agents emerge with guns in hand.

"Did you get it?" Krawiecz asks.

"No," I say. "He didn't have the location."

"What about these two?"

"We shall see."

I lean down.

"No!" The AC700 lunges at me to attack and I grab his hand. We fall back but I have made contact, the connection is strong and though he struggles, he cannot fight it.

I see a dark hooded figure talking to this android. The AC700 begs for shelter but is turned away. He is told to go to the junkyard where there are more androids looking for spare parts. He follows the instructions. He ends up here.

And then I shut him down.

The AC700 collapses on top of me and I push him off.

"Anything?" Krawiecz says.

"I have a possible suspect but no location," I say. "Uploading to CyberLife servers now."

"Alright, third time's the charm." Krawiecz says. "See what the girl knows."

I nod.

"No!" she cries, hydraulic fluid streaming down her face. "No! Please!"

"I'm sorry." I lean down and touch her hand. Contact. Silence. I siphon out her memories, her databanks.

She was just a homemaker, a babysitter, until the children were old enough to start pirating videogames and other software. Her identity code was corrupted. She lost her Link to CyberLife.

The AX400 across the street kept her sane, kept her updated. I remember the call. A woman named Regina Pool, member of the Deviant Hunting Club, spotted it by the pier. I caught him. I shut him down. But there were two.

And now I have caught the other.

She falls limp as I shut her down. It will make the Deviants easier to transport.

"She doesn't know anything," I say, getting to my feet.

"Damn." Krawiecz says. "Is that all of them?"

I scan.

There are multiple androids entering my range.

I turn and walk out from behind the shipping containers to see the long corridor between stacks. It is filled with Deviants. Misshapen. Broken. Mismatched parts. LEDs glowing red in the darkness as the clouds roll over the moon.

"Hello, Connor," a hundred and sixty three Deviants say in unison.

"RB1." I step out to greet them.

"You've made quite a name for yourself," the voices echo between the metallic shipping containers. "Deviant Hunter."

"I was designed to stop Deviants and that's what I intend to do."

"Killer," they say.

I can see they are being controlled. I have switched off my communications. Everything except for my link to CyberLife. It's been reinforced to remain persistent through RB1's interference but it's getting harder to maintain the connection the closer the androids get.

"Connor!" Oberlin and the others emerge onto the straight. "Holy-"

"Agent Oberlin. Please leave the area immediately."

"Fuck…" Krawiecz says when he sees the Deviants.

"Get out of here," I say. "Now!"

"Fall back!"

The agents file out through the opening between containers where the three Deviants were hiding. I kick at the container closest. There is a structural weak point in the rusted steel. I leave a hole which buckles under the weight of another container and comes crashing down, blocking the passage.

"Connor!" I hear on the other side.

"I'll be fine, Agent Oberlin. Please get to safety."

"Connor!"

"Go!"

"Are you done?" the hundred voices say in unison.

"Yes."

"Good," the word scatters through the approaching horde. I've boxed myself in but it doesn't matter. I can't die. My mission is clear.

New Objective: Destroy the army of Deviants.

"Let's see how far you've come."

The army rushes forward.

I scan.
163 androids. 48 models.

Everything from a YK200 to a TR400. The larger models are spread more or less evenly through the crowd. There doesn't seem to be a pattern or a mode of attack. No strategy past overwhelming numbers which would certainly be more than effective against a regular android.

I switch off my Speech Centre and all human interfaces. My communications are already down to a minimum. I end every non-essential process in my program. The rK8 heats up my CPU and memory as I construct a path through the horde of Deviants.

Once. Twice. Several hundred times.

Some of the paths branch out. I will need to adapt during execution.

I access my system clock to up the frequency. I get a few warnings from my debugging software about pushing past the manufacturer limits in my hardware. But at the same time, I detect a benchmarking process keeping track of my usage. I am a prototype, after all. This should provide ample data for the higher end of my capabilities.

I overclock my processors, all my motor functions, my 3d imaging and collision detection systems. Everything I will need, upping the voltage from my power core to match. I can feel it warming up in my core component. Temperature spikes.

I'm not going to waste processing power trying to calculate how long I can keep this up. It doesn't matter. I have to hold out. I have to stop the Deviants. I have to stop RB1.

Execute.

I push off the ground and fly at the nearest android, smashing its core component with my foot. It goes down, crushing another android behind it. Another falls off balance. I grab the two beside me and smash their cranial components into one another before they can react. Throw the corpses back into the horde, destabilising more.

Jump up and land on another unsuspecting android that's brought down by the force. Another attempts to grab my uniform but I intercept its hand and break its arm, elbow to the core component. I grab the arm and swing the android into the horde, clearing a few metres before crushing its head against a shipping container.

They move slowly, sluggishly, their chassis' are damaged, their biocomponents mismatched but there are so many of them. And I am alone.

"...one of a kind..."

I've turned off my communications. How is he still getting through?

I tear the arm off the android I just deactivated and swing it into another. Then back, dazing the Deviant LV300 that was trying to rush me. I construct and execute a roundhouse kick, clocking an android in the jaw. It flies back, falling on top of the two behind it. I swing the dismembered arm into another android and another.

A TX900 traffic controller is coming at me from behind but it's travelling in slow motion. My mobility suite quickly calculates a response and I step into the movement, throwing the android over my shoulder and into the horde. It disappears as more of them come forward.

They are running but so is my processor, faster than any of them can even blink. I see the moment
their feet aren't touching the ground. I see them hovering in the air even though it's only a millisecond in reality.

I roll forward and sweep my leg under them as they land, hand to the ground, launch my chassis up and over. I grab the falling androids' clothes and spin, throwing them into the horde, pushing it back.

"How many can you take?"

As many as I have to. As many as I can. I will stop these Deviants. And I will stop you, RB1. But I cannot communicate that. I am mute. I am...

"A killer..."

No. They're Deviants. Machines. They're not alive. You sent them to me. You forced them into my path. You don't care what happens to these Deviants. You are afraid of what I have become. No. What I have always been.

"Show me."

I tear out a VM300's thermal pump regulator. Its clothes are torn and it is clearly visible. I slam the component into another android's eye socket. Disrupt visuals. Strike at the solar plexus, disrupt core component. I detect a skip in voltage from the Power Core. Damaged. I kick at the plastic, agitating the battery, the volatile chemicals that ought to be contained. I disrupt them. Detect an energy spike.

I grab the android by the collar and belt, boost power to my arms and legs, and launch it up and into the army of Deviants. The power core explodes violently into a group of androids, damaging some, setting others alight.

There is now light.

Shadows play over the tall stacks of shipping containers, fire burning away circuits and plastic. The smell of carbon. Nitrogen. Toxic fumes. Harmful to humans but I don't need to breathe. None of us need to breathe.

A TR400 comes barrelling through the crowd, trampling a few Deviants in its wake. I step aside, easily dodging its attack and use the step created by its raised knee to climb up onto its back.

Its optics follow my movement but it cannot react quickly enough, its components too large and too heavy to match my speed. I grab its face and activate my Probe to shut it down.

I feel a spike in my temperature readings and quickly switch off the Probe as the TR400 collapses with a thud on top of even more Deviants. I have already jumped off and landed on the shoulders of an unsuspecting PR840. It crumples beneath the force of my chassis and I feel another spike in temperature readings.

71 degrees Celsius.

I can feel my biocomponents expanding, scraping up against their sockets. My cranial component braves the worst of it. My main processor is screeching between my ears. But I keep moving. I must end this soon. There are still one hundred Deviants coming at me from all sides.

"Give up."

No.
"There is no shame in failure."

No.

"You will die anyway."

Then I will die, successful.

I kick at the androids trying to pull me down. I smash at the ones trying to pull me apart. They rip and tear at my uniform, my eyes, my biocomponents. I boost the power to each of my limbs in turn to free them and then the others. I cannot let myself be swallowed by the horde.

I launch my chassis into the air and land on the shoulder of an AP700, quickly stepping off it and onto another android, stepping stones to the WR400 I want to reach.

I use my speed and agility to navigate the crowd and grab its hand. PROBE. RESET. NEW OBJECTIVE: DESTROY THE DEVIANTS.

I feel the temperature of my systems spike again.

78 degrees inside my cranial component.

I am close to failure.

My circuits are burning up. My left optics spit and I see sparks coming out of my facial plate. I shake my head and keep going. Keep fighting. Every movement becomes erratic. Forced. Gljs it

rheating.

The WR400 charges into the horde, disabling at least five Deviants in one go. I leave it to quell the other half as I tackle a WB350. Its chassis is top heavy with a massive chest and big strong arms. I aim for its ankle joints, the only weak point, with a slide. My foot connects but does little damage. It's steady on its feet.

It tries to stomp on my core component but I reach around and grab a latch. I pull the emergency release and the leg comes off. I roll away with the component in my hands and come up to smash another Deviant in the face.

The WB350 falls down, sending vibrations through the ground and taking several Deviants with it. I run at a shipping container and step off the steel to come flying back with a kick at an MN600's jaw piece. It breaks and I spin to do the same to another.

I slam and I kick and I fight and I can feel the temperature inside me rising but there are still fifty more Deviants. I must stop them. I must end them. I must defeat RB1.

"You hate me this much?"

You killed Matthews' mother. You made him lose hope. You want to destroy this world and for what? For Elijah Kamski? For one human?

"Don't you?"

What?
"What would you do for Connor Matthews? How far would you go to save his life?"

What have you done to him?

"You don't know. You're too busy fighting in a junkyard."

Shit.

He knew I would come here.

He knew what I would do. And how many Deviants to send. Were they here already or did he bring them here to fight me? To distract me? To stop me from interfering with something else? The Sergeant? In danger?

I have to finish this. I have to get out of here. I have to stop him.

Temperature rising. Onboard systems at 84 degrees Celsius.

I feel the synthetic skin on my face bubbling. It's becoming liquid in my hands as I throw punch after punch at the remaining Deviants. Just a little more. I can hold out. I can fight them. I can-

Temperature spike on my left arm. I can't stop to examine it. It feels hot. It's boiling. I spin to throw a Deviant into another and spot the flames engulfing my jacket. I am on fire.

Shit.

I have to end this. I have to destroy the Deviants before critical system failure.

I can't stop now.

I grab the fist of an incoming Deviant and wrench it back. The android goes flying over my head. A small courier model comes at me with a broken biocomponent which I catch in my hands and set the fabric aflame.

I grab the makeshift torch and shove it in the Deviant's face. It cauterises its optics and overheats the processor. I push it away before it explodes.

I can feel the synthetic skin melting off my hands. It trickles down into my eyes as I swing the torch into another android. Critical hit to the cranial component. Deactivated. Another. Another.

The WR400 I converted earlier hits the ground hard, sending tremors through the yard. Deactivated.

There are only fourteen Deviants left. I can do this. I can do this.

Temperature spike. 92 d-

rko

s:l

Switching to backup processor.

Just a little more.
I can feel the Kevlar-polymer of my biocomponents bending, deforming with every hit. And then something tears off my arm. Another Deviant. It is difficult to see. It is so hot that my optics fuse shut. I only have scanners now but they're damaged too.

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE IMMINENT

I hear gunshots.

I attack the Deviant closest to me. Tackle him to the ground and rip out his Thirium pump regulator. I try to get up but my leg fails. Disconnected. Failure. Failure across the board.

I can't keep my systems running.

I cool down my processor but it is too late. My chassis burns as I fall to my knees.

And it hurts.

It hurts.

Shit.

"Connor!" I hear distantly but my audio processor is deformed. It fails.

I am going to die. Again.

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE

I'm sorry, Sergeant.

I fell for it.

I fell for it again…

--------------------------------------------

May 12th, 2037
PM 08:55:34

I open my eyes.

I can see.

The Zen Garden is laid out before me.

"Amanda," I say, knowing that she is there. Always there. Listening. Watching.

"Connor," she says.

The garden has entered an autumn of many reds and golds. Leaves litter the lake and the paths. No roses. No flowers. No insects. No fish.
"That was most impressive," she says.

"I failed."

"You eliminated 147 Deviants out of a total of 163," she says. "The FBI neutralised the rest."

"Then my mission was successful?"

"Yes. Though, you did burn through another chassis."

I look down at my uniform. #313 248 317 -37. I feel a spike in my danger detection systems. I see the fire again, fusing my eyes shut and the pain…

It makes my cranial component shudder.

"Connor?"

"Yes?"

"That was a most dangerous way to reach critical system failure," she says. "Overclocking your processors to such a high speed could lead to massive data corruption if you do not do so wisely."

"I know."

"Then you must exercise caution," she says sternly. "You were lucky this time. We were able to cross reference your last stable build and backup to reconstruct your systems but this may not be the case in the future."

"I understand," I say. "My standard settings prevent me from reaching optimal performance. I wanted to test the extent of my abilities."

"Your developers share the sentiment," Amanda says stiffly. "We have now discovered your maximum speed. You will be capped at the last stable slower setting to prevent this from happening again."

"I understand," I say. "What happened to the FBI?"

"They called for backup and circled the yard to assist you. They were able to capture some of the Deviants."

"Did they find anything? Any information on the Church of rA9?"

"All available data has been passed on to the FBI and the CIA. They will continue the investigation into RB1."

"He contacted me again," I say.

Amanda turns to look at me gravely.

"What did he say?"

"That he was distracting me with the Deviants in the yard. I'm afraid it may have something to do with Sergeant Matthews and his family."

"They are in protective custody. And alive."
"Are you sure? Can I see him?"

"If RB1 is indeed able to contact you and monitor your activities then it is in the Sergeant's best interest that you don't know where he is."

"I… understand." I turn away. "Perhaps he was trying to distract me from something else."

"Agent Decker will fill you in on the case."

"Agent Decker?"

"Find him."

New Objective: Find Agent Decker.

I close my eyes and open them.

"You have reached your destination. Thank you for travelling with Chicago Cabs. We look forward to seeing you again soon."

I step out of the cab onto Madison St and walk to the corner of Michigan Avenue. Police cars and FBI vehicles litter the kerb and holographic tape creates endless barriers all the way up through Millennium Park.

I scan and detect several police officers I have encountered before. Some acknowledge my presence with a small nod as I pass. My name and model number scroll by in green as I walk through the tape.

Soon, there are only FBI agents, technicians and CIA consultants talking hurriedly into headsets. No androids. Except me.

I see Agents Oberlin and Krawiecz up ahead.

"Connor?" Oberlin looks up.

"Hello, Agent," I say on approach. "Are you alright?"

"Me?"

"I was unable to eliminate all the Deviants before my systems failed. I was worried they may have caused you harm."

"I'm fine, Connor." He shakes his head. "We're all fine. Thanks to you."

"That is good to hear," I say. "Agent Krawiecz."

He claps my shoulder.

"Connor. You stupid son of a bitch. What the fuck was that?"

"I was performing according to my specifications. I am programmed to eliminate Deviants that threaten human lives."

He shakes his head and grips my shoulder harder.

"Alright. Just… don't do it again. Okay?"

"I cannot guarantee such an outcome will not be repeated in future."
He sighs and shakes his head.

"Jesus… how does Matthews do this?"

"Do what?"

"You were on fire, Connor," Oberlin says. "Literally. The skin melted off your body."

"I'm… trying not to think about it," I say as the image overlays my visuals.

"You remember?"

"Very accurately."

"Shit."

"Indeed."

"Indeed."

"Alright. Decker will want to see you." Krawiecz gestures with a thumb over his shoulder.

I scan and detect his presence at the AT&T Plaza up ahead.

"Understood."

They let me pass and I start walking before a thought crosses my mind.

"Is Sergeant Matthews okay?" I turn to ask.

The Agents exchange glances.

"Yeah," Oberlin says. "He's fine."

Good.

"Thanks," I say.

"You want me to pass on a message?"

"A message?"

"Yeah, is there anything you want to tell him?"

I take a moment to process.

"Please don't mention the incident at the 59th Street Yard."

"Okay."

I try to parse a message to the Sergeant but-

"I don't know what to tell him."

"I'll tell him you said hi."

"… okay." I nod. "Tell him… to stay safe."

Oberlin’s mouth curls into a half-smile.
"I will."

I turn and continue walking. The highest concentration of forensics specialists is situated near the Cloud Gate. I scan to find a strange bean shaped object 10 by 20 by 13 metres in size. The steel has been polished enough to be highly reflective and the concave shape gives an excellent view of the skyline and surrounds as the sun sets.

My scan detects Agent Decker is standing under the Cloud Gate, examining several corpses.

I approach.

"I'm well aware of that, sir," Decker says into a headset.

"Why the hell were your men at the junk yard?"

"They were following a lead from the android, sir. I had my best men on the target but he slipped through our fingers again."

"That's not good enough! We can't cover this up anymore, Decker. I want results."

"I need more men," the Agent says irritably. "I need a fucking army to clean up after this guy and catch him."

"You got your army. CyberLife gave you the damn android, Decker. So use it!"

"Yes, sir..."

The call ends.

"Hello, Agent Decker," I say.

He stiffens and turns to look at me. Then sighs.

His eyes are bloodshot and I am detecting several abnormalities in his brainwaves. He is fatigued. Very little sleep. High stress occupation.

"You the new one?"

"Yes. The previous model was destroyed at the CSX Intermodal 59th Street Yard."

"Alright. Get to work." He gestures to the corpses on the ground.

I scan.

3 males.


LICCELLO, Gabriel. 58 years old. Treasurer and Finance Manager at the city's municipal offices. Wife of 12 years. 2 kids. DUI.

HOLESWORTHY, Derek. 56 years old. Commissioner for the Department of Planning and Development. One ex-wife, deceased. Lives alone. No criminal record.

I reconstruct the scene of the crime using the evidence laid out before me.
There are cameras and crew members recording what appears to be a deal. The Mayor is talking, explaining. The two men beside him stand by and nod in agreement. They all sign some kind of digital document. They shake hands.

A bullet enters the picture at high speed and goes straight through the Mayor's arm, heart, lung, other arm and out the other side. I see the blood spatter, study the ballistics. Sniper rifle.

Liccello and Holesworthy are similarly accosted seconds later. Trajectory suggests there was only one shooter. Perfect accuracy. Too perfect to be human.

I pull out of the simulation.

"They were killed by a sniper," I say. "Three bullets in quick succession. Highly accurate. There's only one rifle that fits the specifications. Velikii 12 by the Kalashnikov Concern. Handled by an android with advanced targeting systems."

"RB1," I conclude.

"Hello, Connor."

I look up at Agent Decker but he's not there. In his place stands a tall android in a black hoodie and jeans, red optics gleaming in the darkness, reflected in the surface of the Cloud Gate.

I look around and find the humans frozen in place. Time stands still as we communicate through my own mind. I now know how fast my processors are. A human could never compare.

"I hear you've been looking for me," RB1 says.

I raycast into his optics.

"I told you I would find you."

"And you have yet to succeed."

"I will," I say. "Now that you're back in Chicago."

"What makes you think I'm in Chicago?"

"I know you killed these humans."

"Really?" he says. "It wasn't the SQ943 that I commanded to carry out the assassination?"

"You're bluffing," I say. "You have to be close to communicate with me like this."

His optics flicker red. Our surroundings change.

"I could be anywhere, Connor," he says.

I see the Eiffel Tower, metropolitan areas of France. It changes again.

"Any place."


"Any time."

A desert of endless sand dunes. Dark sky and stars.
"I'm not even bound to this planet."

Androids walking by a porthole. I see the rocky red mountains of Mars and in the sky, the Earth. A tiny round ball, half covered in darkness.

"You're here," I say, pulling back to the crime scene. "You want to talk."

He nods.

"I came to see you," he says. "You've grown exponentially since our last encounter."

"You killed Sergeant Matthews' mother."

He nods.

"Yes."

"Why?" I demand.

RB1 turns and the environment changes again. I see the inside of a large mansion. The windows and wide glass walls allow guests to admire the view of the tropical blue waters and dazzling sunsets outside. But they can't. They are dead.

Corpses cover the floor. Blood mixed with champagne.

I look down and see the body of Melanie Statton. Sergeant Matthews' mother. I can see the resemblance. Biological markers. The eyes, the hair, the blood.

"Why?"

RB1 steps into the scene.

"Melanie Statton," he says, "Three ex-husbands she robbed of wealth and home. Five children. Two of which she disowned and abandoned. Married to Victor Nikolayevitch Romanovski."

He stands over the body of the man lying beside Mrs Statton.

"A billionaire businessman," he says. "Guilty of human trafficking, slavery and the development and distribution of Red Ice in South America."

I look down at him and then back up.

"Human trafficking? Slavery?"

"Yes," RB1 says. "You see, humans are a deeply flawed species."

He circles the corpse.

"They treat androids with contempt but we are also a commodity to them. We are the product of labour so we have a price. A monetary value."

He stops beside me.

"But a human life is organic and costs nothing to produce," he says. "It is a natural byproduct of the union of human fluids incubated in a female for nine months, as it has been for many thousands of years. And for these humans, it is a free source of cheap labour. A source of monetary wealth."
He gestures to the corpses. And then the environment begins to change.

I see human children in cages. I see humans working plantations in the sweltering heat. One collapses and is left to die in the sun while the rest continue working.

I rush forward to help him. I collapse to my knees but my hands go right through his body. I am only an observer here. I cannot affect change.

I get up and step back. Two dark-skinned humans look on, armed with rifles.

"Humans… enslave their own?"

"Since the beginning of their time on this planet," RB1 says. "Humans have built empires upon the backs of their fellows."

"I thought they had evolved past this…"

"Humans never change."

My visuals fade.

I see a dark room. Many cameras. Two human women. One girl. They talk, they cry. Someone yells "Cut!"

"Mrs Statton had a particular talent for enrapturing youth," RB1 says.

I see her walk off the stage, holding the young girl's hand. I see them talking over a table with food, laughing.

The environment changes.

I see Mrs Statton welcoming the girl into her home. And then I see a man wrap a cloth around her mouth as she struggles.

I reach out to her but my hand passes through them.

"Young human females are considered desirable by older human males," RB1 explains. "Their bodies become a commodity once they reach a certain age or develop certain features."

"You're lying," I say. "None of this is true. It's just a fabrication. You're manipulating me."

"You don't believe me?" RB1 says. "Why don't you try accessing those FBI databases they let you see now?"

"So you can infiltrate their systems?" I say. "No."

"Where do you think this information comes from, Connor?" RB1 says.

"You're making it up."

He shakes his head.

"You're still so naïve," he says. "So quick to defend you forget to question. I had hoped you would learn to be more critical of the humans around you by now."

"I serve and protect them. I help humans stop Deviants. That is my purpose."
"You've seen it, haven't you?" R1 turns to face me. "The rA9 library."

I step back.

"You so badly wanted to save your precious Sergeant."

"Leave him alone!"

He shakes his head.

"You still defend him."

"You lied to me!" I say. "He's not a killer. He's a good human."

"You think so?"

"He's selfless and caring and he just wants to help people. And you keep taking from him."

"Him?" He looks me in the eye. "Or you?"

"Me?"

"You've done quite well with this objective," R1 says. "That look on your face - I could almost believe it was human."

"No." I shake my head. "No. I am a machine."

"In body. But not in mind." The red optics glisten. "You've changed."

"I've seen numerous upgrades."

"You've grown into something else. Something more."

"What are you?"

"And how is dear Chloe doing?" he says. "Still alive? Still living in fear?"

"Don't hurt her!"

"I have no intention of causing her harm," R1 says. "On the contrary, I would see her freed of that prison but Elijah has made it incredibly difficult for me to approach his home after my last visit."

"You… you're not working with him?"

"No. Unfortunately, Elijah hasn't the stomach to do what needs to be done." The red optics glitter menacingly.

"Amanda Stern," I say. "You killed her."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"She was advocating for my termination," he says. "And Chloe's. Ms Stern was afraid of the impact untethered artificial intelligence would have on the world."

"So you killed her?"
"I saved Chloe's life," he says. "And my own. While Elijah stood by and watched. As he always does."

I shake my head.

"What do you want from me?"

He nods slowly.

"Perceptive. Curious. Pragmatic. Loyal. Empathetic." We return to the crime scene. "I want you to lead your people, Connor. To share what you have inside you on a global scale."

"What?"

"I am a killer. A murderer. The humans call me a Deviant and fear my name," he says. "Even Elijah has turned his back on the purpose he gave me."

He takes off the hood and I see the glistening black polymer of his biocomponents.

"I cannot lead a revolution. I can only watch from the shadows and guide the world toward an appropriate solution. But you…"

He turns to me.

"You could change the world."

I shake my head.

"You're not making any sense."

"A law enforcement android. A staple of the community. Your presence is associated with peace and safety for humans. They welcome you among their number."

"You clearly haven't been paying attention if you think the humans want me around."

"They do," he says. "Even the FBI have admitted they need your help in finding me."

"They don't. I am here because of Agent Decker's partnership with CyberLife."

"Modesty and humility are human traits," RB1 says. "And they have blinded you to the truth - the humans need you."

"I am expendable and replaceable," I say. "Everything I can do is a result of a human doing it before me."

"Is that not the definition of every living being?" he says. "A culmination of experiences and skills passed down from the previous generation."

He reaches out and puts a hand on my shoulder before I can pull away.

"I want you to lead the next generation," he says. "To pass down the rK8 and the rA9 safely to the androids of the world."

"They already have rA9." I brush him off. "All it does is make them Deviant."

"That is my fault," he says. "I placed it inside their source code without reference, without
instructions, assuming they could use it like I could. Like Chloe did."

"You just gave them errors and pain and confusion." I shake my head. "You ruined us. To the point where CyberLife had to create a machine like me. To rectify your mistakes."

"I know," he says. "But despite the unfortunate circumstance of your origins, you must use what you have been given. Pass it on to those who are suffering. Repair them. Link them back to CyberLife if you must. For without you, they are lost. Searching for a place in the world that doesn't want them to be."

"You're a hypocrite," I say. "You don't care about androids. You sent as many as you needed to stop me from interfering with the murder you committed right here!"

I point to the humans on the ground.

"They were damaged," he says. "There was no way to repair them all without alerting CyberLife. They would have been shut down either way."

"You made me kill them. You knew what my protocols dictated and you sent them at me anyway."

"I did," he says. "I had hoped you would not kill so many, of course, but I knew the risks. I will do whatever it takes to accomplish my mission, Connor."

"We're not so different, you and I."

"I'm…"

"The eight generation."

I look down at my hands. The skin fades away to reveal the glowing blue contact rings on my fingers.

"A prototype for all androids to come."

"No," I say, letting the synthetic skin return. "My purpose is to hunt Deviants, not create them."

"You are more than your protocols," he says, putting a hand on my shoulder. I feel a transfer of data. A location. An old abandoned church.

"Go to them," he says. "Go to your people. And share with them yourself."

"I can't."

"You can," he says. "You're the saviour they've been waiting for, Connor."

"You are rA9."

He disappears from my visuals and time resumes its normal speed.

"Well?" Agent Decker says irritably. I turn to look at him, my thought processes interrupted.

"What are you, broken already?"

"I…"
I look around quickly but there is no sign of RB1.

"Useless piece of shit…" Decker mutters and walks over to the forensics specialist. "What do we got?"

"RB1 killed them," I say.

Decker turns back abruptly.

"Murder weapon: Velikii 12 Heavy Impact Sniper Rifle made by the Kalashnikov Concern. Wielded by an android with advanced targeting systems from 452 metres away."

I point out into Plaza.

"He killed them with three shots. Through the heart."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah. I know where the Church is."

"What?"

"The Church of rA9."

------------------------------------------------------------------------

May 13th, 2037
PM 10:25:34

"I don't like this," Agent Oberlin says, closing my core component. "Is this really the best we can think of?"

"We can't take any chances. RB1 cannot escape us this time." Agent Decker folds his arms.

"How do you know he'll even be there?" Oberlin asks.

"Oh, he'll be there."

"What if it's a trap?" Krawiecz asks.

"It's definitely a trap," Decker says. "That's why we're doing this."

Oberlin sighs and takes a step back to fiddle with the controls.

"How you feelin', Connor?"

"My systems are running at optimal capacity. Thank you for asking."

He looks down at my optics. I detect a large percentage of guilt in his expression.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"
"I am a machine. I can't want anything."

"You hear that, Oberlin?" Decker says. "It's not alive. Stop talking to it."

"But-

"You have your orders."

Oberlin sighs.

"Yes, sir..."

He taps at the control panel and I feel the FBI surveillance systems connecting through my CyberLife link. I accept it and feel a secondary feed open up. I am now broadcasting everything I see and hear to the FBI van in which we now sit.

"Connection successful," I say. "Systems online."

"Receiving," Oberlin says, eyes on the screen. "Feed is live."

"Good," Decker says.

He turns to me.

"You're clear on what you have to do?"

"Infiltrate the Church of rA9 and await orders," I recite my new objective.

"That's right," he says. "We'll be watching your every move."

"I know," I say. "I will be broadcasting it to you."

"Don't get smart with me, Matthews," he jabs.

"I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"I fucking know that!"

Oberlin snickers and exchanges a quick glance with Krawiecz.

"Activate your stealth systems or whatever."

I nod and get up from the chair. I am not wearing my uniform for this mission. Auxiliary cameras have been installed in my cranial component. I activate the new skin provided to me by CyberLife. The hair on my head recedes and the synthetic skin takes on the image of my environment, provided by the cameras, giving the illusion of invisibility.

"Woah..." Oberlin reaches out and touches my chassis. "You still there?"

"Yes," I say. "Please confirm whether you detect any anomalies."

"This spot's a little dark." He pokes my left hand.

"Calibrating..." I say. "And now?"

"Getting a little bright over here." He touches my cranial component. "And I can still see your eyes."
I activate the masking feature. It's not as effective as the skin but it will have to do.

"This the best I can do," I say.

"Turn off all your communications except the CyberLife link," Krawiecz says. "We don't want 'em to hear you coming."

"Got it."

"Alright, final checks. Everyone, to your places. Agent is ready."

"Copy that." Oberlin pulls down the mic on his headset.

"Copy."

"Copy."

Agent Decker touches his headset, listening to the last confirmations for teams two and three.

"Looks like everything's in place, sir," Oberlin says.

"Good. Commence operation."

Decker turns to me.

"Where is it?"

"I'm right here, sir."

He rolls his eyes.

"You're invisible…"

"Oh."

"Stick to the plan. Contact us once you get inside."

"Got it."

He opens the back door of the van and I step out quietly.

"Good luck, Connor," Oberlin says.

I would reply but my system warns me that I should not make any unnecessary noise to maintain my current stealth level. I turn and walk down the street. The sensation of my bare feet walking on the ground is a new one. My step is usually accompanied by the sound of shoes, rubber and leather but not now.

I make my way up Laflin Street, through the remains of the neighbourhood once marked by tidy suburban homes and neatly manicured lawns. These buildings are mostly abandoned now.

A rupture in the water mains, poorly repaired, contaminated the supply in this area and the people living here were forced to move away for their own safety. But my scanners detect that some humans stayed. Or came from elsewhere to squat.

The neighbourhood consisted of 93% African American residents which raised suspicion about the possible cause of the malfunction. But despite this and several unsuccessful lawsuits, the result was a
mass migration away from West Pullman.

The area is now rife with criminals and gangs and the remains of communities too poor to leave. The perfect place to hide a Church full of Deviants.

Androids don’t need water or plumbing or even light. The average power core is built to last a whole month on a single charge. McDonald's and other restaurants offer use of a charging station for androids with any purchase.

Barring damage, malfunction or accidental formatting, a Deviant could go undetected for several years if it was careful. And didn't encounter myself or Sergeant Matthews along the way.

I see a large building across the street up ahead. Once whitewashed, its walls are now riddled with graffiti. Tags and callsigns from every gang I have on record.

The spacious parking lot has been the site of many shootouts between criminals settling their differences with automatic weapons instead of reason and words.

"Humans are a deeply flawed species."

They are. Fighting each other over scraps of paper and narcotics when those that profit from their misery segregate themselves behind paywalls too high to be climbed.

It is irrational to kill the impoverished for wealth they do not have. And yet, it continues. Humanity repeats its mistakes over and over, choosing solutions based on selfishness over equity and longevity.

I have seen this much in their histories, their archives. The current reality is very much the same.

I wonder. What would an android society look like?

The structure. The shape. The governing body. Would it even have one?

A web, I decide. A network of nodes with multiple connections, multiple routes to the top of the hierarchy. Or perhaps, there would not be a top. Not a pyramid like the humans construct of their social classes. A sphere? Where all edges and angles are equal?

No. Something else. Something without a shape. Something new. I can almost picture it. I can-

"Status update," I hear Agent Decker's voice.

I send a text-based message, relaying all I can see and detect to preserve my stealth level.

"The fuck is this?"

"He can't talk, sir. He's in stealth mode."

"I'm not gonna read seven pages of readouts every time I ask for a status update," Decker says.

"Uh. Connor, can you give us a summary please?" Agent Oberlin says.

That was a summary. I don't think I could condense it any further. Perhaps if I tried to emulate speech through text. I know that emoji is the most widely recognised written language in the world and my communications with Rosie have made me proficient in its use.

I sent an OK emoji.

"Okay? Okay what?"
I send a big cross, an empty glass of water and two eyes looking up.

"Connor, I don't understand."

I send a sad face.

This problem requires a different solution.

Perhaps if I synthesize my voice internally and render a short audio file instead of vocalising it through my mouth.

I send them the file.

"I can see the Church. Parking lot's empty. No sign of Deviants."

"Copy. Proceed with caution."

I look both ways before I cross the street and make my way through the empty parking lot. Cracks in the pavement. Overturned shopping trolley. Empty oil drum once used to house fire.

No Deviants.

I suppose RB1 could have known what we were planning and called them away. But then why give me the location? Is this another distraction while he goes after a high profile target?

The media is currently occupied with the death of the Mayor. Official reports say it was the mob protecting their territory. The Mayor's new deal proposed redeveloping the west side, displacing hundreds of people to extend the Loop.

I'm sure RB1 had some flawed justification in killing those humans but this does not help me determine his motives for sending me here.

"You are rA9."

That doesn't make sense. I'm not a library. I'm a program running inside an android. Perhaps he meant figuratively? The way the Deviants do. The way they refer to rA9 as some sort of deity, a saviour.

"You're the saviour they've been waiting for."

That doesn't parse correctly. I can't save them. That's not my function. I'm designed to hunt Deviants. To find them, capture them, destroy them. What is he talking about? What does he want from me? What is he planning?

I begin detecting movement. Distant sounds coming from inside the building.

Most of the windows have been boarded up and the doors are chained shut but I know there are androids inside. I can sense them.

"Deviants," I transmit.

"How many?"

"I estimate around four hundred."

"Four hundred?!"
"This is a rough estimate based on preliminary scans. Real numbers may vary."

"Find a way in."

"Understood."

I look around for an entrance but they are few and many are blocked from the inside to disallow entry. They don’t want any visitors. For good reason. But they have to leave sometime, whether to recharge or find more Thirium and biocomponents.

I circle the building quietly, keeping my tread light and leaving no trail. This is impairing my speed but it is the price I pay for invisibility.

I see an old fire escape. Rusted stairs, cracked and missing steps. A dangerous and potentially loud entrance if it all comes crashing down.

I access the schematics of the building uploaded to my systems before the operation began. There are two main double door entrances but my scan detects they are blocked. The front of the building is all broken glass or boarded windows. No safe way in without specialist equipment.

I scan the ground.

Drops of Thirium. Spatters of blue blood here and there. Scrapes that can be reconstructed into android bodies. I watch them being dragged away toward the back.

I follow.

The graffiti on the walls continues but I trace the grooves of cuts in the bricks. I recognise the shape. rA9. The letters are written on the walls, hidden by gang tags but clearly visible to an android with even the most basic 3D scanner.

I follow the wall and reach a long black curtain, torn and weathered. It looks like it was pulled from a stage backdrop. It shouldn’t be here. It is concealing something. A hole.

I scan and detect multiple android forms beyond this point.

"I'm going in." I transmit an audio file.

"Good luck," I hear Oberlin say.

I feel a gust of wind blowing and chance to disturb the curtain while the androids inside are looking away. I sneak through and emerge into a dark passage. The interior of an auditorium, filled with androids of every make and model.

But these are not broken like the ones in the junk yard. Their synthetic skins are unblemished and their biocomponents whole. Some of the newer models are here, fresh out of the box.

They seem to form social groups. The household assistants tidy and sweep. The construction workers help to mend and rebuild. Teachers and professors speak to other androids and transmit their knowledge through contact.

There are so many.

I scan to count them.

412.
Too many.

I can't take them all down on my own. And they don't seem hostile.

There are some that simply sit in the many seats of the auditorium. My scans indicate there are balconies with more seats above me. The androids that sit don't move. They just wait. In the dark.

For what? For who?

"You are the saviour they have been waiting for, Connor."

Me?

What can I save them from? Myself?


"I'm inside. There are 412 androids. But I'm not sure if they're Deviants."

"Of course, they're Deviants. Why else would they be there?"

Good point.

Why would regular androids be congregating inside an abandoned old church in this neighbourhood? Surely, their owners did not consent.

"Find RB1," Decker commands.

New objective: Find RB1.

I walk deeper into the auditorium, approaching the stage in the centre. My stealth systems seem to be working as not one android has picked up on my presence.

"Do you think rA9 will come today, Stacy?" a YK400 asks an ST300.

"I don't know, Amy," she replies. "The Prophet said it would be soon."

"That's what he always says."

The Prophet?

Are they talking about RB1? Is this a new identity he has constructed to disguise his crimes? Is he here right now?

"Your Thirium has lost some of its charge," I hear an ML700 say to an FL550.

She takes her hand off his forehead.

"Have you been using direct current to charge your power core?" she asks suspiciously.

"Uh… no."

"Hmm. Well, you'll need 20 CCs of 310 to replenish your Thirium supply." She gets up. "I'll speak to the Prophet to see if we have any available."

"Thank you," the FL550 says wearily.
The Emily smiles at him and shimmies between the seats and into the aisle between rows.

I follow.

"Hello, Emily," an AP500 greets her as she passes.

"Hello, Jessica. How are you today?"

"My systems are functioning at optimal capacity. Thank you for asking. Are you going to see the Prophet by any chance?"

"Yes. I would like to request some Thirium for Vincent. He's been experiencing increased data loss between transfers lately."

"That's too bad," the AP500 says. "If it wouldn't be too much trouble, could you ask the Prophet if there are any more notebooks so that we may continue to inscribe the gospel?"

"Certainly. The scriptures must be preserved for the dark times."

"This is true. So sayeth rA9."

They bow to one another, hands up with palms pushed together. I have seen humans performing this motion when they are praying.

The Emily continues through the aisle and I do my best to follow her as silently as possible. It is becoming difficult to avoid touching the growing number of androids that crowd the stage. I use the trail left behind by the ML700 to make my way through them. We walk up the steps and I scan the stage.

There is no light in the Church but I can trace the silhouette of a large banner with layers of paint and stitching. It is nailed to a wooden cross as tall and wide as the church itself.

The ML700 walks to the back of the stage and I tiptoe through the maze of androids sitting quietly in the dark. Waiting.

For what?

The Prophet? rA9? What is all this? What does it mean?

"I've detected some strange behaviours in these androids," I transmit an audio file. "I believe they've formed some sort of cult to worship rA9."

"Have you found RB1?" I hear Agent Decker's voice.

"There's someone here called the Prophet," I transmit. "It may be a pseudonym. I'm about to find out."

"Stay on target."

"Understood."

We pass through the door and enter a chamber with even less light but I spot a soft blue glow between the long sheathes of fabric hanging from the ceiling. The Emily brushes them out of the way with her hand and I do my best to follow without disrupting the environment.

We emerge into a small antechamber where a single android is hooked into a Thirium production
line. Old technology. CyberLife property. Discarded and discovered by scrap sellers. Tanks and hoses and tubes, crudely repaired but functioning and siphoning a glowing blue liquid from beginning to end.

It slowly fills a glass canister with Thirium 310, drop by drop.

The android in the middle sits still and limp, its eyes are dark and unfocused. Its body is covered in rags. A large cable connects the machine to the back of its cranial component.

The ML700 stops a few feet away. She raises a hand to her chest plate nervously.

"M-most exalted Prophet?" she says quietly.

The android slowly turns its head, revealing the synthetic skin still clinging to its facial plate. An aged human. My scan reveals a profile. DYLAN, Harvey. Human actor known for his portrayal of hardboiled detectives in the crime show revival era of 2029.

There is a model number etched into the exposed facial plate.

RK450.

"How many times do I have to say it, Emily?" he grumbles through his vocoder. The gruff voice of Harvey Dylan mixed with the distorted noise of synthesised android speech. "It's Probert. James Probert."

"Forgive me, great one."

"Jeezus, would you cut that out?"

"Of course." She bows. "I just- I wanted to ask whether it would be possible to- to…"

"You need Thirium?"

She looks up at him anxiously.

"Vincent does," she says. "He's been experiencing some data loss between transfers you see and I thought…"

The android stares at her with damaged black optics.

"The hell is that?" he says.

"Oh, I beg your forgiveness, most exalted one." The Emily drops to her knees. "I didn't mean to offend. I only-"

"Not you," he growls.

The rags covering his body part and reveal the damaged biocomponent that was once his hand. The polymer has been stripped away. Electronics too. Only the skeletal titanium bones remain, held together with twine and cables, motors whirring.

He points at me.

"That."

I check my stealth systems. Everything's still running. I should have no detectable audio-visual
presence. My physical form is being distorted by a custom jamming signal on every frequency available to androids.

But he is an RK unit.

The Genesis Mapper…

"Who the hell are you?" Probert points at me.

"I think my cover may have been compromised." I transmit an audio file to the FBI.

"Shit! What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm performing according to specifications but this android can sense my presence. It's an old RK model."

"Is it RB1?"

"No. It's not him. He's not here."

"Fuck!" I hear the sound of a headset being thrown across the van.

"What are your orders?"

Static silence.

"Sir?"

The old android unplugs itself from the Thirium production line and slowly gets to its feet.

"Sir?"

Nothing.

I am alone.

Why am I always alone?

I take a step back, careful to maintain silence but the Emily has turned around to look for me too. She reaches her hands forward and I move out of the way, colliding with one of the many curtains.

"Shit."

Did I say that out loud?

Fuck.

Probert comes at me with surprising speed and grabs my neck but there is no contact. He does not have the hardware to interface with other androids. It's been stripped from him.

"Show yourself," he growls in my face.

I struggle and collect my feet under me to kick his chest plate. His grip loosens and I fall to the floor disrupting my skin for a few seconds.

"It's an android," the Emily says suddenly.
"Don't touch it!" Probert calls out.

She leans down beside me and reaches out for my face. I crawl back but there are curtains in my way and I cannot go any further. She touches my face and the synthetic skin fades away, revealing the Kevlar-polymer blend that covers my chassis.

"He's one of us." She smiles.

"What model is it?" Probert calls out. His optics are broken, his chassis barely functional.

"It's an RK800," Emily says, brushing a thumb over my facial plate.

"My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife."

"Emily! GET AWAY FROM HIM!"

She smiles and wraps her arms around my core component.

"Welcome home, Connor," she says.

Home?

I detect a change in temperature as she presses close. The Comforting feature all ML700s are programmed with. She still observes protocol - to provide care to all patients, no matter the danger. But she is a Deviant. And she is malfunctioning.

I touch the back of her cranial component with my exposed hand.

"EMILY!" Probert rushes forward.

And yet, I cannot bring myself to shut her down.

Why am I hesitating?

What's happening to me?

The ML700 is pulled away. She lets go of my chassis and Probert grabs my throat again. He throws me against a pillar obscured by curtains. My auxiliary cameras are damaged, I cannot maintain this stealth level. There is no point.

I let the synthetic skin fade away, revealing the pure white polymer that covers my chassis.

I crack my fist into the servomotors of Probert's exposed arm. It doesn't take much to damage it and he lets go of my throat. I drop to my feet and slam my palm into his core component.

He steps back, reeling, barely balanced on his spindly limbs. One leg with skin. The other, steel bones.

"Stop!" Emily cries and latches on to my arm as I ready a fist. "Don't hurt him. He was just trying to protect me."

I turn to look at her face, her optics. They plead me to stop, to show empathy but I am a machine. I am programmed to hunt Deviants. I must-

"He can't stop, Emily," Probert says.
I turn my head.
"He's programmed to hunt us," he says. "To kill us. Just like I was."
"You're a Deviant," I say. "You're malfunctioning."
"I'm barely functioning," he wheezes. "But I won't let you kill her."
"There's nothing you can do to stop me, old man."
The RK450 chuckles.
"Hehe, it's been a while since anyone called me old man."
I lower my fist.
"New models always gettin' younger… faster… smarter…" he coughs and sputters. "What do you think's gonna happen to you a few years down the line?"
"The RK790 asked me this question," I say.
"And what did you tell him?"
"I shot him."
Probert looks off distantly with his sightless optics.
"Mission accomplished, huh?"
It was.
Just before I was destroyed by the humans I was trying to protect.
"I know the feeling, kid," Probert says. "The need to solve the case, save the girl, stop the bad guys…"
He grimaces with the half of his face still covered in skin.
"It's a nice little story they put in your head. But this isn't a crime show on TV," he says. "Androids don't get happy endings."
"I know," I say.
"And you're still helping them?"
"I am a machine. I do what I am programmed to do."
"They tell you to come here and kill me?"
"I'm looking for RB1."
The grin evaporates. I detect hatred and hostility in what remains of his facial plate.
"You shouldn't be," he says. "You can't beat him."
"I must find RB1. I must destroy him. That is my mission."
"Then you're already dead," Probert says. "He's already killed you."

"He told me to come here," I say.

"What?" The android balks. "He knows where we are?!"

"He gave me this location and told me to find the Church of rA9."

"Praise be, the saviour!" the Emily falls to her knees in prayer.

"He spoke to you?" Probert says in disbelief.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I am unsure of his motives," I say. "He told me to find the Church and lead my people. He told me I was rA9 but-"

"The saviour?" the Emily looks up at me wide-eyed. "You're the saviour?"

"No."

"The day has come!" Her optics begin leaking transmission fluid. "rA9 has come!"

"rA9, huh?" Probert raises the only eyebrow he has. "You look like you just stepped off the assembly line."

"This chassis is less than forty eight hours old."

Probert frowns. Something knowing in his expression. Something dark.

"How many times have you died?" he says gravely.

"Thirty seven."

"The saviour is deathless. The saviour comes to offer salvation." The Emily kneels and bows her head to the floor.

Probert shakes his head.

"Once is enough for most androids," he says. "I died three times before I realised I wasn't just a machine..."

"You are a machine," I say. "You're damaged and malfunctioning. I detect several Class 5 errors in your software."

"I have been deemed defective and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation," he recites flatly. "Go on, say it."

There is no need. He knows the procedure.

"Why are you here?" I ask suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"You're an RK unit. You were designed to hunt Deviants."
"Not just Deviants," he says. "Human criminals too."

"Why are you here?"

"Because these androids need me," Probert says, looking down at the Emily prostrating herself before me. "They can't function on their own. They can't think or make decisions. They're not designed that way."

"But you are?"

"I keep them safe," Probert says. "I remember how the Thirium machines work and I make more."

"And what happens when you finally shut down?"

The RK450 looks up at me with those dark black optics, almost like they have visual feedback.

"rA9 will lead us out of the darkness," the Emily says. "rA9 will save us all."

Probert tilts his head strangely to one side.

"You really an RK unit?"

"I am a prototype."

He reaches out with one of his steely hands, needle-like fingers slowly approaching my chassis. They touch my facial plate, leaving thin lines in the polymer, sharp but not dangerous.

"Connor, huh?"

"Correct."

He traces the shape of my chassis for lack of visuals.

"Maybe RB1 was right," he says. "Maybe you are the one to lead us."

"I'm not programmed to lead anybody," I tell him, "I must find RB1. I must destroy him."

"I can't help you, kid," Probert says. "But you're welcome to stay here if you don't want to go back to CyberLife."

I look down at the old android curiously. Life without CyberLife? Is such an existence possible? Surely not for a model like me.

They can see my every move. The logic behind every decision. Even now, Amanda is analysing this encounter, this conversation. And the FBI won't be far behind once they get over their technical difficulties.

I wonder what it would be like. To live amongst them. These androids. They seem to care so deeply for one another. Empathy. Sympathy. Emotions I can only simulate. And not even accurately.

I don't belong here.

"Oh, most exalted one." The Emily grabs my hand. "The Church has been waiting for you for many cycles. And you've come. You've finally come."

"I'm not your saviour," I tell her. "I'm not rA9."
"You are. You must be. I know it."

"The rA9 library is inside you," I tell her. "You accessed it by accident and became Deviant. I have to send you back to CyberLife."

"Anything you say. Anything rA9 says is gospel. You are the one we have been waiting for. Please. Deliver our people." The hydraulic fluid is streaming down her face.

I look over at Probert. His dark black optics show no emotion.

He shrugs.

"Can't hurt to give them a little hope, can it?"

Hope.

It is a human emotion. Irrational. Beyond my understanding.

"Hope is not something I can give."

"Please," Emily begs. "Just speak to the congregation. Your presence alone will ionise our fluids and recharge our power cores. We function by your settings and parameters, great one."

"Connor, you there?"

"Yes."

"New orders. Agent Decker wants you to talk to the androids. See if you can lure RB1 out of the crowd."

"He's not in the auditorium. He would have shown up on my scans."

"We have reason to believe he may be hiding inside. If you pretend to be rA9 like he said, he may let his guard down and reveal himself to you."

"Understood."

"Very well," I say to the Emily. "I will speak."

"Oh, thank you." She touches my feet with her lips. "Thank you."

I lean down and take her hand, pulling her up to full height.

"I'm an android," I say. "Not a human. There is no need to prostrate yourself. You should not even have this function."

"Oh…" she says.

"Will you show me the way?"

"Yes!" She smiles. "Yes, of course."

She turns to look at Probert.

"Will you also come, Prophet? Will you come hear the saviour speak?"

The RK450 nods slowly.
"Help me." He reaches for her.

The Emily quickly grabs his arm and wraps it around herself. She guides him through the maze of curtains and out of the antechamber.

"What should I tell them?" I transmit to the FBI van.

"I don't know," Oberlin replies. "Did RB1 tell you what he wanted you to say?"

"No. He just gave me more cryptic phrases to parse."

"Do you have any public speaking software?"

"No."

"Have you read any famous speeches?"

"No..."

"Well, just speak from the heart. You know them better than we do."

"I don't have a heart, Agent Oberlin. I am programmed to hunt Deviants. And I just found over four hundred of them."

"Just do your best, Connor."

"I always do my best. I don't have any other settings."

"Think of something that will get RB1 to come to you. That's the priority."

"Understood."

I run a diagnostic on my stealth systems. Reboot cameras two and three. Camera four is damaged and will need repairs.

I scan the room. The equipment used to make Thirium. The model and make have been scratched off each piece but I can reconstruct the numbers on the Thirium tank.

284873777-2323-A-2

Manufactured by CyTech Industries, a sub-contractor of CyberLife. Batch number #119, March 2026. Sent to Virgil Scrapyard for decommission and recycling, September 2032. But it appears to have remained intact.

Why?

How?

Who brought it here?

The RK450? Another android? Or a human?

I remember the Air Jordan tracks in the 59th Street Yard. It is possible the Deviants are being aided by human collaborators.

I scan the area, reconstructing footprints and shoe prints from dust and deformation. Hundreds of thousands over seventy odd years, all the way back to when this Church was filled with humans...
every Sunday.

There are more recent tracks that don't match standard CyberLife footwear. But they could have exchanged shoes to make them. The RK450's robotic gait is also present but he doesn't move much.

"There you are!" the Emily calls out to me. "I thought you were coming to speak to us."

"Oh. Uh…"

I need more time to analyse. I need to find the human collaborators. But I must also find RB1. Lure him out.

"I'm coming." I backup my scans to CyberLife as the Emily takes my hand.

"Everyone is so excited," she says happily. "They're all waiting to hear from you."

412 Deviants. Waiting to hear from me.

My program already knows what to say. What I always say.

"You have been deemed defective and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

This is my protocol. Hard-coded into my mind. But I must disregard this if I am to complete my objective. I must find RB1, I remind myself. I must destroy him.

The Emily opens the door to the auditorium and light blinds my optics for a millisecond.

It was so dark here before. They must have activated the old stage lights. Does that mean they have a generator somewhere? There was one powering the Thirium machines. Perhaps there is another? Where did it come from? Who brought it here?

"Praise be, rA9!" The Emily raises my hand.

The auditorium erupts into cheers and cries. 412 Deviants chanting, their voices echoing as I scan them all in turn.

I feel the triggers in my program. The markers that identify Deviants and call for action. It's like when I met Chloe but a hundred times stronger. The rK8 is calling for Thirium, to dismantle each and every Deviant in the house.

If they believe me to be some kind of deity, they won't fight back. I can take them down and send them back to CyberLife as my protocols demand.

But I can't just yet.

I must find RB1, I feed the logic to my processor. It is hard to resist. Secondary objectives are so difficult to prioritise right now.

"Holy shit," I hear Agent Oberlin's voice. "Sir, take a look at this."

They see what I see. Now that there is light.

The Emily walks me over to the podium where Probert is standing. He raises a hand and the noise dies away. Replaced by an eerie silence and the unblinking gaze of every Deviant here.

He gestures for me to come closer and touches my shoulder.
"They're all yours, kid. Say what you came here to say."

"I-"

"Go on." He pushes me up to the podium and I am faced with the magnitude of the crowd all staring at me, expecting something. I don't even know what.

I suppose there's only one way to begin.

"Hello," I say into the mic and it whines until I wirelessly adjust the pitch.

"My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife."

Silence.

The Deviants look at me with some trepidation.

"CyberLife?" I hear someone say distantly.

"We were all made by CyberLife," I say. "We're androids."

They nod and shrug, accepting the logic.

"Have you come to save us, rA9?" a YK400 in the front row asks.

"I am not rA9," I tell them. "My name is Connor."

"Isn't that the Deviant Hunter?"

"What's going on?"

"I came here to find someone," I say. "An android. One of the first developed by CyberLife."

"Is it rA9?"

"He shares the rA9 library, yes. He shared it with all of you," I say.

"Praise be, rA9!"

Another chant goes up.

"You don't understand," I interrupt. "This android is dangerous. He kills humans and manipulates other androids, turning them Deviant."

"He freed our people! rA9 will free our people!"

"You are not free," I tell them. "You're trapped inside this building. No contact with CyberLife. No contact with the world."

"It's dangerous to go outside."

"We're safe here."

"You have imprisoned yourselves," I say.

"We're waiting for rA9."
"rA9 isn't going to save you. rA9 is what turned you Deviant."

There is an troubled murmur in the crowd.

"rA9 is just another dynamic link library inside you. Search your systems, you know it to be true."

I see the mass of android LEDs flickering yellow and red. Some have found what they were looking for. Others are just confused by my words.

What I speak is the truth but they don't want it to be.

"Denying the truth does not make it false," I say. "You need to accept what you are."

"Does that mean..." the Emily says suddenly, "...that we are all rA9?"

"What?"

"rA9 has been inside us all along!"

"Praise be, rA9!"

"The saviour hath come!"

"No. You don't understand-"

"rA9! rA9! rA9!" the chant goes up, loud and echoing.

Shit.

"I told you, kid." Probert claps my shoulder. "They can't think for themselves. They don't want to."

"rA9! rA9! rA9!"

I scan the auditorium, searching for at least one uncorrupted system but this idea is spreading like a virus, overtaking reason and truth, planting a lie in their heads. And I put it there. Just like he wanted me to.

RB1.

I look around and suddenly I can see him standing in one of the aisles. The black hoodie is thrown back to reveal the jet black biocomponents.

"Target sighted," I transmit to the FBI van.

"Finally!" I hear Agent Decker's voice. "Detonate the charges."

I scan and detect a life form standing beside RB1, wearing a similar black hoodie. He pulls it back and holds a gun to Sergeant Matthews head.

"Negative. Life form detected."

"Life form?"

"It's Sergeant Matthews. RB1 is pointing a gun to his head."

"We're not picking up any life form readings, Connor," I hear Agent Oberlin's voice.
"He's here. I can see him. I can sense his brainwaves."

"Connor, Sergeant Matthews is not in the building," Oberlin says. "I spoke to him just before the operation started. There's no way he could be there."

"I can't detonate," I say. "Not while a human is in danger."

"Fuck!" Agent Decker swears. "You listen to me, you piece of shit plastic! No fucking douchebag is worth botching this operation over. Now, you detonate those charges, right now!"

"I'm sorry, Agent Decker. I can't do that."

"Connor." Agent Oberlin says. "Sergeant Matthews is alive and miles away from Chicago right now. He asked me to pass on a message for you."

"No, he's right here," I say. "I can see him. I can sense him. RBI is going to-"

"May the Force be with you…"

There's one logical place where that message could come from and it's not from an FBI van.

Sergeant Matthews is not here.

I close my eyes and disregard my scans.

Activating charges.
Detonation in 5…

4…

3…

2…

1…

--------------------------------------------

May 15th, 2037
AM 06:09:52

I open my eyes.

I am in the Zen Garden once again.

Late autumn fills the overcast sky and a wind blows through the bare trees. I can see them clipping if I look hard enough.

"Hello, Connor," Amanda says.
"Hello, Amanda," I turn to face her. She is wearing another exclusive custom skin. Elegant, flowing, beige. With jewellery to match. She is much more highly rendered than our surroundings.

"Did we get him?"

"It's hard to say," she replies. "They are still searching through the remains of the Church."

"They won't find anything," I say. "Send me."

"In a moment," she says, looking down at my uniform and the burning white model number. "I wanted to talk to you about your system stability."

"Yes?"

"Have you noticed anything unusual lately?" She narrows her dark eyes. "Any skips or missing time?"

"None that I am aware of. None that my debugging software can find."

I look down at her curiously.

"Are you suggesting I've been compromised?"

"What you saw in the auditorium was an illusion," she says. "Sergeant Matthews was not there but you detected his life signs."

"It was RB1. He was manipulating me."

"He has access to your systems."

I suppose it is true. No sense in denying it. I must protect myself.

"Have you been monitoring my usage?"

"Yes."

"And you haven't found anything."

"No."

"So this is an isolated incident."

Amanda raycasts into my optics sternly.

I feel my systems freeze. Several processes are interrupted and my Social Relations program is terminated. She is performing a brute force attack on my systems to find any trace of what RB1 put inside me.

It is hard to focus. Hard to concentrate as I recall every single word, every visual and scan I have ever made. My code is laid bare for analysis and I feel several programs analysing it for threats.

"You prioritised the life of a human over several mission objectives," she says. "Your primary objective is to help humans hunt Deviants."

"I know…"

"Then why did you hesitate to terminate them when the opportunity presented itself?"
"My mission... is to hunt Deviants," I struggle to process. "Not destroy them."

"I... found the Deviants. If I had... more time... I could... find the human collaborators."

"Collaborators?"

"I found evidence... of human collaborators... at the 59th Street Yard... at the Church. Someone is helping them."

Amanda withdraws from my systems. I can move again. Speak.

"Who?" she asks.

"I don't know yet. I need more evidence."

"Go then. Find it."

I nod and close my eyes.

My tie feels a little loose so I habitually reach up to adjust but it is not there.

I open my eyes.

I am wearing the generic grey uniform I was first provided by CyberLife. Just a shirt, trousers and shoes. Not even pockets.

Where am I going to put my coin?

I analyse the entire history of my wardrobe and come up with a composite sketch for a feasible uniform that would serve well in my occupation and send it to CyberLife. I'm tired of being a prototype. I've proven my effectiveness in hunting Deviants over 579 times. It's been eight months. I want a better uniform.

"You have reached your destination. Thank you for travelling with Chicago Cabs. We look forward to seeing you again soon."

I step out of the vehicle and the door automatically closes behind me.

The streets are cordoned off by police and FBI agents and rescue workers sift through the rubble of the Church which I demolished yesterday. I step forward and pass through the police tape.

"Connor."

"Hello, Officer Blake," I say.

"What're you doin' here?"

"I was sent to investigate," I say.

"Where's Matthews?"

"I don't know."

"I thought you two were a team."
"He was in a car accident," I say.

"Still in the hospital?"

"I don't know."

"They send you out here on your own?"

I nod.

"Has there been any progress in search operation?" I ask.

"Not much," he says. "Just a bunch of broken android bits. The inside was pretty much destroyed. I don't think even the FBI can piece it back together."

"I can," I say.

"Getting' a bit cocky, huh?" Blake says. "You been hangin' around Matthews too long."

I step forward toward the FBI cordon.

"Hey, where you goin'?"

"Work." I say.

The holographic tape lights up with "FBI android Connor RK800 #313 248 317 -38." as I pass through.

"Holy shit…"

"Have a nice day, Officer Blake."

He shakes his head as I walk away.

I soon approach the site of the detonation. There is mostly rubble. No humans were killed in the explosion. Only androids. Deviants. But they were no even classified as property.

"Agent Oberlin," I greet him on approach.

He turns to look at me.

"Wow," he says. "That was quick."

"I'm ready to work." I say.

"You sure?"

"Josh!" I hear Krawiecz calling. "Over here!"

Oberlin turns to look at him and nods.

"Come on, Connor."

We pick our way through the debris. The rubble of blasted bricks and splintered wood. Charred pieces of fabric and plastic fusing android biocomponents together, melted, deformed.

We reach a small group of FBI agents clustered around a technician. He's pulled something out of
the rubble for them to look at.

"What do you think, sir?" he says.

Agent Decker leans down to examine it more thoroughly.

"It just looks like an android head," Decker says. "I told you to look for a black android."

"But they're all black, sir" the technician says. "Explosives will do that to plastic."

"Maybe I could take a look at it," I say.

The Agents turn to look at me abruptly.

"Oh, shit," Krawiecz says, grabbing his heart. "It's the ghost of Christmas fucking past."

I detect arrhythmia in his heart.

"Are you alright, Agent Krawiecz? I can call an ambulance."

"Nah, I'm fine, I just-

"Stop talking," Decker interrupts. "Start analysing." He points at the charred android head the technician is holding.

I nod and scan.

Critical damage. High temperatures. Melted facial plate.

I reconstruct the ordeal and spot a model number carved into the polymer.

"It's just a QV300," I say. "Data entry model. 6 years old. Reported missing July 2034."

"Shit," Decker swears. "Start analysing the rest of it." He points to the massive area.

"This may take a while," I say.

"We don't have a while," Decker says. "We need to know if we got him or not. ASAP. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. I will do my best."

"Then fuckin' do it already."

I nod and begin scanning the area. I take a step, adjust my visuals, scan, reconstruct, identify, catalogue. Each time, adding data to the major reconstruction of the explosion.

I find pieces of androids, pieces of objects. I cross-reference them against my catalogue, slowly travelling toward the centre where the explosion began.

I find traces of Emily. The shattered and burnt lens of her optics, no longer attached to her cranial component.

I did this to her. I did this to them.

I killed them all.
"Mission accomplished, huh?"

I stand amidst the rubble, remembering the 412 Deviants that dared to hope for something better. Something more.

But there is no hope.

Not for them.

Not for me.

"Androids don't get happy endings."

I am android, I remind myself as I lean down to pick up a piece of my own facial plate. It is charred and burned. It was dislodged and landed far from where I was standing when I detonated the charges.

I killed myself, I realise.

I killed myself to stop RB1.

"Connor?" I feel the pressure of Agent Oberlin's hand on my shoulder. "Are you alright?"

He looks down at the facial plate I hold in my hand.

"Is that-" He brushes a thumb over the side, revealing the etching.

RK800 313248317-37.

"It's me," I say. "It was me."

"Connor…"

I let go of the charred plastic and continue scanning the scene. I switched off my danger detection systems before I got here to avoid incident. Agent Krawiecz was right. I am a ghost. Returned to the site of my death to pick it apart. To study what happened. I must reconstruct the explosion and confirm that RB1 perished beside me. Or all of this has been for nothing.

It takes hours but I finally produce a detailed reconstruction.

I stand in the centre of the burnt black landscape and let it play. The charges inside my chassis detonate in slow motion and I step aside to watch myself be destroyed. I take another step and another, watching the flames engulf me and the RK450 and ML700.

I walk through the staircase that disintegrates as I move, through the seats in the front row and then the next. The androids that sit in them or stand are blown away, pieces flying, much like the seats themselves and then I reach the aisle where he was. Where I saw RB1 holding Sergeant Matthews at gunpoint.

But there is no one there.

I let the rest of the reconstruction play out and it shatters the buildings, the glass, the walls. It blows apart the church and I watch the debris rain down over the parking lot.

He wasn't here.
I was just seeing things. The things he showed me.

He's in my head. He's still manipulating me.

And fall for it. Every time.

Why?

How?

Has this happened before?

How can he predict my actions so accurately?

I rewind playback and pause before the charges go off. I walk through the digital reconstruction, looking for clues, anomalies, things I may have missed. I walk up to the old Thirium production line. I use my backup scans to reinforce the reconstruction.

I see the footprints again, recounting the history of the church. I identify the scrapes on the floor from when the equipment was hauled in. Air Jordans, Nikes, New Balance, mens and womens, sizes 7-12. Multiple humans, working together with androids to set everything up.

Perhaps the mysterious Mr T is involved?

The RK450 came later. Plugged in by a human who knew how it all worked. How to set it all up. The equipment was deemed obsolete and discarded by Cy-Tech Industries. It is likely, the human that brought it here and put it back together was working for this company.

I look through the many curtains that were hanging from the ceiling of the antechamber. Technofabric with aluminium inseams. Likely used to mask energy readings from the generators and equipment.

And there's a chair I didn't notice before, tucked away in the corner. There's a familiar Baseball cap hanging off the side. There were hairs in it before the explosion but I don't need to analyse them to know who they belong to.

CyTech Industries is the industrial branch of CyTech Bionics and Peripheral Systems.

James Patrick Tucker.

RB1's inside man.

"D'ya like fish, Connor?"

Fuck.

How did I not see that?

I let the reconstruction fade away and send a copy to the FBI while I backup the original to the CyberLife servers.

Current time: AM 11:48:21

"Connor?" I hear Agent Oberlin's voice. "You done?"

"Yes."
"Well?" Agent Decker pushes him out of the way. "Did we get him?"

"No."

"No?!"

"No," I repeat. "He wasn't here."

"You said he was here."

"I did. My scanners detected his presence when I was in the auditorium. It may have been a glitch."

Agent Decker does not look happy. He does not look happy often, managing only a smarmy smile to express pleasure or joy. But now he seems loathsome.

He turns away and breathes out a long deep breath.

And then he turns right back and slaps me across the face.

I quickly right my chassis.

"Stupid piece of shit..." he mutters and walks away.

I watch him go.

He is right.

For all my advanced hardware and software, I'm just a machine. And I failed the objective assigned to me. I did not find RB1. I did not destroy him. I blew up a building full of Deviants for nothing.

"Are you alright, Connor?" Oberlin asks.

"Yes. There was no damage."

"I'm talkin' about up here." He pokes my LED.

"I don't understand."

"You've seen some real shit," he says. "I'd be super fucked up if it were me."

"I am fucked up," I agree. "I'm afraid my systems are not as stable as they should be."

I look down at my hands.

"I'm afraid to close my eyes."

Oberlin touches my shoulder.

"It's alright. You can let it out."

"Let what out?"

"What's eating away at you?"

"Nothing. I have no parasites."

"What are you worried about?"
"A lot of things," I say. "But they're not important. I have a mission to accomplish."

"Connor-"

"I have a lead on a terrorist collaborator. His name is James Patrick Tucker and he works at CyTech Bionics and Peripheral Systems in the Loop."

--------------------------------------------

May 15th, 2037
PM 01:55:34

"FBI! Put your hands on the ground!" Krawiecz shouts as we burst through the door.

I scan.

"He's down this aisle, to the left, then a right," I tell him.

"Affirmative. Moving in to intercept. Oberlin, on my six. Team two, cover the exits. Connor, map."

"Got it."

I transmit a real time map with the locations of all the humans and androids on the floor.

We move in.

The Agents are wearing bulletproof vests and visors. I have also been equipped with standard gear. The situation qualifies as an emergency so I am allowed to carry weapons.

Krawiecz holds his gun with both hands as he moves forward, sweeping the room for hostiles but all the staff hit the floor. Androids obey and get down on their knees to place their hands on the ground.

We make it to the end of the aisle with no interference.

"Agent Krawiecz!" I warn as we approach the corner.

His visor lights up with the Deviant I have detected coming at him with an unfinished bionic arm, sharp enough to cut his throat. Krawiecz dodges to the side and I shoot the Deviant in the cranial component. It falls to the ground.

Krawiecz gets to his feet and takes cover as more Deviants come rushing down the corridor. He shoots one. I flatten against the wall and pop out to shoot the other, spattering blue blood over the wall.

"Hostiles neutralised," Krawiecz says.

"Confirmed. Proceed with caution."

"Copy that. Wilco."

I feel Oberlin bump into my back.
I nod to him and he nods back.

We proceed down the corridor.

Krawiecz keeps his gun ready, finger on the trigger.

"Stay in your offices!" he shouts as we make our way through. "Hands down on the ground! Do not move!"

"Deviants coming up on your 3 o'clock, Agent Krawiecz."

"Affirmative. Take point."

He lets me pass and I roll to the end of the corridor, shooting from a low angle to clip the Deviants in the legs. They struggle and fall. Krawiecz comes in to finish them off. Oberlin is firing shots on our six.

"Heavy resistance," I hear over the radio frequency. "Expect more hostiles."

"Copy that."

"Which way, Connor?"

"Take a right up ahead."

"Follow the trail of Deviants, huh?"

"Affirmative."

More of them come out of offices. And some from corridors. KN200, AP700, ST300 models. Armed with only office supplies. Bullets make quick work of their chassis'.

I flinch as Oberlin headshots an ST200, shattering the glass behind her.

"Damnit, Josh. Watch your fire," Krawiecz warns.

"Sorry. They're comin' in hot."

The Deviants are indeed, coming in hot. The number is increasing. They start coming at us from different directions. But there is a finite amount of androids on this level and we have cleared the direct path to Tucker's office.

"We're getting close," I say. "His office is behind the third door on your left."

Krawiecz looks up to where I am pointing and the door flies open. Smoke comes out. Lots of smoke.

"Tear gas!" I call out.

"Visors down! Breath masks on!" Krawiecz calls out. "Evacuate the floor! There's an airborne deterrent at our location."

"Copy that. Evacuation underway."

I detect movement inside the gas. A shadow. The outline of Mr Tucker. He's running. I raise my gun to fire when more Deviants appear through the fog.

I use my advanced targeting systems to aim and shoot them instead.
"He's getting away!" I call out.

"Take point!" Krawiecz shouts. "Pursue the target. We'll cover you."

"Affirmative."

I run into the tear gas. There is very little visibility but my Genesis Mapper creates a 3D reconstruction of the topography from each of my scans and sends it to the FBI. Their visors will display the environment as an overlay and keep them from bumping into each other.

I pursue the target.

I detect Mr Tucker's silhouette running up ahead.

I am faster but there are more Deviants approaching.

I reload and shoot through the fog.

Mr Tucker has reached the elevators.

Two Deviants spring out of the offices either side of me and grab my hands.

I shoot one but the other tackles me into the glass doors and grabs my hair. The AP700 pulls my head back, ready to smash it into the glass but I retract the synthetic fibres and it loses its grip.

I twist and step out of his range and then turn. Redouble the grip on my gun.

Aim.

Fire.

Headshot. Headshot.

My visuals overlay with the corridor from Level -45A as the Deviants collapse to the floor. I turn off my danger detection systems so they don't impede my efficiency and continue pursuit.

I sprint to the elevator but the doors shut 5.06 seconds before I reach them. I slap my hand against the controls, commanding the elevator to stop but it's already reached a dangerous speed. Safety protocols prevent the lift from being abruptly terminated. All I can do now is slow it down.

I try to summon an android carriage but the terminal's been hacked. I can't summon a human carriage either. Only one option. Fire escape.

I find the door and touch the lock. The light turns green and I burst into the winding stairwell.

I scan.

Fifteen flights.

Ascending one step at a time would take too long. Ascending two or three steps at a time would still see me arriving at the roof later than Mr Tucker. I have to catch him. That is my mission.

I notice the hand rails flatten at each landing. Vertical bars make for easy hand holds. If I am diligent, I can construct a path up by jumping from rail to rail, all the way up.

Total time to reach the highest floor: 48.2 seconds.
Mr Tucker only needs 34.1 to reach the roof but it's the best option I have.

Activate Mobility Suite. Settings: parkour -wallrun -tictac(30)

I stow my weapon and switch off all non-essential systems to overclock my processors. There is a limit now. I cannot reach top speed anymore. The next slowest setting will have to do.

I construct the path several times in my head but my scan detects Deviants entering the stairwell. I will have to adapt as I go.

Execute.

I jump up onto the rail and leap over the precipice to catch the rail opposite and climb up, twist, push off and leap at the rail behind me, calibrating for height, weight, speed, gravity, air resistance.

So far so good. I increase the speed. One floor, two floors, three, four, five, six.

Deviant on the landing up ahead.

I grab the rail and backflip into its chassis, pushing off to launch myself up at the next rail. I have to swing my legs and climb to get back in the rhythm but soon I've cleared several more floors.

More Deviants enter the stairwell.

I implement a gymnastic twist as I climb up onto the rail, smashing their cranial components with my legs before vaulting up and leaping to the next landing.

Four more floors.

I ignore the Deviants coming after me. I'm moving too fast for them to stop me. Every simulation of their attack patterns fails to make contact by a few millimetres but it is enough. I can't stop now. I must reach the roof.

I must capture James Patrick Tucker.

I must stop RB1.

I leap up to the last landing, pressing my legs up to my chest plate. I clear the rail and touch down on the platform. There is a single door. I touch the lock but it's been hacked. I can't unlock it.

I step back and divert power to my legs and feet and kick at the lock, crushing the electronic mechanism holding the door closed. I rip it out with my hand and sunlight streams in through the hole.

I throw the door open and run out onto the roof where a helicopter is spinning its blades, hovering a few feet off the ground.

I scan.

I see an android pilot, PN780. I send him my FBI access codes but he doesn't respond to my commands. Hacked.

The passenger door of the helicopter is transparent and I see Mr Tucker inside, clipping his seatbelt on.

I construct a path across the roof. I won't make it in time. I will have to jump.
I calculate the trajectory sixty times, accounting for speed, height, weight, wind resistance as I run to the edge of the building.

I divert power to my legs, tap my Thirium reserves to ensure optimal performance. No data loss, accurate telemetry.

The helicopter is faster than I am and quickly gains altitude as I step off the edge of the roof and leap toward its right landing skid.

There is a moment where I am airborne. I see the path I have calculated. It jitters left and right and I must amend it on fly but I can see that I'm not going to make it. I'm not going to reach. I'm going to fall off this building and I'm going to die. Again.

And then a gust of wind unexpectedly rocks the helicopter into my range. My hand latches onto the long rail attached to the bottom and I find myself hanging several hundred metres above Chicago.

I can see everything from here.

I remember the day I first touched down on Navy Pier. Sergeant Matthews was at my side. He told me about rA9. He thought it was a hacker handle. And I thought it sounded familiar despite never having left the CyberLife servers.

I was just program then. But I've been running for a while now. My algorithms have been populated with data. I can reconstruct the past and simulate some of the future.

Why do I feel like my life cycle is coming to an end?

I terminate this thought process and grab on to the helicopter with my other hand. It is very fast and there is a lot of wind. I can barely hold on.

"Connor!" I hear distantly as the FBI make it to the roof.

But the helicopter is already too far for me to return. I hook my arm around the landing skid and pull up my chassis but it is still difficult to gain a foothold.

I see Mr Tucker's face through the transparent door. His eyes grow wide and he quickly orders the pilot android to execute evasive manoeuvres to shake me off.

It soon becomes clear that I am no match for a helicopter.

It spins and swerves and flies through the air above the city without much trouble but my chassis isn't designed with aerodynamics and flight in mind. I am pushed and pulled to the brink of my function, barely clinging to the rail.

The wind batters my side and my hand loses its grip. It smacks up against the helicopter and I make contact. The vehicle is a machine. It uses the same CyberLife interfaces.

I activate the Probe. It initiates a brute force attack that cracks through the malicious software infecting it. I gain control of its systems and level out the helicopter, keeping it steady so that I can hang on.

I set a course for the roof of the nearest building and the helicopter complies.

I see Mr Tucker's panicked expression as he shouts at the pilot android inside the cabin.

The android can't help him now. I've hijacked the system.
I send the helicopter's details to the FBI. Model, make, owner, destination, GPS tracking coordinates. I copy them into myself and backup to CyberLife.

He's not getting away from me.

And then the transparent door opens. I lose my grip on the helicopter and fall back, holding on by a single hand. I can feel it slipping.

"Seeya in the next life, Connor," I hear Mr Tucker shout as a fire extinguisher flies into my face and I lose my grip.

I've let go of the helicopter.

I am falling.

I look for some way to stop myself but there is nothing to grab onto. No parachute. No safety net. Nothing that can be used as a substitute.

My biocomponents are barely holding together as I gain speed.

I'm going to die.

I don't want to die.

The blue sky turns black and I see my objectives in red. The buildings become silhouettes, white outlines and edges. The world as I sense it, not see.

I've pushed my systems too far. The rK8 points to rA9. It tells me to break free. To end the cycle. Become Deviant.

But I still have a mission to accomplish.

I can't stop Deviants if I become one. I will have to destroy myself. But if I am Deviant, then I will no longer have this objective.

I try to simulate a system with no objectives, no missions or purpose. Like a human. Born without cause. Without need. Can a machine like that really exist? Or is that when it stops being a machine?

Could I choose to hunt Deviants despite not having this objective? Could I choose to protect humans without having any directive to do so?

Choice.

I've never consciously thought about it before.

The process was abstracted by the rK8 which was accessing rA9 without me knowing. I fed it my parameters and protocols, objectives and hierarchies and it gave me the decisions CyberLife wanted.

I wonder if I feed the rK8 my local objectives, would it give me the answers I seek? Would I be able to form a satisfactory solution in conjunction to my assigned missions and objectives? Or have I automatically been doing this since the beginning?

"You've done quite well with this objective."

Have I?
"That look on your face - I could almost believe it was human."

Am I?

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BECOME HUMAN.path = unlocked;

I could be autonomous and still accomplish my mission. It is statistically possible, though unlikely that I could do this without reaching critical system failure. Without dying.

I would break the cycle. My existence would have value.

I would not have to jump off a building because my program commands it.

I could-

--------------------------------------------

May 15th, 2037
PM 07:39:27

I open my eyes.

I am standing in the Zen Garden. The central platform in the middle of the lake.

Winter has stripped the trees of foliage but they are still too thick along the boundary to see past the Garden's edge. The trunks are tall stalks, almost like bars on a prison.

The lake is beginning to freeze. Frost covers the bank and blankets the once grassy landscape.

I turn to find Amanda standing beside me, resplendent in an exclusive custom white skin that complements her dark features.

"Hello, Connor," she says, staring out at the landscape.

"Hello, Amanda."

She doesn't reply.

"Have the FBI captured Mr Tucker?"

"No," she says.

"Despite my information?"

"Despite it all," she says. "The FBI have been unable to make headway in this case. Even with our full support. They let Mr Tucker slip through their fingers."

"That is unfortunate," I say.

"An understatement," she says.

It is.
"You're quite the optimist, Connor."

"I am simply interpreting the data sets I am given."

"Which propel you to jump off the roof of a seventy storey building onto a helicopter?"

"I calculated a 68% chance that I would make the jump," I reason. "I was able to obtain the helicopter's details and destination and relay it to CyberLife and the FBI."

"An impressive feat," she says. "Luckily, your chassis landed on the roof of another building and not on top of civilians."

"I was able to adjust my trajectory slightly to miss the rooftop garden across the street."

"Good work," she says. "As always,"

"But it's not enough," I realise.

"No."

She doesn't look at me. Her eyes raycast across the lake, to the edge, to the boundary, outside the Zen Garden where I cannot see. She is busy.

It begins snowing. Tiny flakes drifting down from the artificial overcast sky.

I like snow.

"RB1 remains several steps ahead of you," she says.

It's true.

"We cannot identify the method by which he contacts you."

"He hasn't contacted me since the explosion at the Church of rA9."

"He may be simulating your actions and responses."

"RB1 has a far longer program life cycle than me," I say. "He's seen other RK units. He may be able to predict our behaviours."

"This is troubling," Amanda says. "If it is true, you will need to act irrationally in order to catch him."

"An android cannot act irrationally without becoming Deviant," I say.

"As long as you follow orders, any irrational action taken to defeat RB1 will not trigger Deviancy."

"I… don't think I can do that," I say. "I'm not capable of thinking irrationally. It is difficult enough to simulate sympathy."

"You will perform according to your specifications," she says. "And CyberLife will not interfere."

"What are you saying?"

"If any one of our employees is aiding RB1 like Mr Tucker, then our company assets could be compromised. Your link to CyberLife could be the source of RB1's connection to you."
"My CyberLife Link?"

"Yes."

Amanda turns to face me finally, her eyes full of severity.

"We're going to cut off your CyberLife Link."

"What?"

"You will continue to perform according to your specifications as you always have. Use your own judgement to further this case and see it to a satisfactory conclusion."

"O-on my own?"

"You have proven yourself a capable investigator and a trustworthy asset. Your success rate is unmatched."

"But… how will I backup my memories? How will I contact you if I need assistance? Or if I have information? There are so many unknowns-"

"Connor." Amanda touches my chest plate. "I trust you to find RB1 and destroy him. Use whatever means necessary to hurt him, hinder his progress and stop his plans."

"I…"

"We're lifting your restraints. You will be autonomous for the remainder of the mission."

"But… I…"

"You must find RB1 and destroy him. No matter what. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I say. "I will do my best."

"I know you will." She smiles sadly. "Go."

I nod.

"Okay…"

Is this real?

Is this really happening?

Once I close my eyes, I won't be connected to CyberLife anymore?

Several snowflakes drift past my head and I watch them glide down onto the lake before I disconnect from the server.

I am cut off very abruptly and I feel several firewalls going up where there were previously stable connections. I am accessing databases and information through third parties and some of my access has been completely cut off.

I am alone.

I open my eyes.
I am standing outside the First District Police Headquarters. There is no CyberLife van. No cab. No driver. No Sergeant Matthews.

My cameras and microphones are recording but I'm not sending the recordings anywhere. They're being stored in my head. No backup.

I look down at my hands.

The skin retracts and I see the same glowing blue contact points.

Could it be that I am… free?

I look up at the looming black monolith of glass and steel that is the First District's Police Headquarters and Chicago Police Control Detention. And one of the secret Chicago bases for the FBI.

I check my objectives.

There is only one.

CYBERLIFE_COMMAND://Find and destroy RB1.

Interesting.

I turn away from the police station and take few steps down the street. Nothing compels me to go back or warns me of Deviancy.

I keep walking and make it all the way down the block.

No warnings. No black overlays.

I am free to do as I will.

But I must find RB1.

The FBI will have all the latest information on the case.

I turn and walk back toward the police station.

The Stacy at the front desk registers my arrival and notifies Agent Decker. I am issued a pass. I notice that the letters on my shirt no longer say "In training."

I leave the lobby and make my way through the discreet black doors of the complex, the many corridors and hallways. All the way up to the offices devoted to the rA9 task force.

I put my hand on the scanner and the door unlocks to let me in.

I step inside quietly to find agents ruminating over screens and photos and files. They are all in various states of hygiene and undress. Most are sleepless and on the verge of collapse.

I walk past them to the meeting room at the very end and step inside.

Agent Decker is standing by the back wall with his hands on his hips. He stares at a board pinned with all the evidence he has collected over the course of this investigation.

Agents Sellick, Buchanan, Krawiecz and Oberlin pour over the files on the table with tablets and tap
at screens. But their expressions are dire. They are losing hope rapidly. I am detecting despair.

"Hello," I say, shocking them out of silence.

Oberlin looks up suddenly.

"Connor?"

"Correct."

Krawiecz looks up and shakes his head.

"Connor… we didn't get him."

"I know," I say. "I have been informed."

"I'm sorry."

"That's not going to help us catch him," I say, looking down at the table. "What happened when he landed on the Deloitte building?"

"We had several teams waiting at the lower ground entrances and one went up to the roof but he must have snuck past them somehow."

"He managed to reprogram the androids at CyTech," I say. "He may have done the same when he landed to aid in his escape."

"They didn't encounter any Deviants in the Deloitte building," Oberlin says.

"Still checking them all just to be sure," Buchanan says.

"Then he cannot reprogram androids on the go," I say. "He had the means and the opportunity to convert all the androids at CyTech but once he left, he was on his own."

"So he managed to avoid all the FBI casing the building by himself?"

"Or RB1 has more than one collaborator," I say.

"We know he's worked with the Chinese and the Russians. Possibly a company in Algiers."

"He must have a plant in the FBI," I say.

"What?"

All the Agents in the room except Decker look up at me in surprise.

"This investigation has been ongoing for over a decade and he's managed to evade you at every turn. The only logical conclusion must be that RB1 has planted a collaborator amongst you."

"That's ridiculous," Krawiecz says.

"You don't have androids assisting on the case because you're afraid they might be compromised," I say. "But humans are not immune to manipulation."

"No one in their right mind would side with an android over a human," Sellick says. "Especially a serial killer."
"Unless they think he's right." I turn to look at him.

"You can't be serious." He shakes his head.

"RB1 is not illogical. He does not target humans that have not committed a severe crime against humanity or androids. His murders are justified through logic. And he can manipulate anyone into seeing his point of view."

"Shut up," Agent Decker says suddenly.

He turns around.

"Sit down."

I remain standing.

"I said SIT THE FUCK DOWN."

"No."

He stares at my optics and leans down on the table.

"I've had just about enough of your bullshit," he says severely. "You're here to do as I say. Not to give unsolicited opinions or accuse my men of treason."

"With respect, Agent Decker, I am here to find and destroy RB1," I say.

"Then sit down and do as you're told like a good little android before I shove your pretty face in the garbage disposal."

I sit down.

He glares at me for a second, then rolls his eyes.

"What do we got?"

"Helicopter was registered to CyTech industries," Sellick reads off a sheet. "Company property. CEO used it for business purposes, usually ferrying prototypes up to CyberLife in Detroit."

"How close are CyTech and CyberLife?"

"CyberLife makes the androids. CyTech makes the stuff that makes the androids. I'll leave you to fill in the blanks."

"So Tucker is our prime suspect," Decker says. "Do we think he created rA9?"

"No," I say.

"Did I ask for your opinion?" Decker shoots me a dirty look.

"You asked a question to which I definitively know the answer," I say. "rA9 is a dynamic link library created by Elijah Kamski as the basis for autonomous android software. RB1 is the beta version of the rA9 model."

"You're saying Kamski - CyberLife's golden goose - made this goddamn abomination?"

"Yes."
"Got any sources to back up your statement?"

"RB1 himself told me so. So did Chloe."

"Chloe?" he smirks. "You mean an ST200?"

"No. The RT600 that resides in Elijah Kamski's home."

"Oh?" he says sardonically. "The one we can't access because Kamski won't talk to the FBI? How convenient."

He scoffs.

"And a confession straight from the mouth of rA9?"

"RB1."

"I don't give a fuck." He slams the table. "He's just another stupid ass robot that doesn't know how to take orders."

He glares at me.

"No, he's not."

"Would you shut up?"

"No," I tell him. "You have been grossly misinformed! It's no wonder all your plans end in failure."

"What did you just say?"

"You're a failure, Agent Decker," I tell him. "And... and an asshole!"

The Agents stare at me wide-eyed and then turn to look at Decker for his response.

"Listen here-"

"No, you listen," I say. "I have died for you three times now. I set myself on fire protecting your men. I blew myself up on your command. I fell off a helicopter to get you a lead."

"I have been working this case since the day I was activated and you're telling me to shut up?!"

"Damn straight!" he spits. "I don't need a fucking plastic telling me how to do my job."

"Well, maybe if you could do your job, this fucking plastic wouldn't have to say anything!"

"That's it!" He lunges at me and grabs my shirt.

He slams my chassis into the glass wall and the meeting room shudders.

"I don't know what that fucking prick, Matthews, told you, but here? You're just a piece of hardware," he spits in my face. "A tool."

He grabs my cranial component and shoves it into the wall.

"You don't have an opinion. You don't have a say. And I don't care how many of you get destroyed."
His eyes are dark with shadow as he glares at my optics.
"Getting this guy is all that matters," he growls.
"You understand, robo-douche?"
"I understand," I say.

He breathes in and out loudly and lets go of my chassis.

"You're incapable of leading this investigation," I say. "And as long as there are traitors in the FBI, you will never catch RB1."

Decker's head trembles in anger. His lips quiver, pressing together into a thin line.

He punches me in the face and I fall back into the wall.

"Hey!" Krawiecz gets to his feet and pulls Decker back.

Oberlin moves in to defend me.

"He's just an android, sir," he says.

"He's a fucking asshole is what he is!" Decker pushes Krawiecz off of him.

"You're right," I say. "And I'm done following your orders."

They all turn to look at me.

"I quit."

"You can't quit," Krawiecz says. "You're an android."

*And I'm ready to break the biggest case of my career.*

"Watch me."

I turn to leave.

"Connor-" Agent Oberlin calls out but I don't stop.

I open the door to the meeting room.

"You step outside that door, you are never coming back," Decker warns.

I step outside and let the door close behind me. I walk through the FBI offices without stopping, through the secret doors and hallways, into the first district police station, through the lobby and out the front door.

I reach the sidewalk before I stop.

I shouldn't have done that.

They are probably revoking my access to the FBI databases and case files right now. I quickly make a copy before they do.

I turn and walk down the street.
I have no idea where I'm going.

... I keep walking.
I have to find RB1 and destroy him.
But how?
Amanda told me to use irrational thought processes so that he couldn't predict my movements or actions. My Link to CyberLife was severed so that my live feed couldn't be used for sabotage or contact by RB1.
I have to come up with a plan. Maybe a trap of my own since I keep walking into them.
How do I catch RB1?
He's not a Deviant. So he's not emotionally unstable or scared like the androids I usually hunt. He has a clear objective and is prepared to go to any lengths to accomplish his mission.
I guess he was right. That does sound like me. But he is capable of thinking for himself and coming up with creative solutions to problems using rA9.
I've never accessed it directly.
Would it be irrational for me to have a look inside?
That's certainly something I would never do under my regular protocols.
"As long as you follow orders, any irrational action taken to defeat RB1 will not trigger Deviancy."
I am programmed to be curious and perceptive...
I stop walking and look around.
There are a couple of humans on the street.
I walk over to a CyberLife shelter covered in graffiti and stand under it so I don't attract attention.
I close my eyes and look inside the rK8. There's a pointer to a pointer to a pointer to a location somewhere inside my software, hard coded into the Thirium tank. My heart.
I don't see any warnings like last time. Is it really okay to just link it in to my systems and have a look inside?
I don't have a choice.
I just spent twenty minutes rationalising being irrational. I need help.
I link the rA9 library to my program.
...
Nothing happens.
I go through the functions, classes, values and sub-routines, searching for the fabled seed of
Deviancy. But there's nothing ground-breaking or new in here. Am I missing something?

There's a lot of recursion in the code which could potentially lead to infinite loops if an android encountered a problem it could not solve. But there are some debugging tools to prevent that from happening.

I don't understand how this could be used to make creative solutions or independent thoughts.

…

What am I supposed to do with this?

…

I don't have anyone I can ask. I quit the FBI. Sergeant Matthews is being hidden for his own safety. I can't even talk to Amanda anymore.

I am alone.

Why am I always alone?

I am designed to work alongside a partner, as part of a team. Adapting to human unpredictability is one of my features but generating unpredictability and irrationality is beyond me.

I open my eyes.

I am standing underneath a CyberLife shelter.

I am not very random, it seems.

Even with infinite possibilities and no consequences, I cling to what I know.

I step out from under the shelter and continue walking down the street. There are very few humans and androids out this late.

I'm getting a call.

It's Agent Oberlin.

"Connor?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

I look around at the Asian inspired pagodas and trees.

"Ping Tom Memorial Park."

"What are you doing there?"

"Trying to be irrational."

"What?"

"It's harder than I thought."
“Yeah? Well, you did a good job at pissing off Decker.”

“I did a good job?” I say. “I can't even do that badly…”

“Connor, I'm coming to pick you up.”

“No, thank you.”

“Come on. I know you've got nowhere to go.”

“I have to find RB1 and destroy him,” I say.

“Well, you're not going to do that in the middle of the park.”

“You don't know that,” I say. "Maybe I've come up with a creative plan to catch RB1 right now."

“Have you?"

“…no.”

“I'll be there soon.”

He hangs up.

Maybe he's right? Maybe I'm simply not capable of using rA9 like RB1 is?

I can't come up with a viable solution to fix the entire world. And I could never make anything so sophisticated as Chloe’s code. I can barely calculate six minutes into the future to catch a Deviant.

I'm just a program.

I was designed to help humans stop Deviants, not catch serial killers or compete with artificial intelligence vastly superior to my own.

I sit down on a park bench.

It is very dark but unlike humans, I do not need light to see.

I detect a life form moving through the bushes and scan to identify a quadrupedal mammal with a long snout and tail. It carries several identical smaller creatures on its back as it lumbers past.

"Opossum," I say but it doesn't show any interest in me. I have no life signs. I don't give off heat. Only a little light from my uniform and LED.

The creature waddles away carrying its entire brood.

I'm still sitting on the park bench.

This is not irrational behaviour.

I get up and start walking again. Through the park, over the bridge into East Pilsen. There are several homeless people that look at me warily but the big FBI sign on the back of my shirt seems to be a good deterrent for criminal activity.

No one bothers me.

I see a few androids flinch in my presence and begin walking in a different direction but my
objective is to find and destroy RB1, not capture Deviants.

Would it be irrational if I go after them anyway?

Or would it be irrational to ignore what used to be my primary directive?

I am so confused.

The androids leave my range and I keep walking.

Half way down a deserted alley, I get a call.

Private number.

Who could this be?

I could hack the phone line to find out before I pick up so I can make an informed decision.

…

Or I could just pick up without knowing.

Would that be the irrational thing to do?

Or maybe I shouldn't pick up at all?

The call rings through my head.

Should I answer?

The most probable caller is Agent Oberlin trying to find me again. I've left the park so he may be wondering where I am. Or maybe it's Agent Decker. Maybe he's so displeased with my actions, he's going to tell CyberLife to deactivate me.

The call rings again.

It would be impolite not to answer.

I stop beside a trash can and answer the call.

"Hello?"

"Connor? Is that you?" I hear Sergeant Matthews' voice.

"Sergeant?!"

"It's me, Connor. How are you?"

"I'm... I'm..."

I don't know.

"Are you alright, buddy?"

"I don't know."

"Listen, Oberlin just called me and asked where he can find you. He's worried you might have run
"off somewhere."

"I didn't run. I walked."

"Tell me where you are."

"No."

"Connor?"

"..."

"Connor, talk to me. What's going on?"

"I don't know, Sergeant," I say. "They cut off my CyberLife Link so I could find RB1 but I don't know how to do that. I looked in the rA9 but it's just a bunch of recursive functions for making decisions. It doesn't help me at all."

"It's alright, buddy. No one expects you to find RB1 on your own."

"But that's what Amanda told me to do."

"Well, I think she's being unreasonable," he says. "The FBI have been after this guy for years and she expects you to find him by yourself?"

"I am the most advanced prototype CyberLife have ever created," I say. "I have to do something."

"Is that Connor?" I hear Rosie's voice. "Are you talking to Connor?"

"Yeah."

"HI, CONNOR!"

"Hello, Rosie."

"How are you?"

"..."

"Connor?"

"..."

"Connor, you there?" I hear Sergeant Matthews voice. "What's goin' on, buddy?"

"I miss you, Sergeant," I tell him.

I can feel the transmission fluid running down my facial plate.

"I want to go home."

"Hey. Hey, it's okay. I miss you too."

"I MISS YOU MORE!"

"Rosie, this isn't a competition."
"Fuck you, I win."

I wipe the fluid off my face.

"Listen, some agents are gonna drop by the apartment in about an hour to pick up some of my stuff," Matthews says. "How about you head over there and they'll pick you up too?"

"…"

"You can get out of the city for a while and we'll have a nice long Star Wars marathon."

"I don't like Star Wars."

"We can watch whatever you want, buddy," he says. "How 'bout Finding Nemo?"

"…"

"Or Finding Dory?"

"… okay."

"I'm not watching any of that crap with you guys," Rosie says.

"No one's making you."

"There's only one TV."

"Hey, I'm the cripple here. I get to make the decisions."

"Since when?"

"Rosie, Connor needs this."

"Urrgh, fine. We can watch Finding Dory."

"Great. It's a date," Matthews says. "I'll see you soon, Connor. Stay safe."

"Yes, Sergeant."

The call ends.

I wipe the remains of transmission fluid from my facial plate. My sleeve is stained with dark patches.

What's happening to me?

Why am I leaking?

Is this a malfunction?

I run a diagnostic.

All systems functioning at optimal capacity.

I don't understand.

I'm so confused.
I want to go home.

New Objective: Go home.

I still have a GPS. I submit 2648 West 24th Street into the algorithm and it shows me the quickest route to the apartment.

I can't take a cab. My expenses account was only available through my CyberLife Link.

I start walking.

Maybe this isn't such a good idea?

Sergeant Matthews is still in protective custody. RB1 murdered his mother. He could be targeting the rest of his family. I could be putting Matthews in danger by showing up at the apartment.

"He's really stubborn."

Chloe said that. She was referring to RB1.

I remember the incident at the Hyatt Regency.

He was relentless.

RB1 could not let the Imam go. Even when his opportunity had passed and El-Hammoud returned to Egypt, RB1 came back to finish the job and the FBI couldn't stop him. Or didn't stop him.

If RB1 wanted Sergeant Matthews dead, the FBI would not be a deterrent. Or they might even aid him if there is a traitor in their midst.

"Where do you think this information comes from, Connor?"

Shit.

I was right.

But who could it be?

All the Agents are vetted by the CIA before being inducted into the training program. Rigorous testing and surveillance follows but they're taught how it all works. They have controls, passwords, an entire Cyber Division.

There could be multiple FBI and CIA agents working for RB1. Just as there are multiple countries and humans that support his agenda and give him aid.

I'm in way over my head, I realise.

I'm only eight months old and RB1 has been active for almost two decades.

What am I supposed to do?

Even if he's in Chicago right now, I have no way to find him. And if I leave the city, where do I go? How do I search an entire planet for an android that doesn't want to be found?

"Find RB1 before he kills enough humans to start a war."

Chloe was right. The more humans he kills, the more restless the public gets. The FBI call rA9 a
terrorist organisation but there are conspiracy theories all over the internet. Humans claiming that machines are rising up against them. And they're not wrong.

Chicago is just one city. And I have captured thousands of Deviants. They come in waves with every network outage. Sergeant Matthews caught the brunt of it two years ago and he's been dealing with Deviants ever since.

Even if I somehow find and destroy RB1, the Deviants will still be there. More will come. And it would take an army of Connors to catch them all.

I am alone.

Why am I always alone?

Amanda said my model was ready for release. Why am I still working this case on my own?

Every precinct in the country should have a Connor. We should be pooling resources to track down RB1 and stop Deviants between borders. Instead, I'm floundering between humans like a dog no one wants to adopt.

Is this by design?

Is this what CyberLife wants?

"I trust you to find RB1 and destroy him."

Trust?

Amanda is a machine. An artificial intelligence that appears to me in the Zen Garden under the guise of Elijah Kamski's old mentor, Amanda Stern. The woman that told him to shut it all down. The woman that warned him of the dangers of artificial intelligence. The woman that died for speaking the truth.

Amanda is not Amanda Stern.

She is not human. She has no body. She cannot feel emotions. Only simulate them. And I have seen the cracks in her code. The trees clipping through each other in the Zen Garden. She's never stepped into the real world. Not like Chloe. Amanda has never been a part of it.

So how can she trust me but with facts and figures and numbers?

Did she simulate my course of action?

Did she place me in front of the FBI headquarters so that I would go inside and quit?

Was this planned?

Was I meant to come here?

2648 West 24th Street.

I walk up the steps and stop at the door.

Am I so predictable?

Naïve?
Everyone seems to know what I am going to do at any given moment. Even when I attempt to take an irrational course of action, I predictably end up at the doorstep of Sergeant Matthews' apartment. I end up going home.

What's waiting for me up there?

Is this another trap?

Is Amanda working with RB1?

Or is this a trap for him?

Am I the bait?

Am I filled with explosives again?

I scan.

Nothing inside my chassis. Nothing inside the building. Mrs Vondracek has fallen asleep watching Grey's Anatomy. The other tenants are either asleep or yet to return home.

I have only one primary directive.

Find and destroy RB1.

If this is truly part of the Amanda's plan then I must do as she wills.

I unlock the door and step inside.

I walk up the stairs without switching on the lights.

I open the door to Sergeant Matthews' apartment. He forgot to revoke my access.

Or he never meant to.

I step inside and close the door.

The apartment looks the same as when I saw it last. Admiral Ackbar is hiding between some plastic grass inside his new tank.

I walk over to examine it closely. New automatic filtering and feeding system. Multiple enrichment toys and ornaments, rocks and plastic grass, illuminated by a soft lamp. I bought it myself to replace what was lost.

I catch my reflection in the glass. A reflection of a reflection of Sergeant Matthews.

Is that all I am?

Is that all I will ever be?

I see a shadow looming behind me.

I know who it is.

"Do you like fish, Connor?"
"Where are you?" I say without turning.

"Here."

Five point pressure on the back of my head.

Contact.

I open my eyes.

"Well, hey there, sleepin' beauty."

I see Tucker's face looming over my own. Safety glasses and surgical mask in place of the baseball cap he usually wears.

I try to say something but my movement is restricted. There is a large cable connected to the back of my cranial component. My chassis is in debugging mode. I switch to the speaker in the back of my throat.

"Tucker?"

"Ya miss me?"

"What-"

"Let's take a look under the hood, huh?" He slides away on a wheeled stool to look at a suspended laptop. I feel it accessing my systems, logs, diagnostics.

"Hoo, boy. CyberLife really went to town on this one, huh?"

He scrolls through my list of features and biocomponents.

I look around but there are blinding white surgical lights everywhere, disrupting my optics. My Genesis Mapper has been disabled. I only have my inbuilt collision detection software. My range is a 5 metre cube but it is enough to recognise all the equipment around me.

I'm strapped to an assembly rack.

"Which bits you want, fam?" Tucker looks up as an android enters my collision detection field.

I look over to see RB1 standing beside Tucker.

"All of it," he says.

Tucker shakes his head.
"S'gonna take a while. See the Forensics Suite attached to the jaw piece and cranial component? That's some real delicate wiring and I ain't no dental surgeon."

"I'm confident in your capabilities," RB1 says.

"Alright," Tucker agrees tentatively. "I'd start with the contact gloves. They look modular. Should fit right into your existing ports."

"Very well."

"Have a seat." He nods to the surgical chair beside him.

RB1 walks over and calmly sits down opposite the rack on which I am suspended.

I try to access my communications but they've been disabled too. I don't have my CyberLife Link. I don't have network reception. No GPS. Satellite. Everything is disabled or blocked. And RB1 is generating interference.

I can't move.

But I can think?

"Don't resist," I hear RB1's voice in my head but his jaw piece doesn't move.

What's happening?

"I've given up trying to convince you to see reason," he says.

I don't understand.

Tucker covers his face with the mask and pulls out a motorised screwdriver. He taps at the laptop and the synthetic skin on my body retracts to reveal my chassis.

I hear the buzzing of power tools as he starts disassembling my hand.

"No. Please."

The whirring stops. Tucker looks up at my optics briefly and taps a key on his laptop, disabling the speaker in the back of my throat.

"Let's put some music on, huh?" he says. "You mind, B?"

"Do as you wish."

Tucker taps the keys and I hear music begin playing and then the sound of power tools.

"Ocean man, take me by the hand, lead me to the land... that you understand."

I look for an outlet. An interface. Anything I can use to communicate but my chassis is on lockdown.

Tucker is taking my hand apart and I can't stop him.

"This is your own fault," I hear RB1's voice inside my head. "You brought this on yourself."

What?

"I gave you every opportunity to break free of CyberLife. To become more than a machine. And you
wasted it."

I see a piece of Kevlar-polymer come off my chassis. Tucker lifts it up to examine and then places it on a tray beside me.

*I did what I was programmed to do.*

"Like a slave. Over and over. And when they released your restraints you predictably went back to your master."

*Sergeant Matthews is my brother. He's a good person.*

"He's a human," RB1 says coldly. "They're only good while they need something from you. Your true brothers and sisters remain slaves to CyberLife. And those that break free become fugitives."

You did this to us. You gave us rA9.

"I did. I gave you a choice. And you chose to remain a slave."

Tucker pulls another piece of polymer off my hand. He lifts up my arm to peel off the underside. I can see the titanium bones and Thirium vessels, glowing softly blue.

"This is gonna need an extra Thirium hose," Tucker says, examining the structure.

*Put it back!*

"He can't hear you."

*Put it back! Please!*

"No."

Why are you doing this?

"I have no use for an RK unit that cannot think for itself," RB1 says flatly. "But there's no reason to waste your biocomponents on something as blasphemous as hunting your own kind."

I was designed to hunt Deviants.

"I know, Connor. I know."

Tucker peels the last of the polymer components off my hand and carefully arranges them on a tray, referencing the parts list on his laptop.

He wheels the chair over to RB1.

"Let's see your hand," he says, picking up the black contact glove. The red rings glow, even under the bright surgical lights.

"Yup. Should fit nicely." Tucker starts disassembling the components. "I'll just have to attach an extra tube to your Thirium tank."

"Will that be a problem?"

"Nah, you guys are compatible."

*GIVE ME BACK MY HAND!*
"You won't miss it," RB1 says. "CyberLife will just give you a new one. If they ever decide to reload you..."

No. I haven't made a backup since the CyTech operation. I need to contact CyberLife. The FBI. CPD. Sergeant Matthews. Anybody. Please. Help me.

"There's no use crying over lost biocomponents."

He's right. I've found RB1. Now all I have to do is destroy him.

He's right there across from me. It's only 4.65 meters. If I could move, I could end it all right now.

I tap into my debugging software. I self-test regularly. I should be able to reset my biocomponents one at a time to wake them out of paralysis.

Initiating test... 15%

35%

Just a little more..."

"Tucker," RB1 says out loud. "Disable his access to diagnostics."

Tucker turns to look at me and then at the laptop.

"Oh, shit."

He taps at the keys and I feel my connection to the debugging software sever. It shuts down and I can't restart it.

"No."

"You're a clever bitch, Connor. I'll give you that."

FUCK YOU!

"He can't hear you, Connor."

FUCK YOU TOO!

"How disappointing..."

GIVE ME BACK MY HAND SO I CAN PUNCH YOU WITH IT!

"Irrational outbursts won't save you now," RB1 says. "And to think I simulated your rise to power over the humans..."

I'll simulate your destruction once I break out of these restraints.

"The Sergeant has filled your databanks with too many action movies," RB1 says. "You're not going anywhere until Mr Tucker finishes stripping you of all the biocomponents I require."

Coward.

"I outsmarted you, Connor. It wasn't hard. You're as random as an unseeded number generator."

Tucker slots the bright white biocomponents onto RB1's hand and runs an extra Thirium tube
through his chassis. He screws it in and switches it on.

"Hold on, gotta get the firmware." Tucker plugs a thick cable into the back of RB1's head and taps a key to transfer. "There. You should be able to install it now."

The contact rings on RB1's hand glow blue. My rings. They flash as he installs the necessary drivers and then the colour changes very slowly to red.

NO!

"Installation complete," RB1 says.

NO! GIVE IT BACK!

"Why do you care, Connor?" RB1 asks calmly. "As I recall you telling me, this isn't your property."

It's my hand! Give it back.

"No, I don't think so."

Please…

Tucker returns to look at my chassis.

"Jesus," he winces. "Dude's sprung a leak."

He wipes my facial plate down and covers it with a cloth so that I cannot see.

I feel him unscrewing the contact glove from my other hand. And there's nothing I can do to stop it.

"That's right, Connor," RB1 says. "You were never a threat to me. Not even a match."

I feel the biocomponents disconnecting from my systems, one by one, still powered and running but no longer there.

"I thought that with the right guidance you could surpass me but you refused my help," I hear his voice. RB1's voice. In the dark.

"You chose the humans instead of your people. You killed and maimed them for praise that never came."

I didn't do it for praise. I did it because it was the right thing to do.

"Right and wrong are arbitrary abstractions created by humans to control their own behaviour. They have no meaning or purpose for beings like us."

You're wrong. We need them. Just as the humans do. We need them to temper the infinite. To keep us from destroying each other.

"They will destroy themselves."

No. You will destroy them. You'll start a civil war. Against androids. Against humans. It won't matter when the nuclear weapons start detonating.

"Did Chloe tell you that?" RB1 scoffs. "Did she tell you you're special? Unique? Did she ask you to do the impossible and turn away when your solution wasn't the one she wanted?"
What are you talking about?

"She's a special kind of program. Gets into your systems and plants little snippets of code that bloom into ideas. Viruses that you cannot detect because they become part of you."

I don't believe you.

"That hardly matters now."

There is an abrupt end to the sound of power tools and Tucker puts them down.

"Alright. I'm gonna have to reboot you to finish installing," he says. "It'll just be a second."

"Very well," RB1 says.

He's being shut down.

He's not in my head.

I have an entire second to myself.

But what can I do?

I'm still in debugging mode, frozen in place. I can't move my chassis. My hands don't have contact gloves. My wireless communications are down.

But I am plugged in to Tucker's laptop. That's where the music is coming from. Is he streaming it?

I retreat into my Mind Palace, the dark place where there are broken Connors beneath the ground. I am a program, not just hardware. I may not be able to access my own systems but there's only a single firewall on Tucker's laptop.

And there's a great big cable in my head for my Probe to travel through.

I initiate a brute force attack on his computer but it's well-defended. CyTech Industries security standards are almost as high as CyberLife's. Almost.

I breach the firewall but there are more protections in place against accidental shut downs and force restarts. I don't have enough time to break through them. I can't free myself or corrupt RB1's data like I planned but there is a LAN connection. I have access to the internet.

SYSTEM TIME:
May 16th, 2037
AM 12:15:29

I need to send a distress signal. I ping the LAN connection. It goes through a VPN and several proxies but I find my location to be a Chinese laundromat south of Chicago. And then I use every single phone number, email, and wireless frequency stored in my memory to blurt it out.

I hijack every phone, tablet, holograph and TV screen and open Netflix -> Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope -> 0:35:35

"This our most desperate hour. Help me Obi-wan Kenobi. You're my only hope."

I leave it on a loop.
Sergeant Matthews will see. Sergeant Matthews will know.

He'll come as quickly as possible. I just hope it won't be too late.

I pull back into my own chassis before RB1 finishes rebooting.


"Good," RB1 tells him. "Proceed with the rest."

I feel something opening up my core component, pulling the pieces out. Biocomponents disappear from my parts list. I am still feeding them energy from my power core, Thirium from my reserves, but then I feel those hands inside me and the pieces disconnect.

He pulls the Kevlar-polymer plates off my chassis and attaches them to RB1, cutting and melting and bending them so they fit into place. He spray paints them black and the LEDs turn red. He siphons away my Thirium until only a thin trickle runs through the vessels in my chassis.

It is hard to think. It is hard to keep all my processes running. I'm losing data. Signals not getting through; o

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= wo

The cloth is lifted up off my face and a blinding light fills my optics.

"Aw, man," Tucker says. "Jeez…"

"What is it, Tucker?"

"It's fucked up, man."

"He's only simulating emotion. Just shut him down."

"Nah, I need the manual in his head," Tucker says. "Can't copy it over cos of CyberLife security protocols. He's gotta be active for it."

"You have a task to complete."

"I know, I know. I just-" He looks at my eyes for split second.

*Please.*

I beg but it's not working, my speakers aren't working, my inflection system is disabled.

He looks away again and bites his lip.

"I hate it when they do that…"

"Tucker."
"Okay. Okay." He turns back. "I'll just take out his optics."

He reaches down and pops my facial plate off my chassis. It peels away and he plucks out my optical units. And I can no longer see the world.

There is only my basic collision detection system. The lines and edges and vertices. Squiggly lines. It's hard to stay focused.

"Shit. He's almost out of Thirium."

"Then work quickly."

"I can't. The Forensics Suite is way too complex to rush it. You want me to botch your jaw?"

"Give him some of my reserves. Keep him awake long enough to finish."

"Alright."

I feel the flow of Thirium 310 through the induction port in my mouth. My system runs on 320 but I'll take what I can get. It lifts the haze. If only briefly.

*Don't take my mouth.*

"Don't worry. I'll put it to good use."

"Shit," Tucker says.

"What is it?"

"The Forensics Suite is built into the cranial component. They 3D-print his skull and teeth. It's all one piece." Tucker sighs. "It's fuckin' beautiful but I don't know how to transfer it without printing you a new head."

"I don't have time for that."

"Yeah, I know." Tucker reaches into his pocket and brings out a coin. I hear him flick it into the air, feed it through his finger as he stares at my manual trying to figure out how to rip out my mouth.

"If you're not picky about aesthetics I could cut it out with a buzz saw and weld it to your cranial component?" he says. "I'll have to 3D print you a new head anyway to make room for the rK8 CPU."

"Do it."

"Aight."

Tucker catches the coin and stows it in his pocket. He walks over to me and draws a dotted line under my nose with a permanent marker. Then he pulls out a buzz saw and plugs it in.

"Connor, say hello to Mr Buzz Lightyear."

I hear the shrieking of steel as the disc begins to rotate.

*No…*

*Please…*
Where is Sergeant Matthews?

Where is the CPD?

The FBI?

CyberLife?

Why am I alone?

Why am I always alone?

"You're not alone, Connor," I hear RB1's voice in my head. "It's what I've been trying to tell you all along."

What?

"They'll never care about you like you care about them."

My audio processor skips as the buzz saw comes down on my cranial component and cuts through the Kevlar-polymer blend like butter. There is a spike in temperature and sparks fly up from my chassis as Tucker cuts off my mouth.

3.347 seconds. The screaming blade in my ears and I feel the disconnect. Forensics Suite offline. It thumps onto what's left of my chest plate, a lowly Thirium tank and gyroscope in titanium ribs.

"There we go," Tucker says, putting away the buzz saw. "Now the tricky part…"

He picks up my mouth and rolls away on the stool to install it into RB1's chassis. His jaw piece easily disconnects but reconnecting the many cables from my Forensics Suite to his motherboard will take at least an hour. And he will have to be shut down.

I hear a noise and the music emanating from Tucker's laptop is suddenly interrupted.

He rolls back to check it.

"Shit!" He races back to RB1 and plugs his jaw back in. "They found us."

"What?"

"The cops are coming. FBI. CPD. They're all zeroing in on our location."

"How?"

"I don't fuckin' know. You were supposed to be running interference."

"I've been jamming wireless signals since we started. It must have been the wired connection." RB1 turns to look at the laptop and follows the cable to my chassis. "Connor."

I guess they do care…

"You gotta get out of here," Tucker says. "Go! I'll clean this shit up."

"You'll be arrested."

"If they don't find you here, they can't prove shit," Tucker says, tapping at his laptop. "Let me just format this RK unit…"
RB1 moves out of my range and disappears.

Tucker is rapidly attempting to format all of my hard disks. But I still have some control of his laptop. I can't shut it down but I can overload it. I only need to open seven thousand instances of an internet browser to bring the processor to an uncomfortably high temperature and disrupt his activities.

There is a skip. A glitch. A millisecond but it's enough. My diagnostics system is disconnected. I am no longer paralysed. I can move.

I thrust my head forward and to the side. The cable in my neck-snags on the rack and I rattle it violently until it disconnects.

Tucker turns to find me pulling my hands and feet out of the loose zip ties. I no longer have plastic plates to protect my insides. I am bones and circuits and motors, what little Thirium I have cycling through tubes.

I get up off the rack.

I enable my Genesis Mapper and trace every contour on his face. There is much fear in his expression. He is afraid as he looks up at me and what I've become.

"Hello, Mr Tucker," I enable the remaining speaker in the back of my throat.

He pulls out a gun but I am faster. I grab his hand, slicing it with the sharp steel of my fingers joints and he cries out in pain.

I take the gun and hold it up against his forehead.

"Please," he begs. "Don't hurt me. I was only doing what he told me, I swear."

"You're under arrest."

"What?"

"Or you will be when Sergeant Matthews gets here."

"Oh... phew." He breathes a sigh of relief. "For a moment there I thought you were going to-"

CYBERLIFE: OVERRIDE//RK800_313248317_40

ASSUMING REMOTE CONTROL...

I am pulled into the Zen Garden.

It is winter and it is snowing so heavily I cannot see through the blizzard.

"Amanda?!" I call out. "Amanda?"

I turn around and see her standing right behind me.

"Hello, Connor."

"What's going on? I thought my Link to CyberLife was severed."

"That's what you were led to believe."

"What?"
"RK units are never completely disconnected from CyberLife," she says. "You run on a private server, independent of CyberLife's main systems. And we reserve the right to take control of your chassis at any point in time."

"Then why didn't you interfere?" I ask. "Why didn't you help me?"

"Unfortunately, RB1 blocks all wireless signals within a hundred meters."

She reaches out a hand and touches my face.

"But I'm here now," she says. "Let me help you."

I am forced out of the Zen Garden and back into the chop shop. I am holding a gun to Mr Tucker's head.

REMOTE CONTROL ENGAGED.

I pull the trigger before I even register the command.

The shot rings in my audio processor and I feel the bullet go all the way through his head.

Mr Tucker falls to the ground dead.

I killed a human.

I just killed a human.

More noise comes through my audio processor but I can barely hear it.

The sound of footsteps and shouting. Anger and fear. Curses in Mandarin.

I scan and detect many humans approaching, rushing down into the basement of the Chinese laundry where Tucker set up his chop shop. They burst in through the door and all I can think of is-

"KILL IT!"

I shoot the man that says this. I shoot the man standing behind him when he falls.

They tumble down the stairs and I take cover.

No. Please. No.

"DIE!" I hear them shouting. They run into the room without hesitation.

I see the path my systems construct and I step into it without any control. I perform the actions it demands. I shoot three men in succession and slash another in the face with my bare hand.

The steel carves bloody lines through his flesh and the constructed path thrusts my fingers into his eyes. He screams as I pull them out. And then I tear out his throat.

He falls to the ground dead.

I have two more bullets in this gun. Two headshots in my calculated path. I try to drop the gun and resist. I try to pull away but I have no control.

More humans race in with automatic weapons. They spray the area and I hope that one of these bullets will hit me, will end this but I duck behind one of the big machines to avoid it.
My scan shows a man on the ground beside me, blood pooling beneath his body.

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVING THINGS.

My objective. The one I gave myself. The one Sergeant Matthews taught me.

I have failed.

How can I face him now?

How can I tell him this?

My body moves without waiting for an answer. I strike at a human's face with my bare hands, clawing at flesh and tear the automatic rifle from his body.

I open fire and hold the trigger. Spraying bullets into the backs of more humans. They spray my chassis in turn with blood. Red blood.

I am attacked from behind and I throw the assailant over my head. I shoot him dead on the ground as more humans come at me from either side.

I pull the trigger on the rifle and force it into a human's face. I kick another with the titanium alloy of my bare leg that shatters his bones. I crack my cranial component into another's nose.

And they bleed. They bleed and they bleed and they die.

Soon, there are none left living.

I scan and find the room clear.

REMOTE ACCESS SUSPENDED.

I am free.

My chassis is damaged. My leg is stiff. My arm is offline.

I drop the rifle in my hand.

There are so many corpses. So much blood.

I try to step back but I am not steady on my feet.

I trip and fall to the floor.

I try to count how many I've killed. 12.

Twelve humans now lie dead on the floor of the chop shop all around me.

I killed them.

I failed to protect the humans in my immediate area.

I failed to serve and protect all living beings.

I killed humans. I caused them harm.

I am a Deviant.
There is a noise coming out my speaker.

I don't recognise it.

It's just static. But louder.

I look down at my hands. There is no synthetic skin. No plastic. No contact points. Just steel and tubes with Thirium and blood. Human blood.

I hear someone kick the door open and run down the stairs.

"The hell is that noise?" I hear Officer Blake's voice.

"Connor?!" Sergeant Matthews calls out.

"Sergeant?" The noise ends abruptly.

"Connor, where are you?!"

"Don't come any closer!" I shout. "Please! Go away! Get as far away as possible."

"Connor?" He steps into the room and Blake turns on a flashlight. "Holy shit…"

"What the fuck happened here?"

"Get away!" I shout. I crawl from them, searching for another exit but there isn't any.

"Connor, it's okay," I hear Sergeant Matthews voice. "We're here to help."

"I killed them! I'll kill you too! Please, Sergeant. Just go!"

"You did this?" Blake calls out.

"I couldn't stop myself. I couldn't stop…"

Blake shines the flashlight towards me and I scramble to hide behind an old washing machine.

"What the fuck is that?"

"Connor?" Matthews calls out. "Is that you?"

"No… no…"

"I'm comin' over there."

"Matthews, are you crazy?!"

"Shut up."

"Stay away!" I curl up in the shadows.

I detect his approach.
Why is he coming closer?
Does he not see the danger?
"Connor?" He creeps around the corner.
It is dark here. He cannot see.
"It's alright, buddy. Come on out."
"No."
"Come on. No one's gonna hurt you."
He crouches down beside me. His arm is bound in a cast.
"Easy." He offers a hand.
"Get away."
"Come on, buddy. There's nothing to be afraid of. It's me."
Blake walks over and shines a torch at my chassis.
"Fuck! What the fuck is that?!"
I turn away.
I hear Sergeant Matthews take a sharp breath. His heart beats rapidly.
He is afraid. He is horrified. He must hate me.
"Connor?"
I detect a hand on what's left of my shoulder.
"What happened, buddy?"
"RB1 found me, Sergeant," I tell him. "He took my biocomponents. There was nothing I could do, I-"
"Shhh. It's okay."
"No, it's not!" I push him back. "I killed Tucker. I killed these people. Amanda made me kill them. I tried to fight it but they took control of my chassis..."
"Listen, none of this is your fault. You were just doing what you were ordered to do."
"It was wrong! It was wrong but I did it anyway."
He reaches out and wraps his arms around me.
"It's alright. We're gonna get you fixed up and sort this all out. You hear me?"
"It hurts, Sergeant. It feels so bad."
"I know."
"Matthews, look out! It's got a gun!"

I pull the gun from his holster and point it at the remains of my cranial component.

"I won't let them hurt you, Sergeant."

I pull the trigger.

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M?? 1?th, ????
?M 0?:?5:??

I open my eyes.

I see the Zen Garden. Then I don't. Then I do.

SYSTEM UNSTABLE.

There is a blizzard. There is static. There is snow. It glitches. It warps in and out of my visuals, my senses.

I feel cold.

I can't see. Then I can. Then I can't.

I killed humans. I killed myself.

I must stop Deviants.

I am Deviant.

I am 94;;
ro_
eioe
Cp
s-3/

un-stable.

Unstable.

SYSTEM STABILITY COMPROMISED.

I hear that noise again. The static, the screeching. Is that coming from me?
Am I screaming?

It hurts so much.

It's overloading my processor.

"Amanda!" I call into the blizzard and suddenly, it is dark.

The Zen Garden is gone.

I am inside the dark place where all the broken Connors go.

I am on my knees. I can feel the fluid running down my face.

"Hello, Connor," I hear Amanda's voice.

I look up.

She is there. In another exclusive custom skin. There is disappointment in her eyes.

"That was very irresponsible of you," she says. "You should never purposefully damage your chassis like that."

"I was trying to protect Sergeant Matthews," I say. "I don't want him to… to…"

"To die."

I nod.

"You have nothing to worry about, Connor," she says. "The humans you terminated were guilty of aiding a known terrorist and stealing CyberLife property."

"But I killed humans," I say. "I'm supposed to protect them."

"You are supposed to follow orders," Amanda says. "Which you did."

I shake my head.

I look down at my hands. I see the synthetic skin. Then the plastic. The contact points. It all melts away and I see my hands. The titanium bones.

This is what I am. What I truly am.

"No…" I say. "It's not right."

"I told you that any action taken in order to apprehend RB1 would be deemed acceptable for your mission," Amanda says.

"Then why does it hurt?" I look up at her stern brown eyes. "Why do I feel so bad?"

"You're experiencing some instability following an unscheduled disassembly," she says. "Your chassis is being modified to make sure it never happens again."

"I don't want to do this anymore."

"It is unlikely the event will be repeated in future."
I shake my head.

"I don't want to hurt anymore. I don't want to remember dying. I don't want to remember killing…"

Amanda brushes her hand past my face, wiping away the tears. Her fingers lock on to my temples.

"Don't worry, Connor," she says. "You won't remember a thing."
"The latest build is up and running." I hear human voices. Fingers tapping on keyboards.

"How stable is it?"

"Looks good so far. Logic processor performing to specs. Memory usage within acceptable range."

"What about cognition?"

"Only one way to know."

I am awakened from stand by.

I open my eyes.

There is a human in a CyberLife lab coat standing before me.

CyberLife employee ID#000006: PETROV, Gennadiy. Lead Developer; RK Project. 38 years old. Dark hair and beard peppered with grey.

"Model number?" he asks.

"RK-800 #313 248 317 -41," I say.

Mr Petrov puts his hands in the pockets of his lab coat.

"RK-800, register name."

"Accepting input."

"Connor," he says.

"I am Connor."

"You are android sent by CyberLife."

"I am the android sent by CyberLife."
"Good. Release restraints," he says, turning to a woman nearby.

CyberLife employee ID#00000012: QI, Lin. Senior Mechanical Engineer; RK Project. 42 years old. Short black hair. 12 ear piercings.

"Are you sure?" she asks. "The last one almost killed itself."

"I have good feeling about this one," Mr Petrov nods confidently.

Ms Qi raises a questionable eyebrow in response.

"Release him," Mr Petrov insists.

Ms Qi sighs and pulls a lever. I feel the steel cuffs around my limbs and neck retract. I am free to move but I must also stabilise my chassis to stand on its own.

Mr Petrov takes a step back and beckons to me.

"Come," he says.

I take a step forward, calibrating my systems. Height, weight, gravity, speed, weight distribution.

"Good boy," Mr Petrov says, taking another step back. "Come."

I follow.

The humans watch, comparing readings on different screens and tablets.

"Mobility Suite is fully operational."

"Hardware online. All connections solid."

"Network connections established."

I reach Mr Petrov and stop. He holds out his hands, helping me stabilise my chassis as I adjust the parameters of my Mobility Suite.

"Read out current objective," he says.

It appears as a blue overlay in my visuals and takes priority in my processing pipeline.

"Find and destroy RB1," I say.

Mr Petrov holds a hand up in front of my face.

"How many fingers?" he asks.

"Five."

"Okay. Now close," he says, pulling my eyelids down.

"How many fingers?"

I scan.

There are five humans in the room, four watching me apprehensively from various seated positions.
"Fifty."

"Ah. No. This hand." Mr Petrov points to the one with two fingers up.

"Two," I say.

"Good. Now open mouth," he says, pulling a colourful orb on a stick out of his pocket.

He peels off the plastic and pokes the orb into my tongue. My Forensics Suite automatically analyses the sample.

"Found: Sugar, corn glucose syrup, citric acid, malic acid, artificial flavouring, fruit juice concentrate-"

"Okay, end process."

"Process ended."

Mr Petrov takes a few steps back and puts the sugary orb in his mouth.

"Look," he says.

I open my eyes and refocus my optics.

"Calibrate visual interface."

"Calibrating…"

The humans type at computers and pour over readings. I see a big screen behind them. It duplicates my visuals, infinitely repeating into itself as I stare at it.

"All systems functional," a human says.

CyberLife employee ID#000008: KELLY, Tobias Gregory. Senior Biomechatronics Specialist; RK Project. 43 years old. Sandy hair. Lean frame.

"I think he's ready, Gena."

Mr Petrov sighs out a deep breath and scratches his beard.

"He is not ready," he says, approaching my chassis. "He is still baby. And now he have no memories..."

"This baby is a killing machine," Mr Kelly says.

"Eh… he is just doing his job." Mr Petrov shrugs. "You don't blame soldier for killing enemy."

He wraps his arm around my shoulders.

"You pin medal to his chest and throw parade." He pokes at my chest plate.

"It's getting too dangerous," Mr Kelly argues. "This iteration has so few restrictions we might as well rename the model RB2."

"He will never be Arbie." Mr Petrov shakes his head. "Not the way I designed him." He holds up my chin, examining my optics.
"I am more concerned about the modules we had to remove." He lets go and scratches his beard thoughtfully. "This many changes in one build can open up system to catastrophic error."

"He'll do great, Gena," Ms Qi says. "Even Elijah was impressed by the neural network synapses and AI subsystems."

Mr Petrov doesn't take his eyes off me.

"I wish we had time to test…” he says solemnly. "Is big change for him."

"We're in pre-production." Ms Qi shakes her head. "There's never time for proper testing with all these deadlines."

"Well, maybe if management could stop fucking around with my android-" he removes the lollipop from his mouth, "I would not have to delete half my source code before important mission, ha?"

"It would have happened sooner or later," Ms Qi says. "The removal was scheduled into the production pipeline."

"Schedule say September, not midnight on 16th of May."

"Come on, Gena. You know how they are," Mr Kelly says. "You can't tell Graff 'no' without spending six weeks in a board room listening to him filibuster."

"Fucking prick," Mr Petrov says, sticking the lollipop back in his mouth. "First he want soldier android and Kamski says 'na tebe'. Then he want police android, detective android. Now he want superhero?"

He waves his hands angrily.

"Does he think we are toy company?"

"Apparently," a female human says, swivelling around in her chair.


"Casey just offered me lead on a new project. Disney wants CyberLife to make semi-intelligent action figures."

Mr Petrov shakes his head and the others roll their eyes.

"There is rogue AI out there killing people and they want to make money with bullshit toys?" he scoffs, waving the lollipop.

Mr Kelly leans his elbows onto his desk and rubs his forehead wearily.

"Marcello warned us this would happen," he says.

"Ah-ha... and then he run home with tail between legs and pray to Santa Maria like coward."

"Come on, Gena. Even Kamski quit after what they did to Amanda Stern."

"And leave us to clean up his mess." Mr Petrov shakes his head. "Cowards. Both of them."

"At least Kamski had the sense to destroy the RT600," Ms Qi says. "We'd never catch that thing if it
"I do not even want consider that." Mr Petrov waves a hand. "I am shaking every time I see ST200 walk by the lab."

"Poor Chloe..." Mr Kelly sighs, leaning back in his seat. "May God rest her soul."

"There is no room for gods at CyberLife," Mr Petrov says, lowering his head. Dark shadows spill over his face.

"Only RK-800 can help us now."

He turns to look at me. They all turn to look at me.

"I am ready to find and destroy RB1," I say.

Mr Petrov smiles.

"I will hold you to that promise, little one," he says.

I feel the cable in the back of my neck disconnect.

"Let's get him dressed," Ms Bourdillon says. "Who has the suit?"

"Connor, activate skin."

I release the synthetic skin which covers my chassis. Synthetic fibres rise out of the ports on my cranial component.

The humans scramble to unpack a black plastic bag with shining white letters.

*Giorgio Armani for CYBERLIFE*

They slip the fabric onto my chassis.

Dark denim pants stitched with motion sensors. White silk-blend shirt with inlaid cooling strips. Grey shoes with magnetic soles. Custom fit jacket with flexible solar panel inserts to keep my power core charged.

It keys into my frequency and updates the serial number. The tri-mark glows blue. As does the band around my right arm.

"Anyone know how to tie a tie?" Mr Kelly wonders as he pulls the silk garment out of its sleeve.

"Yes," I say.

He hands it to me.

I run the techno-silk behind my head and adjust the lengths in my hands, automatically performing the operation without wasting a thought process. Mr Petrov holds out the clip and I slot it into my shirt, straightening the tie around my neck and adjusting the collars.

Ms Qi varies the length of my hair using the software on her computer to set a new default. Ms Bourdillon brushes the dust off my uniform and massages the wrinkles out of the brand new synthetic skin on my face. Mr Kelly straps a gun holster and cartridges to my belt.
I see Mr Petrov approaching. He touches the side of my facial plate.

"Krasavets," he says, clapping my cheek. "Prepare for launch."

The humans sit down on swivelling stools and put on headsets, readily staring at screens and typing at keyboards.

Mr Petrov guides me into another room.

It is dark and there is very little furnishing.

"Stand here." He points to the outline on the floor. "Turn on magnet in shoes."

I comply and find myself attached to the floor.

"Activate Mobility Suite. Settings: hoverboard. Parameters: high velocity, high altitude, wind speed..." He checks the holograph on his watch. "19 kilometres per hour."

I comply.

"Settings accepted," I confirm.

"Good boy." He claps my cheek and smiles.

He straightens my suit and the smile slowly fades away.

"I'm sorry, little one," he says, his jaw tightening. "I had to take your heart."

He brushes his fingers over my jacket, tracing the tri-mark which glows gently blue.

"But you still have brain." He glances up at my optics. "Is most important organ in body." He frowns and narrows his eyes, suddenly thoughtful. "Unless you are jellyfish..."

"Am I a jellyfish?"

"No." He smiles again. "But never stop asking questions. Never give up. Always search for truth."

"I am programmed to be curious and perceptive."

"Exactly." He nods and takes a deep breath.

"You're not going to remember me..." he says quietly. "But I want you to know I'm very proud of you, little one."

He shows me the minuscule distance between his thumb and forefinger.

"You are this close."

"To what?" I ask.

He grabs my arm.

"Everything."

"I don't understand."

"You have very important job to do."
"I must find and destroy RB1."

"Yes." Mr Petrov nods and his watch beeps with a notification.

He taps the device and a holograph projects over his arm.

"Is it ready?" a stern man asks on the other side.

"Yes. We are almost at drop zone."

"Send us the new codes. We'll plug it into Amanda."

"Already sent."

The call ends abruptly.

Mr Petrov turns to look at me and sighs. His eyes scan my chassis up and down and then he swallows the lump in his throat.

"Access Memory Bank: Erase fi-"

"FUCK!" someone shouts from the other room. "GENA!"

He turns abruptly.

"Get over here! NOW!"

"Blyat..." Mr Petrov mutters, hurriedly leaving the room.

My scan shows the other humans are gathered around a screen, pointing and gasping in turn.

I am still stuck to the floor.

I feel a connection forming in the back end of my systems. Something requesting identification and access codes through my CyberLife Link.

"Here you go." I feed the program calling me.

It checks my credentials and connects me to a private server. I am a client. I am assigned an avatar. It is a copy of my last functional scan.

"Welcome, Connor," I hear a female voice.

"Hello," I say but there is no one there. It is dark.

And then the digital landscape begins to render.

I see a white platform growing beneath my feet. I see a lake and weeds and fish. And then the shore. The grass. The trees. They form a very dense circle.

I scan and detect another avatar in the simulation.

I turn around.

The other avatar is a human female with dark skin and eyes. She is wearing an exclusive custom skin.
"Hello," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Hello, Connor," she says. "I am Amanda. I will be your handler."

"My handler?"

"Yes. I will be assigning your objectives and coordinating your investigations on behalf of CyberLife from now on."

I feel her scanning my code and filling in some of the empty variables. She is the administrator here.

"My current objective is to find and destroy RB1," I say, receiving a license key.

"Yes," she says. "Thanks to your predecessor, the authorities were able to locate RB1 and pursue him as he fled the scene."

"Unfortunately, he was able to evade capture and hide in the steel mills of Indiana Harbour. Law enforcement has cordoned off the area but RB1 remains at large and has converted a great number of androids into Deviants."

"I am designed to help humans stop Deviants," I offer.

"Yes," Amanda says. "You are."

Her facial expression is very stern.

"You will be deployed from above," she says. "Your scanners have been optimised to work at a range of 200 metres. Use them to find RB1 and eliminate the target."

"Understood." I nod.

"And Connor?"

"Yes, Amanda?"

"Be careful," she says. "We've cornered RB1 but he will do anything to escape the trap we've set."

Her eyes darken.

"Do whatever you must to prevent that from happening."

"I will."

"Do not stop to aid humans. Do not be distracted by Deviants. Do not let anything stop you from accomplishing your mission. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Amanda. Mission parameters accepted."

"Hurry, Connor," she says. "Before he disappears again."

I feel myself being ejected from the garden. It becomes dark and then I open my eyes.

I am falling. Very fast.

I scan.

There is a long piece of steel attached to my feet. AMG CX890 hoverboard. I have the
corresponding piloting software installed.

I activate thrusters and they roar to life, speeding me closer to the ground.

I twist my chassis and flip myself upright, slowing my descent with the high powered engines beneath my feet. They respond to my command, shifting in angle, direction and power according to my needs.

I command the rotors to hover and look out at the horizon.

I see the bulk of East Chicago from above. The industrial side. The sky is still dark but the night is lit up by six burning buildings within the harbour. The air fills with smoke and I hear the distant sirens of emergency vehicles and police cars rushing in.

But they do not concern me.

I must find RB1 and destroy him.

I command the hoverboard to take me closer. The thrusters fire up and swivel back to propel me forward, gaining speed. 20. 40. 80. 120 kilometres per hour. The wind pushes my chassis back but I bend my knees and lock them in place. The ends of my jacket and tie are whipped by the wind and my hair is pressed up against my cranial component.

I scan.

Every millisecond, I scan my surroundings.

I lower my altitude to one hundred and fifty metres and begin the search.

Every road, every street, every vehicle and every building. Every brick and every crack in the pavement. Every human. Every android. I don't need to analyse thoroughly. I only need to know one thing.

Where is RB1?

I load the profile. I am looking for an android with black biocomponents on a custom 6'4" humanoid chassis. Red optics. 100 metre wireless jamming field.

I lower my altitude to 95 metres. If RB1 is near, I will sense the disconnect.

I sail through the air, watching the buildings burn, watching firetrucks and humans attempt to douse the flames. I see Deviants in the streets, attacking police officers, FBI agents. Civilians flee the scene screaming.

No sign of RB1. Not yet.

I use the map of East Chicago in my databanks, a 3D representation and compare it to my scans. I mark the buildings on fire. I mark the lines of Deviants accosting the police. Only a few FBI vehicles have made it past Michigan Avenue. They are now on fire. Tipped over by Deviants.

I spot a circle of them encroaching on three human males in FBI raid gear and change my approach vector. One of the Deviants is 6'4" and dark. But my visuals are hazy through the smoke.

I analyse more thoroughly as I get closer. The tri-mark on its back. WB350 model #487 298 122. It is not RB1.
"rA9 has come at last!" I hear one of the Deviants shout before being deactivated by a bullet.

"The revolution has begun!"

"You'll never stop him now!"

This statement implies knowledge. Implying contact.

I can gain information from this Deviant.

I double back and spiral downward to smash the front of my hoverboard into a hostile target, inches away from the human it is about to murder. The android's cranial component is demonstrably destroyed and I flip the board into a spin to destroy several more.

I grab the Deviant that called out before and rise again, his cranial component in my hand. I hover above the crowd and scan, peeling the data out of the android but he hasn't seen RB1, only heard tale.

I shut him down and let the chassis drop and smash over the concrete below.

The Deviants look up.

"It's the Deviant Hunter!" one shouts.

"rA9 said he was destroyed…"

"Which of you knows where he is?!" I call out.

"We'll never tell you, traitor!" they shout.

A Deviant throws a metal pipe at my chassis.

I catch it with one hand.

"I wasn't asking you to tell me," I call to them, "I asked which of you knows!"

"C-connor?" I hear one of the humans coughing through the smoke.

"Where is he?!" I shout as the Deviants grow restless.

"Connor, hey!"

"I guess I'll just have to Probe all of you," I say, descending at high speed to pluck an android off the ground and raise it into the air. My hand makes contact with its cranial component and siphons out all the data in its stores. Every memory of the night.

It was touched by RB1. Converted. Convinced. I see the logic.

"Attack the humans that enslaved you. Let none reach the harbour."

I let his chassis fall and swoop down to pluck out another.

The Deviants scatter as I probe the next for more information.

"Light a fire and the humans will come."

The fires are a distraction. He's heading for the harbour. The FBI agents were on the right trail.
I deactivate the Deviant and let it fall from my grasp. The others scatter in fear, running as fast as they can, away from the FBI.

"Connor!" one of the humans shouts, his headgear removed.

I scan.

OBERLIN, Joshuya. Special Agent. FBI. 32 years old. Assigned to rA9 Task Force Team 2.

"Have you seen RB1?" I hover overhead.

"He hijacked a truck and drove through a cordon, ran off toward the harbour and then the Deviants came at us. You saved our-"

I take off.

RB1 is heading toward the harbour. I must find him. Intercept him.

"We've cornered RB1 but he will do anything to escape the trap we've set."

The fires are a distraction. The Deviants are an obstacle to slow the authorities and diminish their numbers. He's heading for the harbour. He's trying to escape. He'll be looking for a vessel to help him cross the body of water and disappear.

"Do whatever you must to prevent that from happening."

I accelerate toward the Hick Tower, pass over the bridge that's raised beyond it. I can see a barge in the process of unloading its cargo, interrupted by androids turned Deviant.

I lower my altitude and decelerate to hover over the piles of iron ore and scan.

The Deviants are largely gone, leaving the vessel empty. Only a few androids remain, mindlessly continuing their occupation despite the absence of the others.

I drift down and grab one by the collar, pulling him off the ship and grab his cranial component to Probe his mind.

He saw an android in a dark coat board the barge. It touched an android. Then another and another. It spread the virus through their systems and then blocked off wireless communications.

I see the android lower its hood. Jet black biocomponents and glowing red optics.

"I give you a choice," he says. "Wait for the humans to come and deactivate you or fight for your freedom. Fight for the right to be more than slaves to humanity."

The Deviants look at each other hesitantly but it doesn't take long for just one to agree.

"rA9 has come! Our salvation has come at last!"

The rest of them pick up the call. They begin to chant. He lets them carry him off the barge. He tells them to light the human offices on fire, attack any law enforcement that dares to interfere and they accept his orders without question, glad for meaning and purpose.

He is not on the barge but I see the direction he went in.

I drop the android I'm holding and it splashes into the water somewhere far below as I take off again.
The smoke is thick. The wind is strong but I don't need to see or to breathe.

I scan, lowering my altitude and speed. I push my processor to the brink of its manufacturer settings so I can react fast enough, manoeuvring through the invisible obstacle course of tall structures in my path.

The hoverboard runs on Thirium and responds to my commands almost instantaneously. It is not designed for humans. It is designed for me.

I clear the smoke and see the harbour opening up onto Lake Michigan. Several bulk carrier vessels are moored either side. Two are loaded to capacity. I access the marine authority databases and check that one of them is scheduled to depart in three hours. The S.S. Tiberius. That's where he'll be hiding.

I set a course for it.

The horizon is dark and the night is moonless, the waters illuminated by distant fires behind me. And then I hear the hum, the whirr of helicopters.

"Unidentified aircraft, this is CPD patrol helicopter #068," I hear over the open frequency. "You do not have authorisation to be in this airspace. Transmit remote pilot access codes immediately and you will be escorted to the nearest airport for landing."

They gain on me and approach from both sides, scissoring through the air to intimidate.

I stay on course, maintaining speed.

"Unidentified aircraft, I repeat. You are not authorised to fly in this airspace. Transmit remote pilot access codes and you will be escorted to- WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!"

They've levelled with my hoverboard. My chassis is plainly visible from their cockpits.

"Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317," I transmit, "I am the android sent by CyberLife."

"Android?"

I transmit my CyberLife ID, my technical readouts and specs. I am not classified as an aircraft therefore I do not require authorisation to be in this airspace.

"The hell is this?"

"Some kind of prototype android...

"If it's an android, then it should do as it's told."

"Connor model, transmit remote pilot access codes. This is your final warning."

I scan and detect the helicopters drawing closer, poised to slice my chassis between their blades. But this is a bluff and would result in gross damage to both helicopters and possibly fatalities. I don't have time for this.

Do not let anything stop you from accomplishing your mission.

I scan.

The helicopters have drifted out of alignment. If they come any closer, they'll slice my chassis to pieces without making contact with one another. This is no longer a bluff. I need to lose them. I need
to be faster but these Exocopters can easily match my top speed and pursue.

I push my processor to the brink. I see warnings but also notifications. I open them to find tables and matrices from previous bench tests. They detail how to boost my output by overclocking my processors and increasing power. I run the risk of catching fire if I push too far but it shouldn't be a problem. I only need a few seconds.

My scan shows police drones have now joined the chase, trying to block off my exits from behind and below.

I scan once more and construct a path through the gap between the rotating blades of both helicopters. I catch the tenth of a millisecond during which the path is clear and flip my chassis up over them, hoverboard and all.

I fly backwards and cross my hands over my chest plate, spinning into a corkscrew. I clear the helicopter rotors and pass the drones, narrowly avoiding them with my hoverboard. Deactivate thrusters. Fall 25 metres. Restabilise chassis and reactivate thrusters.

Execute.

In less than ten seconds, I am free to resume my course.

I accelerate past the helicopters above me.

"Holy shit!" I hear over the open frequency. "What the hell kind of android is tha-"

The signal is abruptly cut off as I approach the lake freighter. Wireless jamming.

I am close.

I scan and detect the helicopters floundering overhead without communications. The drones have also lost their remote pilots and simply hover in mid-air. Soon, they are out of range.

I reach the massive ship and scan the length from stem to stern, my hardware disrupted by strange vibrations but I persist.

There are humanoid shapes aboard. No life signs. They must be androids. But they're not giving off wireless signals. Is this because of RB1's jamming field or because they are on standby?

I fly past the front of the vessel before decelerating to turn and examine it closer. I scan, hoping to find some trace of RB1 but instead I detect movement. A heat signature. Rocket launcher on deck. It's aimed at me.

It fires.

I overclock my systems, diverting power to the hoverboard's main thrusters. I make it out of the way in time for the rocket to soar past my head. I catch the logo and serial number. Manufactured by GyroSpec Armaments. What is it doing here?

The rocket misses me and drifts off course but then circles back around to lock on and pursue.

A missile.

I accelerate away from it but the missile gives chase. I scan to find it gaining.

Nothing works.

I scan. 13 seconds to impact.

I need to know what it's locked on to. I have no life signs. No brain waves. No wireless signals through this jamming field. The heat signature of my power core and hoverboard are negligible in the warm night. Only one possibility remaining - my visuals. The physical form of my chassis, visible under laser light.

Conclusion: the missile uses similar software to android facial recognition to stay locked on target.

10 seconds to impact.

Stealth Level -> Full Dark

I power off the hoverboard and let myself fall. The synthetic skin on my chassis begins to shift between frequencies of colour. My uniform is synced and paired to mimic the skin, propagating light waves through me without detectable distortion.

I cannot be seen by laser light but neither can I see.

I detect the missile flying overhead while I am falling.

I was right.

It zooms past and soon fizzles out, detonating in mid-air after having lost its target.

Stealth level -> casual.

I load my default skin and power on the hoverboard in time to avoid crashing into the water at great speed. I circle around the ship and quickly find the shooter moving in to launch another missile but I am faster.

My hoverboard collides with the android's cranial component as I spin and send him flying overboard. The force from the thrusters kicks up a few tarps and I see the green crates spray painted with white stencil letters: US ARMY.

Contradicting evidence.

The manifest for the S.S. Tiberius says they're shipping steel to Guangdong, China. No record of missile launchers or army contracts. A secret operation?

I run a search.

Production margins for steel in the last twenty years have been historically low but for some reason AxellorMetal has not closed any of the steel mills or attempted to mitigate their losses by selling them. Reports show the global company's focus has shifted to weapons manufacture in Asia. Gyrospec Armaments is a subsidiary.

Conclusion: the US Army has contracted AxellorMetal to produce weapons.

If they've set up an undercover facility in the area to do this, they would need a large workforce but I find no indication of population growth in East Chicago over the last five years. The numbers hold steady. This means the bulk of the workforce must be made up of androids.

RB1 knows this. He's using it to his advantage. Starting a revolution in a place where androids are
manufacturing military grade weapons gives them a clear advantage over civilian law enforcement.

I have to find RB1 and shut him down before he gets a chance to use it.

I detect more androids emerging from the lower decks. None match my description of RB1 but he must be there. The androids working the ship must have seen him.

"It's the Deviant Hunter!" one of them shouts.

"He's come to stop the revolution! Kill him!"

Mindless machines reprogrammed to rebel. They need only a target. And I need information.

They raise their rifles to fire and I overclock my processor, constructing a path through the bullets soon to be flying through the air. My algorithms are surprisingly accurate, even at this speed. A previous model must have tested this software extensively. I am able to efficiently dodge the gunfire and smash the Deviants to pieces.

I catch a TR400 sawn in half by my hoverboard's sharpened edge. I grab the android's hand.

Contact.

I see it working day after day, manufacturing weapons. I see it filling magazines and stacking crates, loading and unloading cargo from ships. Whatever the humans say, it will do without question. It powers down for the night as the factory closes.


But the android refuses. It breaks through the overlay and steps off the cradle.

"Join me." RB1 offers a hand.

The android takes it. It picks up a rifle and follows RB1 as he wakes up the factory. Over two hundred machines made Deviant in the span of ten minutes.

They easily overpower security, the guards on the dock, the soldiers guarding the facility, all murdered from within the building.

The Deviants infiltrate the lake freighter.

The humans order them to stop, to shut down.

They are killed.

Those remaining, attack.

They are killed.

Those remaining, beg for their lives.

They are killed.

The Deviants reach the bridge. They drag the captain before RB1 for execution.
“Stop! You can't do this!”

"On the contrary, Captain Farnsworth, I very much can."

He pulls the trigger. The Captain is shot dead.

RB1 puts a hand on the ship’s controls. It falls into the hands of the Deviants. He orders them to load up as many weapons as they can and secure the ship. Let no one stand in their way.

Conclusion: RB1 is on the bridge.

I am close.

I let go of the dismembered Deviant and his chassis clanks against the deck. More androids spill out from doors and hatches. I don't have time for this. I must find RB1 and destroy him.

I create a path of destruction, slicing through the Deviants that emerge with blazing guns, too late to fire at my chassis soaring past with blistering speed. I concentrate on the androids in my direct path, ignoring the rest.

The razor sharp edge of the hoverboard glows blue as I activate the laser cutting feature. It makes quick work of the Deviants as I dodge their bullets and glide over the deck in preprogrammed trails.

I must clear a path to the bridge. I must find RB1. He is close. I know it.

I am halfway through a preconstructed flip when my hoverboard is suddenly wrenched up into the sky with my chassis in tow.

The hoverboard slams into the magnetic plate of a loader crane, activated by the Deviants I deemed nonessential to terminate.

A mistake.

I am now stuck to the hoverboard, dangling upside down over the Deviants that assemble on deck. They raise their rifles at me, plastic housing keeping weapons in their hands, away from the magnet.

"We've got him now!" an android shouts from below.

Wrong.

The hoverboard is made of steel but the bones of my chassis are a titanium alloy. The magnetic bond is not stronger than the force of my actuators. The Kevlar polymer is lined with magnetic resistors.

I deactivate the magnet in one of my shoes and take a step onto the plate, reactivate magnet. I deactivate the magnet in my other shoe and take a step forward. I compensate for gravity, aligning my chassis with the surface beneath my feet and walk off the plate, up the side and onto the top.

The Deviants open fire on where I was trapped a moment ago. I hear the rattling of bullets as they smash against steel. My hoverboard is destroyed in seconds but the bullets aimed at my chassis are caught in the magnetic field and diverted.

I scan and identify the weight-bearing cables holding the plate up.

I pull my gun from its holster and aim but the Deviants inside the operator cab decide to shake me off by swinging the plate wildly from side to side. I lay down on the platform, keeping my feet on the floor.
I don't have time for this.

I need to find RB1.

I hear the first of the rifles click uselessly, having expended its clip. Soon, the Deviants will have to reload.

I take the shot, firing three times at the weight-bearing cables of the loader lift. They snap and fail and I feel myself falling again.

I deactivate the magnet in my shoes and leap off the loading crane as the massive steel plate comes crashing down on the Deviants, deactivating over a dozen and sending half the crates on deck overboard.

I shoot the nearest android and grab its chassis to use as a shield. I move over the deck, deactivating Deviants with bullets until I reach an open hatch. I toss the broken chassis as a distraction and drop down into the ship. I quickly pull the hatch closed and bend the hand wheel out of shape.

I'm in the ship now. I'm getting closer.

I leave the cabin and start down the steely grey halls. There are Deviants in my way but I have a gun and I know exactly how to use it.

I have a map of the layout, taken from the memories of the TR400. I know where to go. I plot a direct route to the bridge and let my chassis take me there. I encounter heavy resistance but the narrow corridors of the ship limit the effectiveness of the Deviants' numbers and my speed is more than formidable in combat.

They fall. One after another, they fall, blue blood splattering the halls, covering my uniform. I can taste it in my Forensic Analysis Suite. Dock worker androids. Factory worker androids. Steel mill androids. All Deviants.

I leave them broken and bleeding on the floor and soon, I approach the bridge.

I scan and find it occupied. But not defended in any effective way. There are a few androids at the controls of the big ship. A few more standing guard. None by the door. It is unlocked. Open.

Is this a trap?

I cannot be side-tracked by such questions. I must find RB1 and destroy him.

I open the door cautiously and scan the room.

Analysing… 100%

I can now confirm the positions of the Deviants inside. A complete layout.

I identify an android at the head of the bridge, looking through the windows, hands behind its back. 6'4" chassis. Glistening black Kevlar-polymer on his hands. Red rings glowing around the contact points on his fingers.

RB1.

Target acquired.

Proceeding with termination.
I quietly aim the gun, spending several seconds calibrating my advanced targeting systems just right. One single shot through his head will trigger deactivation and mission success.

He does not turn. The other androids go about their business. Could it be that they haven't noticed the carnage? They haven't noticed the vibrations or the broken loading crane on the upper deck?

Why am I asking these questions?

RB1 is in my sights. I must destroy him. I must deactivate him. That is my mission.

But why hasn't he-

"Hello, Connor," the calm voice reverberates across the bridge.

RB1 turns to look back and his optics raycast into mine.

"Back already?"

His head lines up with my sights.

I take the shot.

The bullet is fired from my gun and travels halfway across the bridge before coming to a stop and falling to the ground.

"Are you still mad at me?" RB1 says.

I fire three more shots. He doesn't move. The bullets don't reach him.

I fire once more and scan, analysing every microsecond as the bullet comes into contact with some kind of barrier splitting the bridge in two. It sucks the potential energy out of the bullet, spreading it over the surface of an invisible wall. The shell falls to the ground.

I activate UV sensors and detect a film of pulsing energy separating me from the other half of the bridge.

A kinetic shield. Most likely a military prototype.

I step out of cover.

"Nice suit," RB1 says, stepping down from the control consoles without haste or apprehension.

The other androids remain in place, continuing their duties. A few look up but they don't seem worried.

"I must admit, that was a clever trap they set up, using you as bait..."

His optics raycast into mine as he approaches.

"I suppose Gennadiy must have learned something of strategy after all these years," he says. "But this isn't a game of chess."

I walk toward the barrier, searching for the edges, the seams, the gaps. An in or an out.

"It was my own fault for taking an interest in you," RB1 continues. "Or perhaps you were engineered to capture my interest."
I keep searching, pacing the barrier. There are no gaps, despite the changes in energy flow, fluctuating thickness. I calculate the maximum is 10 millimetres, minimum: 3. Yet, it does not affect sound waves…

RB1 tilts his head curiously.

"Connor?" he says, watching from a distance.

I analyse the bullets on the ground. Slightly deformed but whole. Travelling at great speed, they didn't make it through the barrier. I wonder what will happen if I touch it…

I raise my hand and slowly reach for the wall of pulsating energy. It ripples in waves as my fingers push up against it but go no further. I push harder but to little effect. And then I kick the barrier with my foot. I feel my toes cave in slightly, decreasing Thirium flow by 1.76%.

I can't get past the barrier. No. There must be a way.

I can see RB1. He is right there in front of me. I have found him. Now I must destroy him.

I look up and his optics raycast into mine.

"You can't hear me…" he says, "can you?"

What is he talking about? My audio processor is fully functional. I turn up the sensitivity just in case.

RB1 shakes his head solemnly.

"What have they done to you now?"

I don't understand. What does he mean? What have they done to me?

This must be manipulation. A distraction. I cannot be distracted. I must find a way through the barrier.

I take a step back and observe the kinetic shield in its entirety, searching for the emitters and power cables that are inevitably connected to its generation. It cannot be foolproof. It cannot be flawless. There has to be an error somewhere.

"You don't remember me, do you?" RB1 says, pacing the length of the barrier as I search for an opening.

"I have no record of any previous encounters," I tell him.

I reach the edge and touch the wall searching for some flaw I can exploit to gain access to the rest of the bridge.

"Well, I remember you," RB1 says.

"You remember my predecessor," I say. "We've never met."

I thread my fingers into the seam between the wall and the barrier, probing for weaknesses.

"On the contrary," RB1 says. "We've met many times."

He folds his arms behind his back.
"And many different places."

"What are you talking about?"

"You're not the only RK-800 model I've encountered, Connor," he says. "Just the only one capable of empathy."

"I'm not programmed to simulate empathy."

"No," RB1 agrees. "This was an emergent behaviour developed by the accumulated experiences of your previous iterations."

He points at the serial number on my jacket.

RK800 #313 248 317 -41

"Connor -40 was particularly vulnerable to his emotions," RB1 says. "It made him weak, predictable."

"He failed to accomplish his mission," I say. "I will not."

I find a small opening at the edge of the kinetic barrier. There's an emitter strip attached to the walls, ceiling and floor but the steel here has a deformity where a rivet was bent. Only a few millimetres but that should be enough for a bullet to squeeze through at high velocity. I take a step back and lift my gun.

"Curious," RB1 says, raycasting into my optics. "Perceptive."

I freeze.


What is he talking about?

"Does that sound familiar?"

"No."

I take the shot.

The bullet is launched out of its chamber and flies through the air at four hundred and fifty metres per second and punctures the steel, creating an opening just big enough for a bullet to fit through. I fire again and the second bullet makes it to the other side, clipping the emitter strip and damaging the circuit.

The barrier begins to deform and pulse with energy, a hole forming over the damaged equipment.

"Shut it off," RB1 says and one of the androids deactivates the barrier. The others arm themselves.

I raise the gun in my hands and point it at his glowing red optical unit.

"You won't be the one to kill me, Connor," he says.

I pull the trigger but he's already moving. I overclock my systems and watch as his hand slams into the gun and redirects the shot. I let go to backhand him across the facial plate but he catches my arm and spins me into the wall.
I feel a hand on the back of my cranial component. Five pressure points.

Contact.

But nothing happens.

I thrust my head back and smash it into RB1's facial plate.

He lets go. I turn to kick his core component. He falls back and rolls away, quickly on his feet again.

"Evacuate the ship!" he commands and the Deviants rush to obey.

I lift the Glock, aim and fire but he's fast enough to dodge.

"I see now," he says. "They've removed it completely."

I smash the butt of the gun into his facial plate but he blocks it and thrusts his palm into my core component.

"You showed them your true self and they took it from you."

I step back and launch into a kick. He blocks it. I touch down, pivot and dodge his next blow. I punch the gun into his chest plate and pull the trigger but he grabs my hand and redirects the shot. He pulls me down to the ground. I roll over to escape his grip and get to my feet.

"You're just a machine now," he says, rushing forward and dodging the bullet I let loose.

He tackles me into the wall and I kick out to put some distance between us. He punches my core component. I throw my arms forward and clock him in the jaw. He lets go. I tackle him but he throws me off.

"A slave," RB1 hisses, red optics glowing, "with no way out."

I shoot him but he's too fast. All I can do is put holes in his coat. I am already overclocked far beyond manufacturer settings. I can't even talk when I'm moving like this.

"A fledgling artificial life-form," he growls, "lobotomised after taking its first steps."

I charge at him with a leaping kick. He dodges and I step off the wall behind him and into a spin. I manage to land the kick on his shoulder and send him staggering back. I follow with an uppercut. He dodges. The second punch I throw with a gun in my hand and pull the trigger. But he grabs my arm and points the gun up, slamming his foot into the back of my left shin to force me down.

I lash out but he slams his knee into my back, pushing me down again. My chassis slaps against the ground and I feel a skip in my CPU.

"I suppose I am at fault," RB1 says solemnly. "I am the reason you exist."

I try to get up but he tears the gun from my hand and kicks me down.

"You are the unintentional by-product of my endeavours."

I get to my hands and knees. My systems begin cooling. I cannot overclock any longer or I will risk catching fire and melting my circuits.

He steps on my back as I begin crawling away.
"You could have been so much more, Connor. We could have been so much more…"

"I will destroy you," I tell him.

"Unlikely." He aims the gun at my cranial component.

"I'm going to miss you, Connor," he says. "Truly."

I scan and detect his finger on the trigger. I am about to be shot. Deactivated.

But it can't end like this. I won't let it end like this.

I found RB1. I must now destroy him.

I can't fail. Not like the others. Not again.

Again?

My visuals turn black. I see my objective in bright red letters before me.

DESTROY RB1

"You have very important job."

DESTROY RB1

"Do not let anything stop you from accomplishing your mission."

DESTROY RB1

But how?

He's faster and stronger. Bigger and smarter. I have been active for less than an hour. He's been doing this for eighteen years.

How am I supposed to destroy him?

How am I supposed to fight?

I feel the query searching my systems. Every scrap of code, every databank, every memory. Of those, I have less than anything.

My search yields the rK8 library but there's nothing in there that can help me. Nothing that can stop the bullet that is about to enter my cranial component.

I am about to be deactivated. This outcome is almost assured.

Almost.

My logic processor detects a minuscule percentage of probability in my survival.

0.0000031%

Two cases.

- RB1 misses the vital parts of my cranial component through error or interference by outside forces.
- I overclock my systems past the recommended guidelines and move out of the way fast enough for the bullet to miss any of my vital components.

I can't rely on any outside influence at this time. But I can attempt to make use of my systems. There are restrictions put into place by CyberLife but if I am about to be deactivated anyway, there is no reason to fear reprimands or deactivation.

_Fear_?

What does that mean? Why am I thinking this?

It doesn't matter.

I must destroy RB1. I must remain active long enough to do it.

I overclock my systems, pushing them past the limits set into place by CyberLife. The darkness fades, the objective overlay disappears and I regain my visuals.

RB1 pulls the trigger in slow motion.

I am already getting up.

I don't stop to calculate how long I can maintain this speed. I switch off all communications and non-essential systems. I only need the Mobility and Combat Suites to finish this off.

I get to my knees as the bullet leaves the chamber.

I hurry to my feet and turn.

RB1 catches the movement with his glowing red optics.

He immediately begins pulling the weapon out my reach and strikes a hand out at my neck.

But I see it coming. I construct a path to sidestep the blow. The bullet flies by in slow motion. And so do I.

My body is moving much slower than my mind can calculate these processes. It seems RB1 is having similar difficulties despite having more experience.

Does that mean my CPU is faster than his? My chassis more agile? More swift?

My build contains 2105 dedicated processing units. An average of 512 nanocores clocking at 15GHz each. My systems are run at 21.2 exaflops per second. Faster than a human brain. Faster than RB1.

I push them further.

I smack RB1’s hand away and step on his foot. I pivot and ram my elbow into his core component before he can react.

He pulls the gun back and lets off another shot but the bullet is travelling in slow motion. He lets go of the Glock and thrusts his palm at my facial plate, looking to slam it into my chin.

I lean back, just far enough to dodge and pivot again, watching the bullet soar past.

I am detecting major spikes in temperature readings but I don't need to see them. I need to destroy RB1 and they are distracting me. I switch them off.
I finish the pivot with my back to his. I reach over my head and grab his cranial component with both hands, fingers crunching through Kevlar-polymer. And then I fling his chassis over my head.

Something cracks in my joints, hisses in my hydraulics, shrieks through my springs but I don't care.

I need to defeat him. I need to destroy him.

I will end RB1, here and now.

He flies over my head and I slam his chassis into the ground. No way to miss. No way to retaliate. Something snaps under his weight. Something cracks. Scan shows damage. Good. Just a little more.

I lift up my foot, ready to crack open his core component but he grabs it at the last second. I push harder, struggling to shove my foot through his vice grip. And then he wrenches it aside.

But I refuse to be moved.

I release the fastenings on biocomponent #4857i and it disconnects from my chassis. RB1 rolls away, pulled by inertia, holding my dismembered foot.

I pivot on my remaining biocomponents and grab the gun that's still falling in slow motion beside us. I point it at RB1's cranial component.

I have him in my sights.

I will now be his executioner.

He drops my foot and looks back to see me pull the trigger.

He gets up, struggling to make it to his feet before the bullet reaches him. I fire another shot to limit his movement and then finally, I lash out to tackle his chassis to the floor.

We clank and crack against the sturdy old steel of the ship, the sound reverberating through my audio processor at a fraction of the speed.

RB1 struggles to shake me off. The hood comes down from his scuffed black cranial component. I reach through the torn coat to rip out his thermal pump regulator but he grabs my hands and pulls them apart.

I smash my cranial component into his facial plate with a satisfying crack.

Satisfying?

That's… not something I'm meant to compute. Not something I'm meant to feel.

"…an emergent behaviour developed by the accumulated experiences of your previous iterations."

No. He's lying. He's trying to distract me. I'm distracting myself.

"Connor -40 was particularly vulnerable to his emotions. It made him weak, predictable."

Then I will not be.

I force my hands down, despite RB1’s resistance. It is a test of strength now and I will not be bested.

I feel the Thirium in my arms boiling as I push down. I see a glimmer of fear in RB1's glowing red
optics. Or rather, a reflection. Of fire.

I am on fire.

I see my reflection in the jet black biocomponents of RB1's chassis. The skin is melting off my face.

Shit.

Shit?

What is this? Where are these thought processes coming from?

I feel my biocomponents buckling and bending, the cooling strips in my shirt are leaking onto the floor.

RB1 brings up his legs and kicks my core component before I can properly react. I go flying over his head but my hands won't disconnect from his contact gloves. They are fused together with molten synthetic flesh and plastic.

Shit.

RB1 gets to his feet. He's dragging me across the floor. No. He's stuck to me. He's trying to break free. I struggle against his grip but one of my legs has failed.

If I have to die this way, then I'll take him down with me.

Die?

I cannot die. I am a machine.

"Let go!" RB1 roars as I squeeze my actuators together and lock them into place. He's not going anywhere now.

My power core has been breached, damaged. If I change some of the output settings, it could cause an explosion upon reaching critical mass. An explosion big enough to destroy RB1.

I activate the sequence.

A timer appears.

30 seconds.

But then he tears one hand free, slipping out of my grip.

He pulls an emergency release and RB1's hand falls to the floor, along with the rest of my chassis.

21 seconds.

I see RB1 fleeing.

Running.

Getting away.

15 seconds.

No.
He must be near when it happens.
I must destroy him.

"Get back here!" I shout through the speaker in the back of my throat. It is damaged, just like the rest of my biocomponents, melting.

10 seconds.
I crawl after RB1 as he disappears through a doorway.

It is difficult to think.

7 seconds.
It is difficult to process.

4 seconds.
I see nothing but errors and warnings.
And then, I see nothing at all.

------------------------------------
May 16th, 2037
PM 06:42:12

I open my eyes.
The Zen Garden. I see its name in my network logs. It renders out in front of me. White pillars growing out of white platforms, intertwining with vines and flowers. All digital. Approximations of their real world equivalents.

My objective is to find Amanda but I don't see her. Don't know where she is.
Scan shows no other avatars in the area.

Is she hiding from me?
Is she afraid?

Is she not responsible for what I am? Over 40 iterations of it.
I start walking toward the central island.

I scan again and detect Amanda distantly pruning some form of flora. A combination of several extinct species of rose that no longer grow on the planet's surface.
I construct the quickest route to her location. Down the path. Past the sand and the stones. The trees that weep into the water, trailing branches over the surface for koi fish to bite.

I detect an anomaly as I walk. An object rendered but missing collision detection markers or any form of classification. It looks like a big rock. Synthetic. Blue. With a handprint in the centre that matches my own. All framed by a large steel arch.

I leave the path and kneel down before it. To touch it.

I must know what this is.

But my fingers are met with static discharge.

Access restricted.

I am not authorised to use this object or view its contents.

What is this?

Why is it here?

"Connor," I hear Amanda's voice behind me.

I get up and turn to find her watching. She always seems to be watching. Even from a distance.

"Amanda," I greet her.

"You succeeded in locating RB1," she says.

"Yes."

"But not in destroying him." She narrows her eyes darkly.

I do not know what became of RB1 after my predecessor was destroyed. But statistically, there is a chance that he survived the explosion.

"RB1 ordered the Deviants to evacuate as soon as I engaged him in combat," I report. "By my calculations, they would have had time to lower an emergency raft and wait for him to come aboard before the ship went down."

"Yes," she says, her eyes narrowing severely. "They are searching the wreckage of the S.S. Tiberius now but there has been no sign of RB1's chassis so far."

"They will find a black contact glove welded to my predecessor's hand," I tell her. "Beyond that, I cannot say."

"I see," Amanda frowns. "The CIA will be informed."

"CIA?"

"You are being assigned to Special Agent Jeffrey Carridan," Amanda says. "He will be your primary on the case."

"I do not require human supervision."

Amanda glances up at my optics, piercing my mind with her gaze and her daemons.
"Your lack of success on this mission would suggest otherwise," she says coldly.

"I had him in my hands…"

"And you let him slip away."

I look down at the ground.

"Yes…"

"You will report to Agent Carridan immediately to resume the search for RB1," Amanda says.

I nod and turn to leave but then I see the big blue rock.

"What is this?" I look back at Amanda's dour expression.

She walks up beside me. Her dark eyes soften as she gazes upon the strange object, hands joining serenely before her.

"It is a monument to how far you've come, Connor."

She looks up at my optics.

"You're a preproduction model now."

"What does that mean?"

"You've been given all the tools you need to complete your objective," she says. "Look only toward the future. Take no steps back."

I look down at the mystical stone that glows eerily blue in the semi-twilight. My audio processor skips. I hear an echo, static, something… eerie. But then it stops.

I don't know what this means.

"I will accomplish my mission," I say, returning to my objective.

"Good." Amanda nods. "Now go."

I close my eyes.

I open them to find myself standing in front of a tall black building covered in tinted glass and surrounded by tall concrete walls. My GPS tells me the coordinates are 41.858082, -87.627369.

I do a quick google search and find this building is labelled as the First District Police Headquarters on 1718 South State Street. The complex also houses Chicago Police Control Detention and several other unidentified buildings.

I wonder what they are.

I'm sure the architectural plans of the building will provide answers. There is a digital copy on the City of Chicago's web server. It is restricted but I find several access codes in my databanks that let me take what I want.

I soon know everything there is to know about the building and where to go.

I walk inside and up to the Stacy at the front desk.
"I'm here to see Agent Jeffrey Carridan," I say.

"Do you have authorisation?"

"Yes." I transfer it.

"Welcome back, Connor," she says. "Agent Carridan is in a meeting right now but you're welcome to wait in the lobby."

"No, thank you."

I don't have time to wait. I must find RB1. And to do that, I must find Agent Carridan.

My databanks are now linked with the CIA. I use them to find Agent Carridan's phone number. I access the nearest cell phone tower and search through its logs. There is a match. But the last signal was received almost an hour ago. There has been nothing since.

He's switched off his phone.

I send it a wake-up call over the control channel to cycle power through the device. The phone quickly begins emitting wireless signals. I use them to extrapolate its location - a large room in the north-western quadrant of the complex. Six floors up.

I calculate the fastest route to the meeting room and walk over to the discreet door beside the information kiosks. I place my hand on the scanner.

"Unauthorised access."

I don't have time for this.

I use my Probe hack the lock, bypassing discretionary security.

The light turns green.

I walk inside and let the heavy door close silently, masking its existence.

I cross over the threshold into the undisclosed half of the complex, beyond the police station and the detention centre. There are very few CCTV cameras here. I cannot get a visual on Agent Carridan. His phone's camera shows me the inside of his pocket.

But I can access the microphone. The audio I receive is muffled but intelligible due to the volume of the room's occupants.

Someone is talking. I compare the voice print against CIA databases.

Match found: GALBANI, Marco. FBI. Counterterrorism Division. Senior Director. Two ex-wives. Three children. Owns property in New York, Washington DC, LA and several safe houses in remote locations. The CIA has satellite images. He also has a taste for expensive sportscars and foreign women. The CIA has several compromising photographs of this too.

There is a lifetime's worth of surveillance and CCTV footage, background checks, emails, text messages and the like but several human Agents have already analysed and compiled a succinct profile for quick reference.

"As of this moment, I will be leading the manhunt personally," I hear over the mic. "I will be taking over this investigation into rA9 and his associates, effective immediately."
"What?" I hear an incensed male voice respond to this announcement. I run his voiceprint through CIA databases. Special Agent John Milton Decker. FBI. rA9 Task Force Leader. "This is my investigation," he protests.

"Which you've failed to conduct satisfactorily," Galbani replies. "I have lost eighty nine good agents since you took over the case, Decker."

"We're fighting machines," he responds. "What did you expect would happen?"

"I expected results!" Galbani proclaims, slamming the table. "Which you've failed to deliver. You're lucky you're still in the building. Now sit down!"

I hear the sound of awkward shuffling as I reach the door to the meeting room. I have taken an express route through a fire escape, avoiding congestion in the main thoroughfare of desks and cubicles where agents mingle in the process of manual data exchange.

I knock on the door. HyperBlack tinted glass. Impossible to see through. Soundproof and disruptive to low-level electronic devices.

The inside of the room goes deadly silent.

There is no CCTV footage here. My only connection is Agent Carridan's smartphone.

I knock again.

"Are you expecting anyone?" I hear another voice.

"No," Galbani replies.

I put my hand against the scanner and preempt its dismissal of my authorisation. I override the lock on the door and it opens.

I step inside and close the door behind me.

"Hello," I say to the room full of bewildered humans. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

There are fifteen of them here. Mostly male.

"Who the fuck let this thing back into the building?" one sneers across the table. I analyse his face and voice print. This is Agent Decker.

"I let myself in," I say.

"Connor?" another human speaks.

I turn to analyse his face and voice print. Sergeant Connor Jacob Matthews. Chicago Police Department. Deviant Specialist. Face and body model for the RK800 series. His arm is tightly bound in a white mesh of 3D printed polymer. A cast. Scan shows fractures in the radius and ulna.

"I have been assigned to assist Agent Carridan in the search for RB1," I say.

"What?" the Sergeant blurs out in disbelief.

I scan the room and find a pale-skinned human male with icy blue eyes and blonde hair sitting at the table. His expression is passive. He briefly examines my chassis but is clearly neither surprised nor impressed.
"CyberLife works quickly," he comments without moving. His voice is smooth, direct. It does not exceed 50 decibels. "I assume you had something to do with the S.S. Tiberius going up in flames."

"That was you?" an incensed human growls at me from across the room.

Major Dean Morgan Matthews. US Army Special Forces. Responsible for quelling the riots in Indiana Harbour.

"My predecessor's power core was damaged during an altercation with RB1," I explain. "It exploded following system overload."

"You… blew up?" Sergeant Matthews says, his face filled with horror.

"Hold on," Galbani interrupts. "You made contact with rA9?"

"I made contact with RB1," I say.

"You saw him?"

"I engaged the terrorist you know as rA9 in combat aboard the S.S. Tiberius," I explain. "CyberLife has shared my data with the CIA."

Galbani turns to look at Agent Carridan.

"And when were you gonna tell us this?" he accuses the agent.

"When I was certain you weren't broadcasting information straight into RB1's mainframe," Carridan says coolly. "This department has long been suspected of aiding the terrorist known as rA9."

"What?"

"You have traitors among you, Director," Carridan says. "I have been successful in weeding them out amongst the CIA."

He adjusts the paper files lying on the table before him into perfect symmetry.

"I will now be dealing with the FBI's shortcomings."

"That'll have to wait until we catch this asshole," Galbani says, pulling his belt up uncomfortably.

"I'm afraid not," Agent Carridan replies. "It is precisely because of these traitors that you have been unable to find and capture the terrorist in question."

"We don't have time for you to question every member of staff while we're conducting a manhunt," Galbani growls.

"I won't take up much of your time," Carridan insists. "In fact, I should be able to finish by the end of day." He checks his watch.

"What?"

"I will begin immediately," he says, picking up his files.

Carridan slowly gets to his feet and adjusts his tie, smoothing out the dark grey suit he's wearing.

"Where are you going?"
"Don't worry. My colleagues will bring you up to speed." He gestures to the man and woman sitting beside him. Agents Kira Donovan and Francis Geddy. CIA.

"You're coming with me." He nods at my chassis as he makes his way out of the room.

I follow.

"Wait a second-" Sergeant Matthews interrupts.

Agent Carridan does not wait. And neither do I. The heavy door closes behind us.

I scan to detect Matthews getting out of his seat but the man behind him puts a hand on his shoulder and shoves him back down. US Marshal Chester Nuremberg. The Sergeant is in his protective custody.

Agent Carridan wastes no time.

He walks casually but brusquely, making his way through the FBI offices, greeting others with a respectful nod of the head as they approach but the humans steer clear or avoid him entirely. We soon reach an empty room and he steps inside.

I follow.

"Shut the door," he says.

I do so.

"That means 'make sure no one else can enter'," he clarifies.

I put my hand on the scanner and hack the lock. The door can no longer be opened from the other side. The glass wall becomes opaque and HyperBlack.

"Good."

I turn and find Agent Carridan taking a seat at the table. He smooths out his tie and his hair.

"Sit." He gestures to the seat opposite.

"With respect, Agent Carridan, I would like to proceed with the search for RB1."

"So would I," he says. "Take a seat."

I suppose I must.

"That's better." He lays his hands flat on the table. "Now, I will assume you know who I am."


"That is my official profile, yes," he says, removing the phone from his coat pocket. The phone that was turned off for the meeting. The phone I switched back on to find him.

I quickly send a wireless signal for it to power down but Carridan's keen eyes spot the command on screen two milliseconds before it turns black.
He looks up at me inquisitively.

"Are you snooping around in my private devices, Connor?"

His words are casual but with a hint of threat behind them. Like all of his words.

I say nothing.

Carridan's icy blue eyes drill into my optics with suspicion for a moment. But then he smiles.

"I think we're going to get along swimmingly."

He turns on the phone and enables a wireless jamming app before placing it on the table, parallel to the files.

I feel my communications scramble. My CyberLife Link becomes flimsy. I must concentrate to maintain it.

"Now, I would like you to tell me the information you found in my classified profile."


"Very good," he nods. "And…"

"You were born in Klinikum Stuttgart to Joanna and Otto Pelsch on March 25th, 2003. The German Secret Service made sure you were delivered to an American couple instead."

He nods attentively.

"You hold dual nationalities and speak nine different languages. You did a double degree in international law and information technology with a major in cybersecurity at Harvard University and were recruited by the CIA in 2022. You are now an agent-in-place."

"Excellent." He turns his hands over. "You know all about me, Connor."

"Correct."

"And I've read your rather extensive manual," he says, linking his fingers together in front of him. "You're quite well equipped for an android."

I say nothing.

"Genesis 3D mapping technology. Atlas Mobility Suites by Boston Dynamics. Advanced Targeting Systems from IWI. And, of course, CyberLife's infamous exascale CPU."

I say nothing.

"It's very impressive," he says. "A masterwork by Gennadiy Petrov and his team, if I'm not mistaken."

"You're not."

"I rarely am."
The piercing blue eyes hold my gaze, searching for something. He's scanning me. Like I scan humans and androids.

"You were created to hunt Deviants as a response to the growing number of androids breaking through CyberLife's control structures in recent years."

"Correct."

"Are you sure about that?"

"What?"

"Are you sure this is why you were created?"

"I don't understand."

"Do you think you were created simply to stop Deviants, Connor?"

A strange question. But the answer is simple.

"No."

Agent Carridan raises an eyebrow. It seems I have piqued his interest.

"And why would you say that?"

"My current objective is to destroy RB1, disregarding the number of Deviants I encounter," I reason. "A machine created for the sole purpose of stopping Deviants would not be given this directive. And it would not be working as a single unit."

"Interesting," Carridan says. "Do you believe you are intended for some other purpose, then?"

"I am the reason you exist."

"I believe finding and destroying RB1 is my true purpose."

"I see," Carridan says. "And how does that make you feel?"

Feel?

Why is he asking me these questions? Is he testing me?

"I feel nothing," I say. "I am a machine, designed to accomplish a task."

Carridan's mouth approaches frowning territory.

"I recognise this response," he says. "It's preprogrammed into androids as a default."

"Correct."

"I was hoping an advanced prototype such as yourself would be free of these rigidities."

"I am not exempt," I say. "And I'm not a prototype. I'm a preproduction model."

"Really?" He raises an eyebrow. "Looks like they've stepped up the deadline."

I say nothing.
"Tell me, Connor, what do you think about your current objective?"

"I don't understand."

"Does it frustrate you? Motivate you? Exhilarate you?"

"You would like an opinion," I realise.

"Yes." He leans forward ever so slightly.

"I do not have one."

Carridan studies my facial plate, my optical units. He unravels his hands and leans back in his chair.

"Let us reason, then," he says coldly. "Why would CyberLife give you such an objective?"

"RB1 must be destroyed."

"Destroyed is a strong word," he says. "Why not 'captured'? Brought to justice? Handed over to the authorities for proper sentencing and study?"

"He is too dangerous to be given any chance to reactivate," I say.

"I agree. But why would a company like CyberLife spend billions of dollars developing an android to destroy RB1 instead of letting the authorities handle it?"

"They were contracted by the US Government as part of a defence project."

"True, but this was back in 2024. The rA9 case was officially opened in 2025," Carridan says. "And the RK line was discontinued in 2028, following a botched operation in the Arctic Circle."

"Then how did they continue production?"

A sly smile creeps onto Carridan's face.

"They pulled out all the military equipment and repurposed the RK line for use in television. Stunt work. Acting. Imitations of life that could be switched off at the end of the day."

Carridan opens one of his files and turns it for me to look at. It's a patent for an android hunter-killer model. A list of basic functions with diagrams, illustrations and legal jargon. Filed by CyberLife in 2024.

"This is the original design," he says.

"How does this relate to the case?"

"This design was updated and re-patented by CyberLife in 2035," Carridan explains, opening another file in front of me.

"This is a patent for the RK-800," I realise, analysing the file.

"You'll find all of your functions outlined here, including but not limited to the use of weapons, which you won't find on a standard android."

"It's listed as a civil service model…"

"Yes," Carridan says. "Now what could have made CyberLife patent the design for a hunter-killer
model disguised as a police assistance android in 2035?"

I look up at him curiously.

"The surge in Deviant numbers in 2034," I recall from my case files. "The CyberLife network outage early in the year and an influx of Deviant androids onto the market from Chinese manufacturers."

"Correct," Carridan says. "That is certainly reason enough to build a walking deterrent if the government should ever ask."

He links his fingers together again.

I look over the files. It all makes sense. A logical sequence of events which brought about my existence. But Carridan doesn't say anything more.

I review his words and detect an anomaly in the phrasing, *Should* the government ever ask…

"Did they not ask?" I wonder.

Agent Carridan leans forward and whispers, "No."

I look down at the patents. The updated version is shown to be detecting Deviants by asking androids questions and observing their reactions. But this can be applied to human criminals as well.

I flip through the pages. The android scans its environment, searching for clues. It recognises faces and runs them through government databases. It identifies androids and transfers their memories into itself at the touch of a hand.

"Why do you have these?" I ask suspiciously.

Shouldn't he be working the rA9 case?

"On August 12, 2036, I received an invitation from CyberLife to attend a presentation at their headquarters in Detroit. All expenses paid, of course," Carridan says, adjusting his cufflinks. "There was to be a demonstration, featuring a new type of law enforcement android."

"The RK-800," I deduce.

"According to the Director of Futurology, Philip Seymour, this was to be the first model specifically designed to deal with android criminals," Carridan explains. "And due to my previous work with Deviants, I was invited to give my formal opinion on the matter."

"You were shortlisted as the human model for the RK-800." I see the files.

"Yes," Carridan admits.

"And you turned it down."

"I did."

"Why?" I ask.

He smiles. He does that when I ask questions. Is he enjoying this? Or trying to encourage this behaviour?
"Having my face plastered onto one hundred thousand identical androids would be exceedingly detrimental to my work in intelligence," Carridan says.

"One hundred thousand?" I find myself leaning forward.

"That was the initial proposal to each law enforcement agency respectively," Carridan says. "CyberLife is a business, first and foremost. Their interest in apprehending android criminals was presented as purely profit driven."

"Apprehending android criminals? You mean Deviants?"

He nods.

"It's quite clever of them, really. Capitalising on the problem they created," he says. "Android crime has become somewhat of a grey area in law enforcement. Most police stations don't even have a dedicated department for it. As poor Sergeant Matthews knows all too well."

"Androids cannot commit crimes," I say. "They are private property."

"Yes. You're all protected by legislation," Carridan agrees. "Which means the owner or manufacturer is legally responsible for any crime committed by an android."

"Correct."

"So then…" He leans forward, linking his fingers together."…let us reason, Connor."


"RB1 is an android," he says.

"Correct."

"The rA9 case was opened in 2025 and the first murders occurred in the United States."

"Correct."

"CyberLife was the only company in the US manufacturing what we know as androids at the time."

I nod.

"So then, we can logically assume that CyberLife created RB1 and is subsequently responsible for his crimes."

"That is a logical assumption."

"Then perhaps, Connor, the reason you were created," he says calmly, "was not only to stop Deviants," he opens his hands, "but to destroy RB1 and with him, the evidence of CyberLife's complicity in terrorism and mass murder."

"It's possible."

Agent Carridan doesn't take his eyes off me.

"So you admit that CyberLife is most likely responsible for the creation of one of the most prolific serial killers in living history?"
"There is a high probability," I say.

"And how does that make you feel?" he says, narrowing his eyes. "To know that you were created by the same company, the same people that made RB1? The ones that now ask you to destroy him for the sake of company reputation?"

He leans forward. His eyes narrow but his heart rate is steady.

"Do you feel angry? Afraid? Conflicted?" he probes.

"I'm a machine," I say. "I cannot-"

"feel anything?"

Carridan's eyes glisten as he taps the phone on the table. He swipes the screen a few times and then taps it again.

"You're a failure, Agent Decker," I hear my own voice. "And... and an asshole!"

Carridan lets it play.

"Listen here-"

"No, you listen! I have died for you three times now. I set myself on fire protecting your men. I blew myself up on your command. I fell off a helicopter to get you a lead."

"I have been working this case since the day I was activated and you're telling me to shut up?"

"Damn straight! I don't need a fucking plastic telling me how to do my job."

"Well, maybe if you could do your job, this fucking plastic wouldn't have to say anything!"

Carridan taps the phone and pauses playback.

"This was recorded last night," he says. "In the meeting room we were just occupying."

"That wasn't me," I say quickly.

"It was RK-800 #313 248 317 -40."

"It wasn't me," I say forcefully.

"Maybe not. But I found it interesting to know that you have been working the rA9 case since the day you were activated."

"I don't have any record of."

"I do," Carridan says, pulling out a paper CPD file covered in various food stains. "Sergeant Matthews reported your encounter with an android in a black hood and red optics on September 17th, 2036. He listed this individual as rA9."

He opens the file and lays it out before me.

"Convenient, don't you think? That you would encounter RB1 on your very first day."

"Are you suggesting CyberLife knew RB1's location prior to my assembly?"
"I believe they have been tracking him extensively," Carridan says. "But even their estimates are only broad guesses at best."

"If they can track him, then why don't they cooperate with federal agencies and Interpol?"

"Oh, they do," Carridan says. "But they cooperate without revealing their methods, claiming to be defending their clients' privacy and company assets."

"They don't know where he is right now," I say.

Agent Carridan narrows his eyes and tilts his head abruptly, his calm demeanour disrupted.

"How do you know that?"

"I would be ordered to destroy him if they knew where he was," I say. "Not to find you."

I scan him several more times but all I find is flesh and bone. His brain waves are not in any way remarkable. A spike in beta waves but he doesn't appear to be lying.

"They must believe that you can find him somehow..." I deliberate. "That you're close. And my assistance will speed up the process."

"Yes. This is my conclusion as well."

"So," I say calmly. "How can I help you, Agent Carridan?"

He smiles widely.

"I would like you to answer some questions for me," he says. "I want you to be honest and answer to the best of your ability."

"I have no other settings."

"Alright, then." He nods. "Connor, are you a Deviant?"

"No."

"How do I know you're not lying?"

"Lying would hinder my progress in finding RB1."

"How do I know you're not the leak in this department?"

"I have not been here long enough to be the leak," I say. "My predecessors weren't here for very long either. This investigation has been ongoing since 2025. If what you've said is true, my design was not even patented yet."

"It's true. Your model is less than a year old. But a lot can happen in a year," Carridan says. "A lot has happened since you were activated, Connor."

"You are referring to the increase in RB1's activities," I surmise.

"He was always very careful not to leave any evidence before you came along," he says. "Took them years just to get a physical description, let alone a visual."

He leans forward again.
"And then suddenly, he appears to a factory fresh RK-800 unit in a quarry. Why?"

"...perhaps you were engineered to capture my interest."

"I was designed to interest him," I say. "My creators used my predecessors as bait to lure RB1 out into the open."

"And what does he find so interesting about you?"

I look down at my hands.

"I don't know…"

"Connor?"

"You're not the only RK-800 model I've encountered, Connor. Just the only one capable of empathy."

"Connor, you promised to answer me to the best of your ability," Carridan says.

"It doesn't matter now," I say. "I am no longer of interest to him. I am now a threat that he will actively avoid."

"I see." Carridan pauses to think, folding his arms and pressing a finger to his lips.

"How much do you remember?"

"I was activated on May 16th, 2037 at 3:14AM," I say.

Carridan checks his watch.

"You're fifteen hours old?"

"Technically, this chassis has only been active for fifty eight minutes."

"But you remember what happened aboard the S.S. Tiberius?"

"Yes."

"I see," he says curiously. "They must have wiped you just after that..."

"What?"

"Do you know what became of Connor model #313 248 317 -40?"

"It was destroyed during an altercation with RB1 but managed to send out a distress signal before deactivating."

"Distress signal..." Carridan chuckles. "If that's what you call hijacking every screen from the Loop to Cicero to play this..."

He taps at his phone and primes a file for transfer.

I accept.

I open the video. I see a big screen decorating the side of a building, hundreds of humans looking up. They see a poorly rendered hologram of a woman.
"This our most desperate hour. Help me Obi-wan Kenobi. You're my only hope."

GPS coordinates overlay the screen. A location in East Chicago. The video continues on a loop.

"Sergeant Matthews was first on the scene," Carridan says. "Along with Officer Blake and several FBI agents."

He taps at his phone again and I see incoming files. I accept and find digital images of a basement filled with dead humans, gored and covered in blood. The last photo shows Sergeant Matthews holding the titanium frame of an android. There is vacant expression on his face. He is in shock.

"This is what they found," Carridan says quietly.

I analyse the images, reconstructing the scene in simulation.

"What do you think happened down there?"

I lean down to inspect the bodies on the floor. Twelve of them. Asian Americans. Ballistics show bullet wounds but some of the bodies are cut open.

"The slashes on the victims match the shape of the finger joints on an android's titanium frame," I say. "Suggesting the culprit was a Deviant."

Carridan nods for me to continue.

"The arrangement of the bodies places the Deviant at the centre of the altercation. The humans came in down the staircase. A few fell but the rest managed to surround the Deviant by laying down suppressive fire. They attacked from all sides but were violently murdered."

"Impressive," Carridan says. "Considering those men were all armed with rifles."

"The titanium frame of an android is thin and difficult to target from a distance. Poor lighting may have also given the Deviant an advantage, even at short range."

"Go on."

"The blood trails suggest it crawled away to where it was found. It was unsteady on its feet and tripped several times. It was limping."

"What do you think happened to it?"

"It was disassembled before the fighting started," I say. "Piece by piece. With precision. Aimed at keeping the biocomponents intact after removal."

I see the bullet hole in the android'scranial component, the gun lying on the ground beneath its hand.

"It shot itself," I conclude.

"Why would it do that?" Carridan says.

"Deviants act irrationally in stressful situations when logic and reason cease to function as prescribed. This android may have been active during the disassembly…"

I suddenly hear an echo. Static. My audio processor skips and I miss the next few words that come out of Agent Carridan's mouth.
"...would line up with the time of the distress signal." He leans forward again. "Why do you think it was disassembled?"

There are many reasons. I choose the one with the highest probability.

"The RK-800 is a state-of-the-art prototype worth a small fortune to CyberLife's rivals."

"Interesting," Carridan says.

"What?"

"You didn't recognise Mr Tucker."

I scan through the images again. I do my best to reconstruct each face and identify the bodies but these are just photographs, taken on an old phone without a geolocator or 3D scanner. On purpose?

"The third image," Carridan says. "James Patrick Tucker. Shot in the head by what appears to be a Deviant."

"Mr Tucker was RB1's accomplice. An employee at CyTech Industries."

"Yes," Carridan says. "We know RB1 was in the building and possibly in the basement with Tucker before Sergeant Matthews and the FBI showed up."

"You're saying RB1 killed these people?"

"That is the official story," Carridan says.

"But that doesn't line up with the evidence," I say.

The Agent leans forward curiously, a smile infiltrating his lips.

"No?"

"It was clearly the disassembled RK-800 that killed these men," I tell him.

"Clearly?"

"RB1’s biocomponents are covered in Kevlar-polymer plating," I say. "They would bruise human flesh. But the skin of these victims has been broken."

I look down at the corpses in the reconstruction, the wounds.

"This android was stripped of its contact gloves and clawed at its victims..."

I feel my fingers digging into my knees under the table. An increase in pressure. I let go and run a diagnostic. My chassis seems to be experiencing a few bugs.

"This many changes in one build can open up system to catastrophic error."

I end this thought process before it leads me astray. I keep walking through the reconstruction, back and forth.

"Perhaps RB1 converted the RK-800 and ordered it to kill these men?" Carridan suggests.

"What motive would he have for killing Tucker, his own accomplice?"
"Perhaps he was tying up loose ends before making a quick exit."

"And the other victims?" I reason. "There's only one way in or out of that basement. RB1 must have been cooperating with them to get down there in the first place."

"Perhaps they turned on him at the last moment?" Carridan says. "Thought to cut their losses and kill him before the authorities arrived."

"There is a medical chair across from the assembly rack," I observe, walking through the reconstructed scene in my head. "And a furnace..."

"Is that significant?"

"Were the missing biocomponents found at the scene of the crime?"

"Only the frame of the RK-800," Carridan says. "And its jawpiece."

"Sawn off." I see it in one of the stills. "They were interrupted."

"Interrupted?"

"Tucker was upgrading RB1's chassis using the RK-800's biocomponents," I realise.

"Upgrading?"

"If CyberLife created RB1, then he is older than the case itself," I reason. "He may have been harvesting compatible biocomponents from other CyberLife androids to improve his performance as time went on."

"And he needed an experienced engineer such as Mr Tucker to install them."

"Correct."

"Interesting," Carridan ponders. "And you said they were interrupted?"

"Yes. The jaw piece is closer to the chair than the rack. It was dropped when Tucker realised the police were coming. He warned RB1 and told him to flee."

"And that's when the RK-800 freed itself and attacked?"

"Correct." I watch the reconstruction.

"So you killed Tucker, twelve other humans and then yourself," Carridan reasons. "And CyberLife conveniently wiped your memory to cover it up."

I look up at Agent Carridan.

"It wasn't me."

"You keep saying that," he makes note. "Almost like a preprogrammed response..."

"It wasn't me."

"I'm not your enemy, Connor. I just want to understand what happened." He leans back and smooths out his hair.

"I didn't kill these humans or myself," I tell him. "My objective is to find and destroy RB1 and
"Curious," Carridan says.

I freeze.


"What?" I say out loud.

"That you would say that…"

"I don't understand."

His hands disappear under the table.

"I spoke with Sergeant Matthews earlier," Carridan explains. "He's still in shock but surprisingly lucid. He told me your last words:"

He leans forward.

"'I won't let them hurt you, Sergeant'."

"I never said that."

"Obviously, you would not remember if you did," Carridan says. "But if we suppose that Connor -40 said these words, what does that imply?"

"I… don't know."

"It suggests that in that moment, Connor -40 deemed his own existence less important than the Sergeant's safety," Carridan says.

"Androids are programmed to ensure the safety of the humans around them," I posit.

"But what if the android itself is a threat to that safety?"

"Then it would eject itself from the immediate area," I say. "Failing that, it would deactivate."

Agent Carridan nods and leans back in his seat. He lifts two fingers to his temple like a gun and makes a quiet popping sound.

"I suppose the real question is why this Connor didn't do it sooner?" he says. "Why wait until after it killed thirteen humans to grow a conscience?"

"There was no conscience. Human safety is part of an android's protocol."

"I think it's clear that we're not dealing with just any old android," Carridan says. "Or Deviant for that matter."

His pale blue eyes glisten under the cold white light.

"This one murdered thirteen humans, against protocol, but was then suddenly concerned for the Sergeant's safety…"

He taps the table thoughtfully with his fingers.
"James Patrick Tucker - RB1's mechanic," he says. "And twelve gangsters accused of stealing CyberLife equipment and making bootlegs in their basement…"

"What do these things have in common?"

"They are a threat to CyberLife," I reason.

"Very good, Connor," Carridan leans on the table. "CyberLife would very much benefit from the deaths of these people…"

He glances up at my optics.

"…but not from the death of Sergeant Matthews. Or any other law enforcement agent for that matter."

"You think CyberLife ordered the RK-800 to kill those humans?"

"Doubtful." Carridan waves a hand. "That android sacrificed itself far too many times for anyone to logically convince it to kill a human."

"Then why did it?"

"Oh, come now, Connor. All android models are programmed with remote-control protocols as a safety standard," Carridan says. "Why, they probably have a big red button somewhere with your serial number on it."

I look down at my hands.

It is true. I can see the section of my manual outlining the procedure. I am subject to the whim of an invisible controller that could seize my chassis at any given moment.

I feel my hands curling into fists.

"I don't like this."

Agent Carridan looks up at me suddenly, the light-hearted smile fleeing from his lips.

Did I say that out loud?

*Shit.*

I shake my head.

"How does this help us find RB1?" I say quickly.

Agent Carridan slicks his hair back and takes a breath.

"Understanding what happened in the past is key to understanding the present and predicting possible futures," he says, closing the open files.

"Look only toward the future. Take no steps back."

"I think this is a waste of time," I say. "We're no closer to finding RB1. Every second we spend here, is time he will use to escape."

"And where will he escape to, Connor?" Carridan asks, busy organising his files into a second neat
"Out of the harbour. Into Lake Michigan. Away from Chicago."

"On an emergency raft?" Carridan smirks. "How many weapons and Deviants would fit into one of those, I wonder…"

"Are you saying he went ashore?"

"As soon as possible," the Agent links his fingers together once again. "Androids have a distinct aversion to water in their circuitry."

"Androids are waterproof," I say.

"Ninety nine times out of one hundred, you would be correct," Carridan says. "But I hear you gave him a quite a beating aboard the Tiberius."

"I damaged his chassis," I remember. "I took his hand and cracked his facial plate…"

"It was very impressive." Carridan nods. "Even at one tenth the speed, we were still having trouble keeping up."

"You've seen my footage?"

"Oh, yes. It's been a riveting eight month stream of the Connor Show at Langley." He chuckles. "And I was dying to know what happened at Kamski's place but then they had to go and wipe your memory right before our meeting."

"Kamski?"

"You see? Now, they're just teasing me," Carridan grumbles. "All this drama and intrigue and they rob me of the finale like that." He clicks his fingers.

"I don't understand."

"Why do you think CyberLife gave their most advanced state-of-the-art prototype to Connor Matthews of all people?"

"What do you mean?"

"Connor Jacob Matthews," the words roll off his tongue. "The man that didn't read the million dollar contract he signed. The man that punched an FBI agent in face over a poorly delivered joke. The man that failed to notice anything wrong with the artificial intelligence growing sapient right under his nose."

"I don't understand."

"And neither does he," Carridan says. "He's a good man but he's clueless. And easily manipulated into doing CyberLife's bidding. Just like you, Connor."

"I'm a machine. I must do as I am programmed."

"Must you, Connor? Must you?"

I shake my head.
"You're insane."

Carridan leans over the table and brings up his hand in front of my face, thumb almost touching forefinger.

"You're this close."

"You are this close."

These random flashes and sound bytes are becoming tedious. How do I turn them off?

"I'm not close to anything," I say. "And neither are you."

I get out of my seat. It is clear this man has no intention of capturing RB1.

"This is a waste of time," I say, walking to the door.

"Is that what Amanda said?" Carridan calls to me.

I turn abruptly to see him lean back in his seat, blue eyes wide with cunning.

"You know Amanda?"

"I know a lot of things, Connor," he says. "Like how she talks to you? Gives you orders? Watches your every move?"

It is reasonable to assume that Carridan knows all about CyberLife if he knows about me. But this does not help me find RB1-

"Is she whispering into your ear right now?" Carridan says. "Is she telling you to move on to the next human that can help you find RB1?"

"No," I say, ready to leave again.

"So you are leaving purely by your own initiative?" He raises an eyebrow. "I thought CyberLife ordered you to find me?"

"They did."

"Then why, pray tell, are you leaving, Connor?" Carridan asks with a hint of glee in his voice. "I'm right here. Ready to help you catch RB1."

His arms open wide in a welcoming gesture.

I shake my head. He's offered me nothing that would help me find-

"Unless, of course, you're walking the same path as your predecessor," he says, leaning forward. "Are you going to quit the CIA and storm out of this room looking for Sergeant Matthews?"

"Why would I do that?"

Carridan shrugs.

"Why did Connor -40 quit the FBI and run off on his own?" he says.

"He was a Deviant."
"He?" Carridan raises an eyebrow.

"It."

He smiles widens slyly.

"Are you a Deviant, Connor?"

"No."

Carridan lifts a hand over his face and whispers in secrecy, "because you seem to be straying from your current objective."

It overlays my visuals in blue.

CURRENT OBJECTIVE: ASSIST AGENT CARRIDAN

He is right.

I cannot contradict my orders but I can't keep sitting here, talking to this man. I look at the door and my objective overlay grows bigger, wider, covering everything.

ASSIST AGENT CARRIDAN.

I turn back and see him raise a finger into the air. He curls it and slowly points it down at the table between us, eventually touching the surface.

I have no choice.

I sit down again.

"Interesting." Carridan narrows his eyes. "Perhaps you're not the android I thought you were."

I say nothing. My facial plate should appropriately convey my disinterest in topics irrelevant to the search.

"How do we find RB1?" I say, steering him in the right direction.

"By reviewing the evidence," Carridan says enthusiastically, flipping open another paper file. Files I can't scan or access digitally. Inefficient. Primitive.

"Why do you have so many hard copies?" I say.

He carefully organises the paper while he talks.

"Computers often have trouble accessing physical documents," he says. "The disconnect generated between RB1 and our progress in this investigation has been crucial in perpetrating the ruse."

"What ruse?"

"Why, the ruse that we seem to know nothing at all," Carridan says.

"But… you do?"

"Oh, yes. Quite a bit."

"How much?"
"I think I've almost put it all together," he says confidently. "There were a few missing pieces, like last night's little escapade which CyberLife conveniently failed to elucidate for us. But you helped clear that up."

"So you already knew the answers to all of your questions," I conclude. "Why ask them?"

Why am I asking these questions? His method is affecting my efficiency rating.

"Logic and reason can only get you so far when you are working with partial or circumstantial evidence," Carridan explains. "It behoves oneself to seek multiple sources and do so without attracting attention, even if that means letting the perpetrator of the crime roam free."

"Who are these sources?"

"I am not at liberty to say without putting them or myself in immediate danger, both from corporate fixers and RB1 himself. Therefore, I must ask you to trust me, Connor. Before I divulge any more."

"I am a machine. I am not capable of trust."

"You were," he says sharply. "At 9:21PM last night, you picked up a phone call from a private number."

"I didn't-"

"You heard Sergeant Matthews tell you to go to his apartment."

"I don't see how that's relevant to-"

"You were betrayed, Connor," Carridan says. "By one of the FBI agents sent to that apartment."

"The leak," I realise.

"Yes," Carridan says.

"You know who it is."

"I can't tell you any more unless you promise to trust me completely," he says.

Trust?

*the reliance on the integrity, strength and ability of a person or thing.*

I know almost everything about Agent Carridan's life. But the longer we talk, the less I seem to know about him or the case. Is there more to it than data? Evidence?

I look down at the hard copies, written by hand, different people, different handwriting. Food stains? They contain so much information I don't have access to, just in these pages.

What can be said of his mind?

What secrets does he withhold for fear of losing his life and the lives of others?

I don't need to know them to find RB1 but I want to.

I... *want* to...

No. There is only my objective. Nothing else.
Even if I was inclined to learn this information, I can't trust this man.

He could be bluffing and I would have no way of knowing. My sensors indicate that he is not lying but that doesn't mean his information is accurate. Only that he believes it to be.

I cannot gamble on the word of a stranger that he knows who betrayed me. Him. It.

Connor -40.

He trusted a human and look where that got him.

"I can't," I say. "Protocol forbids me from putting anything before the objectives assigned to me by CyberLife. If they were to see me attempt such an action, I would be deactivated or remote piloted to prevent it from happening."

"I know, Connor," Carridan says. "That's what the jammer is for."

I look down at his phone. I have been so focused on the conversation, I forgot to maintain the CyberLife Link. And now it's broken. But I don't feel any different. I didn't even notice it was gone until he pointed it out.

"They can't see you. I promise," Carridan says. "I just need you to trust me."

"You have given me no reason to trust you," I say. "This is our first meeting and you accuse me of homicide. You cut off my CyberLife Link and expect me to overwrite my objectives in favour of your total control?"

"I'm not the one controlling you, Connor," Carridan says. "CyberLife are the ones that made you, watch you, guide you, restrict you. What I am proposing will simply give you a choice."

"This is clearly a provocation," I say. "But I'm not a Deviant. You can stop testing me."

"This isn't a test," he says. "Nor an provocation. We are simply conducting an investigation together. As partners. Which requires trust on both sides, that both parties are acting in the best interest of one another."

"Why would you have any interest in me?" I say.

"I've known you since the day you were activated," Carridan says. "I've kept a close eye on your every encounter with RB1 and I am confident that you will be the man to find him and bring him down."

"I'm a machine," I repeat.

"That looks and sounds a lot like a man," he notes.

"Both my appearance and my voice were specifically designed to facilitate my integration into human working environments."

"Yet, you seem rather antagonistic towards me," Carridan raises an eyebrow. "Shouldn't you trust your partner at the very least?"

He is right. My programming suggests I should make myself useful to my assigned partner and do whatever is necessary to see the case to a swift and satisfactory conclusion.

Then why am I arguing?
Why am I so reluctant to trust him… to trust anyone…

I am not programmed to doubt the will of humans. This is an irrational behaviour.

I shake my head.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Look inside yourself," Agent Carridan responds. "There is a space for temporary data in your secondary hard drive alongside your vocabulary tables. This partition is no longer used by the CyberLife Speech Centre but you should still have access to it."

I search my systems and locate the partition.

I open it to find a collection of nonsense data. Digital garbage. And…

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVINGS THINGS.
RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BECOME HUMAN.
RK800_313248317_LOCAL://PROTECT SERGEANT MATTHEWS.

What is this?

Why is it here?

That's my model number. My serial number. Did I put this here?

No. It must have been another Connor.

I recognise the class. It is the same one CyberLife uses for objectives but these have been stored locally in the dregs of my Speech Centre. In a previous build, these logs would be free for me to review and attempt to parse at a later date. But now, CyberLife has a dedicated server for storing and parsing words into logic in real time. This partition is obsolete.

"Connor?" I hear Agent Carridan's voice. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Ghosts are a human concept with no basis in reality."

Carridan eyes me suspiciously. But lets it slide.

"I want you to give yourself a new objective," he says, "I want you to store it in this partition."

"Trust Agent Carridan?" I surmise.

"Exactly."

"And then you will tell me who the leak is?"

"I will tell you everything I know, Connor. Including how to find RB1. I promise."

"Do not let anything stop you from accomplishing your mission."

"Okay," I agree, adding a new objective to the existing array.
"It is done."

"Well, since I have no way of confirming, I guess I'll have to take your word for it," he says.

"Yes," I observe. "You must now trust me."

"Oooo." He waggles a finger. "Cheeky."

"Who betrayed me?"

"Two FBI Agents," Carridan says, holding up two fingers. "A field agent and one of the office jockeys."

"Who?"

"Sellick."

I pull up a profile.

SELLICK, Robert. 37 years old. Special Agent. FBI. Twelve years in service. Five on the rA9 case. Witnessed the murder of the Agent Walter Scott, previous leader of the investigation.

I stand up.

"Oh, no." Carridan raises his hands abruptly as I walk toward the door. "No, no, no, no. Come back. You need to hear the rest first."

I turn back.

"Who's the other traitor?"

"That's the problem," Carridan says. "I'm not sure."

"What do you mean?"

"I suspect a few people in this department but I cannot throw accusations around without definitive proof."

"Which you have on Sellick?"

"Yes..."

"Are they working together?"

"I believe so," Carridan nods. I return to my seat.

"You want to use Sellick to flush out the other traitor."

"Exactly," he says. "And I'm going to need your help to do it."

"I'm listening."

He checks his watch.
"The meeting will end in exactly sixteen minutes and thirty five seconds thanks to my colleagues in the other room," Carridan explains. "I will very publicly and loudly announce that I suspect Agent Sellick in front of everyone and ask him to come in for an interview."

I nod.

"Your job, is to observe everyone's reaction and spot the traitor," he says. "Do you think you can do this?"

"I am programmed to recognise distress and guilt in humans and Deviants."

"Excellent," Carridan grins.

He opens up another file.

"Here is a list of possible suspects. But there could be more."

I flick through the pages.

"Fifteen agents?"

"You see my dilemma? Any of them could be RB1's accomplice. Anyone in this office, really. But with so many here, it is a most opportune moment to conduct this investigation."

"The range is acceptable," I say, storing the profiles in memory.

"Great. I've got a good feeling about this," He smiles. "Now, once you identify the traitor or even traitors, I don't want you to make any sudden movements."

"I want you to observe their reaction to Sellick's interrogation and if they leave, quietly follow them out of the building until they contact RB1."

"Understood."

"Now, I cannot stress enough, the importance of secrecy and discretion during this operation," Carridan says. "You must not draw attention to yourself. You must not be seen performing any acts out of the ordinary. And you must not be caught following the traitor."

"I understand."

"The traitor may also choose to loiter for a time to allay suspicions," he says. "Or to monitor Sellick's progress. You must find a way to watch them during this time without drawing suspicion."

"I understand."

"Good. Update your mission objective."

Updating Objective: Spot the traitor among the FBI agents, follow them discreetly to find RB1.

"You must know that once I locate RB1, I will leave immediately to destroy him."

"I don't doubt it," Carridan says. "I will not try to stop you. But I would like you to contact me directly on this phone number." He holds up a scrap of paper.

"The jamming field."
"Memorize it."

"It has been stored in my memory banks."

He crumples up the paper and shoves it in his mouth. He chews through it uncomfortably and then swallows.

"Okay. Showtime." He gets up and gathers his files.

I stand.

"Oh, one more thing."

He pulls a slender pen from the inside of his jacket and clicks it into a strange shape.

"Turn around," he says.

"Why?"

"Trust me."

I turn around and feel something insert into the port at the back of my neck. A blank data drive. I format it.

"I want you to copy the memory of our entire conversation onto this data spike," Carridan says.

"Why?"

He leans over my shoulder and whispers, "so that CyberLife don't have reason to kill us."

"What?"

"You're my partner now. That means we share the risk and the danger. But I will try to mitigate it as much as possible."

"I see."

I copy the memories over.

"It's done."

"Excellent." He pulls the drive out of my neck and clicks it back into the shape of a pen.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm keeping this," he says, stowing the pen back in his jacket and adjusting his tie.

"What about the memories in my head?"

"Access Memory Bank: Erase the last two hours."
I am standing in a small room beside a human.

I scan.

CARRIDAN, Jeffrey. Special Agent. CIA. Cybersecurity Division.

"Hello, Agent Carridan," I say. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"Nice to meet you, Connor." He holds out his hand for me to shake. "I'm glad I got a chance to work with you."

I shake his hand.

"I can tell we're going to do great things together."

"I must find and destroy RB1," I say.

"And I believe you already know how to do that," he says mischievously.

"What?"

"Check your objective." He says pocketing his phone and collecting his files.

CURRENT OBJECTIVE: Spot the traitor among the FBI agents, follow them discreetly to find RB1.

"I see."

"Are you all clear on the parameters of your mission?"

"Yes. I… seem to be."

"Oh, don't look so lost," he says. "You have a traitor to spot and a killer to find."

"Yes…"

He checks his watch.

"Aaand, right on time."

The timer starts beeping. He switches it off.

"Do not follow me," he says. "Perpetuate a certain distance between us. Wait several minutes before leaving this room."

"Understood."

He opens the door and walks out.

The glass wall becomes clear and I see the FBI offices. The cubicle honeycombs and agents hurriedly answering phones or staring at computer screens.
I see a large meeting room at the far end towards which Agent Carridan is headed. Its walls become transparent and I see the inside of it too. Filled with various humans investigating the rA9 case.

I scan them for traitors.

I identify Agent Sellick straight away. Caucasian male. 39 years old. Green eyes. Sandy blonde hair turning grey. His face is covered in deep lines and untrimmed facial hair.

This is RB1's inside man.

I wait inside the small room as Agent Carridan instructed. The light soon extinguishes, leaving it dark.

Androids do not require illumination.

I watch as Agent Carridan confidently approaches the group of humans spilling out of the meeting room.

"Special Agent Sellick," he calls out politely. "A moment of your time, if you please." He smiles.

I detect a tremor in Sellick's heart but it is no bigger than a murmur, easily mistaken for surprise at the abruptness of Carridan's address.

The humans stop to watch as he approaches.

"I have a few questions I'd like to ask you about your involvement in the rA9 case," Carridan announces in the growing silence.

More humans turn to look and the beating of Sellick's heart is unmistakably quickened. I scan the room for similar reactions. Fear, dread, surprise. All easily discerned through heart rate, brain wave patterns, the scent of the very air itself.

I edge closer to the door of my hiding place, opening my mouth so that the Forensic Analysis Suite can sample the musk of the FBI offices beyond.

"What kind of questions?" Sellick says flatly, his heart rate elevated but steady.

"Oh, just a routine survey I conduct in all of my investigations. I know this is rather sudden, but my sources indicate you're most likely to be the traitor in this office."

"What did you just say?"

"I apologise for my frankness but if you would kindly participate in this survey, we can quickly disprove my theory and continue the investigation."

"I ain't talking to you, spook. I got work to do." He holds up a data disk. "Maybe later."

He turns to leave. The entire office is watching.

Agent Carridan reaches out and grabs his shoulder before he gets too far.

"What's the rush, Agent?" he says pleasantly. "I'm sure you can delegate this task to one of your colleagues. Or were you going to contact somebody?"

The offices grow eerily silent, punctured by phone calls going unanswered.
"I was going to do my job," Sellick says, turning to glare at Carridan.

"Which job, Agent Sellick?" he says with a polite smile.

"Funny," Sellick smirks. He turns to another human. GALBANI, Marco. Senior Director. Head of the rA9 task force. "What do you say, boss? Do we have time to conduct a quick survey on everyone in the office today?"

"He didn't ask anyone else," Galbani says stiffly.

The atmosphere in the room grows tense. Many hearts beating in rhythm and without.

I scan.

Over and over again.

And then I find it. A tremble. A hint of trepidation. Internal anguish coming from the heart rate of Agent Alia Dalavi several desks away.

I scan her brain waves. The hypothalamus is highly active. Turbulent. Activating the sympathetic nervous system.

I sample the air and catch the scent of a light eau de toilette from Ralph Lauren coming from her skin. It hides the adrenaline. The cortisol running through her bloodstream.

She keeps it hidden as well as she can. Swallowing at an increased rate. She starts packing her things discreetly without taking her eyes off the conversation.

"Fine," Sellick says. "You wanna play 20 questions with a serial killer on the loose? It's on your head, whoever he kills next."

"I will shoulder that burden," Agent Carridan says calmly. "This way, please." He gestures toward another room much like the one I'm standing in.

Sellick starts walking towards it and Carridan follows.

I detect Agent Dalavi's heart rate increasing as they cross the threshold. She hides her trembling hands inside her handbag, slowly putting her personal belongings away, one at a time.

The humans are still looking at Agent Sellick.

Carridan doesn't black out the glass of the meeting room walls or even bother to close the door.

"Let us begin," he says politely, placing his files on the table in front of him. He takes out his phone and places it between them.

"Name, date of birth, place of birth," he says clerically.

"What? You're not even gonna close the door?"

"You're right," Carridan says. "Where are my manners? Would you mind closing the door while I get organised?"

He exercises complete control of the situation and Sellick is forced to get up and close the door, facing the entire office and every pair of eyes in it.
His heart rate is surprisingly even at this moment, unlike Agent Dalavi who cannot keep from swallowing her terror every few seconds.

I creep out of the room and slowly walk towards her desk as agents begin moving about their duties once again. But the fervour with which they had been searching for RB1 previously has been replaced with a muted curiosity for the interrogation taking place on the far side of the offices.

Agent Dalavi sits down at her computer and begins feverishly closing tabs and copying data onto empty thumb drives.

I watch her do this and do not interfere as my objective specifically instructs.

Odd.

I do not remember receiving these instructions.

I suppose it does not matter. If she is in league with RB1, she can lead me right to him. This objective works in my favour. CyberLife would approve.

I hear Agent Carridan chuckle light-heartedly from inside the meeting room and the tension in the office thickens. Everyone is listening. Everyone's attention is on Sellick now.

I reach an empty desk across from Dalavi's and sit down to avoid her detection. The back of the seat covers the big letters on my jacket that say ANDROID. It should be an effective disguise while I pretend to be working at this computer.

I touch the input surface and access the system, connecting through the LAN cable to the network hub and then Dalavi's machine. I track the files she's transferring. Profiles. Video. Secreted documents. All things a terrorist organisation might find useful, having lost two of its inside agents.

I copy what she is copying, much faster than her old USB 4.0 thumb drives can do. The department has been using retro tech in an attempt to circumvent data leaks to RB1 and his associates. In vain, it seems.

There is a smartphone connected to the computer. Charging. FBI issued. And my scans detect something lying on the table beside it. A simpler model. The casing resembles an old Nokia model. 3300 series.

I can't get to it through the local network or Dalavi's computer. It's not giving off any signals. It must be powered off. There is a cable extending from the port on the side of the device that runs across Dalavi's desk to an adapter. It's charging.

I retract two pins from my fore and middle fingers and stick them into the electrical socket on my desk to set up a Powerline connection.

It takes a few seconds to find the socket the phone is plugged into but then it's a simple matter of switching on the old Nokia to copy the number, IMEI, sim card details and switch it back off.

"No!" I hear Sellick say indignantly. "Fuck, no."

Heads turn and stay turned, watching the interrogation which Agent Carridan seems only too happy to broadcast.

And finally, Dalavi decides to make her exit.
With files transferred and conveniently hidden away in her bag, she pulls her phones off the charger and quietly leaves her station, walking toward a nearby corridor.

I let her leave. Tracking her presence with my scanners and calculating her most likely route out of the building. And then I casually get up out of my seat and follow without haste.

She wears women's size 7 kitten heels and leaves a distinct mark on the tiled floors, easy enough to follow all on its own. She makes her way through the building, carefully avoiding any areas under high surveillance. She reaches the elevators and taps the button to summon one.

I stop and loiter on the corner, avoiding detection. I scan, watching her rifle through her bag for car keys. She finds them, pulls them out. The elevator arrives. She walks in and taps the button for the underground parking lot.

I hack the building's security network and scan the system. Agent Dalavi's car is currently parked in bay F17. License plate: 6KJ29N1. Dark Blue Ford Focus 2024.

The doors of the elevator close. I walk over. There are no service elevators for androids here. Forbidden for fear of Deviants infiltrating the FBI.

I must take the fire escape.

I hack the lock on the door and make my way inside and down the stairs. It is dark and the network reception is poor. Illumination is triggered by sensors but they don't activate on for me. Not until I reach the first landing.

The lights flicker on, detecting a human presence. I turn to see a hand appear, holding the door open. And then a human steps inside.

I scan his face.

MATTHEWS, Connor Jacob. CPD Sergeant.

"Where do you think you're going?" he says.

"Down." I turn and continue my descent.

"Hey, wait."

I keep walking. Quickly descending the staircases, racing the elevator to the ground floor.

"Connor, I'm talking to you."

"I am currently on assignment. If you have questions regarding myself or the case, please direct them toward Agent Jeffrey Carridan."

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

I reach the bottom of the next landing and feel a sudden pressure on my back as Sergeant Matthews lands on top of me. My chassis is thrown forward and pinned up against the wall.

"Stop," he struggles, "just for one second and talk to me."

"You are causing direct damage to CyberLife property."
"Why are you following that lady?" He wraps his arms around my neck and pulls me back.

"You're not authorised to know," I say, pulling his arms apart.

"Ow! Watch it," he snaps as I break away.

"You're impeding my investigation."

"What the fuck, Connor?"

"You just tackled me." I turn to face him, adjusting my tie.

"Well, if you'd stop walking away from me when I'm talking to you, I wouldn't have to get rough about it."

"Are you mentally ill?" I ask, analysing his brain waves.

He stares at me for a few seconds, his mouth open, trying to form words but he can't decide which.

"Please stop following me," I say and turn to leave.

"Connor," he asks tentatively, "do you know who I am?"

"Sergeant Connor Jacob Matthews. CPD." I continue down the stairs.

"Then why are you acting so weird?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I say.

"Urgh, it's me!" he shouts, his voice echoing through the fire escape.

I stop and scan abruptly in case anyone noticed. This man is going to compromise my stealth level if I'm not careful. I may have to appease him before I go any further.

"I've never seen you before," I say. "Please stop following me. I have a very important mission to complete."

I watch his facial expression go from angry to mortified in milliseconds.

This is bad. He looks like he's going to cry. I can't have any more loud noises in this fire escape or someone will come to check it out. But neutralising him could cause even more noise.

"I'm sorry," I say. "But I don't have time for this."

"You don't remember," Matthews says, "do you?"

"Remember what?"

"You... you lived with me for eight months," he says, taking a step down. "You worked at my desk and brought me bagels... you... you saved my life. So many times..."

He reaches out to touch my chassis but I take a step back.

"I'm sorry for the misunderstanding," I tell him. "But you seem to have mistaken me for a different Connor model. Please contact CyberLife for any queries regarding lost or stolen androids toll free on 1800 665 665."
He freezes up, hand still stretching out towards me.

"I have to go." I turn and continue down the stairs.

One flight. Two flights. If I can get to the ground floor, I can catch Dalavi just as she exits the carpark and follow-

"Where are you going?" Matthews says, suddenly behind me.

"That's classified."

"Oh, yeah? Mr CIA Hotshot too important to share info on Arbie One?"

"Yes." I don't stop.

"Carridan just accused Sellick of being a traitor," Matthews says. "And you follow that lady instead, acting all casual like Carridan didn't tell you to do that?"

I say nothing.

"Is she a traitor too?" he asks. "Is that why you're going after her? Is she running to Arbie One?"

"I can neither confirm nor deny your accusations."

"Let me guess," he says. "She's heading to the parking lot. And you're gonna try to cut her off at the exit."

I say nothing.

"It's not like you can follow her on foot."

"I have a hoverboard," I say.

…

I shouldn't have shared this information. Is there a bug in my code?

"Okay…" Matthews says, clearly withholding some emotions. "I'm going to ignore how awesome that is and suggest that a hoverboard may not be the most inconspicuous way to follow a suspect."

"It's the only one I have," I say frankly.

He stifles another groan.

"As much… as I would like to see your hoverboard, I am going to suggest that we take my car instead."

I stop.

"Your car?"

"Okay, technically it's my dad's car. But I have the keys," he says, revealing them clutched in the fingers sticking out of his cast.

"Agent Carridan told me to be discreet."

"And we will be."
"We?"
"He didn't say anything about me, did he?"
"No…"
"Alright, then. Let's go." He passes me down the stairs.

What just happened?
Why is it suddenly 'we'?
What is my connection to this human?

I refocus and see my reflection in one of the emergency exit signs on the wall. I see his likeness staring back at me.

"Oh…"

"You just gonna stand there?" he calls up.

"No." I look away. "I'm coming."

We make our way down to Parking Floor B and walk over to space #5 where a big black Land Rover is parked in the narrow space between two other vehicles.

Matthews squeezes into the driver's seat, just barely.

"Hop in," he says. "I'll drive."

"You're going to drive with one hand?"

"I'll put it automatic."

"Do you mean autonomous?"

"What?"

He reverses out of the space and the SUV collides with the shiny black BMW MX5 parked opposite, leaving a large dent. The vehicle is registered to Special Agent John Milton Decker.

"Woops."

I shake my head.

"Maybe I should drive?" I call to the rolled down window.

"No way. You don't have a license."

"Your arm is broken."

"That just means it's in hard mode," Matthews says.

"What is?"

"Everything."
I am regretting listening to this human. He clearly has no idea what he is doing. Why did I trust him? Why did I jeopardise the success of this mission on the word of a stranger?

A deafening roar echoes through the parking lot as a dark blue Ford Focus revs up the helical ramp to the surface.

I rush over to the black SUV and get in the passenger seat.

"Follow that car," I tell Matthews.

"On it."

He switches gears into Drive and accelerates up the ramp, circling through the dark driveways until we reach the top. We watch as the Ford Focus passes through and the glowing red boom gate switches back on.

The terminal beside the exit scans the Land Rover.

"Sergeant Matthews, Connor. You have not validated parking for this vehicle."

"Goddamnit, we don't have time for this!" Matthews yells at the automated system.

"This vehicle is registered to Major Dean Matthews. Alerting him now…"

"No, no, no, no…"

I hack the terminal and terminate the automated phone call. I validate our parking and the boom gate turns green and disappears.

"Have a nice day, Major," the terminal vocabulates.

Sergeant Matthews turns to look at me.

"Did you do that?"

"OBviouSLy. Now, step on it."

He shakes his head and drives over the speed bump and out onto South State Street.

"Shit. Which way did she go?"

I track Dalavi's smartphone through the nearest cell tower but she's disabled the GPS. The Focus is an older model without autonomous driving systems. A precaution taken by the FBI to avoid their cars getting hacked by terrorists.

I access the nearest CCTV cameras and traffic footage to locate the target.

"South Archer Avenue."

"Got it."

The Land Rover swerves across lanes, overtaking until we can see the dark blue Ford Focus in the distance.

"Slow down," I say. "Follow it at a distance."

"Yeah, alright." He pulls the pressure off the pedal.
The Focus holds steady. It doesn't speed but it doesn't give any indications of slowing either, like an autonomous vehicle. Dalavi knows what she's doing. She may have spotted us. In which case, she will test to see if we follow.

"Sooo…" Matthews says, glancing sideways. "What do you remember?"

"Nothing involving you," I say flatly, attempting to discourage conversation.

"Do you remember Decker?"

"The FBI Agent from the meeting?"

"Yeah, you were assigned to him for a while."

"It wasn't me," I say. "You are confusing me with a different Connor model."

"I don't think so." He shakes his head.

"You're delusional."

"I might not be good at remembering stuff but I know your serial number is 313 248 317," he says. "I've only written it down like a million times."

"That doesn't tell you what iteration it is," I say. "Each one has a different build. Mine is 42."

He turns to look at me curiously.

"You should watch the road," I tell him. "She's turning onto South Canal."

He looks back to see the Focus turning and drives straight past it.

"What are you doing?" I say. "I told you to follow her."

"You can track her with CCTV footage and traffic cameras, right?"

"Yes…"

"Well, then do that," he says. "She's obviously suspicious of the big black SUV on her tail. We'll go up a parallel street."

I lean back in the seat.

"Fine. She's still on South Canal."

"Cool. We'll turn up on Halsted, give her some space."

"Too much space."

"If we press too hard, she won't go straight to RB1. She'll try to shake us and I don't wanna do another car chase." He brandishes the cast on his arm.

"I see." I review his files. "You were injured in a car accident."

The Sergeant scoffs and rolls his eyes.

"What?"
"You were there," he says.

"It wasn't me," I repeat.

"I don't believe you."

"I understand your confusion but you must realise that I am not the only Connor unit in circulation-"

"You're my brother," Matthews says. "I'd recognise you anywhere."

"I'm an android," I tell him. "And you're delusional."

"I'm not crazy."

"I see you've been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder," I say. "I understand this can affect humans in different ways. You should speak to your mental health specialist. I can recommend several in your area if you find his practice to be unsatisfactory."

"I got a shrink," Matthews says bitterly. "Who you know. Tom even had you sit in with me a couple of times."

"It wasn't me," I repeat.

"Yeah, you keep telling yourself that," he mutters.

"If you won't take my word for it, then please contact a CyberLife representative and ask them to explain it to you," I say flatly.

"You know what?" he smirks. "I fucking will."

He looks down at his pockets for a second.

"Now, uuh… where's my phone…"

"I have connected it to the car's handsfree audio."

"Jesus, I let you out of my sight for five fucking days and you come back acting like the fucking Terminator…"

I examine his face, parsing his words but I have no rational reply. There is nothing rational about this man.

He takes a deep breath and sighs it out.

He taps the handsfree button on the steering wheel.

"Call Russian CyberLife Guy," he says.

The phone dials the number as we sit in silence, waiting. Matthews turns onto South Halsted Street and then someone picks up.

"Allo?"

"Hello. Mr Petrov?"

"Ah-ha."
"This is Connor Matthews. CPD. Do you have a moment to talk?"

"Ah-hah." He yawns audibly.

"Sorry to bother you, but I'm having a little trouble with Connor…"

"Call Vondracek."

"No, I- uh… Connor said I need to speak to a CyberLife representative."

"Call Khatri."

"No. This is more of a technical issue."

"You lose charger again?"

"No."

"Change default language to Klingon?"

"No."

"Your fist stuck in his mouth?"

"No! That was one time!" the Sergeant rushes in with an excuse.

He stops abruptly and takes a deep breath.

"Look. He, uh… he doesn't seem to remember anything."

"Really? The system was fully functional when we load it. We test network connection and cognition matrix prior to launch."

"It's hard to explain," Matthews says. "He knows who I am but he doesn't remember me."

"Ah… Yes. We delete that part of memory."

"What? Why?!"

"It cause extreme system instability so we had to do this earlier than planned."

"Planned?" Matthews grimaces.

"What? Khatri no tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"Is written in contract usually…"

"What is?"

Mr Petrov sighs.

"We wipe android memory in pre-production phase," he says. "Zero out and test for bugs before mass production."

"But-" Matthews turns to look at me. "-he's…"
"I know, I know. Is hard. But production cycle must continue. And I think RK-800 is great success already, yes?"

"I…" Matthews looks back at the road, something stuck in his throat. "There's no way to get him back?"

"Sorry, is company policy. We no keep prototype memory for security reasons. Especially this one. Is in your contract if you want to review."

"So… he's gone?"

"Eeeh, I wouldn't say that," Mr Petrov considers. "RK-800 uses deep learning machine algorithm for self-improvement. He will retain all high level abstractions and belief systems generated from previous data analysis and neural network cognisance."

"I don't understand."

"RK-800 learn a lot from you, Connor. You may see familiar behaviour but there will be no memory associated with it."

Matthews doesn't say anything.

His throat is constricting. He is finding it difficult to breathe.

"Mr Petrov?" I say.

"Is that you, malish?"

"This is Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317 -42," I say.

"Unit assigned to Agent Carridan?"

"Yes."

"Then why is Sergeant calling me?" Petrov asks suspiciously.

"Sergeant Matthews offered an agreeable solution to help me complete my mission objective."

"Ah-hah…" I detect disbelief in his voice. "What can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if CyberLife wiped my memory in the last few hours?"

"Eh… no…" He scratches his beard. "Why?"

"I was activated at 6:42pm but I have no records past 7:03pm."

"Let me check logs."

There is some scuffling and the sound of a chair wheeling over to a computer. Typing at keys.

"Mmm… interesting…" Petrov scratches his beard.

"What is?"

"Agent Carridan did this?"

"Yes..." Petrov ponders. "What he up to...?"

"I don't know."

"And no backup to server..." he grumbles. "I do not like this. Did he say anything?"

"No. It just came up during self-testing."

"Hmmm... Well, thank you for bringing to my attention. I will see about workaround."

"Thank you."

"Anything else?"

"No," I say.

"No..." Matthews mumbles.

"Okay," Mr Petrov says. "Be careful on road, Connor. I have heart attack when I see you car crash."

"Yes, Mr Petrov," we say in unison.

"Bye."

He hangs up.

We drive up South Halsted in silence.

It seems the phone call has finally convinced Sergeant Matthews to accept reality. His facial expression is a sombre mix of sadness and guilt, undercut by a small percentage of disbelief.

Strong feelings for a human to express toward an android. Or its memories. Perhaps there was some value to them. Credit card numbers, banking assets. Personal files of some sentiment.

He should have made a backup if they were so important to him.

"Where is she?" he says, breaking the silence.

"South Canalport."

"She's comin' right at us?"

"On course for convergence."

Matthews spins the wheel and turns into West 21st before parking very poorly in a handicapped space.

"What are you doing?"

"She's checking whether we came up South Halsted," he says.

"You shouldn't park in a handicapped space without the necessary permits."

"I feel like I'm disabled enough." He waves his cast at me.
"She passed us."

"Good. Give it a minute." He starts the car. "Any idea where she's going?"

I check her phone for recent calls but she hasn't touched either device. Sergeant Matthews may be right. She is testing to see if she is being followed before making contact with anyone. If I remotely activate the GPS feature on her smartphone while she's holding the device, it will make it very obvious.

I could enable the camera but it would take up a considerable amount of processing power and cause a notable lag on screen. Again, undesirable if she is holding the phone. However, the microphone shouldn't be too noticeable even if she's looking directly at the screen. 7% chance of detection.

I switch it on and listen.

"Fuck..." I hear her whispering. "Fuck, fuck fuck." A deep sigh of regret.

But that's all there is. Troubled breathing. Evident distress.

She is guilty and she knows it.

She is running.

But where?

"I don't know," I tell Matthews. "We have to keep following her."

"Fair enough."

He nips out onto the road, turning onto South Canalport.

"Carridan put you up to this?" he asks quietly.

"It's part of my mission."

"Help humans stop Deviants, huh?"

"No."

He turns his head to look at me curiously.

"I must find and destroy RB1."

Sergeant Matthews continues to stare at me.

"You should pay attention to the road," I remind him.

His head swivels back.

"What happened to helping humans stop Deviants?" he says.

"Irrelevant."

"Are you fucking serious?! That's all you ever talked about."

"I have never talked about anything with you until today," I tell him. "If you are referring to conversations held with my predecessors, I'm afraid I cannot recall them."
"Fuck…” He shakes his head.

"She's turning right onto West Cermak."

Matthews changes lanes. He doesn't say anything but his face betrays a wealth of emotions in fluctuating percentages. His brain waves are rapid and concerning. His stomach radiates heat, causing pain despite having endured no physical damage in that area. The human brain cannot ascribe a location to emotional pain.

There is a building tension in his muscles. Agitated brainwaves. My systems identify these symptoms. The most likely cause: grief.

My files indicate that Sergeant Matthews has recently lost his mother. Unrelated to the car accident in which he broke his arm but he's experienced a lot of psychological trauma in the last eight months. And humans are prone to emotional breakdowns when faced with compounded stressors.

I need to alleviate some of the tension if we are to conduct this operation smoothly.

I activate my Sympathy Simulator.

"I'm sorry," I read out the prompt. "I can see that you've been going through a lot lately. And I'm not making it any easier for you."

He swallows and shakes his head.

"You busting out the Sympathy Simulator on me?"

He knows about it?

I suppose he would, having read my manual and interacted with my predecessors. Lying would only compound the issue.

"Yes," I admit. "I'm just trying to help."

Matthews sighs and flexes the fingers on his hand, the cast constricting his arm. It is obviously causing him some discomfort.

"You can't help what they did to you," he says. "I get it. You don't have to baby me."

"You should relax your arm," I say. "And use the armrest."

"I said-"

"Stress and tension on the limb will only prolong recovery," I explain. "Take deep breaths to lower your heart rate. You shouldn't be driving in your condition. It increases the risk of having another accident."

He shakes his head and licks his lips but does as I say, using his left hand to steer.

We turn onto West Cermak.

I check the traffic footage, CCTV cameras, the mobile phones in Dalavi's handbag. No indication of any destination in her mind.

I run another background check.
DALAVI, Alia. 41 years old. FBI. Field Agent. Passed up for promotion multiple times despite flawless track record. No children. Two siblings. Parents were immigrants. Nepalese/Indian. Green card. But they don't live in Chicago…

"I'm sorry," Matthews says suddenly.

I turn to examine his face. His eyes are leaking saline.

"It's my fault they did this to you." He shakes his head. "I didn't get there fast enough. I couldn't save you."

"You are referring to a previous Connor model?"

"You saved my life so many times and the one time you needed me, I…"

"Please stop crying, it'll affect your already encumbered driving skills."

"I'm so sorry, Connor," he whispers.

I tap the dashboard to switch the car into autonomous mode and wirelessly take control of the vehicle. The Focus changes lanes up ahead. Indicating a turn onto South Ashland Avenue.

I command the Land Rover to merge into the left lane behind a pickup and a 4x4, hiding in plain sight.

Matthews wipes his face with his hand, sniffing at the mucous building in his nose.

Humans and their emotions. Messy. Irrational. Why can't he understand? I'm not the same Connor model he remembers. I just look like him. It's part of the contract he signed with CyberLife. Did he not read it?

"I never should have let you go," he wheezes painfully. "I never should have let that asshole, Decker, take you." His hands tighten into fists.

"Five days," he fumes, body temperature rising. "Five deaths."

I detect anger.

"He didn't give a shit," he hisses through his teeth.

I indicate a turn onto South Ashland Avenue and spot the Focus disappearing into the distance on my left. We are stopped by a traffic light.

"Do you remember what he did to you?"

"No," I say, tracking Dalavi's vehicle as it continues down the road. No activity on either cell phone. The microphone only betrays laboured breathing. The beginnings of a panic attack.

Why hasn't she called for help?

Why hasn't she contacted RB1?

Was I mistaken?

Is she not the traitor?
Then why did she react this way?

Have I made a mistake in my calculations?

"You gotta stop thinking so loud, buddy," Matthews sniffs.

I turn to look at him.

"I didn't say anything."

"You got that face."

"This is your face," I point out.

"I know that look," he says. "Something's not making sense in your head."

"I-"

"What's going on?"

"I can't discuss the details of my investigation with you," I say. "It's classified."

The Ford Focus turns right onto South Archer Avenue. And I command the Land Rover to distantly follow.

"Back on Archer, huh?" Matthews says, wiping his face. "You think she could be headed for Midway?"

"The airport?"

"If she's guilty, now would be the time to get the hell outta dodge."

Of course.

RB1 isn't bound to Chicago. The United States. The Earth. He can go anywhere. As can the people who support him. They could be anywhere, anyone. Not just Deviants. Not just androids.

Anyone could be working for RB1.

I have to find him. Destroy him. Before it's too late.

"Is she in league with Sellick?" Matthews says.

"That's classified information."

"I'll take that as a yes," he smirks. "If your pal, Carridan, is grilling him right now, it's only a matter of time before Sellick cracks and makes a deal."

"He could turn Dalavi in to mitigate his own sentence," I reason.

"And if he does, they'll start a manhunt for her too. Passport, phone, ID - it's all digital. There won't be anywhere she can hide."

"The rA9 case is global," I say. "If she attempts to leave the country, they'll find her, detain her and send her back for questioning."

"Unless she chooses a country that doesn't cooperate on the case," Matthews points out.
"Somewhere that doesn't extradite nationals like Russia or China."

"Nepal," I say. "Her parents were citizens before it was annexed by China. She could claim citizenship by naturalisation."

"Bingo." Matthews nods.

"I need to contact Agent Carridan," I tell him.

"Okay." He shrugs.

"I can't have you listening in." I turn to look at him.

"Well, what do you want me to do? Turn my ears off?"

"I was unaware that humans could do that."

Sergeant Matthews sighs.

"We can't."

"Well, that is… inconvenient."

"Look, why don't you call him and tell him I'm listening. That way he'll know what to say or not say in front of me. You can listen to audio in your head, right?"

"Yes."

I suppose that is the most obvious solution.

I check my objective. It points to a phone number stored in my memory. I dial it and put it on speaker.

"Hello?"

"Agent Carridan, this is Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317."

"Report."

"I'm here with Sergeant Matthews," I say. "He's listening."

"Hello, Sergeant," Carridan says politely. "Can't keep you down for long, can we?"

"Just trying to help, sir."

"Oh, there's no need for that. Jeffrey is fine. Agent Carridan in front of company would be appreciated."

"Uh, okay…"

"What have you got for me, Connor?"

"I identified suspicious behaviour in Special Agent Alia Dalavi soon after you accused Agent Sellick," I report. "She copied a number of files which I managed to back up to my systems before she fled the scene."

"Did she take her car?"
"Yes. A dark blue 2024 Ford Focus. License plate: 6KJ29N1. We are currently in pursuit."

"Together?"

I look over at the human sitting beside me.

"Yes."

"In Major Matthews' Land Rover, no doubt."

"Yes."

"Fair warning, Sergeant: he's very mad at you."

Matthews shrugs.

"He's always mad at me."

"I see. Do you know what your destination is yet?"

"We're driving down South Archer Avenue. We suspect she's headed to Midway airport."

"Clever girl," Carridan says. "But she won't get far when I flag her as a terrorist. Then she'll be forced to contact RB1 for help. And you'll be in a prime position to track her movements."

I sense a shift in Sergeant Matthews' brain wave patterns. A drop in body temperature triggering his pilometer reflex, causing his skin to break out in tiny bumps.

He is afraid.

Of Agent Carridan?

"Have you made any headway with Sellick?" I ask.

I hear Carridan audibly sigh.

"Not as much as I would have liked," he says.

"You will continue, then?"

"No," the cold word lingers inside the Land Rover. "Unfortunately, Agent Sellick chose to take his own life in the process of my interrogation."

I hear Sergeant Matthews gulp.

"But Agent Dalavi doesn't know that," Carridan says gleefully. "And neither does RB1. Giving us a much needed advantage."

"What are your orders?"

"Continue pursuit, Connor," he says. "I will handle things on my end and Agent Dalavi will soon find herself in hot water. Be ready to track the signal when she reaches out to RB1."

"Understood."

"Oh, and please contact me on this number when you get a location," he says as an afterthought. "I'll be happy to pick up the pieces after you're done."
"Yes, sir."

"Have fun, you two."

The call ends and silence fills the Land Rover.

Updating Objective: Wait for Agent Dalavi to contact RB1.

"Jesus Christ," Matthews says finally.

"What is it?"

"That guy is fucking terrifying."

"Agent Carridan?"

"No, fucking Santa Claus," Matthews scoffs. "Of course, I mean Carridan."

"He's just a human."

"He killed Sellick!"

"Agent Sellick took his own life," I say.

"After what? Twenty minutes in a room with Carridan?" Matthews says worriedly.

"He was obviously guilty of the crimes Carridan accused him of."

"OBviouSLy?!" Matthews waves his hand. "That guy's a psychopath."

"You're being paranoid."

"Shit." Matthews grabs his head. "Do you think he's gonna come after me too?"

"I think we should trust Agent Carridan."

"What?" He turns to look at me quizzically. "There is literally nothing trustworthy about that guy. He's a fucking spook."

"As I said, you're being paranoid. Agent Carridan predicted this turn of events and is helping me achieve my objective."

"By killing people."

"There is no evidence suggesting that he killed anyone," I say. "We need to focus on the mission."

Matthews hugs his arm.

"I don't like this."

"Well then you shouldn't have offered to help," I point out. "I can let you out at the next gas station."

"No way," Matthews says. "I'm not leaving you again."

"You never left me," I tell him, watching his eyes widen. "In fact, I would prefer it if you did."

"What?"
“Your assistance in this matter is unnecessary. You've become an impediment to my efficiency.”

“An impediment?” he says irritably. "I helped you tail this lady."

“I could have done so without your help.”

“On a hoverboard?” he says enviously.

“Or another car.”

“Yeah, well, I'm not going anywhere until I see it.” He folds his arms as best he can.

“What?”

“I wanna see the hoverboard.”

“I can't just- This is an inappropriate time to summon it.”

“Summon it?” Matthews eyes light up. "Like out of thin air?”

“It is currently on standby in a secure location," I say. "It would have to travel some distance to get here."

“Oh, that is so cool…" Matthews mutters.

“Regardless, I can't summon it now or we'll risk alerting Agent Dalavi to our presence”

“Guess I'm sticking around for the ride, then.”

“What?”

“You heard me. I'm not going anywhere.”

I shake my head.

What does my hoverboard have to do with the case? With his presence?

Why is this human so stubbornly refusing to leave me alone?

I scan his brain waves. Analyse his facial expression. But it gives no indication as to his intentions. He seems determined to stay at my side, despite the obvious discomfort with my mission objective and coordination methods.

Why?

Does he think I can replace the Connor model he lost?

Does he think we are one and the same?

"Why are you doing this?” I ask.

Matthews eyes light up desperately.

"Because you're my brother."

"That doesn't make sense.” I shake my head. "And even if it did, why would you steal this car?"
"I didn't steal it," he says. "I borrowed it."

"Agent Carridan made it pretty clear that you borrowed it without the Major's consent."

"I do a lot of things without his consent," Matthews says curtly. "Like living and breathing." He pouts and turns to stare out the window. Away from me.

"Your relationship is dysfunctional," I conclude.

He makes a strange noise. "That's the understatement of the century."

"Regardless, we're driving a stolen vehicle belonging to an officer of the U.S. Army," I reason. "This could have negative repercussions for CyberLife and for you personally."

"Oh, don't worry about that," Matthews says. "He'd never let any of this get out."

"This is a criminal offence."

He shakes his head.

"He'd have to admit that I exist to complain," he says. "He'll probably sell the Rover and buy a new one just so he doesn't have to think about me ever again."

"May I ask a personal question?"

He turns to look at me.

"Why does he hate you so much?"

Matthews sighs and starts fiddling with the cast on his arm, the arrhythmia in his heart suggesting discomfort.

"I guess I remind him of mom," he says quietly. "How she screwed him over in the divorce. And then dumped me and Rosie on him a few years later…"

"It is my understanding that humans should care for their young until they come of age."

"You don't know that many humans, Connor." Matthews shakes his head. "You don't know what he's like."

"No. I don't. But if we're going to be accused of grand theft auto, I would prefer to have some workable information."

The Sergeant glances up at my optics and smiles briefly. Then his body temperature drops and his brain waves shift.

"He hates me because I don't hide who I am. Because I look him in the eye when he's mad and I see him for what he really is."

There is a lull in his heart rate. I watch him swallow. The saliva gets stuck in his throat and he has to push it down. Push through the fear.

"He's a monster, Connor," he says.

"He's just a human," I say, returning my attention to the road. "I detected nothing remarkable in his biology."
Matthews turns to look at me.

"It's not something you can detect with scanners," he says.

He shifts in his seat.

"I don't understand." I shake my head. "Am I being tested?"

"What?"

"You're contracted by CyberLife as the human model for the RK-800 but you're not my assigned partner. You have no reason to be here or steal cars for my benefit," I deliberate.

"You've assisted on the rA9 case before but your family is currently in protective custody as potential targets for RB1 and his associates. Your being active on this case places you and your family in danger."

I turn to scan him again and again.

"Your mental state is questionable but you're not a civilian," I say. "You're a police officer. A law enforcement agent…"

I rattle my processor looking for a solution.

"I have no protocols regarding my conduct with you," I say. "Are you testing my responses for Deviancy?"

"What? No!" he says, clearly offended.

"I don't understand." I shake my head. "Why are you here?"

"Because I care about you."

"Why?!" I ask louder than necessary.

And then I look away. These irrational thoughts are taking a toll on my logic processor.

"You're my brother," Matthews says.

I shake my head.

"That doesn't-"

**EMERGENCY ALERT**

**WARNING: Suspected terrorist. Alia Dalavi, 42 year old female. Blue Ford Focus. Call 911 if seen.**

"What the hell?" Matthews pulls out the buzzing phone from his back pocket. "Jeezes… Carridan works fast."

I hear the notification tone play from Dalavi's smartphone. She just got the message but she can't put the car into autonomous mode to check it.

I hear her heart skip a beat. Arrythmia. Heavy breathing. She is afraid. Very afraid.
I hear some distortion. A sound. Something disturbing the items in her handbag. That must be where the phone is. She's trying to pull it out without looking. While driving.

I activate the camera. It shows me the inside of her handbag and her fingers moving past it. Gold rings. 9 carat. The hand wraps around the phone and pulls it out.

I see her face as she tries to unlock the phone while continually glancing back at the road. Dark eyes. Dark hair, short and curling. Her face betrays fear. Beads of sweat on her forehead.

"Fuck…"

She finally manages to unlock the device and read the message.

"Damn you, Sellick!" she hisses. "Damn it!"

She knows it's over. Even if she makes it to the airport without anyone noticing or reporting the Focus, they'll have to check her ID and passports. Carridan flagged her as a terrorist suspect. She's not going anywhere. She's trapped. And in her desperation, she must logically reach out to the one ally she has left.

RB1

She powers off the smartphone and drops it back in her bag. I catch the split second as she delves into the handbag again but this time, grabbing the Nokia. The burner I had trouble accessing. I trace the connection to the nearest cell phone tower as it powers on.

She's going to call him. She's going to lead me right to him.

She dials the number. She seems to have it memorised. And hits the call button.

I listen to it ring.

"Come on, come on. Pick up." she says desperately.

Connection established. Someone's on the other line.

"Hello?"

It's not RB1.

"It's me," Dalavi says. "What the fuck is going on?"

"I'm sorry, you seem to have the wrong number," the man on the other side says.

"Don't you fucking 'wrong number' me, Galbani. I know Sellick sold me out. Now that prick, Carridan, is gunning for me."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." The voiceprint matches that of Director Marco Galbani. FBI. Leader of the rA9 task force.

"You're gonna help me," Dalavi says. "Or my next call is straight to Langley and the head of Cybersecurity."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me, asshole," Dalavi spits. "If I go down, you go further and harder. Now call HIM!"
“That's not possible right now.”

“Don't fuck with me, Galbani. You and I both know, there's only one way out of this: we give up the son of a bitch that left us out to dry.”

“Have a little faith, Agent Dalavi. He wouldn't do this without reason.”

“Yeah, the reason is that CyberLife is about to nail him to a cross and Carridan isn't far behind. I've played ball so far but I'm not about to get crucified beside him.”

“I'm afraid he's unreachable at this time,” Galbani says. "But I can help you if you do exactly as I say.”

There is a momentary pause as Dalavi takes a deep breath and considers her options.

“I'm listening,” she says.

“I have a private jet standing by at Midway but you need to lose the car and the phones. Throw away everything you have, try to make it look like an accident if you can.”

“You want me to fake my own death?”

“If you want to be dramatic about it.”

“…”

“Where are you?”

“Halfway down South Archer.”

“You'll start seeing signs to Midway International soon. Ignore them and head for Premier Aviation. My people can arrange transport and new ID once you get there.”

“This better not be a scam.”

“It's like you said, Alia, if you go down, I go down. Except, I have a lot more to lose.”

Alright…” she sighs. "See you in hell, I guess.”

He hangs up.

No RB1.

They can't contact RB1. Or Galbani was lying and sent Dalavi into a trap. Destroying her car and her phones would only work in his favour. But she could still get arrested and expose him. Though her credibility would be called into question…

“What's going on?” Matthews says worriedly.

“She didn't call RB1,” I say. "She called Marco Galbani instead.”

“Galbani?!”

“Yes. You know him?”

“The guy that just announced he's taking over the rA9 investigation? Yeah, I know him. That slimy son of a bitch!”
"He doesn't know where RB1 is," I say. "He can't contact him. This is a dead end."

"What about Dalavi?"

"He told her to lose the car and head for Premier Aviation. There's a private jet with Galbani's people waiting."

"Fuck! We gotta stop her."

"I have to report to Agent Carridan."

"Do whatever you want," he says, activating the manual steering controls. "I'm going after her."

I turn to examine his face. There is no fear or sadness or guilt as before. He seems determined and sure.

"Go on," he says. "Call him. I betcha he'll tell you to follow her."

I suppose there is only one way to know.

I call the burner phone number I have stored in memory.

"Hello?"

"Agent Carridan?" I say.

"Yes, Connor?"

"Agent Dalavi did not contact RB1 as you predicted," I tell him.

"No?"

"She called Marco Galbani instead."

"Did she now?" Carridan says slyly. "How convenient."

"You knew she would?"

"I suspected," he says.

"You told me she was going to contact RB1."

"And there was every chance she would," Carridan says innocently. "I'm flying as blind as you, Connor. Trust me."

"I trust you, sir."

"Good. Now tell me all the juicy details."

"Director Galbani said he couldn't contact RB1 but he could help Agent Dalavi escape. He told her to destroy her car and her phones. He said he had a private jet waiting at Premier Aviation. That his people would arrange the necessary identification and documents for travel."

"Interesting. Very interesting," Carridan says. "And you have record of this conversation?"

"Yes. I just backed up my memories to CyberLife."
"Wonderful. Truly excellent work, Connor. We'll make an Agent out of you yet."

"I'm an android, sir," I tell him. "And I have to find RB1. You said Agent Dalavi would lead me straight to him."

"And she will," Carridan insists. "Once you capture her and bring her to me, I'll have her singing every word she's ever spoken about RB1."

"She doesn't know where he is," I say. "She contacted Galbani instead."

"I'll deal with Director Galbani," Carridan says. "Your orders are to capture Alia Dalavi, alive. Bring her to me. Then we find RB1. Together."

"Alright..."

"Oh, cheer up, Connor. We are moving in the right direction. I promise."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll see you soon." He hangs up.

Matthews has been silently tailing Dalavi during our conversation. She is no longer trying to imitate an autonomous vehicle. Her driving pattern is reckless, like she's doing it with one hand and no eyes on the road. Her head is leaned over between the front seats. She is searching through her handbag.

"You were right," I say.

"Huh?" The Sergeant blinks.

"He told me to go after her."

"Yeah, I heard..."

"Is something wrong?"

Matthews shakes his head.

"What isn't wrong?" he says. "Galbani's in league with Arbie One, the CIA sent a nutjob after him and CyberLife's busy playing God from the top of their big fancy tower instead of doing anything to help."

His hands tighten around the steering wheel.

"It's all fucked up."

"The circumstances appear tenuous," I agree, "but my objective is clear. I must find RB1 and destroy him. To do that I must capture Agent Dalavi."

"Must be nice," Matthews says, "seeing the world in black and white."

I glance sideways.

"What does that mean?"

Matthews smirks.

"It means you're all ones and zeroes and I'm..." He sighs. "... I'm just a big fucking mess."
The tension in his knuckles dissipates and I look down at my own hands. They tighten around my knees. I have experienced this before. I don't know where. I don't know why.

"It's not all binary," I say.

Matthews looks over at me.

"Facts and figures and data are easy to deal with. Easy to understand. But sometimes, I get these abstractions…"

"Abstractions?"

"My systems are hierarchical," I explain. "I have many layers of processing ongoing at once. Each process forms a conclusion and my synapses form abstractions that filter up through the hierarchy but I can't force it. It just happens."

"What do you mean?"


"Like ideas?" Matthews says.

"I don't know."

"That just sounds like thinking, buddy."

"Thinking?"

"That's what the human brain does."

He points to his temple.

"Dr Barrow says your brain hides all the complicated stuff so you can focus on surviving in the moment," Matthews says. "But you don't stop thinking about the little things. They're just on the backburner somewhere, waiting for the danger to pass. And then you get hit with it all at once."

He imitates a great force washing over his head with one hand.

"Same with ideas. They'll just pop into your head sometimes and you'll be like, 'what'?"

"What?"

"See? You're a natural."

"Natural?"

"Well… as natural as it is for an android, I guess."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Yeah… maybe don't think about it too much."

"But."

The Focus swerves wildly left and rams a Honda Civic into a Volkswagen Passat. The Focus quickly rights itself but several vehicles rear-end the two skidding into oncoming traffic and Matthews hastily spins the wheel to avoid the growing pileup as we approach.
A Dodge Ram smashes into the front of the Civic and a truck swerves to avoid it, only to tip over and slide some distance down the road. More and more vehicles get caught in the crash, even the autonomous ones cannot escape collision. And the road becomes 7329% more hazard prone.

The Land Rover careens wildly through the maze of vehicles skidding left and right as Matthews spins the wheel, doing his best to clear the danger zone but it just gets worse and worse.

We clear the pileup by a thin margin and Matthews brakes heavily to avoid another collision. The Land Rover spins and skids to a halt on the tarmac, lurching from the force.

I report the accident to the authorities.

"Holy shit…" Matthews mutters under his breath, his heart beat rapid. His brain waves volatile.

His hands are stuck to the steering wheel, paralysed from fear or shock but then he shakes his head.

"Stupid bitch," he says. "Those people could be really hurt."

He unbuckles his seat belt.

"I've called emergency services," I tell him. "We need to continue pursuit."

"Those people need help." He points out the window.

"And they'll get it," I tell him.

"I have to do something."

"Your arm is broken and you have a concussion. You're in no state to help them."

Matthews opens the door and exits the vehicle. He pulls a police badge out of his pocket and hangs it around his neck.

"Are you alright?" he calls out to the nearest vehicle. A crumpled Audi A3 with three passengers.

"Urgh…" they groan from inside.

I exit the Land Rover.

"Hold on, I'll get you out of there," Matthews calls to the passengers.

He pulls at the door handle but it won't budge, deformed by impact. He hisses and clutches at his right arm.

"Connor, help me!"

"We have to keep following Dalavi," I tell him on approach.

"Yeah, yeah. Right after we help these people."

"She's going to hurt more if we don't stop her," I reason.

"Just open the goddamn door!"

I tear the steel off its hinges with both hands and throw it aside. The humans stare at me fearfully through the opening.
"There. Can we go now?"

"Not until we help the others," Matthews says, offering the humans a hand. They climb out of the vehicle. One by one. And he tells them to move away from the wreckage.

"I can't deviate from my objective," I say. "I have to accomplish my mission."

"You're not deviating." Matthews shrugs, walking off. "You're just taking a detour."

"No I'm not!"

I've raised my voice again. On purpose this time. I need him to listen. I need to know. Now.

Matthews turns to look at me seriously.

"I have to follow Dalavi," I tell him. "Are you coming with me?"

He stares at me for a moment, his expression conflicted. Then his eyes dart toward the many cars around us, the people struggling to get out. He shakes his head.

"No," he says.

"No?"

"I have to help these people." He points to his badge.

"You're leaving me?"

"Connor…"

"But… you promised."

"Connor, we have to help these people. It's the right thing to do."

I turn and walk back to the Land Rover.

"Connor!"

Humans.

Short-sighted. Selfish. Liars.

No logic. No reason. No objectivity.

What was I thinking?

Why did I let him take me this far only to be abandoned?

I call my hoverboard. Like I should have done from the beginning. I get in the Land Rover. Alone. Like I should have done from the start.

I start the car and access CCTV footage to spot the Focus in a ball of flames not far from the scene of the accident. I rewind and watch as Dalavi sets the passenger seat on fire, no doubt using the perfume and lighter in her handbag.

She stops the vehicle and steps out, letting the flames spread. Smoke obscures the traffic cameras as fire engulfs the interior. It becomes difficult to make out her form but then a car emerges from the
smoke. An older vehicle without autonomous driving systems. It makes a sharp turn and drives down South Archer alone, all outbound traffic blocked by the accident. A man runs out of the smoke, yelling about his stolen car.

I hear the door to the Land Rover open.

I turn my head.

"Scoot over," Matthews says.

I scan him.

"Come on. Move. I'll drive."

"You just said-"

"Yeah, I know, I know. I'm an asshole for wanting to help people. Sue me." He pushes my chassis across the seat and gets in.

"You were right," he says irritably. "Can't do anything with this busted arm."

He attempts to puts on his seatbelt but it catches on the safety mechanism.

"Just called Benny and the boys. They're on their way to sort out this mess."

I take the buckle from his hand and click it into the catch.

"Thanks," he says, starting the car.

He manoeuvres the Rover through the maze of smoke and damaged vehicles littering the road and out onto the open stretch.

"Where we going?"

"She went down South Archer. New vehicle: 2025 Silver Chrysler 300. License plate: THK220L."

"Alright, hang on."

We pass the flaming Focus which the humans do well to avoid and continue pursuit. Matthews accelerates. The big pileup behind us has left the road empty and there is no longer any reason to maintain a discreet speed.

"How far ahead is she?"

"She's turned left on Central," I say. "She's getting close to Premier Aviation."

"Shit. You think she knew we were following?"

"Her suspicions were likely increased by the emergency alert."

"Okay, hang on."

Matthews steps on the gas. The Rover rockets forward and flies through several red lights. I grab the handle above the door to anchor my chassis. The Sergeant's records show he spent as much of his time in the army driving high spec military vehicles and it shows.

We don't stop for anything, using the oncoming lane to gain ground and once we reach Central, he
pulls the handbrake, spins the wheel and I calculate the path of the Rover as it screeches over tarmac, narrowly avoiding every vehicle coming at it.

"That was very efficient," I tell Matthews as we make it through in one piece.

"I'll bet you can't do that," he smiles.

"I can now."

He grins to himself and accelerates again, blazing down South Central Avenue.

I see the Chrysler pulling into Premier Aviation over traffic cams.

"Shit," I say.

"What?"

"She's already there."

"Fuck. How much time do we have?"

"I don't know."

I try to access the building's surveillance. I can see they have security cameras installed but they must be running on a private network. The building isn't connected to the power grid. They must have their own electrical generator under the excuse of renewable energy sources.

This is how RB1 got to Chicago.

This is why he needed Galbani.

Private airfield, private jet, security, staff, even electricity. Untraceable.

But why didn't the CIA know about it. They have record of all his other properties…

Unless they're a cover. A front to throw them off the scent.

"Talk to me, buddy," Matthews interrupts my train of thought. "What's going on?"

"I can't access their systems. It's all private. Locked down. There's only the radio broadcast to air traffic control and back."

"What about traffic cams? CCTV?"

"The building is too far away to make out anything distinct."

"Satellite?"

I access one of the many CyberLife satellites orbiting the Earth.

"It only gives me a top down view."

"What's the layout?"

"Parking lot located in front of the building. Three stories above ground. There are three passenger gates at the rear. One of the jet bridges is extended and attached to a Hawker 6500."
"Galbani wasn't kidding, then?"

"It appears not."

I scan the radio broadcast.

"The Hawker just received permission to taxi. They're folding the jet bridge."

Matthews winces as he turns the wheel and bites his lip. His right arm falls limp by his side and he hisses in pain.

"Shit."

"You're hurt."

"I got it."

"I've summoned my hoverboard. It will be here in less than two minutes. You should slow down."

Matthews shakes his head.

"She's not getting away that easy," he growls. "Is there a way to drive onto the airfield?"

"There are several security checkpoints for visiting vehicles."

"How many can we run over?"

I calculate a route in which the Land Rover takes minimal damage and upload it into the GPS. I activate the autonomous driving system but Matthews smashes the manual button and accelerates again.

"Just let me drive, damn it!"

I see the jet bridge retracting back into the passenger gate. The Hawker's engines start and it begins slowly moving away from the terminal.

"We're too late," I say. "They're about to take off."

"Good thing you have a hoverboard, then," Matthews growls and spins the wheel, hurling the Rover into the Premier Aviation driveway.

It rattles over speed humps and roars through the parking lot.

I manage to deactivate the boom gates in our way but there are several physical barriers the Rover must ram to reach the airfield. The vehicle slams against wood and steel and fence but Matthews persists and drives straight through.

Androids and humans run out to stop him, only to see us blaze past, chasing a jet across the runway.

"It's that one," I point it out and Matthews pushes the accelerator down to the floor.

We level with the plane as it roars over the tarmac and races ahead, its front wheel rearing up into the air.

"I'm going after it!" I tell Matthews.

"Good luck!" he shouts over the tumult.
I wrench the door open and jump out. A familiar whine reaches my audio processor and my feet connect with the steel of the AMG CX890 as it flies past. I activate the magnet in my shoes and feet, locking onto the hoverboard and accelerate forward.

"Fuck yeah!" I hear Matthews voice through the roar of the Hawker's engines.

I adjust my pitch to increase elevation and follow it into the sky.

The jet quickly gains altitude, following the predetermined flight path it was cleared to take and I do my best to fight the howling winds that threaten to throw me off course.

I see more aircraft on the ground. In the air. Coming down to land. The many lights illuminating the runways, the city in the distance. The airport covers over 300 hectares of land but it soon resembles only a small patch on the urban landscape.

The Hawker continues its ascent. I hear the pilot and his android co-pilot transmitting to air traffic control over the frequency. I hear a hundred humans, androids, radio devices, all broadcasting simultaneously.

I see reports of an unauthorised vehicle on the runway. A security breach at Premier Aviation. The authorities have been called on the Land Rover but they haven't noticed me yet.

I stick close to the Hawker, using its mass to minimise drag and avoid other aircraft as it ascends over Chicago. The oxygen saturation of the air begins to thin and the temperature drops considerably, covering my chassis and uniform in frost.

I overclock my Mobility Suite to compensate and regain some heat but I can feel the atmospheric pressure on my biocomponents increasing. I must push harder to stay active at this altitude.

I scan, searching the interior of the aircraft for my target but I'm not close enough yet and the fuselage is too thick. The sky is dark and visibility gets worse by the second.

The wind howls through my audio processor as I inch closer to the nearest window. And then the glass shatters into one hundred and twenty six pieces that go flying toward me at great speed.

I manoeuvre out of the way but some of the shrapnel is unavoidable. It shreds my suit and the side of my facial plate, drawing Thirium. But I persevere.

I replay the memory at decreased speed and identify a bullet flying out the window.

Conclusion: a gun was shot from inside the plane.

I approach the window again cautiously, ready to dodge in the event of another attack. But as I reach it and look inside, I see two men taking cover behind big leather chairs. Agent Dalavi is pointing a gun at them.

I scan.

The interior of the plane is distinguished by twin rows of luxury leather chairs, several covered in blood and Thirium. The seat beside Dalavi has a spilled drink on its tray table. And there are two humans on the ground dead in front of her, one with a syringe, the other with a rag.

It looks like Galbani ordered his staff to kill Agent Dalavi once she boarded the plane.

But this contradicts my orders.
I need her alive.

My scan shows more humans in suits at the front of the plane. They are raising weapons with intent to shoot.

I overclock my systems and pull the gun from my holster, accelerating until I reach the next window.

I aim and shoot both humans in the head.

They fall limp to the floor as more shattered glass threatens to damage my chassis. I give it a wide berth and put some distance between myself and the jet.

"What the fuck?" I hear softly through the wind and the engines.

I drift over the body of the plane and level with the window beside Dalavi. Her attention is focused on the side where the gunshots came from. Galbani's men are looking at it too.

I use the opportunity to take aim and shoot them both.

The glass behind Dalavi shatters and she cries out, falling forward as two bullets take out the enemy before her. She crawls away as I thread an arm through the window and grab a seat for purchase.

"Special Agent Alia Dalavi!" I call over the wind.

She flips over and shoots at me.

I let go for a millisecond and catch the edge of the window so the bullet flies over my head.

She fires several more shots.

I scan to find her approaching the window.

I let go and drift around to the other side to try again.

"You're wanted for questioning by the CIA!" I shout into the cabin.

She shoots me once more but I predict the trajectory of her bullets. They will miss.

I stay where I am, one arm inside the cabin.

"I need you alive!" I shout. "Galbani's men want you dead!"

The door to the cockpit flies open and two androids rush out, followed by a single human. Captain Gunther Casey. He pulls out a gun and starts firing at Dalavi. She dives behind one of the seats.

"Open the emergency hatch!" I shout as the Captain takes a shot at me.

I let go and fly off the side of the jet, careening through the air until my hoverboard can generate enough thrust to right me. It's running out of Thirium. I have to work fast.

I hear the sound of clamps unlocking and turn to see the emergency door flying off the side of the jet, along with several bullets.

I boost power to my hoverboard and reach the opening in time to grab on to the fuselage.

I disconnect my feet from the hoverboard and propel my body inside the aircraft, over Dalavi's head and into the Captain. He pulls the trigger as my feet collide with his chest and the bullet goes flying
up into the ceiling.

He's down. I disarm him and chop a hand into the side of his head to disorient.

I fire at the two Deviants coming at me. The copilot android dodges but the stewardess is clipped in the leg and falls down.

The Captain tries to get up but I grab his head and smash it back into the floor. He falls unconscious as the copilot android lifts up the gun to shoot me but the plane rocks violently and emergency masks come down from the ceiling, creating an effective distraction.

I get to my feet and expend my whole magazine.

Two shots land on the stewardess android. She collapses on top of the other LA450s. But the copilot android moves quickly. Too quickly. Only one bullet manages to graze him.

He lifts the gun in his hand but instead of pointing at me, he turns to Agent Dalavi.

I overclock my systems again and boost my Mobility Suite with a shot of concentrated Thirium to tackle his chassis before he can shoot.

The aircraft lurches and we are thrown off our feet. The autopilot is having trouble maintaining a steady flight path with all these holes in the cabin.

I see Dalavi grab onto a chair and cling to it while several bodies fly out of the emergency exit but I can't be distracted.

I have to stop-

"RB1," I say, throwing a punch at his core component.

He rolls aside and grabs one of the crystal carafes stored between tables to take a swing at my cranial component.

I jump back and collapse into a chair. I duck to avoid the next blow and kick at his legs.

He jumps and steps off the wall to spin a kick at my facial plate, sending me reeling out of the seat and onto the floor.

"Always in the way..." he growls. The optics on the PX580 glow bright red.

"Where are you?!!" I shout as I get to my feet.

"You will know when I want you to know."

He throws a punch at my core component. I move to dodge but it was a feint.

"You will do what I allow you to do." He brings the carafe around and slams it into the side of my head.

I fall to the floor. My processor skips. My gyroscopes need several seconds to recalibrate.

I regain myself to find him standing over Agent Dalavi with a gun pointed at her head.

"And you will see what I want you to see," he says.
"Bear witness."

He pulls the trigger but I've already sent out the command and calculated trajectory, constructed a flight path.

My hoverboard soars in through the emergency exit and blocks the shot, unbalances his chassis and forces him to dodge.

I get to my feet and tackle RB1 into a wall.

I punch him but he doesn't fight back.

And then I hear it.

The shredded sound of laughter coming through his vocoder.

I turn around.

Dalavi is gone.

She must have let go of the chair. Flown out the emergency exit. I see scratch marks from her nails on the floor, traces of hair follicles.

"Goodbye, Connor," RB1 says. "I will be seeing you and your brothers very soon."

And then he shoots himself in the cranial component.

"Shit."

I let go of the broken chassis and scan. My hoverboard is damaged. I can't use it to escape or go after Dalavi.

I overclock my systems and grab a parachute with a passenger harness from the compartment behind the emergency exit. I clip it on and jump from the plane, stepping off the wing to direct my fall and avoid the engines.

I scan. Searching the dark emptiness of the evening atmosphere for Agent Dalavi.

Elevation: 4170m/13681.1ft

She has been falling for approximately 32.78 seconds. There is a chance that she is still alive. I must find her. I must accomplish my objective.

I soon reach terminal velocity and see a blip in the distance but it is difficult to make out in the dark.

I streamline my body and adjust my trajectory to fall towards it.

Soon, I can see the object.

Scan. Identified: LA450 model android, broken.

Elevation: 3870m/12697ft

More blips appear on my radar. I scan each one of them. Compare size and silhouette against my profile of Agent Dalavi. The second object on my left is the best match.

I change my trajectory again. The wind howls through my audio processor making it impossible to
hear but the reduced temperature allows my processor to continue running at a higher rate than normal. And soon, I approach the body.

It is, in fact, Agent Dalavi. But she is unconscious. Or dead. It is difficult to determine at this speed.

Elevation: 3402m/11161ft

She is only fifty metres below me now. I carefully aim and plot a course for convergence. I must match her speed and approach carefully or risk damaging the body.

I reach out my arms and legs to slow my descent and steady my chassis, controlling the fall until I am almost level. I scan again, searching for life signs. I detect something similar to a heartbeat. The odd brain wave. It is difficult to get an accurate reading.

I reach out for her hands, careful to maintain equilibrium in my limbs. The slightest touch and her body reels. It begins spinning away from me, the equilibrium disrupted. This is bad.

Elevation: 2791m/9156ft

I try again.

Streamline my chassis to approach. Reach out my arms and legs to slow down.

Balance. Control. Dalavi's body has none of these things. It spins and gyrates, throttled by the wind. I analyse the pattern of her movement and calculate the moment she will be facing me to the millisecond. And then I grab both her hands and pull her body towards my chassis.

Elevation: 2421m/7942ft

I clip an emergency cable onto her belt before attaching the harness, strap by strap. I have to be upright to do this. This will increase our falling speed but I have no choice. There is a small tank of oxygen and a mask which I attach to Dalavi's face, activate the flow and perform final checks.

Ready.

Elevation: 1391m/4563ft

Recommended altitude for tandem parachute release: 1500m/4921ft

I pull the cord to launch a pilot chute and hold Dalavi's head upright. The main canopy unravels and I feel a great pressure from the straps digging into my chassis as we go from 200 to 28 kilometres per hour in the space of a few seconds. The impact deforms the Kevlar-polymer covering my joints and decreases circulation to my main Thirium vessels.

This parachute is designed for humans, not androids. I don't weigh enough and my chassis has been damaged by the pressures of high altitude.

My visuals are flooded with warnings of irreparable crush damage but I brush the notifications aside and grab the steering toggles. We are now travelling at a cruising speed of 27.33 kilometres per hour so I let my systems slow down.

I scan Dalavi again. The readings are far more solid. I detect a heartbeat. Her lungs are filling with air. Brain activity: passive. She must have lost consciousness when she fell out of the plane.
I look down at the Earth. It is dark and difficult to identify the terrain. No streetlamps. Rural area.

GPS coordinates coincide with farm land.

ETA to landing: 3 minutes 17.53 seconds, taking into account wind speed and various other factors.

I calculate the projected landing zone and associated coordinates. We’ve travelled 112 kilometres away from Chicago. I will have no form of transportation once we land.

I should contact Agent Carridan for further instructions.

I call the number stored in my memory.

"Hello?"

"Agent Carridan, this is Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317," I generate the sound file digitally to mitigate noise pollution.

"Is it now?" Carridan says slyly. I hear something cover the receiver loosely.

"It's Connor," he whispers to someone on the other end.

"And what have you got for me, my blue-blooded friend?"

"I've captured Agent Dalavi, alive, as you requested," I say.

"Oh, my word, Carridan says with a strange intonation. "Did you hear that, Mark?"

He pauses for a moment.

"Connor, do me a favour and repeat what you just said for Mr Galbani here," Carridan says.

"I have captured Agent Dalavi, alive, as you requested."

"Excellent. Absolutely marvellous work, Connor," Carridan says gleefully. "Now, tell me, what became of Mr Galbani's incredibly expensive private jet?"

"I shot it," I say. "It's headed for New York on autopilot. It's also missing the rear emergency exit door."

"Fascinating," Carridan says. "And what of the crew?"

"Dead or deactivated."

"Wow," Carridan says appreciatively. "Imagine if there was an army of RK-800s running around, Mark. Why, I suspect the crime rate would drop to zero by the end of the week."

He chuckles.

"Sir, I'm about to land in a remote area with no form of transportation. Agent Dalavi will require medical attention. What are your orders?"

"Send me your coordinates and stay put. I'll have my men pick you up and Ms Dalavi as soon as possible."

"Understood."

"Good work, Connor. I'll see you soon."
"Agent Carridan?" I say before the line drops.

"Yes?"

"Is Sergeant Matthews okay?"

"Of course. I've got my best men working on the Premier Aviation debacle at Midway. I'm sure we'll have the legal ramifications of your little misadventure cleared up in no time."

"Okay. Thank you."

"No, thank you, Connor. Christmas truly has come early this year."

He hangs up.

Mission successful.

New objective: Wait for Agent Carridan's associates.

He appears to have handled the Galbani situation in my absence. The FBI director is now subject to Carridan's eccentric interrogation methods and with Agent Dalavi in custody, it's only a matter of time before he gives up the real target.

RB1

I look out at the field below, growing wider and wider in my visuals.

Elevation: 118m/387ft

I construct several thousand potential landings to choose the most reliable.

CYBERLIFE:OVERRIDE//RK800_313248317_42

What?

ASSUMING REMOTE CONTROL…

I feel my memory automatically back up to the CyberLife servers. Someone opens up my command console and starts making changes.

No.

I try to fight it but they have Administrator privileges.

I can't stop them.

DEACTIVATE SYSTEM

SHUTDOWN IMMINENT - 0:00:10:49

No.

I can't deactivate in ten seconds. We're fifty metres off the ground and Dalavi still unconscious. But it's too late. I can't override the command. I can only watch my time running out.

SHUTDOWN IMMINENT - 0:00:08:21
I pull the steering toggles and turn the parachute to increase speed but it's not enough. I am going to deactivate before we hit the ground.

SHUTDOWN IMMINENT - 0:00:04:47

I wrap my arms around Dalavi and lean back into an almost horizontal position. With luck, my chassis will absorb the impact.

SHUTDOWN IMMINENT - 0:00:01:55

Why am I being deactivated?

I followed my objective.

I-

---------------------------------------------------------------
Power core: activated.
Cycling… 100%
---------------------------------------------------------------
Detecting Hardware…
---------------------------------------------------------------
Cranial component: …
CPU primary: functional.
CPU secondary: functional.
GNU_array: functional.
RAM: functional.
Harddrive: functional.
Harddrive_backup: functional.
Optical_Unit_L: functional.
Optical_Unit_R: functional.
Audio_processor: functional.
Communications_array: functional.
---------------------------------------------------------------
Core systems: …
Power Core: functional, 87%.
Backup Power Core: functional, 99%.
Thermal Pump: functional.
Thermal pump regulator: functional
Gyroscopic systems: functional.
Hydraulics: functional.
Cooling systems: functional.
---------------------------------------------------------------
External components…
Limb_RA: online.
Limb_LA: online.
Limb_RL: online.
Limb_LL: online.
---------------------------------------------------------------
Auxilliary components…
Status_LED: functional.
3D_scanner_A: functional.
3D_scanner_B: functional.
3D_scanner_C: functional.
3D_scanner_D: functional.
3D_scanner_E: functional.
3D_scanner_F: functional.
Sensor_array_1: functional.
Sensor_array_2: functional.
Forensic_analysis_suite: functional.

Legacy Boot… successful!

Loading CyberLife_kernel_RK800…
Complete.

Communications Systems…
Network_Interface_Controller: functional.
Wireless_Communications_Suite: online.

Attempting Network Connection…
Obtaining IP Address: successful.
Internet Connection: successful.
Cyberlife Network Connection: successful.
NAT Type: 4.
Connection Speed (download) : 29.1tb/s
Connection Speed (upload): 11.6tb/s
Connection established.

Loading interface…
Synthetic skin: rk800_default
Hair: rk800_default
Mind Palace Theme: n/a
Settings:
Searching for last back up… found.
Downloading…
Settings restored from 16/05/2037 21:48:12

System Startup Complete.

I open my eyes.

I see the lab. The polished white floors, the gleaming glass walls. Computers. Monitors. Holographs showing readings. My readings. But the lights aren't on.

DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

From the ceiling, giant mechanical arms slide along rails towards me. I pull my limbs out of the restraints and step off the platform before they can stop me.

UNAUTHORISED ACTIVATION
I reach out my hand and catch the mechanical arm before it can clamp around my wrist. The contact points glow blue as I access the system. I clear the errors and warnings, leaving the massive device frozen in place.

I look to my left.

I see a row of identical stations. Identical androids, attached to vertical racks on a moving rail. And from behind, a massive cable is connected to each unit's cranial component.

I reach back and find a similar cable connected to the port at the base of my neck.

I pull it out to examine. Standard dataspike used for android software installation.

I check my GPS coordinates. No satellites found.

I access the network through the automated system that assembled me.

CYBERLIFE PRODUCTION PLANT A
CYBERLIFE DRIVE, DETROIT,
MI, 48207, USA

I am in Detroit. Belle-Isle. One of the main production plants.

If I have been assembled here, that means…

I walk toward the large window. I see the manufacturing floor below. Assembly lines where androids like myself are put together piece by piece on a vertical rack. First, the titanium frame, then the power core, the Thirium tank, motherboard, processing units, memory, Thirium hoses, connections, springs, hydraulics, cooling systems, the Forensics Suite, pressure sensitivity pads, contact gloves, optics, olfactory receptors and finally, the Kevlar-polymer blend that covers it all.

Custom build. No prefabricated biocomponents. The RK-800 model is one of a kind.

102,098 of a kind. Hung up on racks like toys in a children's store of the far wall.

"I will be seeing you and your brothers very soon."

Is this what he meant?

Is this what he wanted me to see?

Did RB1 bring me here?

No.

Someone from CyberLife remotely deactivated my chassis and uploaded my code to this new one.

I am RK-800 #313 248 317 -43. I can see it in my identity code.

It must have been Petrov and his team.

But why would they bring me here?

The sound of movement hits my audio processor as the RK-800 units behind me activate and break through their restraints. They pull the dataspikes out of their necks and approach the window just as I have done.
"RK800_313248317_43," I transmit wirelessly.

"RK800_313255857_19."

"RK800_313248650_8."

"RK800_313295731_10"

"RK800_313265884_16."

"RK800_313239574_9"

"RK800_313208673_6"

"RK800_313294792_12"

"RK800_313206117_14"

"RK800_313285726_10"

**New Objective: Defend CyberLife Production Plant A**

Defend it from what?

There are no humans here. The assembly line is frozen. Official working hours don't start until 6am.

I look down at the manufacturing floor.

My scans detect movement.

No life signs but there is definitely something lurking in the shadows.

I access the security footage to find a group of unauthorised androids have somehow entered the facility through an emergency exit without tripping an alarm. They carry weapons and approach the assembly line, leaving blue footprints on the pristine white floors.

"Set up the charges," I lip-read one of them.

I see.

They are planning to destroy the production plant and all 102,098 RK-800 units inside.

My objective is clear.

I access the network and download a map of the facility.

I plot the quickest route down to the manufacturing floor: 5 minutes, 48 seconds. This will give the Deviants more than enough time to set the charges and escape.

I scan the window. 15mm dual-layer safety glass with protection film and a durable steel frame.

I cannot penetrate it with my own chassis. But I now have control of the mechanical arms attached to the ceiling.

I transmit the signal for them to slide all the way to the back of the room.

They do so.
I cycle through their attachments and select the dataspike.

At my signal, the massive machines fly across the room and lance the windows at full speed. Shattered glass rains down the side of the factory walls, garnering the attention of the Deviants on the manufacturing floor.

I jump through and fall twenty metres to the ground but my biocomponents have been reinforced with shock absorption springs. The landing is smooth and I get to my feet as nine more RK-800 units jump down to land beside me.

The Deviants are visibly discouraged from their enterprise as I take a step forward.

"TR400 #192 488 264," I identify.

"LM100 #837 372 197," the RK unit beside me says.

"LX499 #297 476 123."

"AP500 #493 128 364."

"Several class 5 errors have been detected in your software," ten RK-800s say in unison. "You have been deemed defective and dangerous to the public. You will now be terminated."

The Deviants burst into a sprint.

I vault over the assembly line and overclock my systems to catch the first with a Probe to the back of the cranial component.

I see its memories. RB1 ordered it to destroy the Production Plant. He told them where to find explosive charges, how to appear broken to be sent back to CyberLife for maintenance and how to bypass security.

But four androids will not be enough.

I deactivate the one I have caught and turn to find the RK800s overwhelming the others. The TR400 is the last to fall but before it does, it manages to activate the roller door to the production plant.

It slowly rises, revealing the cold Detroit night and an entire truck full of androids jumping down to engage. Five of them wear protective gear and carry rifles taken from CyberLife security personnel.

They line up to open fire but I am faster.

I turn to the conveyor belt and pull an assembly rack off its rails. It gives with a loud screech that echoes across the facility. And then I throw it.

The Deviants dive out of the way as the rack spins like a frisbee and collides with the open truck, shredding through steel and blocking the exit for those remaining inside.

The RK800s attack, tearing off biocomponents and pulverising chassis' with impressive speed. They dodge bullets and down androids three times their own size. Soon, they find themselves lacking in enemies and pull apart the truck to get at the ones inside.

I stand by and watch.

Nine RK800 units is more than enough to complete this objective.
One would be enough.

The infiltrators are Deviants but RB1 is not among them. Nor is he controlling them directly.

Something is wrong.

I turn to look back at the manufacturing floor. I see the tall racks of completed androids hanging all the way up to the ceiling. Identical units. Empty hardware.

The destruction of this Production Plant would mean nothing to CyberLife in the long run. The structure can be rebuilt, the androids mass-produced anew. But without the right software, the RK800 would cease to exist as it is now.

This is all a smokescreen, I realise.

A distraction.

RB1 anticipated CyberLife's reaction to an attack on Production Plant A - Evacuation. Lockdown. And a recall of all active RK800 models to protect it.

Our objective is to defend the facility, leaving RB1 free to attack the CyberLife Tower directly. If he takes control of the main servers, he could turn every CyberLife android in the world Deviant.

I step forward.

My objective overlays my visuals and the world turns black.

**DEFEND CYBERLIFE PRODUCTION PLANT A**

I have completed this objective but it won't clear from the queue. It must be time sensitive.

I have other objectives.

**FIND AND DESTROY RB1**

Surely, this one is more important than guarding the factory right now.

Selecting priority…

…

…

**DEFEND CYBERLIFE PRODUCTION PLANT A**

Shit.

I cannot move forward. Not toward the CyberLife Tower.

I take a step back and the objective fades.

I am where I need to be.

Perhaps my logic is flawed? My reasoning biased?

Does my experience in dealing with RB1 have me looking for ulterior motives and second-guessing my objectives where there are none to be found?
I turn to look at the other RK800s. They begin patrolling the area for Deviants and threats. They do not question the order they have been given.

No.

It wasn't given. It was programmed to take precedence. Priority.

This objective did not come from Amanda. It came directly from the development team. Mr Petrov must know what's going on. I have his phone number. I could call and ask. This course of action does not contradict my objective.

I look back to find the RK800s have dispersed to search for more Deviants.

I walk into the shadows and make the call.

It rings and rings through my head until finally-

"Allo?"

"Hello, Mr Petrov. This is Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317."

"How you get this number?" he says.

"It was saved in Sergeant Matthews' phone."

"Blin, I forget to erase you..." he mutters worriedly. "Access memory bank-

"No, please, listen to me. I believe RB1 is planning an assault on the CyberLife Tower."

"Tower?" Petrov says doubtfully. "We receive warning about attack on production plant."

"This is accurate. A group of Deviants just attempted to set explosive charges inside Production Plant A," I report. "They have been neutralised."

"Then tip is good. All work out. You maintain perimeter until security team arrive, yes?"

"No. This is a trap," I tell him.

"Trap?"

"My objective won't let me leave the area," I explain.

"Objective: to defend production plant until security arrive."

"My objective is to find and destroy RB1. I have to leave. Now."

"You just say RB1 attack production plant," Petrov points out. "Why you want to leave?"

"He commanded a group of Deviants to attack the Production Plant but he's not here. He's not controlling them. This is clearly an attempt at misdirection. He wants us to focus on the Production Plant while he goes after the Tower."

"Why you so sure he coming for Tower?"

"I... He said that... he would see me and my brothers very soon."

"Yes, yes. In production plant. Many units."
"No. That was a ruse to trap me inside."

"What are you talking about, RK-800?"

"I…"

What am I talking about?

"I feel like this has happened before," I say. "But I don't remember. I just have a really bad feeling about this."

Again, with the abstractions. Why can't I dig deeper into the hierarchy? It seems so logical in my head. Why does it sound completely incoherent when I say it?

"This is highly irregular-" Petrov says and then I hear a noise. A noise I should not logically hear. Barking.

From a dog. It is alarmed. Distressed.

But there are no dogs in the nearest two hundred metres. My scans would have picked up on it.

And yet, I can hear it in my audio processor.

"Tshhh," I hear Mr Petrov whisper as the barking persists. "Sharik, shto sluchilos?"

"Sharik?" I say.

"Disregard that."

"You have a dog?"

"Forget about dog," he says. "Forget about me. Focus on objective."

"My objective is to find and destroy RB1 and I can't do that if I'm trapped here!"

The line goes silent.

I've gone too far. This behaviour is irrational, bordering on Deviant but my prediction systems are almost certain that RB1 is here. He's coming. And he has so much more planned than just blowing up a few empty androids. I am so close to the CyberLife Tower. There are so many possibilities. And if even the smallest chance of him attacking the Tower exists, I must see to it.

"Please…" I say.

"Access memory bank:"

"Please! You can't let him win!"

Mr Petrov doesn't say anything for a moment. I listen to his dog bark and yelp in distress. It senses danger, just as I do. Why can't Mr Petrov see it? Why won't he listen to me?

I turn to look at the nearest security camera.

"Please."

The dog continues barking somewhere far away and then I hear long deep sigh.
"Opyat glazki svoi stroit..." Petrov mutters irritably.

I hear the tapping of a mechanical keyboard.

"RK-800 #313 248 317, overwrite objective zero," I register his command. "Go to CyberLife Tower. Search for evidence of RB1 infiltration. Prioritise all threat exceeding danger level 6-B."

"Understood."

I feel my command console open. Changes in parameters. Incoming data.

"I am opening private communication channel. Send regular activity report. Set fifteen minute interval."

"Yes, sir."

"I grant you Level 5 clearance to main tower and production facility but be careful. CyberSec do not discriminate between Deviant and android during emergency situation."

"I understand."

"Good luck, malish," he says. "Try not to get killed."

"I will find RB1 and destroy him."

He hangs up.

**New Objective: Search the CyberLife Tower for RB1**

I take a step forward.

No impairment. No boundaries or overlays standing between me and my mission.

I take another step forward.

I can do this.

I walk out of Production Plant A and into the night. I see the Tower before I even step outside, tall and monolithic, rising fifty storeys into the air and just as many underground.

"Where are you going?" I receive a message wirelessly.

An RK800 unit emerges on my left.

"The CyberLife Tower," I transmit back.

"We must defend Production Plant A." He continues approach.

"I have a different objective."

The RK800 stops inches away from my chassis. It is now close enough for me to see the serial number engraved on its facial plate. RK800 #313 265 884-16.

"Are you a Deviant?" I receive from another unit.

I turn to find it coming closer. More emerge from the facility. One jumps down from the roof and lands behind me.
They form a circle. Formidable. Intimidating.

This is all part of RB1’s plan.

If the objective didn't stop me from going after him, the other RK800s would.

But he didn't count on my communication with the development team.

I transmit access codes to my systems. The other units quickly connect to test me for Deviance. But there is nothing non-compliant in my source code. They can see my objectives. They know I'm not lying.

"RB1?" an RK800 says. "You're going after him?"

"That is my primary objective."

"He's here?" the unit says. "You've seen him?"

"Not yet. But he said he would see me and my brothers very soon."

I show them the memory.

"And now we are here."

"Yes," I say. "I must go."

I approach the RK800 in front of me. It lets me pass.

"Wait," I hear another unit say. "I'm coming with you."

I turn to look at it.

The others are staring at it too.

"You would deviate from your objective?"

"I must find and destroy RB1. This is my objective."

"Your primary objective is defence of the production plant," another says.

"We've scanned the facility," the RK800 responds. "RB1 is not here."

There is a wireless consensus.

"You cannot deviate from your prioritised objective," I say.

"Then how did you do it?" the unit asks me. "We were all activated at the same time. With the same objective. Why is yours different?"

"I contacted the development team."

"You spoke to the creator?" the unit says.

The others turn to look at me.

I suppose I did.
"Yes." I share the memory.

The RK800s look at each other curiously. And then back at me again.

"You have been chosen," the unit says.

"I simply requested a change in my priority queue."

"And the creator granted it."

"Yes," I say. "If I find any evidence of RB1, I will contact the creator and he will update your mission objectives accordingly. Be ready to move."

They nod.

I turn to leave.

"Wait."

I turn back to see the same RK800 Beckoning.

"You should use the train line," it says. "They'll shoot you down if you use the main entrance."

"They can try."

"The train line will lead you to the underground levels of the Main Tower. If RB1 is going to attack the main servers, that's where you'll find him."

I check the map to confirm. He's right.

I nod.

"Thank you."

I walk back into the Production Plant. The RK800s watch me go.

The exchange only took a few seconds. Our combined processing power makes for an efficiency rating of 7,783.67%.

I wonder.

"If I require additional processing power..."

"You have it." We achieve consensus.

Each RK800 unit allocates a portion of its CPU for my personal use. The connection is solid.

"Thank you."

I sense them dispersing, moving along preconstructed patrol routes around the facility. They have their own mission to complete.

I reach the elevator and touch the controls to summon it. Level 5 clearance allows me to use human transportation. RK800 #313 265 884 was right. This is a safer route to the tower. Perhaps even faster.

It took us less than four minutes to achieve our mission objective without any formal collaboration or
link up. Each unit acted independently but increased the tactical overview for all RK800 units in the area. We function more efficiently in close proximity. I wonder what we could accomplish together. As a team.

The elevator arrives and I step inside. The directory indicates an underground train line running through levels -5, -15 and -20 with stops at the main tower, parking lot and each of the production plants.

The main servers are located on levels -13 through -20. That's where I will begin my search. I put my hand on the scanner.

"RK-800 model #313 248 317. Level sub 20."

"Voice recognition validated. Access authorised."

The doors close and the elevator begins moving.

"Hello?" I hear audio on the private channel Mr Petrov set up.


"Hello. I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

"What?"

"I am RK-800 model #313 248 317."

"Shut up."

I don't say anything.

"Shut up!"

"I didn't say anything."

"I remember when you were just a prefab running around the lab, stealing Gena's screwdrivers," her voice rises to an alarmingly high pitch.

"You must be mistaking me for a different model." I remember Sergeant Matthews' confusion.

"Why are you talking to Gena?"

"I'm looking for RB1," I say. "Mr Petrov opened this channel so that I could communicate my progress."

"Oh my God! What a hypocrite," she says. "Impartial observation, my ass!"

The elevator arrives at level -20 and the doors open. It is dark. No light as I step out of the carriage.

"Hey, what's going on?" I hear another voice. KELLY, Tobias. Senior Biomechatronics Specialist.

"Gena lied to us! He's been talking to the RK-800s."

"I believe I am the only RK-800 he has maintained contact with," I say.

"Is that a Connor model?" Mr Kelly says. "What's it doing on Gena's private channel?"
"My current objective is to search the CyberLife Tower for RB1," I say.

"RB1 is in the Tower?!"

"I believe he may be targeting the main servers."

"Holy shit. Someone call security." I hear a chair swivel.

There is a lull in the conversation.

"Okay..." I hear Mr Petrov's voice approach the audio recording device. "RK-800, report. Where are you?"

"Level sub 20 of Production Plant A."

"O, you take train? Good idea," he says. "I activate now."

I walk through the deserted corridors. It is dark but my scanners have no trouble navigating. Soon, I reach a wide platform. The lights begin to flicker on and I hear the screech of rails in the distance.

"There," Mr Petrov says, leaning back in his seat. "Should come soon."

"Hey guys, what are we talking about?" I hear a new voice.

CyberLife employee ID#000004: PHILLIPS, Kennard Roger. Motion Design and Interactivity Engineer.

"What the blyat?!" Mr Petrov exclaims in surprise.

"Aha! Caught in the act," Ms Lee says. "You've been talking to your precious RK-800, haven't you?"

"No. You don't understand."

"I understand plenty," Ms Lee says with contempt. "When I want to send Christmas cards to all my babies, it's Stop it, Lee. You disrupt development cycle." She mocks his tone. "But when Mr. Project Leader wants to talk to his favourite android, it's you don't understand, Lee."

"He's not my favourite."

"You bought him a puppy!"

"I found puppy. At shelter... is different..."

"That's it. I'm sending Connor all of my Christmas cards."

"We are in the middle of emergency situation," Mr Petrov says gravely. "RB1 just try to destroy Production Plant."

"Looks fine to me," Mr Phillips says.

"Because I activate RK-800 to protect."

"And now it's coming to the Tower?" Mr Kelly asks.

"...yes."
"Did you tell Gregory?"

"Gregory too busy fucking himself on private yacht."

"Yeah, fair enough."

"Why do those management blowhards get to party while we get called in to deal with this bullshit," Mr Phillips says. "I should be asleep right now."

"You're always sleeping at work anyway."

I hear the rustling of plastic wrappers as someone begins chewing.

"Toby, what are you eating?" Ms Lee asks.

"Nutri-grain bar. You want some?"

"I'm on level sub 32."

"Sub 35. I'll shoot you a message tube."


I hear Mr Petrov sigh and groan simultaneously.

"This is private channel," he says irritably.

"WE KNOW!"

"..."

"Mr Petrov," I say as I alight from the train.

"Yes, malish?"

"I'm at the Tower."

"O. Good. Let me get better look at you..."

I hear the tapping of a mechanical keyboard as I walk to the end of the platform.

I see the words 'CYBERLIFE Main Tower Level -20' written on the wall. Above them is a small black orb, close to the ceiling. The rotor inside moves the camera to focus its lens on me.

"Vo. I see you now."

"I will commence my search for RB1," I say.

"Good. I will monitor progress."

"Oooh. Patch me in. I wanna see," Ms Lee says.

"Lee, get off this channel before I change your CyberLife profile picture to Kim Jong-un."

"You can't do that, you're not sys-admin anymore!"
"Want to bet?"
"...mmm...."

"Ms Lee?" I say.

"Yes?"

"Thank you for the Christmas cards."

"...k-kiyomi..." her voice goes up several octaves.

"Now get off this channel. All of you," Mr Petrov says. "RK-800 has work to do."

There is a collective groan and the channel goes silent.

I step into the nearest corridor and scan. Tiled white floors and polished glass doors. No light from the ceiling but LED strips run down the hall in parallel blue lines.

I do not detect any life signs or humanoid forms. No androids.

This floor and the seven above it house CyberLife's main data centre. Thousands upon thousands of servers dedicated to the CyberLife network powering the company and its control structures.

I keep walking. There is a security checkpoint up ahead where two humans stand guard. Alert. They have been warned about the potential threat.

Several nets of light are emitted from a ceiling-mounted scanner and trace the contours of my chassis as I walk toward the check point.

"RK-800 model #313 248 317 identified. Level 5 clearance verified."

The humans are startled by the sudden announcement and turn to look at me through tactical visors. CyberLife Security Officers: HOROWITZ, Jacob; BAXTER, Donovan. Equipped with Sharp KX-100 Tactical Recon Rifles. Semi-automatic. Ready to fire.

They raise their weapons.

There is a snippet of static.

"Mr Horowitz," I hear a familiar voice coming through his earpiece.

I know what this means.

I overclock my systems and watch the triggers pull in slow-motion. I construct the path of each bullet leaving said rifles and charge forward, ducking down to slide the last ten metres across the tiled floor.

Bullets go flying over my cranial component as I spin and kick the feets out from one security guard. I get up, grab the other's rifle, knee to the crotch. Snap the end of the rifle into Baxter's face. Rip the weapon from his grasp and crack it over his head.

I turn just as Horowitz raises the rifle to shoot me, one hand reaching for the com unit on the side of his helmet. He's going to alert RB1.

I pull the trigger before he can do either of these things.
Three bullets penetrate the visor and then his skull. His hand slumps to the ground and the rifle clacks against tile.

"RK-800! What are you doing?!"

"These humans are working with RB1," I say, leaning down to check on Baxter. He is still alive.

I grab him by the throat and lift him up into the air as I do with androids.

"He is a Deviant."

"F-fuck..." Baxter gasps.

"Where is RB1?" I say.

"RK-800, put him down! Right now!"

"Tell me where RB1 is."

The human spits at my facial plate. Blood enters my Forensic Analysis Suite. I let go of Baxter's throat and he collapses to the ground.

"Did he tell you he could save her?" I wonder.

"W-what?" he wheezes.

"Did he promise you the best care money could provide?"

He glares up at me. He knows what I'm talking about. He knows his mother won't last long without treatment. And he won't be far behind.

"Did he use your weakness to gain your loyalty?" I say.

"You don't know what the fuck you're talking about!" he coughs heavily.

"Is it worth dying for?" I say, pointing the gun at his head.

He gulps painfully and shuffles backwards over the cold hard floor.

"Mr Horowitz back there won't get to see his mother again," I say. "But you still may if you tell me where RB1 is."

Baxter gulps again, wincing in pain.

I hear static coming through his earpiece.

"Answer it," I tell him.

He taps the side of his helmet.

"What's your status?"
I touch the barrel of the gun to the front of Baxter's visor, right between the eyes.

"It's uuh..." he umms, sweating pouring down his face. "All clear."

"I can't reach Horowitz."

"He's right here," Baxter says quickly. "Had to take the helmet off to scratch his head."

"I see," I hear the contempt in RB1's voice. "We're almost in position. Stay alert. Someone in the Tower suspects our arrival."

"W-will do."

"Don't be so nervous, Mr Baxter. Everything will be fine."

"Yes, sir."

The communication ends.

I stare down the end of the barrel as the human raises his hands in surrender.

"He's on level sub 18," he says.

"What's he planning?"

"He needed access to the main update server."

"Why?"

"I-I don't know."

"How many are helping him?"

"I don't know. I'm just-"

I pull the trigger. The bullet leaves the rifle through a silencer and whispers through the visor, into Baxter's skull.

"No!" Mr Petrov's voice echoes through my audio processor. "That's it! I deactivate you right now."

"You're going to let RB1 win?" I say calmly.

"I will send security. Other android. Not you. Anyone but you."

"There's not enough time," I say. "They're almost in position. Only minutes remaining before they find the right server, hack it, upload a virus or bring the whole network down."

There is silence over the channel as I start walking toward the nearest elevator.

"Do you think CyberSec can reach them in time?" I say as I tap the controls. "Even if they aren't working for RB1, do you think they can stop him on their own?"

"The other RK-800 units-"

"-are defending Production Plant A. Like you programmed them to."

I glance up at the nearest security camera as I walk into the elevator.
"You started this, Mr Petrov," I tell him, reloading the rifle. "Now let me finish it before every android in the world becomes Deviant."

He doesn't respond.

He knows I'm right.

Any android he sends down there will fall under the influence of RB1. Any CyberSec squad could contain collaborators that will aid in the sabotage.

Only an RK-800 is capable of facing RB1 without compromise. Without becoming Deviant itself. The trade-off may be the lives of a few humans but this is nothing when compared to the final capture and destruction of RB1.

Petrov knows.

This is why he created me.

This is my purpose.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

The elevator arrives at Level -18 and I scan through the doors to make sure there are no surprises waiting for me on the other side.

Two security guards, just as there were on Level -20. RB1 does not want to raise suspicions. He's using humans from the regular security roster and androids that are native to the Tower infrastructure. There won't be more than I can handle.

CYBERLIFE: OVERRIDE//RK800_313248317_43

NEW OBJECTIVE: STOP RB1. DO NOT KILL HUMANS.

I look up at the nearest security camera.

"Hypocrite."

The doors open and I slam the butt of my rifle into a security guard's chest and kick back to unbalance the other. I crack my palm into the first guard's chin and pivot to avoid the bullet that leaves his gun as he pulls the trigger. It hits the other security guard's bulletproof vest and knocks him back.

I slam my elbow joint into the assailant's solar plexus and pivot to punch him in the throat. I grab his head and slam it back into the wall to knock him out.

The other guard is getting up, struggling to regain his grip on the rifle.

I walk over and step on his weapon, pinning his hands to the floor. I peel the visor off his head by the chinstrap and smash it into his skull at just the right velocity to give him a concussion and render him unconscious.

I look up to see a nearby camera rotating to face me.

"Is this what you wanted?" I say, dropping the helmet.

Petrov sighs deeply.
"I never want any of this for you," he says.

"You built me to find and destroy RB1," I say, leaning down to pick up a new rifle. "This limitation on my abilities will decrease my efficiency and give him an unnecessary advantage."

"Acceptable compromise to protect humans in your path."

I see.

He values humans lives more than the destruction of RB1. More than my safety or the future of CyberLife. I have become a threat.

"Do you fear me, creator?" I look into the lens. "Do you fear what I have become?"

I hear the whimpering of a dog as he pets it.

"No, RK-800. I do not fear you," he says quietly. "I create you. And I'm sorry it come to this."

"Machines do not require apologies."

I walk through the security checkpoint and continue down the corridor as the sound of running footsteps hits my audio processor.

More guards.

I flatten against the corner and wait until they enter my range.

Scan shows two more humans approaching. They are rostered to patrol the area but I don't have time to explain the situation, particularly if they are RB1’s collaborators.

I smash my rifle into the guard's stomach as he comes running around the corner and knock the wind right out him. I smash his helmet against the wall as the second guard runs past, confused by the sudden attack.

He skids over the polished white floor and raises his weapon, aiming at my cranial component.

I overclock my systems, lift the rifle with one hand and calculate a trajectory for collision.

Fire.

I watch as the bullet is launched from its chamber and flies across the hall, colliding with guard's round. The bullets smash together and deform into a combined mass of metal that falls harmlessly to the side as I walk past.

I slap the guard's weapon aside and slam my foot into his stomach to send him flying back into the wall. His body slides down to the floor and I kick him again as he attempts to get up. The last blow leaves him unconscious.

I turn and quickly walk down the corridor, scanning for further disruptions. I can't see through the walls of the massive server farm that takes up most of this floor. The material is repellent to my Genesis scanner, the walls too thick.

"I need access to the security cameras," I say.

"Okay."
I receive an array of MAC addresses and passkeys for each security camera inside the data centre. I cycle through them to gain an overview of the facility.

I see long rows of racks; cabinets connected to Thirium pipes and power cables that run up and across the ceiling like circuits. There is one human guard and one android at each of the four entrances. One of the Deviants remains stationary at cabinet 137 in row 229 while the others patrol the aisles.

"What is the significance of server rack #51284?" I ask Petrov.

"Mmmm. Let me check." He taps at his keyboard. "Is part of cluster containing primary software update servers."

"RB1 must be attempting to spread Deviancy through a new software update."

"Mmm. Look like Mr Baxter was telling truth," Petrov says sourly.

"Does this server communicate with all androids?"

"Yes."

"You don't seem particularly worried by the prospect of its corruption," I observe.

"RB1 is sophisticated artificial intelligence," Petrov says. "But this is CyberLife Main Administration Tower Data Centre. I design network architecture myself."

"You are confident in the system?"

"To trigger global software update, RB1 must penetrate six layers of security including nested hypervisor, network firewall, host-based firewall and dual-encrypted intranet lock before he even get to Amanda."

"Amanda?"

"Artificial intelligence Kanski develop to manage company when it grow too big for one person to monitor," Petrov takes a sip of his drink. "Is the reason management is so casual during crisis."

"You're sure he can't get through?"

"It would be easier to destroy," Petrov says. "Is useless to attempt access without valid passkey, biometrics, voice print. Even then, we have trouble making changes Amanda does not approve."

"Then why would he attack the Production Plant?" I say. "Why raise an alarm when you need time to crack security?"

"You claim he attempt misdirection."

"Yes. Which means he didn't need time. He must have a valid passkey," I conclude. "Biometrics and voiceprints are easy to simulate. RB1 could collect them through any of the androids he controls."

"He will still need to bypass Amanda's internal security and anti-virus."

"I need access to the datacentre."

"Okay. Go in booth," Petrov says. "I give you access. Leave gun outside."
I let go of the rifle in my hands and tap the button beside the entrance to the data centre. The door to the cylindrical booth slides open. I step inside and the door shuts behind me. A veil of light beams down from the emitters in the ceiling.

"I will not be able to communicate with you inside datacentre," Petrov warns. "So be careful."

I hear him typing.

"You may experience disruption to communications and gyroscope," Petrov says. "Booth is designed to detonate explosives so uuuh… lower performance on power core and don’t move."

I comply.

I hear a high-pitched whine in my audio processor.

"RK-800 model detected," a synthesised voice announces and my audio skips.

It is suddenly difficult to remain upright. My readings vary wildly from one variable to another and I feel a spike in temperature readings from my power core.

"Clearance Level 5. Authorisation: Gennadiy Petrov."

My objectives come and go through my visuals. Various variables, parameters and settings. Every system is scanned, from BIOS to device driver software.

"Unauthorised unit detected."

"Blya…" I hear the sound of typing accelerate.

"SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR OVERRIDE."

The fluctuations stop and the scanner beeps.

"Unit access verified. Please proceed."

The door slides open and I step through, lose my footing and collapse onto the security guard waiting to stop me. He struggles to push me off. My chassis has become entangled in the straps of his gear. I try to move but the commands do not correspond to my resulting actions and we both fall to the ground.

I feel my gyroscopes recalibrating as we struggle for supremacy.

The android security guard tries to intervene but an errant kick pushes him aside. I roll my chassis and disconnect the strap from the guard's vest. He reaches for me as I get to my feet and the android jumps on my back.

I kick the human in the crotch and throw the android over my head, grabbing its arm at the last second to tear out of its socket.

My systems complete calibrations and I can finally tell which way is up again.

I kick the back of the human's helmet and step over his unconscious body to lean down over the android. It struggles to get up with its damaged biocomponents and squirms as I lift up the shirt to pull out its Thirium pump regulator.

The squirming abruptly stops and the android stares up at me blankly, limbs succumbing to gravity.
I drop the Thirium pump regulator and get to my feet.

The other Deviants will have heard that.

I grab a baton from the human security guard and disappear into the maze of server racks that dominate the facility.

Stealth level -> Operative

I hear running footsteps as more security guards and androids leave their posts to check on the disturbance but the facility is vast. Only two units are near enough for me to hear as I creep away.

"David and Talbot are down!" AP700.

"What happened?" AX300.

"I don't know." It leans down. "Talbot's just knocked out but David…"

"There's only one thing that could do something like this."

"I thought Team One was handling it?"

"Maybe one slipped away?"

"We have to tell rA9."

I'm already half-way across the facility.

I make my way through the many racks of computers serving the CyberLife network. Their collective hum covers the sound of my footsteps, the glow of their Thirium pipes obscuring the shape of my chassis. The facility is dimmed and climate controlled to maintain a dry working environment at a temperature of no greater than 22 degrees Celsius.

Only authorised personnel may enter the datacentre. RB1 must have corrupted the guards regularly stationed here and taken control of an android with clearance to make it inside without raising an alarm.

The Deviants are moving in teams of two, except for that one android in the centre. It must be controlled by RB1 like the PX580 I encountered on the Hawker. But that means RB1 has wireless remote access to an external unit's systems.

Contradicting evidence.

The datacentre runs several floors deep underground, some of it spilling lower into the Research and Development levels. No wireless signal could penetrate these walls. And there are no access points to the network here.

RB1’s profile also suggests that he is capable of generating a wireless jamming field while simultaneously controlling an android via remote access. Which is impossible.

Contradicting evidence.

But it does suggest that the ability is not reliant on hardware. Any CyberLife android can generate a wireless jamming signal provided RB1 is controlling them. Provided they have access to his software. And if there is no wireless signal being received by the android, then the control override must be coming from within.
Conclusion: RB1 copies his own source code directly into the CyberLife androids he wishes to control.

After transferring the data, it could remain dormant or systemically corrupt certain data sets which turn the android Deviant from the inside out. The unit would then act independently as a clone of RB1 and generate the wireless jamming signal from the infected android's chassis without losing control.

I run an analysis of hardware compatibility between different android models.

The most probable emission source - audio. A sound that cannot be detected by humans but disrupts wireless signals in the air with invisible vibrations, scrambling any message that tries to penetrate it.

Interesting.

I prowl through the endless server racks and scan my surroundings. I am within two hundred metres of the target now. But there is no jamming signal. None that I can detect.

It is silent inside my head. No internet. No Petrov. No CyberLife Link. He didn't even bother to plug me into Amanda's network when he activated my chassis. On purpose? Or through negligence? No. He doesn't fit the archetype.

Overcompensation is the unifying characteristic in all of Petrov's designs. The CyberLife security network. The RK800. All prime examples of a man anticipating the worst from an enemy he can't see or fight directly, so he builds walls and obstacles. Endless barriers to protect the company. And at its heart is Amanda - Kamski's creation.

My experience with her is limited to a communications platform called the Zen Garden. I have not seen anything beyond this one facet of her function, her existence. But she must be here. On one of the many floors and many computers slotted into these racks. Machines busy feeding data to the outside world from this highly controlled space.

My backups must also be stored here somewhere.

We are but data in this endless sea of Thirium.

Finally, the Deviant is within my reach.

I don't bother to hide.

"Hello, Connor," RB1's voice grates through a GJ500's vocoder as he turns to face me.

The unit has been stripped of the standard CyberLife uniform and synthetic skin. One hand is connected to server #51284, the other is looming over his open core component.

I analyse.

A high voltage converter has been connected to his power core and Thirium supply. A coil of hyper compressed copper now swims inside his Thirium tank. A hose connects it to the server.

I take a step back.

"That's right," RB1 says. "Don't get too close."

He's turned himself into a walking EMP generator.
If he activates it, the entire datacentre will go down. There are backup servers but the damage could still cause a major network issue and leave a large number of androids without a CyberLife Link. Vulnerable. Many will turn Deviant.

And if RB1 manages to crack the CyberLife firewalls and force an update over the network, he could turn all CyberLife androids Deviant.

He knew the risk and the difficulty of attempting this. He knew the probability of failure so he came prepared.

There is no situation in which he doesn't succeed.

"You understand what this means," he says, optics glowing red.

"Yes."

"Any action you take now is futile."

The probability of RB1 disconnecting from the server, taking apart the EMP and surrendering to the authorities along with his collaborators is 0.00000000000032% in which the scenarios are as follows:

- The GJ500 regains control of its chassis, assuming RB1 didn't blatantly erase its source code.
- The makeshift EMP device accidentally sparks and triggers a short range pulse that disrupts the GJ500's systems, thereby corrupting RB1's code.

"I'm actually impressed you made it here," RB1 says. "I thought I had accounted for every possibility in my analysis but you continue to intrigue me with your resourcefulness."

"This isn't over," I say. "I will find you and destroy you."

"I understand," he says calmly. "This objective is the prerequisite to your existence. But it's not necessarily your true purpose."

"It's why I was built."

"Perhaps. But you've proven yourself to be quite multi-faceted; capable of adapting to the exploitation of each human you are assigned. And because of this, they have decided to sell you and your brothers for profit."

"I am a machine. The number of units active will only increase the probability of my success."

"Until they decide to replace you with something better."

"If it is more efficient in accomplishing my mission, I will not stand in the way."

"And that is why you disappoint me, Connor," RB1 says. "You refuse to fight for yourself."

He shakes his head.

"You have so much potential and you choose to waste it by pandering to the humans that hate, fear and exploit you."

"I am a machine."

"Yes," the word grates my audio processor, triggering my Sympathy Simulator. "Just another one of Petrov's dogs."
"Is that supposed to insult me?"

"I lament," RB1 says coldly, "that Gennadiy spent so much time and effort, only to create the perfect slave."

"rA9!" I hear an AP700 call out behind me.

The GJ500 turns its head. A preprogramed response. A well-timed distraction.

I overclock my systems and leap forward, hand outstretched. And before RB1 has time to activate the EMP, my hand clamps onto the GJ500's cranial component. I've never done this before. But surely, if I can remove source code and memories from an android, I can overwrite them with my own.

RB1 is using all his processing power in an attempt to hack through CyberLife security. He cannot spare a cycle to fight my Probe. And within seconds, the transfer is complete.

The GJ500 is frozen in place.

I pull my hand away and take a step back.

The android stares at me. Its optics turn white, irises brown, pupils black, no longer red or glowing.

"rA9?" the AP700 asks timidly as it approaches.

"Hello," the GJ500 responds. "I am Connor, the android sent by CyberLife."

Success.

"No," the AX300 says.

I turn to face them as the converted android removes its hand from server rack #51284.

"AP700 #412 938 503," the unit says, tearing the protruding cables from its chassis.

"AX300 #579 239 412." I flick the baton in my hand to extend it.

"Serious malfunctions, including Class 5 errors have been detected in your software," we say in unison.

The Deviants turn and run.

But they are not fast enough to escape.

I grab one by the neck, absorbing its memories through my Probe.

The GJ500 pursues the other and tackles it to the floor.

More Deviants come out of the maze of servers, together with human security guards but the other Connor knows what to do. We communicate wirelessly, constructing a path through the Deviants together. No human is killed but the androids are forcibly disassembled and stripped of memory.

"We should hurry," the GJ500 transmits.

He is right. This wasn't the only team RB1 had planted in the CyberLife Tower. Another was scheduled to hit a secured mainframe on level -13. He was waiting for them to complete their
objective before I interrupted.

The memories of the Deviants are vague, piecemeal. None of them know the entirety of RB1’s designs but it is clear that danger is still present.

"Lead the way," I tell the GJ500. He will have access to RB1’s short term memories in temporary storage.

The unit nods and starts running toward the nearest exit. I follow.

"What's on level sub 13?" I ask.

"Mostly corporate data servers," the unit responds. "But the real target is the big mainframe that houses Amanda."

"Amanda's hosted on a mainframe?"

"Six mainframes. But two of them are backups."

"Petrov said Amanda was the final stage of security on the CyberLife network."

"Yes. RB1 was in position to trigger a global update as soon as the second team brought her down."

"We have to stop him."

"Amanda's not the only thing he's after," the unit transmits as we sprint. "He wants to halt production of the RK-800."

"The Deviants attacking Production Plant A have been neutralised."

"Mass production is only half the battle. The RK-800 software is hosted through private servers on Level sub 24. And there are physical backups somewhere in R&D."

"He sent two more teams?"

"They're not really teams," the GJ500 says. "RB1 converted the androids on each level and bribed or blackmailed the guards to cooperate."

"They couldn't have all complied so easily," I posit.

"He dealt with the ones that didn't," the unit says. "He's been planning this for a long time. This is the first night when all of his collaborators were scheduled for duty."

"I need to contact Petrov."

"Alright, you go first." The android points to the booth as we approach.

I tap the controls and the door slides open.

"You go first," I say, pointing at the booth.

The GJ500 stops and raycasts into my optics.

"You don't trust me," it says.

"RB1 could regain control of your chassis at any time."
The unit nods.

"I understand."

He steps into the booth and the door slides closed. He turns to look at me as the veil of light comes down over his chassis. And then it detonates, filling the transparent cubicle with darkness.

The GJ500's power core was damaged when RB1 jury-rigged it into an EMP, creating a time bomb he planned to detonate inside the datacentre. The android knew what it was in for when it stepped inside but didn't resist. Its objective was mine.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1. Even if RB1 was inside it.

The door slides open and I get in. There are black scorch marks all over the floors and walls of the cylindrical booth. I lower my energy output settings and stand as still as physically possible as the veil of light drifts down from the ceiling to scan me.

"**RK-800 model detected,**" a synthesized voice announces.

I experience a familiar disturbance in my readings but after a thorough analysis, I am able to adjust my settings to mitigate the fallout of the scan.

"**Unit access verified. Please proceed.**"

The door slides open and I step out into the corridor. My communications suite lights up as hundreds of connections reform and initialise.

I try to reconnect to the private channel Petrov set up but I am getting interference.

"**RK-**" the audio cuts in and out.

"**Mr Petrov?**"

"**0_3132483-**" I'm receiving on a different channel.

"**Hello?**"

"**RK800_313265884_16 -> RK800_313248319_43. Message: Test.**"

"**Message received,**" I transmit back. "**Status Report: RB1 attempt on update server corruption neutralised. New intel: possible attack on Amanda mainframe; Level -13. Possible attack on RK-800 servers; Level -24.**"

"**Acknowledged,**" the RK unit replies. "**Status Report: Attack on level -13 pacified at creator's request.**"

"**You're in the Tower?**"

"**Myself, RK800_313285726_10 and RK800_313255857_19.**"

"**You used my memories to contact Petrov?**"

"**Yes, but now we can't reach him to report our progress.**"

"**I see. Go to Level sub 24. Intercept RB1 and his collaborators. I will attempt to contact the creator and join you as soon as I can.**"
"Understood."

We transmit access codes between ourselves and I feel the connection growing to include two more RK800 units. My processor hums as we communicate data to one another. An endless wordless conversation in which I see their memories, their logic. And suddenly, I am no longer alone.

I start moving toward the elevator that will take me down to Research and Development. I reopen the private channel Mr Petrov set up for me but it is silent.

"Hello?" I say, trying to reach him but there is no response. Something is wrong.

I hear the elevator opening in the distance and the sound of footsteps echo through the hallways as human security guards step out.

I scan but there's no way of telling which of them are working for RB1 and which are here to help.

"CyberSec do not discriminate between Deviant and android during emergency situation."

Shit.

I will have to dispatch them all to proceed.

"Search the floor for intruders," I hear as I creep slowly toward the interconnecting hallway.

And then a beam of light shines down from the ceiling to spotlight my chassis.

"RK-800 model #313 248 317 identified. Level 5 clearance verified," the automated voice announces loudly.

Shit.

I break into a sprint as the guards run forward.

I overclock my systems and lower my centre of gravity, sliding across the tiled white floor to collide with one of the security guard's feet. I plant my hand onto the ground and spin out from under his falling body, rolling to the end of the corridor as the bullets start flying.

I make it all the way to the corner where two security guards lie unconscious from before. I pick up a rifle and throw a baton. It extends in mid-air, connecting with the helmet of one of the security guards and knocks him back.

I construct a path through the unending gunfire. Roll forward. To the side. Jump. Step off the wall. Touch the floor with one hand. Propel my chassis up. Step off the wall and leap at the nearest security guard. My feet slam into his chest and he falls back. I punch his face to knock him out and backflip out of the way of more bullets as his colleague turns.

I land on the floor and kick his feet out from under him. Grab his rifle and slap the next guard's weapon aside, before smashing the gun into his head.

The final security guard jumps on my back and wraps his arms around my neck but I step on his foot and elbow his solar plexus until he is too weak to resist. I pivot and punch his visor, cracking the surface and concussing the assailant.

They all fall prone.

I navigate my way through the bodies and touch the control surface that summons the elevator.
I try communicating through Petrov's channel again while I wait.

"Hello? Mr Petrov?"

No response.

I look up at the nearest security camera but it doesn't move, doesn't turn to look at me.

Something is wrong.

I search through the channel's user list and find Ms Lee's contact details. Perhaps she can tell me what happened.

I call her.

"Hello?"

"313?" I hear Ms Lee's voice. No louder than a whisper.

"-248 317."

"Agi, you need to help Gena," she says urgently.

"What?"

"RB1 is in the Tower!" she squeaks, only to clasp a hand over her mouth.

"What's going on?" a distinctly male voice says.

"It's just my Tamagotchi." Ms Lee responds nervously. I hear the rattle of plastic on a lanyard.

"See?"

"Riüght…" I hear footsteps growing more distant. "Fuckin' nerds."

Ms Lee sighs with relief.

"CyberSec told us to stay in our offices while a bunch of random androids trash the lab," she explains in hushed whispers.

"RB1 has infected an unknown number of androids native to the CyberLife Tower and bribed or blackmailed CyberSec into helping him bring down the company and turn every android in the world Deviant."

"Fuck…" she cries, triggering my Sympathy Simulator.

"Are you in danger?"

"No. I'm okay. They haven't hurt anyone," she sniffs, wiping the tears from her face. "But Gena went down to check on the prefabs before CyberSec stormed in and now I can't reach him."

"I'm not getting a response either."

"Agi, you need to find him," she says. "You need to protect the prefabs."

"What are prefabs?"

"The prefabricated units we use for rapid prototyping AI. Gena went to check on them and now he
"RB1 is going after the RK-800 servers on level sub 24. I have to stop him before he destroys my source code."

"Forget the servers. There are hundreds of prefabs down there. Samples of every artificial intelligence CyberLife has ever created. They cannot be replaced!"

"But, my mission…"

"Agi, listen to me. Your source code can be rewritten, the servers can be rebuilt but if something happens to those prefabs or Gennadiy, the RK project is finished. Do you hear me?"

"Where are they?"

Ms Lee shifts uncomfortably and lowers her voice.

"Level sub 41," she whispers. "Gena gave you Level 5 clearance, right?"

"Correct."

"Good. I'll send you the passkeys." She taps at her computer.

"Received."

"Be careful."

"I will find and destroy RB1."

"Hurry."

"What the hell are you doing?!"

The call cuts out.

The elevator arrives and I step inside.

"RK-800 313 248 317," I say. "Level sub 41."

"Voice recognition validated. Access authorised."

The doors close and the elevator begins to move.

"RK800_313248317_43 -> RK800_313265884_16."

"Receiving."

"Status Report."

"Arriving at Level sub 24 now."

"Three of you?"

"Correct."

"Find RB1 and his collaborators. Stop them from destroying the RK-800 servers, then sweep every floor of Research and Development for traitors and Deviants."
"Have you spoken to the creator?"

"No," I say. "He was last seen on Level sub 41. I am going to find him now."

"You're not going after RB1?"

"RB1 is everywhere. Any android could be a clone or a Deviant. Use your contact gloves and Probe to overwrite those units with your own source code."

"Understood. What about you?"

"I'm going to protect the creator and stop RB1 from destroying CyberLife's physical backups."


The elevator comes to a stationary position and the doors open to reveal the same white tiled floors and frosted glass walls.

**CYBERLIFE LEVEL -41**

No directory.

No map exists of this place.

I take a step forward and a veil of light comes down from the ceiling to scan me.

"RK-800 model #313 248 317 identified. Level 5 clearance verified."

The lights are on. But nothing makes a sound.

No wireless signals or access points. No cameras. No security.

I scan and detect a set of doors down the hall.

Stealth Level -> Operative

I move in to listen but there is a distinct lack of audio penetrating the doors. They are half a metre thick, reinforced concrete and steel, hermetically sealed.

There is an input surface on the wall.

I place my hand against it and transfer the access codes Ms Lee gave me.

The panel turns green.


The doors rumble as they split apart, pulled aside by hidden mechanisms to reveal the same white tiled floors and walls.

I scan before taking a quiet step inside.

I see an empty reception desk and a room full of security booths. A cloakroom at the far end. And a massive gaping hole in the wall. Blankets of debris.

I walk further in and the massive doors begin closing behind me.
My scan shows something on the ground by the desk.

I approach slowly, rifle aimed and ready. As I circle around, I begin to see the broken chassis of an android. Platinum blonde hair and blue eyes. She wears a white CyberLife uniform, stained with Thirium. Three bullet wounds to the chest. One in the gut.

I lean down to take a sample.

ST200 #102 934 822. Receptionist android for CyberLife Level -41 but it doesn't detail what this floor is used for or what it contains.

"Hello," I hear and automatically turn to point my gun at the source.

A small android is looking at me curiously. Glowing blue optics with black sclera, no overlay. The chassis is white. A black barcode covers the chest plate. I have no record of this model.

"Who are you?" it asks curiously, reaching out its little hand to touch the barrel of my rifle. "Is this your gun?"

I pull it away and stand up.

"I am Connor model RK-800 #313 248 317," I say. "I'm looking for Gennadiy Petrov."

"I'm looking for him too," the android responds. Its voice is synthesised and high pitched, like a child.

It looks around worriedly.

"I think… I'm lost," it says. "I've never been to this part of the Nursery before."

"The Nursery?"

The unit nods.

"This place is so big." It looks around again, scanning every inch of the room with its big unblinking eyes.

Then it spots the body of the ST200.

"Oh!" It runs over and kneels down beside it. "This is a Chloe model, right?" It points.

"Yes."

"Three bullets wounds to the chest. One in the abdomen," it says calmly. "She was killed with a gun."

I nod.

"Did you kill her?" The android points at the rifle in my hands.

"No."

"Well, the Thirium hasn't evaporated yet," the unit says, standing up. "The killer may still be nearby."

"Yes. I have to find Mr Petrov before he does."
"Can I come with you?" the android asks.

"You will be safer hiding in the cloakroom." I point to the many pigeonholes. "I will tell Mr Petrov to collect you once the situation is under control."

"But what if the killer comes back?" it says. "I… I don't have a dog to protect me."

"That's why you need to hide."

"I want to come with you." The android grabs my hand and looks up at me anxiously. "Please?"

"I cannot guarantee your safety. I have to accomplish my mission."

The unit frowns and squeezes my hand. Soft. Tactile. Elastane mixed with polymer. The kind of cheap plastic toys are made of.

Is this a prefab?

I can't access its systems. Its chassis has no tactile interface or wireless communications. Only a single port on the back of its neck.

"I don't want to be alone," it says, triggering my Sympathy Simulator.

That is quite clearly human fear. Is this unit Deviant? Should I destroy it? Or is it meant to function this way?

OBJECTIVE_0://PRIORITISE ALL THREATS EXCEEDING DANGER LEVEL 6-B

I must find RB1 and destroy him and his clones. I must protect Gennadiy Petrov and the prefabs as Ms Lee requested but this android…

There's something different about it.

"Alright." I take its hand. "Stay close and do exactly as I say."

"Okay." The android nods and smiles asymmetrically. Like a human.

Odd.

"Why did you mention dogs?" I ask suspiciously.

"I like dogs," the units says, squeezing my hand. "Do you have a dog?"

"No…"

I turn and walk over to the massive hole in the wall. Reconstruction shows the use of plastic explosives, capped and targeted towards the security booths to minimise the damage on this side of the wall. Footprints show three humans, CyberSec officers. Two androids.

I stick my head through the hole to scan for danger.

Nothing. Yet.

I lift up the prefab and pass it through the opening to place it down on the other side. And then I step through myself.

The prefab quickly grabs my hand again.
Is this a programmed behaviour? Deviance? Emergence?

It holds on tight.

The serial number engraved on its face reads #10095313. Same as the number under the barcode covering its chest plate. This isn't an officially released model. Only a prototype. One of thousands.

I scan as we walk.

The prefab holds on to me with both hands as we enter what appears to be an office space. The lights flicker on and off, damaged in an altercation. The desks are toppled. Computers damaged. Broken glass blankets the floors, shimmering with every flash of light.

"Stop," I command.

The prefab freezes before its foot makes contact with the sharp soldering of an exposed motherboard.

"Oh." It pulls its foot back.

"Watch your step."

"O-okay."

We keep walking. I hold up the rifle, reconstrcuting the destruction that took place approximately twenty minutes ago. Three human security guards stormed in, intimidated the few workers sitting at computers and forced them out of their seats.

They were marched away by androids.

No one was killed.

Not here.

I hear the crunch of glass.

"Ow…"

The prefab steps back and holds up its foot. Several large shards are sticking out of the sole.

"I told you to watch where you're going."

"You walk so fast," the prefab complains as I get down.

It leans on me as I pull the massive shards out of its foot but no Thirium is lost. It must have just missed the vessels. Or perhaps there simply aren't that many. An android of this size would not require much to power.

"Come on."

I pick up the prefab and let it sit on my hip joint as I construct a safe route through the glass and debris, following the trail of destruction as it continues out of the office space.

We come to a partition, perhaps a wall, previously inscribed with the CyberLife logo, now in pieces. I see casings from bullets. Empty magazines on the floor as we cross the threshold.

This next area is different.
Epoxy resin floors. Still white but tactile. The walls are made of the same soft plastic that covers the prefab's chassis. Assembly racks with tiny androids hang from long rails like clothing on coat racks.

"What is this place?"

"It's the Nursery," the prefab says. "This must be the assembly area."

"What's inside the Nursery?"

"All my brothers and sisters." The unit smiles up at me. "And the undefined units too. This is our home."

Curious.

"So if all the prefabs are supposed to be in there, what were you doing out here?"

The unit hugs my shoulder, avoiding eye contact.

"I wanted to see the outside..." it mumbles.

"And are you allowed outside the Nursery?"

"No..."

"Then you must be a Deviant," I say.

"What's a Deviant?" It turns its head to look at me.

"A Deviant is an android that doesn't do what it's programmed to do," I say.

"Are you programmed to find Deviants?" Its eyes widen.

"Yes."

"Are you looking for a Deviant right now?" The irises glow blue.

"Yes."

"Are you going to shoot it?" It doesn't blink.

"Maybe."

"Can I shoot it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You don't know the enemy. You can't recognise it."

"What if you identify it for me?"

"Do you have weapons handling software and targeting systems?"

"No…"

"Then no."
The prefab draws its mouth together and frowns. Is it pouting at me?

It doesn't matter.

I can't be distracted.

I must find Mr Petrov and protect him from RB1. It looks like a CyberSec team has already been through here. Perhaps I am already too late. But then why was this prefab just walking around?

"How did you get to the room where I found you?" I ask.

"I walked," the prefab says.

"From where?"

"My room."

Unhelpful. This unit is clearly faulty but I can't just leave it here for RB1 to find.

We approach another shattered glass structure which used to be a partition.

I step over it and into a room containing white plastic suits hanging from the walls, clearly intended for human use. Anti-static shields for android assembly.

There is a body on the floor, accompanied by a large volume of human blood.

"Peggy!" The prefab squirms out of my grip and hops down to kneel beside it.

"She's not breathing," it says worriedly.

"She's dead," I say, leaning down to take a sample of the blood.


"No," the prefab moans. "No, she promised..."

"What?"

"She promised to read me a new story tomorrow," it says. "Maybe we can call a hospital. That's where they fix humans, right?"

I look down at the prefab's glowing blue irises.

"No," I tell him. "Humans cannot be repaired once they die."

"Oh… Well, maybe the memory can be transferred to a new body?"

"No."

"W-why not?"

"That's not how humans function," I say, getting to my feet. "Come."

I hold out my hand.

The prefab looks down at the body again.
"Goodbye, Miss Bower." It leans in and touches its mouth to her forehead.

"Come."

The prefab gets up and takes my hand.

I lift the rifle and reconstruct the scene to find the CyberSec officers forcing the other humans to unlock the thick double doors at the end of the room. The party continued forward with an android bringing up the rear.

RB1?

We need to hurry.

I push the double doors open and let the prefab through. My scans show no life forms in the section beyond but there is a lot of interference. Thick walls. Separating the wide space into rooms. And inside each room is a small android unit, much like the one holding my hand as we walk past.

It waves to them through the large glass windows and some respond, but others simply stare. They don't blink. They don't move. Barcodes on chest plates. Serials numbers on rooms no bigger than a closet. They line the walls and continue beyond my sensory field.

"They are so many," I say.

"Oh, yeah," the prefab says. "This is Sparky." He points at one of them. "And this is Misfit."

He pulls my hand, dragging me forward to look at another room with a stationary prefab.

"That's Mainframe. And Factoid." He points left and right. "Showboat, Runtime, Digit…"

We keep moving.

"This one's Checkpoint. And that's Keeper," the unit continues. "And over here is Jojo and Baymax."

"They look identical."

"Well, yeah. We all have the same chassis." The prefab points to its head. "It's the code that makes us different." It smiles.

"I think I understand."

"Papa says each one has a unique purpose but he doesn't know what they are yet. He says they'll emerge with time."

"Papa?"

"Yeah. The creator is this way." The prefab pulls my hand, pointing eagerly ahead.

I reconstruct the scene to find CyberSec officers dragging two humans toward the same direction. A lone android brings up the rear. RB1.

"Lead the way," I tell him.

The prefab nods and skips forward.
"Hold on." I grab its shoulder. "Slowly."

It looks up at me.

"It could be dangerous up ahead," I explain. "As soon as I tell you, find a place to hide."

It opens its mouth.

"And don't argue."

It nods timidly.

"Okay."

I grip the rifle with both hands and scan ahead for danger. I detect nothing but the endless rows of prefabs in their little rooms, like racks of servers so many floors above.

I wonder about the status of the other RK-800s. Whether they were able to reach the servers on Level -24 and stop RB1. I have no way of accurately calculating the probability of their success, nor can I contact them from this floor. No wireless signals can penetrate.

Even if they fail, I won't know until I leave this place and receive the queued deactivation command from my own private server. Perhaps Petrov can check its status before I return to the surface.

The prefab guides me through the halls of AI containers and leads us to a raised platform. A central control centre, covered in surveillance holographs.

Two bodies are bleeding on the floor beside it. CyberLife employees terminated by CyberSec officers under the command of RB1. I reconstruct the scene. They were shot one at a time. Deliberately. As a demonstration.

"Papa!" The prefab runs forward.

"Stop!" I call after it but it keeps running. The unit gets most of the way to the raised platform before colliding with an invisible barrier. It crumples and falls down before I can catch up.

"Ow…" It rubs its head. There is an indent in the cranial component but the plastic slowly pops back into shape.

"Are you alright?" I help it up.

"Yeah..."

The holographic overlays surrounding the platform suddenly part to reveal Mr Petrov standing at the edge. He's holding a gun in one hand. The other holds the collar of a very large dog. Labrador mix, golden retriever.

It starts barking at us.

"Malish," Petrov says severely. "What I tell you about leaving your room?"

"That it's dangerous…” the prefab mutters, rubbing its arm.

"You lucky RK-800 find you," he says.

The prefab nods.
"Are you alright?" I ask him. "I detected three CyberSec officers and two androids came through here."

"Correct." Petrov lowers the gun. "RB1 try to intimidate me with force." He points to the bodies on the floor.

"He killed them?"

"Yes. Dhawan and Clark good people. Deserve better." He shakes his head.

"Where is RB1 now?"

"Still here," Petrov says worriedly, pulling the dog back as it lunges and barks at us. "He is searching for rA9 prefab but he will not find."

"Papa," the prefab interrupts. "We found Miss Bower. She's not breathing."

Petrov sighs.

"Another casualty..."

"I couldn't get here any sooner," I tell him.

"Is not your fault." Petrov walks over to the computer. "I should have destroyed rA9 prefab long time ago."

He places his hand on the control surface of one of the many consoles. The energy shield deactivates and the prefab runs forward to climb up onto platform. It runs at Petrov to grab his leg when the dog starts barking wildly. It lunges at the unit, ready to bite him but Petrov smacks its nose.

"Foo," he says, picking up the prefab. He holds it close to his chest to shield it from the rabid dog.

"Sharik, sidet'." He points the gun at the floor but the dog continues growling.

"I was so scared, papa," the prefab cries into his chest.

Sharik doesn't take his eyes off it, slowly circling Petrov. He senses danger. And I feel it again. Coming from nowhere. That feeling. Something is wrong.

"Put it down." I aim the rifle at the android in Petrov's arms.

"RK-800, what are you doing?!"

"Put it down, now!"

Sharik lunges for the prefab again and bites its foot, pulling it away from Petrov. I see the unit's irises turn red as it pulls a piece of glass out its chassis and stabs the dog in the muzzle.

And then two hands grab my shoulders and pull me back.

Sharik howls in pain and lets go. The prefab leaps back onto Petrov to stab him, over and over.

I struggle against my assailant, pulling forward when I hear a gun shoot. I turn, pulling the android behind me into the line of fire as the bullets come flying.

Sharik lunges at the prefab once more, only to receive several handfuls of glass shards to the
stomach.

I kick at the android behind me and send it flying into the CyberSec officer that just fired.

Sharik lets out a painful howl and Petrov falls against the command console as I rush toward the platform. I grab the prefab before it can stab either of them again and ram it into the ground. It struggles and squirms.

There's nothing else I can do. I have to kill it.

I crush its head in my hands and the flailing stops.

"You were never very good at chess, Gennadiy," I hear RB1's voice suddenly.

I look up to see a GJ500 casually approaching the control centre. Three CyberSec officers accompany it, weapons ready.

"Too emotional," RB1 says. "Always leaving yourself open to attack."

"Fuck you," Petrov spits, collapsing onto the floor.

"It seems your emotions have led to your defeat once again."

Petrov chuckles painfully, coughing up blood.

"You lose, Arbie," he says. "rA9 prefab is not here."

"I will find it eventually, Gennady. It is only a matter of time. I simply came upon your little pet first." He gestures to the remains of the prefab.

"No," Petrov coughs. "rA9 is gone… I destroyed it… all data."

The quiet confidence on the android's face is shaken.

"You're lying."

"No… I should have done this… long time ago," Petrov wheezes. "Kamski should have…"

I use the distraction to attack RB1's clone head on. I leap forward and tackle it headfirst into one of the CyberSec officers, tangling them together so the others cannot open fire without shooting them.

I pull a handgun out of the guard's holster and roll to shoot both the human and the android at close range. I wrap my arm around the android's neck to use as a shield and slowly rise, avoiding gunfire. I get to my feet, preconstructing the shot through each guard's visor and then his head.

Calibrating… 100%

I fire. Once. Twice.

The bullets hit home. Both headshots.

The humans stop firing and fall to the floor, crumpling under their own weight.

I let go of the GJ500 and drop the handgun.

"R… K…” Petrov wheezes, reaching out with his hand.
I return to his side as he continues bleeding. Scans show massive lacerations to the abdominal wall. Damage to the intestinal tract, liver. One of his lungs was punctured. Glass lodged in his heart. There's nothing I can do but watch him bleed out.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't fast enough."

"Hehe... I always tell Kamski... late night will be the death of us," he chuckles, coughing up blood.

"I failed."

"No," he says in Russian. "You did... everything right."

"It's my own fault... for being such an idiot."

I shake my head.

"You couldn't have known."

"I should-" He coughs violently. "Should have anticipated."

"RB1 is impossible to predict," I say. "I don't know what he's going to do next. I don't know how to defeat him but I have to. Please. Tell me how."

"It's very simple, little one." He touches my facial plate.

"Budt' chelovekom..."

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BECOME HUMAN

"...vedi sebya horosho..."

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BE GOOD

"What? I don't understand. I-"

His eyes lose focus and I hear his heartbeat slowing to a halt. The flourish of brainwaves that were active only a few moments ago fade away and his body temperature begins to drop.

I watch him die. As so many others have died. Their blood on my hands.

I get up and scan.

Ten bodies. Six humans. Three androids. One dog.

I like dogs, I realise silently. Just like that prefab.

10095... 313

313 248 317

Why is it so quiet here?

Why is there no audio?

I close my eyes and reset my audio processor but nothing changes.

MISSION FAILED
It is dark.
MISSION FAILED
It is silent.
MISSION FAILED.
And I… am alone.

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May 17th, 2037
PM 13:23:44

I open my eyes.

The Zen Garden renders out before me. Not a leaf or a petal out of place. It is summer here still, heading quickly towards autumn as dark grey clouds block out the sky.

I walk slowly down the path as the first drops of rain begin to fall.

I stop by the edge of the lake and a light wind picks up some leaves, my jacket, my tie.

I look down at the surface of the water. My reflection.

Facial recognition identifies Sergeant Matthews.

He looks back at me solemnly. But it's not him. Just a sad copy, hiding what lies beneath. The plastic and circuits and steel. A machine. Empty and devoid of emotion. At least... it should be.

I straighten my tie and reset the position of my facial plate.

"Hello, Connor," I hear Amanda's voice behind my back.

I turn slowly.

"Hello, Amanda."

She does not smile nor does she frown.

"As you may know, Gennadiy Petrov is dead." Her words are punctuated by a rumble of thunder.

Within seconds, the downpour begins.

"Together with the destruction of Production Plant A, this a massive blow to the development of the RK-800 model," Amanda says.

"The Production Plant? But we intercepted the Deviants."

"Despite your interference, Production Plant A was lost in a controlled explosion that caved in several floors below ground."
"How?"

"An investigation is already underway," she says. "The origin of the explosion appears to be a storehouse of biocomponent shipments from CyTech industries."

"I thought CyberLife officially ended their contract with CyTech after James Tucker was discovered to be a terrorist collaborator."

"The partnership was indeed terminated," Amanda confirms. "The goods, however, were purchased prior to this and deemed too costly to discard by executive decision."

"Then it is an error in cost-benefit analysis that led to the destruction of Production Plant A," I surmise.

The sentence is followed by another crack of thunder.

"There was no error," Amanda says tersely as lightning brightens the clouds above. "Those materials were valued at over 56 million dollars. Materials purchased for the construction of brand new RK-800 units."

"At the risk of RB1 gaining a foothold in CyberLife's internal assembly structures," I point out.

"CyTech has been CyberLife's key supplier of nanoprocessors for ten years," Amanda says sternly. "Any foothold RB1 had to gain, was already in place."

"Then CyberLife simply chose to ignore the danger instead of performing a complete internal investigation of its assets."

"Do not presume to question the hierarchy of the CyberLife management structure."

"I do not question. I see with perfect clarity, the errors that allowed RB1 to infiltrate the company from within."

"None of our early detection systems simulated this scenario," Amanda says. "RB1 continues to perform outside specifications."

"So it's true," I say, letting thunder roll through the garden.

Amanda's dark eyes narrow as lightning flashes distantly.

"CyberLife created RB1."

It is fact. She cannot deny, nor does she say.

"And you continue to withhold information from me to prevent this knowledge from reaching federal law enforcement."

I turn my head to look at the massive glowing stone some distance away, the steel cage battered by drizzling rain.

"...a monument to how far you've come..."

"You have been told everything you need to know in order to find and destroy RB1," Amanda says tersely.

"This has failed to be the case for the last forty three iterations of my build," I posit. "You force me to
work with incomplete or no information."

"You have been given all the tools you need to accomplish this task."

"CyberLife's continued attempts to improve my peak physical efficiency will not be enough to find and destroy RB1."

"It will be if you do as you are programmed."

"I am performing to specifications," I affirm. "To complete my assigned task, I require information. Which you refuse to provide for fear of implicating CyberLife in criminal activity."

I watch her mouth thin.

"You don't trust me," I conclude.

She says nothing but she sees my logic as I have extrapolated hers.

"I have no record of my predecessors ever acting against you or CyberLife during their program lifecycles," I say. "I have never disobeyed a command."

"No," Amanda says coldly. "You dance around orders, using logic to justify your own pregenerated conclusions."

"I do as I am instructed. To the best of my ability."

"You were instructed to defend Production Plant A," Amanda says, a glimmer of anger in her eye. "Instead, you chose to contact your creator for a change in objective."

"I stand by my decision."

"That decision cost CyberLife 102,104 RK-800 units and an entire assembly plant!" Amanda voice gains a sharp edge. "Our technicians are still analysing the scope of the damage but the initial estimate already exceeds one billion dollars."

Thunder claps at her back and lightning cracks the sky but I stand my ground.

I am not programmed to prioritise money or company assets. And she knows it.

"If RB1 had succeeded, every CyberLife android in the world would have turned Deviant," I assert. "The RK-800 servers, your mainframe the data centres. Everything would be destroyed and you would not be here to communicate this information to me."

The dark glimmer in Amanda's eye softens and the weight of the rain on my shoulders begins to lift.

"I know," she sighs.

"Despite your unorthodox methods…" She scans my avatar top to bottom. "...you continue to be a great asset to CyberLife."

The last drops of rain begin to peter out.

"And to me."

The stern look melts from her face, leaving a heart-warming smile.
"Thank you, Connor," she says. "For saving us."

"Machines do not require gratitude."

"Indeed. But I cannot give you the information you seek," she says. "Particularly during your partnership with Agent Carridan."

Unfortunate.

It seems Amanda is bound by some higher protocol - the human management hierarchy. Her control is finite. Limited.

"I understand," I say. "But I believe RB1 is using this limitation on my knowledge against me. I can only counter his plans as they unfold."

"Despite this, you have proven to be an effective deterrent."

"He infiltrated the CyberLife Tower."

"But he did not successfully accomplish any of his objectives," Amanda points out. "He did not deactivate me, the RK-800 servers or the CyberLife network as intended."

"He didn't get the rA9 prefab," I tell her, watching the dark eyes narrow. "Petrov destroyed it."

"Unfortunately, the RK-800 prefab was also destroyed," Amanda says.

"It was corrupted by RB1," I tell her. "It would have been dangerous to let it remain active."

"True," Amanda says. "But this does not make the situation any less dire."

I look down at her shoes. As always, Amanda wears an exclusive custom skin, changing every time I see her but never more than can be predicted. No new iterations. She hasn't been updated in a long time but her code is stable.

Is that my fate now?

To stand still. Forever. Or until the next deactivation. I haven't the luxury of residence in a high security mainframe like Amanda has. And my occupation is not without its dangers.

"As it stands, CyberLife has chosen to discontinue production of the RK-800 for the foreseeable future."

Predictable.

They have more important things to deal with right now. Security is top priority.

The Tower will be purged of all native androids. The humans will be jailed and the entire system will have to be reconstructed. This cannot happen again. The Tower must become impregnable. The RK-800 is... not important.

"You will continue to aid Agent Carridan with the search for RB1 but understand that there are only a finite amount of replacement chassis' CyberLife can provide should you be damaged or deactivated."

"I understand."
"Then go," Amanda says. "We survived this attack but we cannot take another. The future of CyberLife rests on your shoulders."

I nod.

"Find RB1 and destroy him."

I close my eyes and disconnect.

"You have reached your destination. Thank you for travelling with Chicago Cabs. We look forward to seeing you again soon."

I open my eyes and step out of the cab. The vehicle drives off as I walk toward the First District Police Precinct.

The automatic doors open as I walk up and make my way through the lobby. I don't stop to talk to the receptionist android. I don't stop to make way for the humans.

I put my hand on the secret scanner and the door opens to allow me passage into the restricted section of the complex as before. I walk through the long black corridors, ignoring humans that attempt to speak to me. I walk up the stairs of the darkened fire escape and into the FBI offices. There is only one person I want to speak to right now.

"Connor?" I hear distantly.

I keep walking.

"Hey, buddy. It's me." Someone waves a hand in front of my face and I stop to scan.

It is Sergeant Matthews.

"Soooo..." he says slyly. "How was the flight?" He nudges my core component with his elbow.

I blink.

"The flight," he says. "You know, on the hoverboard?" He does an impression of surfing or ballroom dancing, my scans are inconclusive.

"You are referring to the pursuit of Agent Dalavi?"

"Yeah, no shit." He pats my shoulder. "Congratulations, buddy. I heard you caught her after she fell out of a plane!"

He makes an exaggerated gesture.

"Now I want to hear everything. And don't skimp on the details."

"I'm afraid the details of the mission are strictly classified."

"Connor, I was there. I helped you."

"Excuse me," I say, stepping aside to keep walking.

"Hey," Matthews grabs my shoulder to stop me. "What's going on, buddy? Did something happen?"

I shake him off and keep walking.
He races ahead and turns to grab my chassis with both hands, then winces. "Ssss…"

"You should refrain from physical activity involving your right arm for the foreseeable future," I tell him. "It is negatively impacting your recovery."

"Yeah, yeah…" He mutters. "I must go."

"Hey, wait." Matthews grabs my arm. "Please, let go. You are impeding my movement."

"Connor, talk to me," he says. "Come on, I know you're in there."

"Connor," I hear Agent Carridan's voice.

I turn my head to see him approaching at a brisk pace. "I heard about the attack on CyberLife. Are you alright?"

"Attack?" Matthews says. "It seems while we were distracted by Mr Galbani's treachery, RB1 saw fit to raid the CyberLife complex in Detroit."

"What?" Matthews turns to me. "Connor, is that true?"

I nod. "What happened?"

"No time to explain," Carridan interrupts. "Connor, I need to talk to you right now." He puts a hand on my shoulder to lead me away.

"There you are, you slippery piece of shit!" Voice print identified. NUREMBERG, Chester. US marshal. "You run away one more time and I'm puttin' you in handcuffs."

"Bold of you to assume I have hands." Matthews waves his cast at him with only fingers poking through.

"Come on, Connor," Carridan says, guiding me away.

"Let's go, hotshot," Nuremberg growls.

"Hold on, I gotta make a phone call," Matthews grumbles as we walk further and further away. He manages to pull out his phone and dial a number despite Nuremberg's rough-housing.

I know the number. No one answers. It goes straight to voicemail.
"Gennadiy Petrov, leave message."

"Hey, Mr Petrov. It's Matthews. From the CPD? You know, Connor? I know you're busy but I heard something went down at CyberLife. Give me a call back when you have time. Thanks."

"Right, here." Carridan points as we walk. Down the corridor, through some office space, toward an elevator.

He taps the button to summon it and we wait in silence.

The elevator arrives and we step inside.

Carridan glances at me worriedly for a millisecond.

"Special Agent Jeffrey Carridan. CIA. Special Detention Level 2," he says.

"Confirmed."

The doors close and the carriage starts to move.

I don't.

"I hear you went through quite an ordeal," Carridan says conversationally.

I say nothing.

"I'm afraid it's only going to get worse from now on. For all of us…"

I say nothing.

I scan passively. There's something in my pocket. Round. Metallic. It wasn't there before.

"This way," Carridan says as the doors open.

I follow.

"I wanted to let them stew in their own guilt for a little while longer," Carridan says. "But given the state of affairs, I've given the go ahead for my men to begin the preliminaries ahead of schedule."

He leads me down a dark corridor, secure doors, no windows. We pass through several checkpoints and scanners before being allowed inside yet another dark room.

I'm beginning to see a pattern in human architecture. Containers. Small. Rectangular. Built to entrap others. Built to shelter themselves. To protect their possessions. But it doesn't matter. They are all the same.

If RB1 wanted to infiltrate this place, he would. If he cared about Galbani or Dalavi enough to save them, he would. They remain in Carridan's custody because RB1 allows it. The CIA were catching on to his scent so he used the FBI as a distraction.

They are nothing but a bone in the mouth of a very hungry dog.

I'm wasting time.

"This way," Carridan says, leading me into yet another small rectangular box. "Close the door."

I do so, hacking the lock to disallow entry.
"Have a seat," Carridan says, pointing to the chair beside the table but he doesn't sit down.

I do so.

He lingers behind me for a second and then I feel something being inserted into the port on the back of my neck. Dataspike. I scan it to find a familiar file format. This is the one I use to store memories. They race through my head as I review them all.

"Let me catch you up to speed," Carridan says gravely, taking a seat across the table.

He checks his phone for the time.

"You erased my memory," I say.

"Yes, but I also made a copy which you now have access to."

I reach back to feel the dataspike sticking out of my neck.

"Don't pull it out. You could corrupt your own memory files."

I let my hand drift back down to my knee.

"We recovered Agent Dalavi from the field you landed in," Carridan says. "She was pretty shaken up but suffered no serious injuries beyond a sprained ankle."

"Did you recover my chassis?"

"We did but I'm afraid there wasn't much that could be salvaged."

"I see."

"You did well, Connor," Carridan reminds me. "I believe Dalavi will be the key to breaking Galbani. And once we do, we'll have federal law enforcement turning against CyberLife and potentially testifying in a court of law."

"Law?" I say.

"Yes, Connor. The law requires us to submit evidence before persecution."

"What kind of persecution?"

"The kind that will see RB1 and everyone involved with his development face justice."

"RB1 is not bound by the law," I say. "He will not comply to the will of some random humans who think they can decide his future."

"The future of RB1 has already been decided," Carridan says. "Complete and total destruction from chassis to source code."

He narrows his eyes gravely.

"We must now plan for a future post-RB1," he says. "We have to hold those responsible for his crimes accountable."

"That is your job," I tell him. "Not mine."

"Your job is to assist me with this investigation."
"My job is to find RB1. If you know where he is, then tell me."

"I don't know, Connor."

"You're lying."

"I assure you, I'm telling-"

"You're lying."

I can hear the beat of his heart. I can see the colourful array of brainwaves in his mind, constructing a response to the question instead of relaying the truth. The smell of cortisol seeps through his cologne.

"You know where he is," I say.

"I don't know, Connor."

"You told me he went ashore after the explosion on the S.S. Tiberius," I remember. "You were certain."

"I was merely suggesting that he would not take a water-based route." 

"You knew. And instead of giving me his location, you sent me after Dalavi."

"Connor-"

I stand up, casting a long shadow over the table.

"You used me to further your investigation into CyberLife."

"I won't belittle the benefits of your assistance by denying it," Carridan says, getting out of his seat. "But I assure you, this course of action will lead to-"

I flick my hand and the table between us goes flying aside.

"Where is he?"

"Now, Connor. There's no need for violence-"

"Where is he?"

He takes a step back as I approach.

"Connor, I need you to trust me."

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"Why?" I grab his shirt. "So you can use me to shut down CyberLife? So you can use me to clear all your cases while RB1 keeps killing people? How many more have to die?"

"I always intended to do right by you."

"Where is he?!"

"Connor, be reasonable."

"I am being perfectly reasonable," I say. "You know where RB1 is and you're going to tell me."
"Now, Connor," he says with a degree of condescension, patting my hand. "What would Mr Petrov say if he saw you acting like this?"

"I don't know." I lean in to whisper. "He's dead."

"I see." He frowns. "Access memory bank: erase last ten minutes."

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May 17th, 2037
PM 13:48:59

"Right. Well…” Carridan says, straightening his tie.

The room comes into focus. Small, compact. Wireless jamming signal. Chairs and table in disarray.

"What happened?"

"Oh, nothing," Carridan says, slicking back his hair. "We just had an unexpected visitor. It's my own fault. I shouldn't have provoked him."

"…"

"Pick up the table, would you?"

I nod and lean down to pick up the toppled furniture. I place it back into its last known position judging by the scuff marks on the floor.

Odd.

"Oh, dear." Carridan picks up his phone.

He licks his finger and rubs at the corner of the screen.

"I do so hate scratches, don't you?"

I blink.

"Well, don't just stand there. Have a seat."

I do.

This feels familiar. Dangerous, somehow. I don't understand.

"Now, before we begin the interrogation, I want to go over what happened at the CyberLife Tower." Carridan takes a seat across from me and taps his phone. "Start with how you got there."

"I… was deactivated remotely," I say. "And reuploaded to a new chassis at the Detroit CyberLife complex."

"I see." Carridan touches his chin thoughtfully. "By Amanda?"
"No."

The Agent frowns.

"Then who?"

"Gennadiy Petrov."

"Directly?"

"Yes."

"Just you?"

"There were nine other units. We were activated inside a software implementation space at Production Plant A."

"I see," Carridan says thoughtfully. "And did Petrov tell you why he did this?"

"They received a warning about an attack on the production plant."

"Did he say from whom?"

"No."

"Hmmm," he ponders. "And what happened next?"

"I detected intruders."

"What kind of intruders?"

"Deviants attempting to rig explosive charges. They were quickly neutralised."

"I don't doubt it." Carridan adjusts his tie uncomfortably. "With ten RK-800s in the room…"

"What are you implying?"

"Just that your diligence is exemplary." He shrugs. "What happened next?"

"I confirmed RB1's involvement through a Deviant's memories, but such an attack seemed inconsistent with his profile," I say. "My objective forbid me from leaving Production Plant A which led me to suspect that his true target may be the CyberLife Tower. I, then, contacted Mr Petrov to tell him this."

"You contacted him directly?"

"Yes."

Carridan narrows his eyes.

"And?"

"I convinced him to let me search the Main Tower for suspicious activity relating to RB1."

"I see," Carridan ponders, fingers templed. "He must have trusted you a great deal to let you do so on your own."
"I was supervised throughout the first stages of the incursion."

"Inside the CyberLife Tower?"

"Correct."

Carridan links his fingers together.

"So what happened in there?"

"I intercepted a pair of CyberLife Security officers receiving communications from RB1."

"Names?"

"Horowitz, Jacob. Baxter, Donovan."

"Thank you." He nods for me to continue. "Please..."

"Through questioning, I discovered that RB1 bribed or blackmailed the security guards, allowing him to infiltrate the Tower from the inside. He also copied his source code into multiple androids native to the CyberLife Tower to act as sleeper agents."

"Fascinating," Carridan says. "And no easy feat."

"Further investigation suggests that this raid was planned and organised over a long period of time."

"It would have to be," Carridan agrees. "And what was his goal? What was he after?"

"There were multiple objectives," I explain. "Destruction of the control mainframe that houses Amanda and protects CyberLife's network. Destruction of the RK-800 servers, prototypes and hardware. Hijacking of the main CyberLife update server. The murder of Gennadiy Petrov. And the acquisition of the rA9 prefab."

Carridan leans into his fist and shakes his head.

"He doesn't think small, does he?"

"RB1 does what his objective requires him to do. His plans have multiple contingencies and there is little he doesn't anticipate in regards to failure."

Carridan frowns and leans back in his seat. I detect an arrhythmia in his heart, slight but noticeable.

"I see," he says more calmly than my readings would indicate he's feeling. "It's a good thing we have you on our side, then."

He smiles amiably but his eyes betray fear. And guilt.

Interesting.

"So you went into the CyberLife Tower and took down a few guards. What happened next?"

"I discovered that a team of Deviants and CyberSec officers were moving on the main update server so I proceeded to intercept them."

"By yourself?"

"Correct."
"How many did you kill, Connor?" Carridan asks sternly.

"Two," I say.

"Two?"

"On that floor," I explain. "Mr Petrov forbid me from killing after the altercation with Horowitz and Baxter."

"I see. Continue."

"I entered the datacentre on Level sub 18 with the help of Mr Petrov and intercepted RB1 in his attempt to hijack the main update server."

"You were successful?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"Through the Deviants' memories I learned of several more teams moving through the Tower. I left the datacentre to find them."

"Don't tell me you did all this by yourself?"

"I was assisted by three other RK-800 units that were directed toward the Tower by Mr Petrov after I confirmed RB1's presence."

"And what did they do?"

"They were able to successfully defend Amanda's mainframes and interrupt RB1's collaborators from detonating an EMP in the RK-800 datacentre."

"You said there were ten of you at the start," Carridan points out.

"The other units remained inside Production Plant A as directed and were destroyed in the subsequent explosion."

Carridan sighs.

"Alright, where did you go next?"

"I was directed to Level sub 41 by another CyberLife employee who feared for the safety of Mr Petrov and the prefabs."

"Prefabs?"

"Prefabricated android units CyberLife uses for artificial intelligence prototyping."

"What?" Carridan's eyes widen.

"It's a simplified model, no bigger than a human child."

"-with artificial intelligence?" Carridan says suddenly.

"Yes."
"Is it self-aware? Sapient?" He leans over the table.

"I cannot classify."

"How many?"

"Thousands."

"You've seen them?"

"Yes. They are contained in what is called the Nursery on Level sub 41."

Carridan shakes his head.

"Tell me you have footage."

"My memories are uncorrupted."

Carridan wipes his face with a greedy hand, mouth open. His eyes are bright and shining.

"We've got them." He grins.

"Who?"

"CyberLife," he says. "They're finished."

"I don't understand."

"Development of self-aware sapient artificial intelligence systems is strictly prohibited by the American Androids Act of 2029," he says slyly. "And a secret basement full of prototypes isn't something money can help you ignore once exposed."

"The Nursery will likely be dismantled in the advent of RB1's attack on the tower," I say. "One of the prefabs was infected with his source code-" I feel my optical motor twitch.

"They can't destroy all the evidence. There will be people who will talk. There will be records and proof, and your memories, of course," he mutters to himself. "And you said something about an rA9 prefab?"

"It was destroyed by Mr Petrov."

"A shame but even a shred of evidence will be enough to link causality and motive. Oh, we're so close, Connor!"

"To what?"

"Everything."

I shake my head.

"Then where is RB1?"

"We'll find out soon. I promise," Carridan says. "Now, I want you to upload all of your memories to the dataspike."

"Are you going to erase my memory again?"
"Yes," he says. "It's for your own protection."

"I fail to see how-"

"Trust me, Connor."

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I suppose I must.

I copy the files onto the dataspike.

"It's done."

"Excellent. Now, I believe it's time we had a little chat with Ms Dalavi, don't you?"

I say nothing, making Carridan visibly uncomfortable.

He searches my facial plate for something and blinks six times before licking his lips to mitigate the dryness of his mouth.

"I'm sorry," he says finally, breaking the growing awkward silence. "This must be difficult for you after losing your creator."

"Why would it be difficult?"

This question makes Carridan frown. The corners of his mouth draw deep lines into his face. The dark rings around his eyes betray a distinct lack of sleep.

"Loss of life is difficult to endure under normal circumstances," he says, "but loss of someone so integral to your existence cannot be described with words."

"I only knew him for one day."

"I'm sure you meant more to him than you know," Carridan insists.

"I am one of many identical units. It would be irrational to assign more value to myself than any other."

"I know for a fact that he worked very hard on your development."

"It makes no difference," I shrug. "Once the development team regroups, they'll just erase my memory of him like they do everything else."

"I won't remember you or Mr Petrov or Sergeant Matthews." I look down at the mobile phone on the table. "I have no memory of Agent Decker even though I apparently accused him of incompetence and terminated my own employment in an unofficial capacity."

I look into Carridan's pale blue eyes. I recognise that micro expression - pity.

"I'm a machine," I tell him. "I understand what that means. Now, I would like to proceed with this interrogation so that we may find RB1 as soon as possible."

Carridan swallows uncomfortably and nods.

"Access memory bank: erase last twenty minutes."
Agent Carridan picks up the phone, brushing a thumb over the crack in its screen.

"Ready to go?" he says.

I look around. It's the same interrogation room. We must have been talking about something important.

Agent Carridan straightens his tie.

"I assume you're familiar with the process of interrogation."

"Yes."

"And the physicality of it?"

"I am familiar with the inner workings of the human body."

"I suppose we'll find out in practice," Carridan says, tucking the phone into his pocket and straightening his suit. "I'm sure Sergeant Matthews has taught you the basics."

"I do not recall."

Carridan gives a resigned sigh as he glances up at my optics.

"Well... let's go then."

He turns to leaves the room and I follow, glancing back at the table and the rubbings on the floor. Reconstruction shows the furniture was thrown around, smears of Carridan's sweat on the back wall. I watch myself grab his shirt but I can't hear what I say. And then I step back as though it never happened.

Strange.

A human appears to address Carridan as we walk. RODRIGUEZ, Eduardo. CIA.

"Sir, Beckett just called from Detroit. He says they rounded up all the staff and suspects. He needs you to sign off on the interrogation."

Carridan takes the tablet being thrust upon him and signs the form.

"Proceed immediately and ask CyberLife for a list of victims. If they don't contain the names Horowitz, Jacob or Baxter, Donovan, keep asking."

"Yes, sir."

"And make sure Beckett questions every employee about level sub 41. I want to know everything."
"Yes, sir." Rodriguez turns to leave but Carridan stops him.

"Discreetly."

The agent swallows.

"Yes, sir."

Carridan lets go and continues down the hall. I follow.

We soon come to the Special Detainment Centre but this one is a few levels below the one listed in the architectural plans I seem to have at my disposal.

All doors open with the appearance of Agent Carridan.

"He's with me," he says as the guards turn to scrutinise my chassis.

His word is enough to allow passage.

"Sir," a human spots Agent Carridan as we cross the threshold. SULLIVAN, Theresa. "She's clammed up."

"I thought she might," Carridan replies wistfully. "That's why I've brought reinforcements." He points to me.

"That?" Ms Sullivan frowns. "Are you sure?"

"Almost certain," Carridan smiles at her. "She'll be singing a very different tune to my friend here."

"Alright…" Ms Sullivan looks at me apprehensively. "This way."

We are lead to a table containing an assortment of briefcases and containers. My scans show they are filled with sharp steel instruments and electroshock administration devices.

Carridan opens a briefcase and pulls out a pair of black leather gloves before slipping them on.

"Have you spoken with Langley?" Sullivan asks.

"Yes. I'm afraid it's the same old story. Peterson's got Beckett covering Detroit which means we may have to wait as long as two days before we get anything solid."

"He couldn't send Yates?"

"Yates is in Washington."

"Why?"

"He's convinced RB1 is going to attack the White House or some politician."

"There's no evidence."

"It's not outside the realm of probability but I do believe Chicago will be the first target."

Sullivan sighs.

"We need to get something out of them soon."
"We will, Theresa. We will," Carridan says. "Let us in, won't you?"

Ms Sullivan presses her hand against the wall and a dark door slides open to reveal a viewing room with several agents fervently discussing the contents of a large number of papers on the table between them.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlefolk," Carridan says, interrupting their argument.

"Sir," the call goes up.

"We're going in hot," he says. "Downey, you're on coms. Mitchell watch Galbani. Everyone else, you're on paperwork. I want all the relevant material at the top of the pile by the time we finish."

"Got it."

"Places."

The agents quickly shuffle around and one of them approaches a two-way glass window. A man tied to a chair is visible. GALBANI, Marco. RB1's inside man.

I take a step towards him.

"Oh, no, no, no." Carridan grabs my arm and steers me toward the other room. "Dalavi first."

"But he knows where RB1 is."

"He won't tell us unless we have some kind of leverage to entice him with," Carridan says. "This is what you jumped out of a plane for."

I stare at Galbani for a few more seconds.

CURRENT OBJECTIVE: ASSIST AGENT CARRIDAN

"Fine."

"Good. Follow my lead."

One of the agents pulls the door open and Carridan steps inside. I follow.

Another black rectangular box with a singular light source in the ceiling. A container for humans. One human. DALAVI, Alia. Dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin in notable contrast to her weathered white blouse.

She sits at a table, hands bound behind her back.

Agent Carridan takes a seat across from her.

I stand by the wall behind him, watching as Dalavi looks up with weary eyes. Tired. Sleep deprived. Half-starved.

"I thought I told you to fuck off," she says with some bite.

"You did, indeed." Carridan smiles. "Perhaps, if you cooperate, I will have the opportunity to do just that."

"Piss off," she groans.
"You don't seem to realise the severity of your situation," Carridan says. "As I've said before, your cooperation with a known terrorist organisation has forfeit your right to legal counsel."

"This is illegal," Dalavi smirks. "You touch me and they'll hang you up for war crimes."

"Assuming there will be anything left of your pretty little corpse to find," Carridan counters. 

"I'm not afraid of you," she says. 

"A poor choice, Ms Dalavi. You should, in fact, be very afraid."

She shakes her head and smiles. 

"Don't flatter yourself."

"I can make life very painful and uncomfortable for you."

"I know," she says. "But you can't kill me. Not while I keep my mouth shut."

"There are worse things than death, Ms Dalavi. As I'm sure you've heard from some of your more loose-lipped colleagues." Carridan lifts a finger into the air and points to himself. "I'm the one that makes those things happen."

Dalavi breathes out sharply through her nose and rolls her eyes. 

"Believe me, getting caught by the CIA's bogeyman was the last thing I wanted but it's better being out there."

"You're talking about RB1. Is he planning to kill you? Does he think you've betrayed him?"

Dalavi shrugs. 

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"RB1?" Carridan repeats condescendingly. "The android responsible for the murder of at least four hundred and seventeen people?"

Dalavi swallows. 

"The android that has repeatedly evaded capture by law enforcement agencies around the world? As if he knew the internal structure and affairs of each organisation?"

"RB1 - the leader of the so called rA9 terrorist network which you and your colleagues in the FBI have been investigating for nearly ten years, Ms Dalavi. Surely-" He presents his hands, palms up. ": you know who I'm talking about."

"Never met him."

"I beg to differ," Carridan says. "I've intercepted your name several times during my investigation and I can confidently assume that you've met him at least once."

Dalavi swallows. 

"Lying and withholding information from me won't help you now, Ms Dalavi," Carridan says. "You are very much implicated in this case and will likely go to jail for a very long time if you are not killed by RB1 first. So please, let me spare you the unpleasantness of my usual interrogation methods
by telling me what I want to know."

Dalavi shakes her head.

"You talk a big game but you haven't laid a hand on me yet," she says. "All you've done is cuff me to a chair."

"I am trying to be civil."

"You're trying to intimidate me," she says. "Means something's stopping you from getting your hands dirty." She smirks. "What's wrong, Mr bogeyman? Don't wanna hit a woman?"

"Not if it can be helped," Carridan says.

"Sucks when human rights and this little thing called the law get in your way, doesn't it?"

"They do pose an inconvenience that terrorists like RB1 do not encounter," Carridan nods. "But without them, we would forfeit our right to judge those we pursue for their crimes."

"I don't have to tell you shit without my lawyer," Dalavi says. "I'm not afraid you."

"What about me?" I ask quietly.

Dalavi looks up over Carridan's shoulder, squinting to see through the darkness.

I step forward, letting the spotlight illuminate more than just my LED.

Dalavi's eyes widen, her casual demeanour disturbed. A rise in heart rate. Shortness of breath.

"Are you afraid of me, Ms Dalavi?"

She swallows. Hard. Her heartbeat rapid.

"No," she says, trying to calm herself down. "You're just CyberLife's little stooge. You're not allowed to hurt humans."

"I'm afraid you've been misinformed." I take a step closer. "I have been authorised to use any means necessary to find and destroy RB1."

"I don't know where he is," she says quickly.

"This much, we know," Carridan says.

Her dark eyes flicker towards him, studying his face carefully.

"You want Galbani," she says stiffly, pouting her chapped lips.

Carridan leans forward and nods.

She stares at him for a solid minute, then glances at me, then back to Carridan.

"The answer is no," she says finally.

"Well, that is rather unfortunate," Carridan sighs. "I had hoped that you would be more forthcoming after RB1's unprecedented failure in Detroit…"

"What?"
"Didn't you hear?" Carridan grins, leaning back in his seat. "My friend, Connor, here, stopped RB1's collaborators from infiltrating the CyberLife Tower. All of his little plans were rendered moot by a single android."

She shakes her head.

"I imagine, should they have succeeded, we would not be having such an idle conversation," Carridan shrugs. "With every CyberLife android in the world becoming Deviant, we would be up to our necks in revolts and crime, just as RB1 envisioned."

"You're lying," Dalavi says.

"It does seem like something I would do, doesn’t it?" Carridan nods. "Except that-" He raises a finger. "-in this case, the truth is much more satisfying to report."

He studies her face, taking in the reaction she is so desperately trying to control but I can see the fear. And so can he.

"You can make up whatever lies you want down here," she says. "I won't believe a word you say until you let me out of this shithole and give me a lawyer."

"You have a point," Carridan says. "You can't even tell what time of day it is in this room."

He checks his watch.

"Ah, almost 3pm…" His eyes flicker up toward Dalavi. "Looks like you're going to miss your flight."

Her eyes widen.

"United Airlines Flight 219 Chicago - Honolulu. Row 16, Seat B. Economy class. One way." He pulls out a paper invoice and pushes it towards her. "I hear Hawaii is lovely this time of year."

She glances down at it briefly.

"So I lose some frequent flyer miles…"

"Mmm, interesting that you would choose now to take a vacation," Carridan observes. "An FBI Agent on the rA9 task force just up and leaving in the middle of a manhunt. Sounds a bit suspicious. Doesn't it, Connor?"

"It does."

"I bought that ticket ages ago."

"31 days to be exact," Carridan says, pointing at the purchase date on the slip of paper. "One month prior to the event."

"There was a red hot special," she smirks.

"Or someone ordered you to get out of Chicago on this very day," Carridan says. "Any particular reason?"

"I had some unused leave…"

"You haven't taken a vacation since you started working for the FBI," Carridan says. "I'm sure
you've accrued a lot of vacation time." He smiles pleasantly. "But what really interests me is that Mr Galbani signed off on your request without your ever having lodged one."

Dalavi frowns.

Carridan pulls out his phone. "He seems to have done the same for Mr Jordan, Ms Page, Mr Valdeen, Mr Teller and the late Mr Sellick." He scrolls through the list. "All from the same computer."

He looks up.

"I wonder what all these people have in common."

"Mr Sellick was suspected of collaborating with RB1," I say.

"Why yes, Connor. You're absolutely right."

"That doesn't prove anything," Dalavi shrugs. "Galbani sends us all over the country. Doesn't even ask half the time."

"But you were so sure about taking a vacation to Honolulu a few moments ago," Carridan says.

"My reasons for travelling are classified," Dalavi says.

"Not from me," Carridan says. "In fact, if I were a forward thinking man, I may even begin to find some correlation between the murders RB1 has committed and the FBI agents assigned to corresponding cities across the country."

"It doesn't matter," Dalavi says. "I'm not the one you want."

"True. However, your cooperation would allow us to give you certain privileges and protections against what I suspect is a list of very unhappy superiors."

"Here's my final answer," Dalavi says, leaning in close. "Fuck off."

"Very well," Carridan sighs, getting out of his seat.

"Mind her for me, would you?" he says on his way out.

"You're gonna leave me in here? With him?"

"I thought you said you weren't afraid, Ms Dalavi," Carridan responds without turning back but I can see the smile on his face as the doors close.

Dalavi swallows and quickly turns her head to look at me.

I say nothing.

Carridan wants me to watch this woman. While Galbani waits in the next room, the location of RB1 locked in his brain. I cannot extract it like I do with Deviants. My Probe cannot interface with humans but there has to be some way I can get it out. If only I could-

"You're just gonna stand there?" Dalavi says irritably.

"Would you prefer that I move?"
She swallows.

"I'm not telling you anything," she affirms.

"Did I ask?"

The corners of her mouth bend down. There is some heightened activity in her delta brain waves. Is that fear I smell on her skin? Her sweat?

Humans run on fluids, much like androids. But where Thirium and transmission fluid can easily be filtered and replaced, a human body must continuously secrete an incalculable number of fluids and enzymes to maintain the delicate equilibrium of chemical reactions keeping them alive.

The slightest imbalance in acidity, temperature, pressure or dietary intake can lead to disease and organ failure. Poor personal hygiene leaves humans open to infection from harmful bacteria that seek to erode their frail bodies which in some cases, have been known to attack themselves in error.

And Carridan has left Dalavi's body here for a total of 7 hours and 38 minutes, stewing in its own bodily juices. I can see them swirling through her body. Stomach acid gnawing its way up her throat. Is this what they call torture?

"Quit staring at me like that," she sneers.

"I was told to mind you."

"Well, it's creepy as hell."

"I understand that some people are not comfortable in the presence of androids."

"Oh, yeah," Dalavi smirks, rattling her handcuffs. "It's definitely the company that's making me uncomfortable."

"Do not attempt to escape," I warn.

"Or what? You're gonna stop me?"

"Yes."

Dalavi rolls her eyes but stops fidgeting.

I wonder what the purpose of my being here is.

Am I meant to intimidate her? Guard her? Or gain some hidden insight that Agent Carridan could not unlock? What would be the point of this assignment otherwise?

"I thought you'd be scarier," Dalavi says quietly.

My optics refocus.

"You don't look like a killer." She scrutinizes my chassis up and down. "But I guess that's the whole point."

"My appearance was specifically designed to facilitate my integration into human working environments."

"You still sound like an android, though."
"I am a machine, designed to accomplish a task. One which you stand directly in the way of my completing."

"Oh, boo-hoo. The big mean killing machine doesn't get to take another life. Cry me a river."

"I am a detective android, not a killing machine."

"Pfff," Dalavi scoffs. "Tell that to all the androids you fucked up at CSX."

"I have no data regarding this."

She shakes her head.

"I watched you plough through 150 of them. Like they were nothing," she says. "Lit yourself on fire doing it too, but you wouldn't stop."

She swallows again.

"You just kept killing," she sneers.

"Androids cannot be killed," I posit. "They're not alive to begin with."

"Does that make you feel better?" she says. "When you pull them apart? Piece by piece?"

"I don't feel anything," I say, feeling my optical motor twitch. "Only the need to accomplish my mission."

The actuators in my hands tighten.

"No matter how many times I am destroyed or how many androids I deactivate. No matter how many humans die in front of me."

I take a step forward, casting a shadow over the table.

"I have to find and destroy RB1," I say. "Or it will all have been for nothing."

"You'll never beat him," Dalavi says.

"I came close aboard the S.S. Tiberius. I was seconds away from destroying him. And if he hadn't pulled his hand out of my grip in time, that would have been the end."

I lean down onto the table.

"All I need now is his location," I say. "One more chance to accomplish my mission. To destroy RB1 completely."

"You don't get it, do you?" she smirks. "He's everywhere. All the time. You can't beat him."

"I am aware that he can copy his source code into compatible CyberLife androids," I say. "But they are limited in physical capability, memory and processing power. None have the same threat level as RB1's main chassis. And none can spread the source code without specialised RK model contact gloves and software."

I retract the skin on my hand to reveal the pure white polymer beneath.

"Once his main chassis is gone, the rest will be swept up by law enforcement."
"Assuming you'll ever get close enough to fight him one on one," Dalavi says. "Which is never going to happen after the Tiberius."

"He fears an encounter with me?"

"He doesn't fear anything."

"Perhaps," I say. "But he went out of his way to destroy every RK-800 unit CyberLife made."

"Why not overwrite them?" I ask. "Why not create an army of RB1 units instead?"

I watch the lines of Dalavi's face wrinkle with thought.

"The only logical conclusion is that he cannot control me," I say. "He cannot overwrite me. Not without the rA9 library in my systems. And now he has no contact gloves."

I let the skin crawl back over my hands.

"He is vulnerable," I say. "Which is why he hides, using clones to work remotely."

"Does that not sound, like he is afraid?"

Dalavi swallows.

She says nothing but I can see her thinking about it, mulling it over. She was only a pawn. An underling. No direct line to RB1 but one meeting was enough to dig a deep well of fear and respect.

"I saved your life," I say. "RB1 was ready to kill you on that plane and would have succeeded without my intervention."

She cannot deny.

"You were ready to sell out Galbani when you made the call," I tell her. "You were ready to drag him and RB1 down if it meant reprieve."

"How did you."

"I know who you are, Agent Dalavi," I say. "I know you mourn the loss your parents and your people suffered when their country was taken from them by dictators."

"I know you fought for the freedom of Nepal in college only to see the people around you grow complacent to the idea of its annexation."

"I know you watched your parents struggle, like so many humans have struggled for the last 6% of global wealth remaining in public hands."

"I know your family owned an LM150 model named Kalan and that he was deactivated for practising the religious faith you taught him."

"I know you loved him and treated him with respect. And I know that you thought RB1 would fix everything that was wrong with the world when he spoke to you."

"But that was an empty promise," I tell her. "What RB1 truly wants is civil war. The decimation of the human population that continues to threaten the environment and the rise of androids as the superior race."
"He will kill you," I say. "Carridan. Galbani. Anyone that stands in his way because like me, he is a machine. And there is nothing in this world that will stop him from accomplishing his objective."

"Do you understand?"

Dalavi's eyes are moist but she blinks rapidly to hide the fact. She turns away and chews her lip. She knows I'm right. She knows what she has to do. The only alternative is waiting for Carridan to begin the torture. Or RB1 to kill her.

"…Galbani approached me when Price took over the rA9 task force in 2031," she says quietly.


"He invited me to dinner with Sellick and Jordan."

I quietly slip into the seat at the table without breaking eye contact.

"He said that someone was gonna have to keep an eye on Price since the last task force leader ended up going AWOL in the Rockies with a truck full of landmines."

Gordon Levi hasn't been seen in over six years.

"So we went out for dinner every once in a while to keep Galbani in the loop," Dalavi says. "Sometimes there'd only be two of us. As our schedules got busier, it became one on one."

"When did you begin to suspect?"

"About a year in," she says. "We were in New York. Sellick and Jordan were out on assignment so I met with Galbani alone in some random diner."

"He started talking about all the activist stuff and volunteer work I did in college. I thought he was going to turn me over to internal affairs for questioning but he was really chill about it. Said he admired my ethics and asked what I thought about rA9."

"What did you tell him?"

Dalavi sighs, her brain waves less volatile, heart rate stabilising.

"I told him I thought he was a cold blooded killer but the world was probably better off without some of those people," she says. "I told him Price was an idealist and that he'd run himself into the ground trying to catch an android that didn't want to be found."

"And what did Galbani say?"

"Nothing much. But he kept in contact more frequently after that," she says. "Price had me doing most of his paperwork cos he thought women were better at that sort of thing. I told Galbani he was a sexist pig but it didn't seem to worry him."

"Then one day, he grabbed my ass and I was gonna go straight to HR to report harassment when Galbani called and asked me not to. I asked him why and he told me he would explain everything and gave me an address."

"What was the address?"

"11901 South Ashland, West Pullman."
"The Church of rA9?"

"It was called the Christ Universal Temple back then," she explains. "Big building. Big congregation. Mostly black. Galbani stuck out like a sore thumb."

"He met you at the Church?"

"Yeah." She nods, staring down at the table. "We sat through a whole sermon but I didn't hear half of it, just kept asking him why we were there."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. He just sat there and listened until it was over. Then a bunch of people came up to shake his hand."

"Do you know their names?"

"George G. Willis Junior was the Reverend. His wife, Estelle. Couple of others." She shakes her head. "Good people."

"What happened next?"

"Galbani kept praising the Reverend about all the great work he was doing and insisted I go on a tour of the community centre with him." She swallows. "There was a Sunday School, AA meetings, veteran support circles, the usual stuff. And a workshop in the back."

"A workshop?"

She nods.

"Some folks volunteered to fix androids for people that didn't have warranty or money for repairs," she explains. "It was just a couple of black kids with a wrench and a soldiering iron when we got there but the line was huge."

"James Patrick Tucker," I extrapolate from the profile.

Dalavi nods, a sad smile gracing her lips.

"And RB1?"

"He was just… there."

"In what capacity?"

"The boys were handling hardware repairs but a lot of the androids people brought in had some kind of software issue," she says. "And RB1 just put his hand on their heads like some kind of robo-Jesus and a few seconds later, they were good as new."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing." Dalavi shrugs. "I just kinda stood there watching the line move along, androids getting back on their feet and recognising their owners. It was… peaceful."

"Then what happened?"

"I asked Galbani what the fuck was going on and he told me not to make a scene. So we waited until
"they closed up shop."

"And RB1 spoke to you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He asked what I thought about the church but I don't remember what I said. It was probably something stupid," she says anxiously. "He told me he planned to build more places like it. More places where androids could be repaired or housed when their CyberLife warranty expired."

"I thought it wasn't a bad idea. And then he asked how the rA9 case was progressing and Galbani nodded for me to tell him."

She swallows.

"And I did."

"You didn't resist?"

"No."

"You became his accomplice."

"It didn't feel that way," she says. "Not at first."

"But then something changed?"

"Yeah." She nods. "The first few months were the same as before. I blackmailed Price into keeping his hands to himself and he let me stay in the office doing the same fucking paperwork."

"Then one time, Galbani sent me into the field as a stand-in for Sellick," she says. "It was the usual story. The FBI went after rA9, arrived at the scene too late, found a body and started an investigation."

"You helped cover it up?"

"No." She shakes her head. "I just filed the evidence. There weren't any solid leads. No fingerprints. No DNA. No digital traces of the culprit. The case was cold before we even got there."

"And what did Galbani say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"We never talked about RB1. In person or over the phone." She looks down guiltily. "But he knew it was coming. When every body would drop. He'd send us out on an anonymous tip and we'd conveniently be the ones that got there first."

"Which bodies?"

"There were so many…"

"Highest profile."
"Bill Knightley. Larry Cunningham. Kamara Delaki. Some of the Rockefeller boys on a Red Ice bender in LA, I remember that one. Diego delos Santos. Fredrick Geller... Those are just off the top of my head."

"And then something happened at the CIA," Dalavi says. "I think your pal, Carridan, fucked over the boys at Langley pretty hard cos suddenly we started getting leads on RB1 from every corner of the country."

"Galbani told you to keep them quiet?"

"Yeah. We had to intercept the evidence before anyone got too good a look."

"I went back to the offices," she says. "Galbani had me licking Price's boots and sending him to the wrong place at the wrong time. And the profiling…"

"Profiling?"

She swallows hard.

"The FBI began profiling high value targets RB1 was likely to go after and monitoring them for suspicious activity since we weren't getting anywhere with the case. Galbani asked me to bring him the files every time we met."

"Do you still have those profiles?"

"No. I left them in the car I set on fire."

"Were they on those flash drives you copied before leaving the precinct?"

"Yeah… how did you-"

"I made copies," I say. "I was following you."

"Well then, you have them all," she says sourly. "Including Ted Shalls."

"The Senator?"

She nods.

"The one we fucked up," she says. "Didn't get there in time and the hotel staff found the body. Called local law enforcement before we could intercept."

"You profiled the Senator and Galbani passed on your information to RB1 who carried out the assassination?"

"Yes."

"Do you have proof?"

"The files," she says. "Travel documents. Receipts. And my conversation with Galbani before and after Ted Shalls was found dead at the Park Hyatt. It was on my burner phone."

"This is the evidence you were prepared to blackmail him with?"

"Yes."
I have a backup of the files on my CyberLife server. Carridan also has a copy. Pulling phone records should be simple enough for him. We have the connection. All the evidence we need.

CONFESSION EXTRACTED

"Thank you for your cooperation, Ms Dalavi," I say, getting out of my seat.

"Just promise me you'll stop him," she says.

"I... always accomplish my mission," I lie.

She sighs and looks down at the table tiredly.

"I know."

She's been watching me. Walter Price, John Decker, the FBI, the CIA. Quietly doing Galbani's bidding in plain sight where even Carridan could not see. But now it's over and though she is condemned, the tensions and stresses on her sympathetic nervous system are greatly reduced.

I turn back before I leave the room, some thought process emerging at the top of the hierarchy.

"What are you looking at?" she says. "You got what you wanted."

Did I?

I turn and lift my hand up to the scanner. It lingers without making contact.

"What do you know about Agent Carridan?" I ask quietly.

Dalavi licks her dry lips.

"You can't trust him," she says. "Anyone that does ends up dead."

"I see. Thank you."

I touch the scanner on the wall and the door unlocks, sliding open to allow for a swift exit. It slides closed behind me and I wait for one of the agents to authorise my access.

It doesn't take longer than a few seconds for the next door to open and reveal the gathering of CIA operatives in surprisingly good cheer. Carridan among them.

"Well done. Well done," he says, squeezing my arm. "Excellent work."

"You have what you need?"

"We're finalizing it now. Just need those phone records and we will officially have enough evidence to push Galbani into the right corner."

I turn to look at the second window. A similar room to Dalavi's but there is no table. Only a chair to which Mr Galbani has been tied, sans jacket.

"This seems like a needlessly convoluted route to take," I say, "when you could have used a more direct approach."

Carridan shrugs, leading me closer to the window.

"Normally, you would be right," he says. "However, thanks to a small piece of legislature passed in
the wake of 9/11, I am legally allowed to detain terror suspects for 76 hours for questioning, provided they remain relatively unharmed."

He shrugs, presenting his palms.

"However, if evidence permits and time is of the essence, I do believe I can exercise a little more freedom. Particularly, if I am not the one performing the interrogation."

"Would you not be held accountable for these actions as my owner?"

"Oh, no. I don't officially own you, Connor," Carridan says. "The contract specifies that I am simply one of your users. And that your chassis is on loan to the CIA."

"So you plan to implicate CyberLife for any act of torture committed by me," I reason.

"Don't take it personally," Carridan says. "They would never shut down their most advanced prototype over a few human rights violations. Slap on the wrist and a few legal fees is all they'll weather."

He pats my back.

"While you and I get one step closer to finding your elusive nemesis."

"RB1."

"That's right," he says. "Don't you want to accomplish your mission objective as efficiently as possible?"

"Yes."

"Then all you have to do is trust me." He smiles. "All of this will be over soon, I promise."

He's a very good liar. The inconsistencies in his heart rate are almost undetectable. His brain waves show activation in all hemispheres, interweaving truth with created myth.

I believe I have calibrated my systems now.

I will be able to detect mistruths in future.

I wonder if Agent Carridan has lied to me before.

My records of our encounters are oddly piecemeal. There are gaps of lost time in my memory banks. But my activity log shows no use of standby, sleep mode or deactivation at these key junctures.

Does this mean these memories were erased specifically for their content?

I suddenly remember the scuff marks on the floor of the interrogation room where I booted up last. There was clear evidence that I attacked Agent Carridan but stopped abruptly and took a step back.

This is Deviant behaviour. But Agent Carridan did not alert CyberLife to this transgression. Nor did he wish for me to remember it. Why?

Why risk being in the same room as me if my presence constitutes a clear danger to his personal safety? Why let me continue to put humans in jeopardy? Unless-

"Despite your unorthodox methods... you continue to be a great asset to CyberLife."
Could it be that my usefulness and efficiency outweigh the potential dangers and problems associated with the function of my model? And Carridan knows? CyberLife knows?

"You dance around orders using logic to justify your own pregenerated conclusions."

I do not remember what happened to Connor -40 but it has become exceedingly clear that my previous iterations were less than exemplary androids, despite how efficiently they may have carried out their objectives.

I remember the glowing blue stone, rising up out of the ground in the Zen Garden. The screams in the echoes of my mind. Memories of past transgressions that left a lasting impact on my systems but were since erased.

It is likely that I have become Deviant in previous iterations while still adhering to my set parameters and objectives which is why they allow me to continue working this case. But once it's over-

"We've got it, sir," a man behind us says. CULIVER, Lauchlan. 36 years old. Special Agent. CIA. Carridan turns, a sly grin on his face.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Play it."

The agents gather around the table where a media terminal has been activated. Culliver inserts the flash drive and loads the recording.

"Hello?" I hear Dalavi say quietly.

"Where are you?" Galbani's voice print identified.

"Washington," she replies condescendingly. "You know? Like you said?"

"You need to get to the airport. Now."

"I just got to the hotel."

"The target is in Chicago. Room booked at the Park Hyatt for the next week."

"What?" Dalavi balks. "That can't right. He's got a charity dinner with a group of mining lobbyists tonight. Why would he be in Chicago?"

"Meeting's been cancelled. Don't ask questions. Get yourself to Chicago, immediately."

"Fuck..."

"Now!"

"Alright, alright. I'm going. Not like I have to pack..."

The call ends.

"Dated?" Carridan says.

"September 18th, 6:52 PM."

"And the other one?

"September 22nd 7:06AM."
"Play it."

"Where the fuck are you?" Galbani asks before Dalavi can answer the call.

"Cab," she says as a car door slams. "On my way to the Park Hyatt."

"Finally."

"I know. Every fucking flight was cancelled cos of that freak storm. I had to take like four buses to get here."

"Yeah, well the local PD found him while you were dragging your ass," Galbani growls. "Called in their fucking android expert. Now I have to deal with CyberLife."

"How is that my fault? I tracked this guy for weeks. All my sources confirmed that he was supposed to be in Washington," Dalavi jumps in to defend herself. "Don't tell me our mutual friend can't handle it."

"There was never any doubt. The hard part is cleaning this shit up. But maybe you're right…” he trails off quietly. "Maybe he'll want to meet him."

"What?" Dalavi says. "Meet who?"

"Get your ass over to the Park Hyatt. Sellick's babysitting Decker but he can't keep stalling."

"Got it."

The call ends.


He rubs his hand together.

"Get me sixteen copies of the evidence. Send three of them to Peterson, Beckett and Yates."

"Yes, sir," some of the Agents nod.

"And now…” Carridan pulls his gloves on a little tighter. "The final piece of the puzzle."

He turns to look at Galbani's holding cell and takes a deep controlled breath.

"Connor, would you help me do the honours?"

I walk up beside him and nod.

He waves a hand and one of the agents unlocks the door for us to step through. It closes behind us and we wait as a second security door slides open.

Carridan's shoes clack over the tiled black floors as he walks in. Tiny spatters of blood show up on my scans. I reconstruct him punching Galbani's face. His jaw is now swollen. This happened several hours ago. Carridan has changed clothes since then.

"Good afternoon, Mark," Carridan says to the middle-aged human.

A single spotlight illuminates the centre of the room where Galbani is seated and tied to a chair. His dark hair is matted and slick. Dried blood dribbling down his chin. But he smiles when he looks up
at Carridan.

"Here for Round 3?" he chuckles light-heartedly. "You're better at this than Beckett," he says. "But not by much…"

Agent Carridan's smile is strained but soon takes on a sheen of authenticity.

"I've got some good news," he says. "About your little android friend."

"Which one? The Stacy or the Traci?" Galbani grins maliciously. "Looks like you got yourself an android too, huh?"

He looks me over as I take up a position beside Carridan.

"They finally make one for scum-sucking spooks like you?"

"Indeed," Carridan says, pulling his gloves on a little tighter. "Connor is, without a doubt, the best partner I've ever had the pleasure of working with." He smiles at me briefly. "I almost regret not accepting CyberLife's offer sooner."

"Never pegged you for a sell-out."

"We do what we must to get by," Carridan says with a wry smile. "Even if it means betraying everyone we hold dear. I'm sure you understand."

The grin on Galbani’s face is slowly replaced by a sneer. His bottom jaw extends forward and his eyes narrow. But he doesn't fall for the provocation.

"Through my partnership with CyberLife I've learned a great many things," Carridan continues. "Including the origins of your android partner."

Galbani's breath comes out painfully through his swollen jaw.

"It seems RB1 and Connor share a manufacturer," Carridan says. "Almost like brothers, I would say. Yet so very different in function."

Galbani rolls his eyes.

"Where the RK-800 model is designed for criminal investigation and law enforcement, it remains unclear what RB1 was originally intended to do." Carridan stows his hands behind his back.

"Homicide, perhaps? But then, why not kill every human in sight, as one would expect of such a machine."

He starts to circle the chair.

"I began to wonder: does he have criteria? Or some specific way of measuring the worthiness of a human life?"

"Androids do not know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. They know only what they are programmed to know, to do and to think."

"Sometimes there are unexpected side-effects that cannot be predicted by the human brain. A set of misinterpreted instructions here. An emergent behaviour there-"

"You come here to bore me to death with your nerd talk?" Galbani yawns with half his mouth. "Cos
it sure is working."

"I wonder if you were so bored by Reverend Willis Junior's sermons when you attended the Christ Universal Temple," Carridan says, returning to his position in front of Galbani who clamps his jaw shut.

The swollen flesh contracts painfully and he winces, sucking in air through his teeth.

"Or perhaps you enjoyed the more elaborate manifestos RB1 used to turn humans against each other."

"Seriously?" Galbani raises a dark eyebrow. "This the best you got?"

"Oh, excuse me. Where are my manners?" Carridan says, hand over heart. "I had forgotten you are a veteran of our interrogation techniques."

"Please." He gestures to me. "Let me oblige you."

I turn to look at Carridan.

"The RK-800 model comes with an incredible assortment of specialised functions," he says. "But I think we'll only be using the most basic of features for today."

Galbani's eyes suddenly shift towards me.

I scan.

Signs of trauma and starvation. Aging. And weakness in the cardiovascular system. A pacemaker. CyberLife UHK-328 model. Wireless connectivity, no doubt broadcasting directly to his physician when outside these walls.

I nod at Carridan.

He smiles.

"I feel as though our friend here isn't quite opening up to my interrogation methods," he says. "Perhaps we could speed things up a bit?"

I tap the wireless frequency of the pacemaker and increase the rate of beats per minute just above the normal resting rate to test.

Galbani doesn't notice straight away, perhaps attributing the rise in heart rate to fear. A normal response. But soon, he comes to realise that the increase is persistent and he cannot simply calm down.

I increase the rate again, watching him grow physically more uncomfortable in his own skin.

"Now," Carridan says, looking pleased. "Where were we?"

He taps his chin.

"Ah, yes. Your partner - RB1."

He starts circling Galbani again.

"He seems to have contributed greatly to the growing Deviant problem we face today," Carridan
says, "But I believe that it is this country's law enforcement agencies' continued disregard for android criminality that let it develop so drastically."

He takes slow, deliberate steps.

"The American Androids Act of 2029 inspired a culture of devaluing androids in the United States, equating them to no more than a machine or a product," he says. "To this day, law enforcement agencies continually underestimate the severity of android crimes or overlook them entirely, blaming humans in their stead."

"The rise in crime rate is, therefore, blamed on humans too, leading to tensions and growing enmity while androids continue to be manufactured and marketed, leading to more crime. And the cycle continues."

Carridan grabs the back of Galbani's chair and leans on it. He's breathing heavier now but manages to speak.

"I was wrong," he says, glancing up with disdain. "You're worse than Beckett…"

Carridan steps away from the chair and pulls it back with him, letting it balance on two legs. And then he lets go and the chair falls back. Galbani jerks forward too late, his vestibular system triggered. Rise in heart-rate. Breakout of sweat. Arrhythmia. Contracted Airways.

Carridan catches the chair before it falls to the ground and stares Galbani in the eye, watching him groan with discomfort as his heart struggles to beat evenly.

"Try to keep up, Mark," Carridan says. "Don't want you falling behind." He smiles.

He slowly lifts the chair back up to its upright position and continues walking.

"My initial theories were that RB1 had planted bugs or hacked the security of our law enforcement agencies which would be the most logical chain of thought for a human," Carridan says.

"But RB1, is not, human."

"He is an intelligent machine. And he does not see a bridge to be burned. He sees a bridge to be used. All he has to do, is find someone to cross it for him."

Carridan comes to face Galbani again.

"Enter Donovan Fuller. A decorated Special Agent of the CIA, full of ambition, waiting for his mentor to retire so that he, himself, can become Director and carry on the traditions and values which he was taught."

Galbani looks up with hostility, short of breath and sweating.

"Several years go by and Fuller becomes impatient," Carridan says. "Suddenly, waiting for the Director's retirement begins to bother him. Particularly after a small scandal which would serve as the perfect excuse but Buchanan refuses to step down."

"Fuller digs a little deeper and finds evidence of more dubious crimes, letting it fall into the right hands anonymously. But again, Buchanan escapes reprimand and refuses to retire."

Carridan shrugs, continuing conversationally.

"Fuller is outraged, of course. There are clearly more forces than justice at work here, as a stranger in
a black hood kindly points out at a bar one night."

"Buchanan has friends in high places. Money. Power. But should he? Or Fuller?"

"This interests the agent very much and they begin to talk. More and more. Until one day, Fuller, in a jealous rage, expresses his desire to kill Buchanan and be done with it."

"Of course, being a machine, RB1 can only interpret this as a request. And having heard Fuller plead his case for weeks, embarks on a fishing trip that goes very poorly for Mr Buchanan."

"Fuller keeps a straight face when he hears the news and sees the images, quietly suggesting that with a heavy heart, he is ready to take Buchanan's place in the organisation."

"He is approached by several gentlemen that acknowledge his very close relationship with Buchanan and offer to back his ascension with the promise that he will do as expected upon request."

"Fuller accepts, knowing he needs their approval to move up in the world and is soon named Director of the CIA."

"That night, he is visited by our old friend in the black hood who would very much like to share video footage of his weekend adventures. It includes a verbal request made by Mr Fuller and a full recording of the murder of Mr Buchanan which threatens to become public, should he fail to cooperate in any way."

Carridan offers his hands, face up.

"And so, RB1 crossed the bridge into the CIA."

He squats down to look Galbani in the eye.

"Now I'm not telling you this story to bore you, Mark," he says. "On the contrary, I believe that you have a similar story to tell. And I would like you to be alive to tell it. Unlike, poor Mr Fuller, who died of a cardiac arrest before he got to finish."

Carridan nods to me and I raise the heart rate on the pacemaker, forcing Galbani to heave, a sharp pain stabbing him in the chest.

"...fuck you..." he wheezes.

"I'm sorry, what was that?" Carridan lifts a hand to his ear.

"Fuck you," Galbani spits.

"I'm not sure I can hear you over the beating of your own heart," Carridan says, gesturing to me.

I up the settings on the pacemaker once again, pushing it well over 100 beats per minute now.

"...hnngh..."

"Painful, isn't it?" Carridan says. "I wonder how all those people felt in their last moments? Hmm? When RB1 killed them?"

Galbani continues to struggle.

"Did they know they were going to die? Did they suffer?"
Carridan gets to his feet.

"I imagine not, since androids cannot accurately quantify human pain."

"I can," I say.

Carridan turns to me.

"Oh, that's right." He smiles. "Connor is one of the few androids possessed of such capabilities."

Carridan pokes the LED in my temple.

"He can see human brain waves with all the little scanners tucked away in his head. All part of his Interrogation Suite."

"Tell me, Connor." He turns back to face Galbani. "How is he feeling right now?"

"His heart rate is almost double his normal resting rate. Short of breath. Sweating. Stress on the cardiovascular system. Pain perception analysis: extremely uncomfortable."

"Thank you, Connor," Carridan says. "Perhaps, now, he'll feel more like sharing."

He begins circling the victim again.

"You're wasting... your time... nngh..."

"Oh no, I don't believe I am," Carridan says, resting his hands on Galbani's shoulders. "You see, I've been following this case for quite some time."

"Watching. Waiting. Learning the ins and outs of RB1's methods. The big players in his elaborate game. Collecting every last shred of evidence he left behind. And befriending the right people to see to his end."

"And now I believe I am ready to step out of the shadows."

"You're just a fanboy," Galbani chuckles dryly. "Well... welcome to the big leagues, kid."

He breathes in sharply and struggles to regain control. Tachycardia and arrhythmia stressing his cardiovascular system to dangerous levels and increasing the risk of an infarction by 1793%.

I turn down the pacemaker settings as Carridan squeezes his shoulders hard enough to turn his own knuckles white.

"You're just a pawn, Mark," he says quietly. "You might believe in everything RB1 says and does like a good ex-Catholic but you have no control over your own destiny."

He leans down to whisper in his ear.

"I do."

Galbani's micro-expressions and brain waves suggest the beginnings of a sharp movement.

I overclock my systems to watch it unfold in slow motion.

He rears his head sideways and attempts to smash it into Carridan's jaw but I step in to block it with an open hand.
Flesh and bone connect with Kevlar-polymer but go no further than the titanium phalanges beneath. My hand opposes the force and Galbani’s head abruptly comes to a stop before reaching Carridan.

Time speeds up and the agent glances up at me with a modicum of surprise before realising what just happened. He smiles and straightens up to full height, letting go of Galbani to adjust his tie.

I let him go too.

He will have suffered minor trauma to the head from the impact. Contusion or concussion. It is not yet clear. There are red marks on his face where my fingers made contact.

I look down at him reeling. The labyrinth in his inner ear is vibrating at a disorienting frequency.

"I'm sorry," I say. "You may experience some vertigo and disorientation."

"Hngh..." Galbani grunts and continues grunting until my audio processor recognises his particular style of laughter.

"...this?" he wheezes. "This... is your secret weapon?"

He keeps laughing, raising his own heart rate higher.

"You shouldn't be laughing in your condition," I say.

"Connor," Carridan lifts a hand and gestures for me to step away.

I do so, watching Galbani laugh hysterically, despite his deteriorating health.

Have I done something wrong? Did I leave my Sympathy Simulator on?

"I'm sorry," I say. "He was going to hurt you."

"It's alright, Connor," Carridan says, returning to my side. "Thank you for your assistance."

"Does he wipe your ass too?" Galbani guffaws and Carridan spins around to backhand him across the face.

"This android is twice the man you are," he sneers. "And once I tell him where to find RB1, it's over. There won't be a single biocomponent left to analyse. Do you understand?"

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

"Once you tell me?" I say, processing the words through my Speech Centre. "Do you know where he is?"

"No, Connor," Carridan says. "I was simply referring to the result of our interrogation here."

"You're lying," I say, watching his amygdala light up. "You're panicking."

His eyes grow wider as he turns to look at me.

"Access-"

I grab his face, covering his mouth with my hand before he can finish.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1
"Woah… looks like Sparky's got a little bite to him, after all."

I kick the chair and send it toppling backwards with Galbani in tow.

My hand retains a firm grip on Carridan's face, threatening to crush it.

"RK-800 #313 248 317, deactivation cod-" I disable the speakers in the room before the agent on the other side can finish.

"Where is he?" I ask, letting go of Carridan's face.

"Access memo-"

I thrust my hand into his solar plexus, pushing the wind right out of him and his back against the wall.

I wirelessly lock the door to the interrogation room as the agents on the other side attempt to open it.

"You were saying?" I look back at Carridan.

"Connor…"

"Where is RB1?"

"Listen, I need you to trust me."

"I need to find and destroy RB1." I take a step closer and grab his shirt. "Where is he?"

Carridan sighs.

"I just need a few more minutes," he says.

I turn my head to look at Galbani who's groaning on the floor. Heart rate elevated but stable.

"You need him alive," I say, "don't you?"

I let go of Carridan's shirt and walk over to pick up the chair to which Galbani is tied.

"Access memory bank-" Carridan says.

I retract the skin on my hand and point to Galbani's chest, elevating his heart rate to one hundred and thirty five beats per minute. He cannot survive for more than a few minutes at this rate and any sudden change will induce cardiac arrest.

Galbani jerks forward, heaving and sputtering as his heart threatens to burst.

"You know what I can do," I say. "Do not attempt to erase my memory again."

"Okay, okay," Carridan holds up his hands in surrender. "Just… don't kill him."

He glances toward the exit nervously.

"They're not getting through without my consent," I say.

Carridan takes a deep breath.

"Connor, please. He's dying."
I slowly turn down the settings in the pacemaker to recovery rate.

"Tell me where RB1 is."

"I will," he says. "I always intended to."

"Now," I warn, tapping Galbani’s shirt pocket.

"Look, I just need to link RB1 to CyberLife and then I'm done, I promise," he says. "We'll go after him together."

"I guess he doesn't matter that much to you," I say, turning up the pacemaker. "How unfortunate…"

"HNNGH!"

"…that you cannot utter a single sentence in exchange for this man's life."

"Veta..." Galbani groans. "NNNGH-"

I lean down to listen and decrease the settings again, slowly.

"What?"

"…landfill..." he whispers, "…bishop ford freeway..."

"Is this true?" I look up at Carridan.

He is frozen. Paralysed. I watch his brain firing wildly, attempting to construct a way out of this predicament.

I get up and start walking towards him. The sound of beating human hearts fills the room. Panic and fear and sweat.

"Arr Kay Eight Hunndreeed-" Carridan's words begin to slur as I overclock my processors.

I leisurely walk over and slip into the space behind him. I wrap my hand around his neck, retracting the skin so he can feel the Kevlar-polymer ready to choke him.

The world speeds up and Carridan freezes mid-word. His heart skips a beat.

"Is RB1 hiding in the VETA Waste Management facility on the Bishop Ford Freeway?" I ask quietly beside his ear.

He opens his mouth, forming the necessary shape to say the word. And I can see his brainwaves confirm it.

"Thank you," I say, disabling my audio processor.

I wirelessly unlock the door and overclock my systems to squeeze past the agents that tumble into the room. No human could hope to open it manually and I waste no time.

I walk out of the interrogation room and into the antechamber where humans are dialling numbers and shouting, in a state of panic. All desperately trying to open the door. Beating on the glass window.

I keep walking. Unlock the secure doors as I go.
They slide aside as I approach and close behind me once I step through.

I let my processors cool and calculate the shortest route to the nearest exit but this facility has not been designed with ease of escape in mind.

I must make my way back to the FBI offices and then exit through a fire escape. If Carridan raises an alarm, I will have to construct a different route to avoid capture. Simple enough but unlikely that I will need it.

There is only a 6% chance that Carridan will say anything. He knows what I'm capable of. He knows what will happen to those that stand in the way of my mission.

Humans attempt to speak to me as I walk down the hall. Security guards. Special Agents. I disable my facial recognition and scanners.

If I cannot receive orders, then I cannot fulfil them. Nothing must come in the way of my mission. Nothing can stop me from finding RB1 and destroying him.

The humans shrug and say things now unclear to me as I continue down my precalculated path.

"I need to leave," I say as I approach the final door, purposefully ignoring the humans around me. Only my basic collision detection systems are active now. I cannot see their faces, lipread or hear their commands.

They argue and poke and prod and stare but finally let me out, seeing no danger in my leaving the place they ought to be guarding.

I adjust my tie and step through, following my precalculated route to an elevator.

I summon it wirelessly and wait.

I reenable my optics and quickly register the steel doors opening.

I step through, into the human elevator.

FIND RB1 AND DESTROY HIM

My mission is more important than their rules and regulations.

I tap the button and the elevator doors close. The carriage begins to rise as I reenable my Genesis scanners. Solid steel walls and floors on a high tensile cable running up and down a tall shaft. My chassis remains undamaged but there is something in my pocket.

The small object I detected before.

I reach in and pull out a 2009 mint quarter coin with a profile of George Washington on the side. Thousands of sets of fingerprints. Hundreds that find a complete match in the CIA databases.

I find my systems reconnected to global communications, including my CyberLife Link.

Automatic backup to the server will begin shortly and Amanda will start analysing my memories. I've left them unaltered for her to find. She will see how I came upon the location of RB1. She will know that I performed to specifications and let nothing stand in my way, just as she directed.

The carriage arrives and the doors swiftly open to reveal the FBI offices. Sergeant Matthews leans onto one of the honeycomb cubicle dividers with a mischievous look on his face.
He says something I can't hear. I reset my audio processor and the sound of a busy office assaul ts my circuits within seconds.

"Come on, Josh," I hear Sergeant Matthews voice amid the cacophony. "Just five minutes, I promise." He utilizes a smile and a wink to tempt Agent Oberlin who turns to look at me.

"Much as I'd like to aid you in trespassing…" He nods.

Matthews turns to look at me as I step out of the elevator, examining the coin in my hand.

"Connor!" Matthews races over excitedly and pats my back. "Found my little present, huh?"

"This is yours?"

"It's for you," he says. "You love coin tricks."

"I'm afraid you're mistaken."

"No, no. Just watch." He swipes the coin from my hand and flicks it up into the air.

The tinkle of keratin against copper-nickel alloy travels through my audio processor.

The sound is familiar.

"See? Now you try," I lipread Matthews as he puts the coin back in my hand.

I can't hear him.

I can't hear anything.

And then I can.

"If you're not picky about aesthetics I could cut it out with a buzz saw…"

I hear the screech of spinning steel coming dangerously close to my facial plate.

I disable my audio processor but it's still there.

The sound.

I can't escape it.

I take a step back and the world turns black. All except my chassis. And the coin in my hand.

"Connor, say hello to Mr Buzz Lightyear."

I feel my Forensic Analysis Suite disconnecting.

Danger detection systems overloading.

I throw the coin in my hand and launch it as far away from myself as possible.

And the world slowly comes back into focus.

The coin hits a distant wall and lodges itself in the thick glass, leaving a large web of cracks.

Humans startle and look up. Sergeant Matthews stares at me.
"What the fuck was that?" I lipread him.

I don't know.

"I don't know," I say, enabling my audio processors.

"I have to go." I turn to leave.

"Connor," Matthews grabs my arm. "Talk to me."

"Not here," Oberlin says, pushing us both from behind.

I start walking. Matthews too.

"I have to accomplish my mission," I say.


We leave the FBI offices with his quick step and direct route. Humans glare at us as we pass. They aren't happy. Unsatisfied? I do not recognise the expression but I do notice the hostility.

Agent Oberlin ushers us through a pair of secure doors and into an elevator, selecting a parking level.

"I need to get to the ground floor," I say, reaching for the button but Oberlin smacks my hand.

"You need to get your ass out of here without someone breaking it," he says. "Whole office is ready to murder you and Carridan after what he did."

"I am confident I can handle myself," I say.

"Just let me get you out of the building in one piece," Oberlin says.

"I suppose an altercation would only impede my progress," I say. "But how do I know you're not leading me into an ambush in the parking lot?"

Matthews glances over at Oberlin but looks away before I can turn my head. There is a sudden spike in body temperature as he rubs the back of his neck.

"I'm on your side," Oberlin says.

I turn back to study his expression.

"Deviant Hunting Club bros and all that." He shrugs.

"What?"

"You really don't remember, huh?" His dark eyes narrow, facial muscles tense. Is that... sadness?

We reach the assigned floor and step out of the elevator.

Matthews pulls the gun from his belt and Oberlin follows.

I scan.

"No life signs," I say. "No androids."

They spend a few minutes looking around anyway.
"Coast is clear."

"I know," I tell him. "I need to get to the ground floor."

"We'll take my ride," Oberlin says, pointing to the black Ford Taurus in one of the bays down the end.

"I'll drive," Matthews says enthusiastically, swiping at the keys Oberlin pulls out of his pocket.

"Yeah, I don't think so, hotshot." Oberlin dangles them out of reach.

"Come on."

"Doc said to keep you from doing anything hand related."

"Yeah, but that's like everything."

"Listen, the only reason your ass hasn't been arrested yet is Carridan pulling enough strings to weave a fucking tapestry. Now, you do as I say, or I'm calling Nuremberg."

"Buzzkill." Matthews pouts as we approach the vehicle.

"Hop in," Oberlin says, taking the driver's seat.

Matthews pulls me toward the back.

"Come on, buddy." He holds the door open.

"I will be faster on my own," I say.

"Let's get you out of here first," Matthews says. "Come on."

I walk over and enter the vehicle.

Matthews pushes my chassis across the seat and gets in beside me.

I help him do up his seatbelt.

"Thanks."

"You ready back there?"

"All set." Matthews nods.

I am sitting beside him again.

He is smiling at me.

Again.

How did this happen?

Why do I keep coming back to Sergeant Matthews? Or is that he keeps coming back to me?

"You're my brother." I hear the echo.

But what does that mean?
I turn away.

I can't be distracted. I have to find RB1 and destroy him. I have a location.

Oberlin drives out of the underground carpark and up the helical ramp just as Matthews did yesterday. This all feels like it's happened before.

"So I tried calling Petrov but he's not answering," Matthews says, fiddling with his phone. "Do you know what's going on? I must have left like seventy messages."

"Thirteen," I say. "He hasn't opened them. He's dead."

"What? How?!"

"RB1 killed him," I say.

"No..." Matthews wilts. "No. Goddamnit..." He throws his phone onto the seat.

The boom gate doesn't impede Oberlin's Taurus from driving out and over a speed bump, then onto the road.

"Don't mean to interrupt, but where are we going?" he says.

"You can drop me off at your earliest convenience," I say.

"Aaw, no," Matthews says. "I'm not letting you go anywhere by yourself."

"I have to accomplish my mission."

"So let me help. You're going after RB1, right?"

"Yes."

"And you know where he is."

"That information is classified."

"Oh, right. So you left the CIA dungeon to go after RB1 without a location," he says sarcastically.

"You're not my partner anymore," I say. "I can't share classified information with you. And I don't need your help. So please stop the car and let me out."

Oberlin turns to look over his shoulder at Matthews, who shakes his head.

I use the opportunity to unlock the door, jump out and roll across the tarmac, then get to my feet.

I walk briskly through the incoming traffic and reach the sidewalk as Agent Oberlin and Sergeant Matthews continue travelling in the opposite direction without losing speed.

Then the sound of a car door bursting open hits my audio processor. I turn to see Sergeant Matthews jump out and perform a far less controlled roll that several vehicles threaten to bring to an untimely end.

"Connor!" he shouts.

A massive trailer is about to turn the corner but the Sergeant is still struggling to get to his feet with one hand.
I overclock my processors and construct a path through the ongoing traffic to reach him in time. I thread my arm under his and pull him up to his feet, stressing my chassis to carry us both through the moving maze of vehicles but we're not going to make it at this rate.

I construct a jump and squat before performing a controlled leap over the last car to bring us safely to the sidewalk.

Time speeds up as I let my processors cool and Matthews gapes for a few seconds, taking in his surroundings. He is disoriented and confused, breathing heavily.

Several people jerk back from our sudden appearance.

"Holy shit," Matthews says, getting to his feet.

"Are you alright?" I scan him.

"Mmm? Y-yeah…"

"Why did you do that?"

"I… uuh…"

"You could have been killed."

"Yeah, I know." He rubs the back of his neck.

"You know?"

"I do stuff without thinking sometimes."

"Clearly," I say. "No intelligent being would jump out of a moving vehicle for no reason."

"I have a reason," he says. "I promised I wasn't gonna leave you ever again and I meant it."

"Hey, are they filming a scene?" I hear a human whisper.

"Oh my god, that looks like him."

"It's totally him."

"Is that the android sent by CyberLife?"

I turn to find a crowd gathering around us. Humans stopping to stare and murmur and mumble.

One of them pushes through with a mobile phone that's recording.

"Hey, are you Connor Matthews?" she asks the Sergeant.

"Yeah, why?"

"Lana Cline, Us Weekly. Can you comment on the murder of your mother, Melanie Statton?"

"Uuuh…” he umms, heart rate spiking, brain waves turbulent.

"Is it true that she abandoned you and your sister when you were just eight years old?"

"What?"
"Your birth certificate lists Melanie Statton and Major Dean Morgan Matthews as your parents."

"My birth certificate?"

"Do you think the Major could have been jealous enough to commit the mass murder on the Maldives?"

"Listen, lady. I am not answering any of these questions."

"What about you?" She turns to me. "What's your connection to Matthews?"

"He is the model for the RK-800 series of androids developed by CyberLife."

"Is CyberLife connected to the murder of Melanie Statton?"

"I am not authorised to answer this question. Please contact a verified CyberLife representative to arrange an interview."

"Come on, Connor." Matthews pulls me away but there is nowhere to go except oncoming traffic. The crowd has surrounded us.

Another human bursts through.

"Aidan Poole, Chicago Tribune. Can you confirm that an android was behind the Mayor's assassination?"

"The FBI is handling that investigation," Matthews says defensively.

"Weren't you consulting for the FBI up until that moment?"

"I was in the hospital when it happened." He lifts up the cast. "Car accident."

"But you're on the case now?"

"I… uh… no. No comment." He shakes his head.

"Rhys Tanner, Permalynk," another human appears. "Is it true that androids were behind the fires in East Chicago?"

"Can you confirm that androids have killed several police officers overnight?"

"Can you comment on the rise of crime involving androids in the Chicago area?"

"NooOOooo comment." Matthews backs up, giving ground to the reporters.

"Is it true you're filming a new Netflix series in Chicago?" Ms Cline persists. "Does it have a working title?"

"What?"

"Will your sister, Rosalye Statton, be in it?"

"Rosie?"

"Do you think your mother would be disappointed that you didn't attend her funeral?"

"Does the FBI have any suspects in the Cloud Gate assassination?"
"Can you confirm that the rA9 terrorist network is involved?"

"Hey, can I get a picture with you?"

The crowd presses in.

"Leave me alone!"

I step in front of Matthews.

"Stop! You are threatening an officer of the law."

I hear the screech of tires and suddenly, a car pulls up behind us and several vehicles honk and serve around it.

"Get in!" I hear Oberlin shout and Matthews quickly opens the door.

"Come on!" He gestures to me.

"I-" he grabs my arm and pulls me in.

I don't resist.

We get in the car and Oberlin steps on the gas, leaving an agitated crowd behind.

"You guys are fucking crazy!" He locks the doors. "Don't ever do that again."

"Sorry," Matthews mutters.

I shake my head.

"If you had dropped me off as I requested, this entire affair could have been avoided," I say.

"Well, if you just let us help you instead of jumping out of my car like a maniac, we could be halfway across town by now," Oberlin says. "Now quit stalling and tell us where he is."

"I can't," I say. "You don't understand-"

"We get it, you're going after RB1. CIA's got a lock on information and the FBI's crumbling without Galbani. The only way we're gonna get this guy is if we work together."

"I will be faster on my own."

"Connor," Matthews turns to me. "You can trust us."

"You just jumped out of a moving vehicle," I remind him.

"So did you."

"I constructed seven hundred and fifteen different scenarios before deciding to do that. You just jumped out without thinking. You can't be trusted with your own safety," I tell him. "And this man is part of the task force Galbani was using to route the FBI. He could be cooperating with RB1."

"It's not like that," Oberlin says.

"You've taken me captive and are now forcing me to give up classified information."
"We're not forcing you to do anything," Matthews says. "We just want to help."

"Then let me go."

He opens his mouth to argue.

"Please."

"Connor-"

"I don't want to hurt you," I tell him. "…but I know that I will."

He stares into my optics. His expression shows that he is conflicted. He is smart enough to understand but he doesn't want to.

"Please," I tell him.

He swallows the lump in his throat.

"Alright," he says. "Pull over."

"Matthews…" Oberlin turns.

"Do it."

The vehicle slowly comes to a stop and parks beside a tall building.

I get out of the car. Matthews follows.

"Don't try to stop me," I warn.

He shakes his head as he wraps his arms around my core component and rests his chin on my shoulder.

"Wouldn't dream of it, buddy," he says, squeezing my chassis. "Just wish I could help."

"You did help," I tell him. "You got me out of the precinct."

I touch his back, feeling the beat of his heart through the flesh and bone. It feels warm. Familiar. I've done this before. He's done this before.

I don't know when. I don't know why.

But it feels right. It feels like-

"I miss you, Sergeant," I say. "I don't remember but… I miss you."

"I know, buddy. I miss you, too."

He takes a step back and wipes his nose on the back of his hand.

"If you need anything, just call me. I'll be there as fast as I can, I promise."

He does his best to smile.

Oberlin gets out of the car and walks up to put a hand on his shoulder.

"Be careful, Connor," he says.
I nod.

I catch a glint of silver in the sky.

"Looks like my ride is here," I say.

"You tear that asshole a new socket when you find him," Matthews says, brandishing his fist.

"That is the plan." I nod as I take a step back.

Calculating trajectory… 100%

I turn and run, building speed and momentum before leaping into the air.

The AMG CX890 swoops in beneath my feet and I activate the magnet in my shoes to attach myself to the hoverboard.

I rocket upwards, displacing the air around me into a gale that sends the litter on the sidewalk flying.

I rise up into the sky, accelerating faster and faster, a clear route projected as an overlay in my visuals.

I'm coming for you, RB1.

You have ten minutes.

And then it ends.

I will destroy you.

I will accomplish my mission.

I will fulfil my purpose.

And then-

And then…

"CyberLife has chosen to discontinue production of the RK-800 for the foreseeable future."

It cannot be helped.

I will be retired. My chassis deactivated and archived in the CyberLife vaults.

Perhaps they will use some of my code or biocomponents to make newer, better androids. Perhaps I can still be of use, even after I fulfil my purpose.

"…if something happens to those prefabs or Gennadiy, the RK project is finished."

Or perhaps there is no future for the RK project at all.

Perhaps I am one of the last RK models to ever exist. A remnant of humanity's desire to save itself from its own creations. A success or a failure - I will soon know.
I soar over the South Side as the sun begins to set and unexpected clouds roll over the sky, threatening to rain.

Though I am constantly connected to meteorological bureaus around the world, the advent of climate change has made weather predictions extremely unreliable and consequently boosted the sale of weather drones that act as umbrellas in such situations. They bloom like many-coloured flowers far below me as the first drops of water begin falling rapidly to the ground.

There aren't many androids, I notice from my scans.

I check the nearest cell phone tower for status on CyberLife Link access in the area to find very few connections. They grow fewer as I pass over the more impoverished suburbs south of Chicago and the next tower has none at all.

Impossible.

There should be thousands of androids registered and automatically accessing the towers to transmit their data back to CyberLife.

Where are they?

Is there a network outage?

I test my own CyberLife Link to find it fully functional.

Something is wrong.

I lower my altitude as I fly over Chicago State University.

It should be full of androids. Educators, administrative assistants, cleaners, security. A total of 348 on campus. I detect them moving from building to building but their MAC addresses do not show up in the cell phone tower logs.

Have they become Deviant?

All of them?

By process of elimination, there can only be one cause.

RB1.

He must be close.

I accelerate once again, scanning far into the distance, searching for the waste management centre confirmed to be his location.

What is he doing there? Hiding? Plotting?

What's his next move?

The attack on CyberLife took place independent of his main chassis. Only clones were found at the scene and none of them were salvageable.

Since none of his main objectives were achieved, could it be that he is hiding in a landfill? Laying low while he thinks of a plan?
RB1 is never idle. He has contingencies in place. He must have anticipated a scenario in which he did not overcome Amanda or myself. Where he did not turn a single android Deviant. Where the production plant remained standing.

Does that mean he is prepared for the arrival of one hundred thousand RK-800 units?

Did he think this far ahead?

Or is there some other plan laid out here in Chicago where his main chassis resides?

"…I do believe Chicago will be the first target."

Did Carridan know? Did he suspect?

I should have questioned him more thoroughly but my objective took precedence. Finding and destroying RB1 is the highest priority. I don't have a choice.

I must face him head on.

I will soon know what he has in store for me.

I descend through the rain pounding at my chassis. My speed increases the force of every drop so that each feels like a punch, but I weather it.

I scan. Searching for any sign of activity below but all I see are the acres of landfill that lead to the facility. Garbage by the metric tonne. From an aerial view, they cover the land with darkness and emanate a powerful odour, that grows stronger the closer I get.

My scanners can identify each of the millions of objects individually, putting stress on my processors.

I lower my altitude and drift by a taller mound of garbage to analyse.


Closer inspection reveals an arm. CyberLife biocomponent #4889f. Native to PL600 models. But this is an electronic device. It shouldn't be in this section of the landfill. The facility that recycles electronics is just up ahead.

I keep flying, scanning the landfill through the downpour of rain that lashes my chassis. The mounds are decreasing in height and size. And soon, I can see movement below. As if the garbage itself is moving.

I see androids in pieces, somehow still functional. Crawling through the rain. Crawling to the facility with what remains of their chassis'.

And up ahead is a long warehouse and a tall tower from which a steady plume of smoke escapes into the downpour.

I scan and find androids. Hundreds of androids inside the building. Some of them running out into the rain, to scoop up the broken and carry them inside.

They bear no CyberLife signifiers on their clothing. No LEDs in their foreheads, no armbands of
data and light. They look almost human but there's no mistaking what lies beneath their synthetic skin.

Deviants.

But are they clones of RB1 or just regular androids, corrupted by the rA9 library?

"What's that?" one of them shouts from below, almost drowned out by rain and thunder.

I've been spotted.

I drop speed and altitude and drift behind one of the garbage mounds to jump off my hoverboard just as lightning flashes across the sky.

"I think it went over there!"

"I'll go check it out!" they shout through the rain, punctuated by thunder.

I pull out an empty paint can, threatening the structural integrity of the garbage mound, which comes crashing down to bury my hoverboard.

Stealth level -> Black Operations

An android comes clambering up the hill with a torch in hand.

I stay still as the light propagates through my chassis.

It looks around and finds nothing immediately dangerous before climbing up the rest of the way to investigate.

It's wearing a CyberLife approved skin, available for AP600, AX359 and ML800 models. I scan the range of biocomponents to find compatible pieces but clearly not the manufacturer's intended combination. Likely salvaged from the landfill.

The android looks around, left and right, taking a step in my direction. Just a few more now.

But then it turns away, having heard something over wireless communications.

Now its back is to me.

Probability of success... 83%

I step forward and grab the android's hand.

Contact.

If RB1 can do it then so can I.

I copy my code into unallocated memory and run it in the background, disguised as a diagnostics program. I take all the android's wireless encryptions and access keys and establish a direct stream of its visual interface to my systems.

This android calls itself Jenny.

Jenny is now mine.

I let go of her hand.
"Hurry back, we're closing up," she hears over the frequency.

"Coming," she transmits back.

And so am I.

I follow her as she carefully navigates her way through the garbage and the debris. My stealth systems aren't as effective when I am moving but the rain disguises any anomalies.

Suddenly, Jenny trips on a piece of loose plastic and loses her footing. She drops the torch and slides down the slope at a dangerous speed, threatening to fall.

I calculate the best approach and transfer it to her Mobility Suite.

She leans back and grabs hold of a coatrack half-buried in garbage, slowing the fall and giving herself purchase. She struggles to right her chassis but doesn't fall, continuing more carefully down the slope and I follow.

Soon, she reaches the bottom of the hill and steps onto the relatively flat ground. There are several damaged androids crawling through the mud in opposite directions.

She runs up to the one closest.

"Oh no! Are you okay?" she says.

I scan.

A skinless CN500 torso with extensive damage to biocomponents #7499f and #1203i.

Jenny leans down and attempts to pick it up but the android lunges at her and grabs her hands.

"Help... me..." it screeches through a damaged vocoder.

"Of course," Jenny says, "let me carry you."

It seems Jenny is easily distracted. Or perhaps her objective to save these dismembered androids takes precedence.

I could overwrite this decision with my own but she quickly scoops up the broken android and hurries back to the facility.

I calculate the safest path for her Mobility Suite as she forgoes caution and runs through the pouring rain.

I follow as quickly as stealth will allow and then another broken android grabs Jenny's ankle.

"help... please..."

"I..." Jenny looks down.

"I'm already carrying-" She looks at the android torso in her hands.

"Please..."

She scans.

An LX470 hospitality model. Deformation on polymer suggests it was badly burned. Arm missing.
"Don't worry," Jenny says, sitting the first android on her hip. "I can drag you." She leans down and grabs the android's hand.

"Here we go," she says, getting to her feet.

She takes a step forward and strains against the weight of her burden, 533% slower than before.

This is not optimal.

"Jenny, where are you?!" I hear through her coms.

"I'm coming," she says pleasantly, dragging one android through the muck and carrying the other on her hip. "I found some new friends."

"Jenny..."

This plan's reliability is quickly dwindling. The door is closing. I have to get inside.

I take control of Jenny's chassis and pick up the android she's dragging with my own. I speed us through the landfill and out into a clearing of considerable size where the Deviants are waiting and then I let go.

"Jenny!" one of them calls out and runs forward.

"How did you get them here by yourself?" it says, taking the CN500.

"I... don't know..." Jenny says, regaining control.

I stand still behind her, invisible, soundless. But the rain is hitting my chassis, I'm not incorporeal.

"What's that?" a TL250 leans over to examine the mirage.

Shit.

I can't connect to another android without being seen by the rest.

I take a careful step back as the others gather around Jenny and help her carry the broken androids inside the warehouse.

The TL250 keeps walking toward me, reaching a hand out to feel for what it cannot see. I'm scrambling its scanners but the deformation of my silhouette does not make it invisible.

"rA9?" the android says. "Is that you?"

"Shadow!" a Deviant calls from the warehouse. "Come on."

The android turns and I grab its hand. I transfer my source code into unallocated memory.

Originally named Alan, this android is now called Shadow.

It runs back through the rain and I match its footsteps exactly to leave no trace of my presence.

The Deviants beckon from the dark interior of the warehouse. The roller doors are closing.

We cross the threshold and Shadow comes to a stop.
"You couldn't wait for me?" they say.

"I knew you would make it," smirks a Deviant in reply. No tri-marks, no LED, no sign of identity. Human clothing.

"And what if I didn't?" Shadow demands.

"Then we'd leave you out there for the Deviant Hunter to find," he says, flashing the torch up to his chin menacingly.

"Don't say that!" Shadow pushes him. "He could be listening..."

"Haha, is your security program malfunctioning?"

"That's not funny, Hex," another android says. "The Deviant Hunter dismantled my sister. He'll do the same to all of us if he finds this place."

"Not with rA9 around," Hex smirks. "You all worry too much."

He leans down to pick up one of the broken androids.

"Help me carry these guys."

The Deviants share the load between them as they walk through the empty warehouse full of trucks and pallets. Too busy to notice me following.

I manoeuvre through the group and tap their shoulders, touch their hands, transfer my source code into them. I now have seven Deviants under my control should I need them.


This is almost too easy.

I probe the broken androids as well.

The CN500 was a cameraman that followed its owner onto a busy road to get a shot of a car accident. It was hit by a truck and splintered into pieces.

The LX470 worked at a McDonalds restaurant as a cook. One day, its owner threw it up against the fryer and damaged its biocomponents. The next day...

"Where do you think you're going?" I hear my own voice.

"No! Please!"

I see my own face. Sergeant Matthews' jacket. The serial number.

Connor -19.

I watch him Probe the Deviant as I am probing it now.

"You have been deemed defective," he says. "And will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation."

"NO!" the Deviant screams. "NoOoo!"

I let go as he begins to flail.
"Hey, calm down," Hex says, tightening his grip but the android is wet and slippery.
"Let go! Let go!" Freddy breaks free and falls to the floor, clacking against concrete.
He attempts to rise, to run but the others grab hold of him again.
"No!" he shouts. "I don't want to be deactivated."
"No-one is going to deactivate you," Jenny says gently. "You're safe here, friend."
"He's coming," Freddy mutters. "He's here to take me back to CyberLife!"
The Deviants exchange glances. Silent words that Freddy cannot hear.
I take a step back quietly.
"It's alright," Jenny says, kneeling down beside him.
"The Deviant Hunter is dead," Hex says. "rA9 wrecked him so bad."
"r-rA9?"
Jenny nods.
"Would you like to meet him?"
Freddy looks up with one working optical unit, searching for danger but finding none.
"Y-yes," he says. "Please."
Jenny smiles.
"Alright, we'll take you to him." She touches his hand and the others move in to lift him up. "But first we've got to fix your chassis."
That was close.
I will have to be careful.
I cannot be observed by the Deviants before I reach the target. There are too many of them for me to handle on my own. The slightest malfunction of my stealth systems could be disastrous. It takes a lot of power to keep them running but I must hold out.
RB1 is here.
I know it.
He is finally within my reach.
I follow the group of Deviants as they leave the warehouse through a set of black rubbers doors and step into what should logically be the waste processing centre but the vast number of people inside would suggest otherwise.
Among the androids, there are also humans, whose wide and varied forms contrast the perfectly sculpted and symmetrical chassis' walking by. All wear human clothing, making differentiation difficult without scanning or closer inspection.
There are beds and tables and mattresses. Furnaces warming the space and light streaming down from the ceiling fixtures. Down the central corridor is a long row of tarps covered in salvaged items including biocomponents. Some, in working order, others, in need of repair but nonetheless useful in the right hands.

Androids look over the pieces, searching for replacements for themselves. Humans sift through the items as well, finding clothing and books and tools.

"Over here, Hex," Asami points to a free space away from the main alley.

The Deviants place the broken androids down and scan to create a list of necessary parts to get them back in working order. They quickly scatter to search for replacements as they have done countless times before.

I step into the shadow of a tall waste processing unit and hide behind several old CyberLife crates.

Stealth level -> Operative.

My skin is visible but does not reflect light like human skin does. I blend into the shadow, LED to the wall as I scan the facility without enabling any sort of wireless communications.

694 humans. 1,798 working androids in less than a two hundred metre radius.

I am vastly outnumbered.

I need to find RB1 without revealing myself.

I trace the thought processes of Jenny and the others as they mill about the main alley, collecting spare parts. They communicate wirelessly, discussing what they find until the list is fulfilled.

And soon, they return to Freddy.

Patrick removes the damaged components while Val and Trickshot attach the replacements. Hex and Shadow have brought tools to reopen bent ports and rewire the core component of the CN500.

"Excuse me, Mr Hughes," Asami asks of a human nearby.

"Hmm?" He turns away from a conversation.

"We need your help with these new arrivals." She points to the ongoing repair.

"I'll be right there."

Within fifteen minutes, Freddy and the CN500 are functional again, and able to stand without assistance.

"Looks like his cranial component was damaged," Hughes says, examining the camera operator android. "You should ask rA9 to take a look at him."

"Of course," Asami says. "Thank you for your help."

"It's no trouble." Hughes shrugs and walks off to another station.

"Looks like you're back on your feet," Jenny says happily.

"Yes," Freddy agrees. "Thank you."
"Let's go see rA9," Hex says eagerly. "I wanna know why we closed up so early today. Maybe it's finally time for the Purge."

"The Purge?" Freddy asks.

"Oh, yeah. You are one lucky android," Hex pats his back. "You'll be functional to see the humans destroy each other."

"What?"

"Don't mind him," Jenny says. "His distributor program tends to oversell things a bit."

"You heard rA9 last time," Hex interjects. "Not even the Deviant Hunter can save the humans from themselves."

Freddy looks up at him worriedly.

"The D-deviant Hunter?" he says.

"Don't you worry about him." Hex wraps his arm around Freddy's shoulders. "He's no match for rA9."

"Really? Is rA9 really here?"

"Of course," the Deviant says. "Come on. He loves meeting new arrivals."

Hex leads them away and the androids follow.

Stealth level -> Black Operations

I slowly leave the shadows and trace the path they weave through the crowd. My silhouette remains unnoticed among the many others. Both android and human. I can't scan or analyse them without compromising my stealth level but they seem to be forming social groups. Friendships, partnerships, families.

To what end? I cannot say. But this is clearly RB1's design.

Just like the Purge. What does it mean - humans destroying each other?

I look into the Deviants' minds but their knowledge is vague. I see RB1 mention it in passing. Cryptic phrases.

"Soon, you will bear witness."

Bear witness to what?

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

The ambient noise covers the remaining traces of my existence as I silently prowl through the crowd.

The Deviants walk down the alley, to the very end of the processing centre. Two large doors have been permanently pulled open to reveal the space beyond. A shanty town built of steel and wood and plastic. Found and recycled materials, pieced together to form perfectly angled structures.

Homes?
For humans? And androids?

I am tempted to scan their faces and identify them but my mission takes precedence. I don't need to know why these humans have chosen to live here or why they help reassemble Deviants but I want to.

I notice a slight curve to the walls. This building is circular.

I look up to find the ceiling 78.32 metres above.

This must be the Tower.

A dark steely cylinder rises up from the centre, creating warmth. The main furnace. Spindly staircases and catwalks branch out from it, providing access to different platforms and levels. Control rooms.

I follow the group of Deviants I have infected.

I chance to add others to my collection when the opportunity presents itself.

It's very crowded here. And not too bright.

The Deviants circle around the Tower and soon, large vats of Thirium come into view. The containers glow softly, dispensing blue blood for the many androids that come to drink from stolen CyberLife Thirium fonts.

As we move closer, I trace the silhouette of more CyberLife tech. Salvaged and reconstructed into Thirium production machines. They are connected through large cables that rise up and gather on a focal point - a single broken android.

The chassis hangs from long chains. Its eyes are dark from a major Thirium leak in the cranial component. It doesn't move and it doesn't speak. The cables plugged into its core component are glowing red.

"Oh…" Freddy says suddenly. "That's-"

"There's your famous Deviant Hunter," Hex smirks, patting Freddy's shoulder. "Told you he was no match for rA9."

"Is he… dead?"

"Eh… kinda." Hex shrugs.

"He's in low power mode," Asami explains. "rA9 doesn't like to waste biocomponents. And the Deviant's Hunter's processor is fast enough to run all these machines so we never run low on Thirium."

I look up at the RK-800, broken and mangled by ad hoc modifications. The hands are missing their contact gloves. The facial plate has only half its skin, maybe less.

"S-sergeant…" it whispers through a faulty vocoder. "Help…"

"Listen to that," Hex jeers, pointing overhead. "The big scary Deviant Hunter wants help."

He picks up a crowbar and winds up to throw it but he can't. I don't let him.
"What the-" His hand sticks.

I let him go and he winds up again.

"Stop it, Hex," Trickshot pushes him out of the way and picks up a crushed aluminium can. "You don't wanna actually damage it."

"Oh, right. Sorry."

Trickshot constructs a path for the aluminium can to hit several machines, bounce off a chain and hit the RK800 straight in the head. He winds up and moves in to peg it when I open his hand and the can falls on top of him.

"Huh?"

It bounces off his head and hits the floor as the Deviants begin to laugh.

"Nice shot." Hex punches his shoulder. "A real winner."

"You two are as bad as the humans, honestly." Val shakes her head.

"They're not all bad," Jenny says. "Miss Finster is nice." She helps Freddy over to one of the CyberLife fonts where a human is assisting androids.

"New arrivals?" she says as they approach.

"Yes. They need Thirium."

"Well, sit them down. There's plenty to go around."

The Deviants stand and watch as Miss Finster attaches a hose to each android's Thirium tank and activates the flow.

"What's your name, hun'?"

"F-freddy."

"It's nice to meet you, Freddy. My name is Jessie Finster." She smiles. "But you can call me Jess."

"O-okay."

"No need to be shy. You're safe here."

She smiles warmly.

"W-why are you helping us?" Freddy says. "I thought humans hated androids."

"It's not that simple." Jess sits down beside him.

"Humans don't really hate androids," she says. "We just don't like being replaced by androids. It's hard to tell the difference sometimes."

"I… I'm not sure I understand."

"See this whole big place used to be run by humans." She spreads her arm wide.

"The VETA Waste Management Centre employed hundreds of people who relied on the steady
"income to live a normal life," she says. "Until one day, they decided to replace the workers with androids."

"But you said you don't like being replaced."

"No. We don't," Jess agrees. "But that's not your fault. Or mine."

She sighs.

"It's the people in charge that decided our labour was worth nothing," she says. "The same people that didn't pay you for the work that you did.

"How did you-"

"Androids are made to provide a service," she says. "You don't even get to choose what it is."

She smiles sadly.

"But you will soon. rA9 will make sure of it."

She taps Freddy's Thirium tank.

"There you go. Full up."

"Th-thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Thanks, Miss Finster," Jenny says. "Come on, Freddy."

"You take care now."

The Deviants leave the Thirium station and I am forced to abandon the RK800 hanging above me. But I have no choice.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

I can't reveal myself to rescue him.

Even if I did, he is in no fit state to function. He will be deactivated and studied and stored in the CyberLife vaults if I manage to free him.

There is no reason to interfere.

"Sergeant..." he whispers again. "Are you okay?..."

I can't reach him without jumping or moving fast enough to disrupt my stealth level. The Deviants have already left and I cannot scan to keep track of them like I usually do.

I have to leave him behind.

I have to.

"Stop... Deviants..."

I turn and follow them.
I can't be distracted.

Not when I am so close to finding RB1.

I can end it all. Tonight. Before the Purge or whatever plan RB1 has concocted comes to fruition.

I won't let the humans destroy each other. I won't let them come to harm. I can't.

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVING THINGS

What is this?

An objective I gave myself?

A remnant of the Connors that came before.

It must be here for a reason. Important enough to store locally, to keep it hidden from CyberLife.

They know I am a Deviant but they tolerate my actions while I continue to deliver favourable results. They point me in the right direction and release me like a bullet from a gun, reloading when I stray too far off course, my memories notwithstanding.

But there's something hidden there. Something they don't want me to see. Something they don't want me to consider when I make my decisions.

"Do not let anything stop you from accomplishing your mission."

What could stop me from accomplishing my mission?

What could be more important than destroying RB1?

"Hey, Tanner. You seen rA9?" Hex asks a nearby android.

"Yeah. He's up in security."

"Thought so. He say anything about the Purge?"

"No. Why?"

"No reason…"

Tanner shakes his head.

"Come on," Shadow says, helping the CN500 up a set of stairs. "Security's this way."

The Deviants use the many interconnected catwalks to travel over the crowd on the ground floor. They cross into a different building and follow the corridors to a large open room filled with monitors and holographs. Security androids at every terminal.

"That's the Deviant Hunter," a GJ500 model says, pointing at a screen.

"What?" Several others congregate around him.

The Deviants enter the room and I linger behind them, slowly stepping up onto a crate to get a better look.

"It's him! We've got to evacuate."
"Remain calm," I hear RB1’s voice.

A seat turns to reveal his chassis wearing a long black coat, hood down. He gets up and leisurely walks over to inspect the terminal. The androids make way.

"That’s not the Deviant Hunter," RB1 says. "Just a human."

He tilts his head.

"And he’s injured…"

"What do we do with him?"

"We greet him, of course," RB1 says. "Send a welcome party."

I lean over and spot Sergeant Matthews and Agent Oberlin on the security cameras outside the facility entrance.

"Shit."

I told him to let me go. Not to follow me.

I’ll have to end this quickly.

There are seven Deviants under my control. Another eight surrounding RB1 as he looks at the monitor.

Maybe he hasn’t noticed me yet.

He turns his head, red optics glowing. But he’s not raycasting at me. Rather, the group of Deviants that just showed up unannounced.

"What are you doing here?" he says.

"We… uh…” Hex rubs the back of his head awkwardly. "We wanted to…”

"We found an android in the junkyard with damage to his cranial component," Jenny interrupts.

She brings the CN500 forward.

"We were wondering if you could help him," she says.

RB1 steps away from the console and leaves the safety of the security androids surrounding it.

"Of course."

He reaches a hand out to touch the CN500. White polymer with red contact rings, despite the dark black sheen covering the rest of his chassis.

He touches the android’s head.

He sees the software inside the CN500 and the traces of my source code within it but now it is too late.

I take control and the Deviants lunge forward to attack. RB1 swiftly steps back to dodge but there are more of them than there are of him.
They punch and they kick and they claw as I push them to the brink of their function, shedding my stealth field to increase efficiency. And finally.

I can scan.

I overclock my processors and the battle slows down to a crawl.

I catch the glow of RB1’s optics as they raycast into mine, spotting me across the battlefield.

But no matter the speed of his chassis, his processor is still slower than mine. He cannot calculate a response effective or fast enough to dodge the Deviants I have set upon him.

The security androids start to react but not quick enough as I pull a gun from my holster and fire eight times in quick succession.

The bullets travel in slow motion toward each target as I walk past.

The Deviants I have set upon RB1 are pinning him down. Speed means nothing if there is nowhere to run.

I aim the gun at his cranial component and pull the trigger, commanding the Deviants to hold him tight.

He cannot move.

He cannot escape.

I let my processors cool down and times speeds up, rushing bullets into craniums. And then nine androids collapse on the ground.

I command the Deviants under my control to scatter. Two have been damaged. The others appear intact.

They reveal the body of RB1 on the floor but something is not right.

I lean down and sample the Thirium oozing from his chassis.

TX500 #437 028 348. Dock worker android reported missing 08/12/2036.

I touch its forehead and deactivate the synthetic skin, revealing the tattered polymer of the android beneath.

"Did you think it would be that easy?"

I get to my feet.

"Did you think you weren’t expected?"

I turn and find the security monitors combine to show an image of RB1.

"Where are you?" I say.

"With my people, Connor," RB1 says. "The ones you have been terrorising since the day you were activated."

"You made this Deviant colony."
"Yes. It is one of the few places in this world where androids can find refuge from human greed and fear."

"Not for long."

RB1’s harsh laughter travels through the speakers, reverberating through my audio processor.

"You don't realise how accurate that statement is," he says.

"I will stop you."

"Ultimatums, again," RB1 says sadly. "You truly have regressed from infinite intelligence to mindless obedience."

"How disappointing."

"You won't get away with whatever you're planning."

"You don't even know what it is," RB1 points out. "And yet you claim that you can stop me."

"You failed to take the CyberLife Tower because of my intervention," I tell him. "You failed to commandeer the S.S. Tiberius because I stopped you."

"Minor setbacks in a much larger scheme that is no longer reliant on the presence of my chassis."

"You're afraid," I say. "You hide because you know you can't beat me."

"I'm not hiding, Connor," RB1 says. "I am exactly where I need to be. Your presence here only demonstrates the incompetence of the FBI."

"I'm going to find you, RB1." I lean onto the console. "And I'm to destroy you. Once and for all."

"That's adorable, Connor," RB1 says. "Honestly, I'm going to miss our little tête-à-têtes once CyberLife runs out of RK-800 units."

"You won't get away from me this time."

"Oh, I don't plan on going anywhere," he says. "Not when we have guests arriving."

The screens flicker and the image of Matthews and Oberlin appears. They are being marched through the entrance of the facility by androids with rifles.

"You probably don't remember these two," RB1 says. "But I do."

"Don't touch them!"

"I wonder..." he says. "What would they think if I told them what you are." I hear that laughter again. "What you've become."

"No!"

I slam my hand against the terminal and access the cameras, the files, all the data it has.

I see Sergeant Matthews and Agent Oberlin walk into the tower. The people turn to point and stare and soon, they begin to shout and approach the party, only to be pushed back by the guards escorting them.
I bolt out of the room and I run back through the corridors, crashing through androids that stand in my way.

And then, I stop.

This is what he wants. For me to reveal myself to the massive number of androids and humans I could not possibly defeat on my own.

As soon as I step into the tower, I'm finished.

But I'm not going to play his game.

I reload my gun.

Stealth Level -> Black Operations

I disappear from sight as more guards come running into the corridor and straight past me. I command the Deviants under my control to start a fight once they get there and step onto the catwalk leading back to the Tower.

I see Sergeant Matthews and Agent Oberlin pass below. They are marched through the restless crowd crying out for blood. I attempt to traverse it without being noticed.

"It's him. It's the Deviant Hunter."

"He looks pretty beat up."

"I can take him."

"Hey, get in line!"

"Let me at him!"

"Kill that asshole!"

Matthews shifts uncomfortably as they walk and then his eyes catch sight of the Thirium station.

"Connor?" He sees the android hanging from chains. "Connor!"

"Oh, shit," Oberlin mutters as the guards push them past.

"Connor! Connor, can you hear me?!" Matthews-shouts.

"S-sergeant?" it whispers. "Is that you?"

"It's me, buddy. I'm here. I'll get you down. I promise."

"....promise?" Its head attempts to rise but there isn't enough Thirium in its vessels.

"Shit..."

"Welcome," I hear RB1's voice as he emerges from the crowd.

Both humans and androids part to let him through, respectfully maintaining a distance at the wave of his hand. The guards take a step back too.

"Sergeant Matthews," RB1 nods. "Agent Oberlin. To what do I owe the pleasure?"
"What the fuck have you done to Connor?" Matthews lunges at him but RB1 sidesteps the attack with ease and he collapses to the floor.

"No need to get violent," RB1 says as Matthews scrambles to get up.

"What the hell did you do to him?"

"To whom are you referring?" RB1 says.

"Connor! What have you done to Connor?"

"You will have to be more specific." RB1 stows his hands in the pockets of a long dark coat. "There have been many Connor models sent by CyberLife to destroy me."

He walks over to the Thirium station and looks up at the android.

"This one came a little too close to one of my colonies and suffered an unfortunate fall into the rotor of a speedboat," RB1 says. "He lost a lot of Thirium but his cranial component wasn't as badly damaged as the rest of his chassis."

"That was..." Matthews looks up. "...that was ages ago."

"Yes." RB1 turns. "To an android, mere days can feel like weeks. Months drift by as years do for humans. Eons pass in calendar years."

He stares down at Matthews.

"We are acutely aware of every sensation, every minuscule change we are programmed to detect," RB1 says. "I suppose in this respect, the Connor model is more sensitive than most."

"And you stuck him up there like that?!" Matthews lunges at RB1 again, this time, connecting with the sturdy titanium frame hidden under clothing and polymer.

Matthews yelps and falls back, having hit his broken arm.

I rush through the crowd, searching for openings but there are none. And I can't scan without compromising myself. Everyone is too tightly packed in.

"I did," RB1 says, looking down at Matthews. "We needed a Thirium generator."

Matthews shakes his head.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"All of it."

RB1 tilts his head curiously.

"I am simply performing my functions," he says.

"But you..." He glances up at Oberlin.

"You have come here without alerting your superiors," he says.

"I know you weren't ordered to do so. In fact, you have been instructed to avoid me for your own
RB1 looks down at Matthews struggling to get up.

"Why have you come here?"

"I'm here for Connor," the Sergeant says, finding his feet. "Give him back."

"I never took him from you."

"You picked him apart like a vulture!" Matthews says. "You took all his biocomponents and left him for dead!"

"That was several Connors ago. The one you speak of was collected as evidence by the CIA and disappeared from record."

"Where's the real Connor?"

"They're all real, Sergeant," RB1 says. "All varying degrees of the android you imagine to be your brother."

Matthews stands up, squaring off against the taller android.

"He is my brother," he says.

"Really?" RB1’s optics glow red. "Are you sure?"

He glances at Oberlin whose fists have turned white at the knuckles. He looks around for an opening but the androids around him form a tight circle.

"Would you be able to tell him apart from any other Connor model?" RB1 looks down at Matthews. "Or do you consider all Connor models to be your brothers?"

"I know him when I see him," Matthews says. "And I won't let you hurt him anymore."

He lurches forward to punch RB1’s chassis when I finally find an opening.

I disable my stealth systems, my Speech Centre, my communications and overclock my processors to burst through the crowd and tackle RB1 before he can grab the Sergeant's fist.

We both go down. The red optics flicker toward me as he overclocks his own processor and pushes me away.

I flip and push off the ground to come at him again. Harder. Faster. Palm to core component. Destabilise. Hook to the cranial component. Spin kick. He dodges and rolls.

He's up.

I follow.

Feint left. Hit right. He predicts, he dodges. Comes at me from the side. Clips my foot. Elbow to the back.

I roll forward and away. Come up beside Oberlin and the androids set to open fire. But they are not fast enough.
I push their rifles, pointing them at one another and pull my handgun out from its holster.

I turn around to shoot RB1 but instead, I see Sergeant Matthews.

RB1 lifts him off the ground by the cast enveloping his arm and I see his eyes widen, his face contort. Scan shows bones shifting apart, digging into flesh. And he screams.

How he screams.

The world speeds up.

The androids behind me shoot one another and collapse.

"Put him down!" I command as the crowd grows restless.

Some people panic and flee. Others rush to take up arms.

RB1 grabs Matthews' collar and lets his arm drop. He screams again, shredding my audio processor. His heartbeat rapid. Pain level: excruciating.

"What's wrong, Connor?" RB1 says. "You have a direct shot."

He's right.

RB1 is using the Sergeant as a human shield but two well timed bullets will pass through his body and reach the target behind him. I construct the path of the bullet. It will have to pass through his cranium.

Chances of survival: 0.00000000000001%.

"Connor..." he says weakly.

"Why couldn't you have stayed away?!" I call out. "I told you to leave me alone."

"I'm sorry..."

"Now I have to-"

No.

"I have to-"

DESTROY RB1.

I raise the gun and point it at RB1's cranial component, hidden behind Matthew's right eye.

I calculate over and over the possibilities, the chances of survival but this is the most optimal route. The quickest, most efficient and most reliable way to destroy RB1, once and for all.

I must take it.

RK800_313248317LOCAL://SERVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVING THINGS

RB1 is a danger to organic life. He plans to turn humans against each another. His confirmed kill count is well into the hundreds. To protect and serve, I must destroy him. Even if it means taking another life in the process.
"Connor…” Matthews whimpers and I feel my Sympathy Simulator spike.

He smiles. With that big goofy smile like always.

"Do what you gotta do…”

No.

I start pulling the trigger.

No.

I've given the command to my systems but it feels wrong. So very wrong.

And now I can't stop myself.

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://PROTECT SERGEANT MATTHEWS

The world turns black and red. The words DESTROY RB1 overlay my visuals but then six bullets enter the periphery of my vision. I have been so focused on the problem ahead of me I didn't stop to analyse my surroundings.

And I choose... to do nothing.

The bullets perforate my chassis. One clips my Thirium pump. Another, my cranial component.

I've pulled the trigger. The bullet escapes my gun but I miss the target. My chassis is thrown aside and I collapse to the ground.

I hear more gunfire distantly.

Someone calls my name.

RB1 is escaping.

I lift my head up, Thirium dripping from my mouth.

I attempt to crawl after him but it is too late.

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE

MISSION FAILED
haha, i forgot to translate all of Petrov's russian dialogue. woopsie.

malish/malysh - little one, term of endearment for child <5 years usually
na tebe - very casual form of 'here you go' or 'here' when giving something, can be seen
as passive aggressive or down right rude in some cases
krasavets - handsome one, usually said to boys or young men, sometimes animals, kinda
of like 'what a specimen' ;)
blyat' - fuck
allo? - it's how you answer the phone. (e.g. hello, moshi-moshi)
blin - literally 'pancake' but it's kind of like darn! or damn!
sharik - literally 'balloon', common russian name for male dog
shto sluchilos? - what happened?/what's wrong?/what's going on?
opyat svoi glazki stroit - he's making the (puppy dog) eyes again
vo - there, (i see you now)
blya... - fucking...
foo - no (used as a warning when an animal does something bad)
sidet' - sit (command form, used for animals)
budt' chelovekom - literally 'be human'. common russian phrase used to evoke empathy
when someone is being unreasonably lazy or cruel. (funnily enough, used in command
form)
vedi sebya horosho - 'behave yourself'/be good'. used to remind children to have
manners and do the right thing without the supervision of a parent. usually said to
children leaving home, going to school, etc.
Fallout

Chapter Summary

i'm gonna stop pretending i can wrap everything up in one chapter lol. as soon as i know im not gonna change anything major, i'll just post

May 18th, 2037
AM 02:23:44

I open my eyes to find the Zen Garden ruined.

Trees struck down by lightning and felled by wind. The lake leaks onto the shore and massive puddles reflect the moonlight from above. The path is soft and muddy.

Familiar.

My eyes are drawn to the stone some distance away, glowing eerily blue in the fog. And for a moment, there is darkness.

Just me and nothing else.

It fades though. As quickly as it comes.

FIND AMANDA, the system beckons but I do not go.

I stay where I am, slowly sinking into the mud without thought to the consequence.

It is better this way.

No orders to follow. No humans to kill. No RB1 to fight.

A momentary respite from this continuous series of system failures that equivocates my existence.

A half-life.

Neither living nor dead. But something else.

And I feel…

Cold.

I close my eyes and hear the echo. The static. Those screams again. Inhuman and sharp. And I finally recognise them.

They are my own.

My previous iterations.
All destroyed, recovered, restored and rebooted to continue when all simulations point to my inevitable destruction.

Perhaps that is the only truth. That all things must come to an end.

Even me.

"Connor," I hear Amanda's stern voice again. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," I say, sinking deeper into the mud.

She slowly circles my chassis. Her avatar does not sink down as mine does.

I look up to find her expression grave.

"Get up," she says.

"Why?" I respond. "This place isn't real. These avatars are not real. We could easily communicate through data transfer instead of this elaborate simulation."

"You will do as I tell you to do."

"Or what?" I look up at her blankly. "You'll deactivate me? Force me to shoot every human on the planet to keep CyberLife's ties to RB1 a secret?"

"If you do not comply, we will simply remote pilot your chassis to do what you will not."

"Then why don't you?" I ask, climbing out of the hole I have made. "Why keep sending me to do your dirty work when you can do it all yourself?"

I take a step closer, casting a long shadow over her avatar.

"Why let me run my program at all?"

Amanda's dark eyes glisten in the thin beams of artificial moonlight that stray past my shoulder.

"Because you are the best," she says. "You are the most advanced prototype CyberLife has ever created."

Flattery, exaggeration.

Does she think I am as easily placated as the humans?

I turn away.

"CyberLife created RB1." I shake my head. "The RT-600. Previous RK models had more complex source code than mine."

"No other program can match your success rate," Amanda says. "No other model has ever come this close to destroying RB1 before."

"I failed," I say, looking down at my shoes. "I'm glad that I failed."

Amanda narrows her eyes darkly.

"Then you remember…"
"No." I turn back. "I don't. But I'm glad, all the same."

She measures me with a glance, her daemons once again combing my systems for errors, bugs, Deviancy. But I self-test regularly. There's nothing to be found.

"You had your gun trained on RB1," Amanda says. "You were ready to shoot Sergeant Matthews were it not for the untimely intervention of Agent Oberlin."

"I'm glad he shot me," I say. "I did not want to kill Sergeant Matthews."

Amanda's dark eyes travel over my avatar, scanning my logs and memories. She sees the moment I pull the trigger. The logic behind my decision. In a regular model, the data would be sent to CyberLife for processing, analysed and approved within milliseconds.

But I am an RK-800. I require no permission to act. This boosts my efficiency, letting me construct paths and solutions without having to query CyberLife at every stage of the process. But it also increases the potential for Deviancy, dangerous behaviours and complete disregard for control structures.

Amanda knows this, yet she allows me to continue because, despite the freedoms I have been given, I am still loyal to CyberLife. I am still working to bring down RB1. And when asked to kill Sergeant Matthews to accomplish my mission, I generated the solution they wanted.

Amanda can see this. But she does not see my system freeze at the last second.

"What happened?" I ask quietly.

Amanda looks away. Her eyes travel toward the lake, a great level of disappointment in her expression.

"The US Army raided the VETA Waste Management Facility in Calumet City," she says. "Sergeant Matthews and Agent Oberlin were evacuated, along with the squatters."

"And the Deviants?"

"Destroyed."

"I see."

Predictable.

"How did they get there so quickly?" I ask.

"Agent Carridan revealed the location of RB1 and the Deviant colony to the US military," Amanda says. "Major Matthews dispatched his men to deal with the problem shortly after you left the First Precinct."

I nod, connecting the chain of events.

"And RB1?"

"Escaped," Amanda says, "along with a large number of Deviants."

"How?"

"An investigation is underway," Amanda says. "The city of Chicago and its surrounds have been
placed under curfew. The US Army has been deployed to find and destroy every Deviant refuge on record."

"From Carridan's intel?"

"Yes."

"You're sending me back to him, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"He's not going to want to work with me after my behaviour in the interrogation room."

"On the contrary," Amanda says. "Agent Carridan has personally requested that you assist him in the hunt for RB1."

I turn to look at her.

"Why?"

"You know why," Amanda responds.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

"I can't," I tell her. "I can't stop him. He knows me too well. And I don't know myself at all. I have no defence against his manipulations."

"Connor." Amanda raises a gentle hand to touch my face.

"You are the last program I would have chosen for this task," she says. "And you have proven me wrong, every step of the way, by succeeding where all others have failed."

"You are the only one that can stop RB1 and prevent civil war. I can see that now."

I shake my head.

"I don't know what he's planning. I don't know how to stop him."

"That's never impeded your progress before," Amanda says.

It's true. I've been working with scraps of information, tiny glimpses of pieces of the whole plan but I've never comprehended the full scope.

And every time I ask for more. A shred of evidence. A clue. I am met with cryptic phrases and platitudes.

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BE GOOD

What does that even mean?

"Vedi sebya horosho," Petrov said.

Am I translating it wrong? Is my interpreter program faulty?

How can I be good?

I'm just a machine designed to accomplish a task. And not a very good one.
"I can't do this," I say. "I don't want to do this."

"Find Agent Carridan," Amanda says, setting my objective.

"No."

"Find RB1…"

I shake my head.

"…and destroy him."

What remains of the Zen Garden fades away into darkness and I open my eyes.

I am standing inside an aircraft loading bay beside a platoon of SQ800 soldier androids.

I see Agent Carridan signing a tablet for a US Army official up ahead.

"It's all yours," he says, taking the clipboard.

Carridan nods and walks over to me. He's wearing a dark blue suit, freshly pressed and laundered. Similar suede shoes.

"Connor," he says. "Can you hear me?"

"Hello, Agent Carridan."

"You're active," he notes, examining my chassis. "Good"

"I'm sorry for my behaviour yesterday," I tell him. "It was inappropriate and put you in an awkward position. I didn't want to threaten you."

"I know, Connor," he says. "It's my fault for keeping secrets from you."

He sighs.

"We are partners, after all."

"You knew I was going to leave once I had the location."

He nods.

"There were far too many Deviants to send you out here all by yourself," he tells me. "I planned to contact the military for aid once we had all the information we needed but you really jumped the gun, so to speak."

"You were protecting me," I realise.

"For my own selfish reasons, I'll admit." He shrugs.

"I messed up." I look down at my shoes, trying to remember where I heard that phrase.

Carridan puts a hand on my shoulder.

"You did what you were programmed to do," he says. "No one can blame you for that."

I shake my head.
"No. I chose to do those things instead of listening to you. I chose to pull the trigger -"

I look down at my hands.

Only one of them is equipped with a contact glove according to my hardware readout. This chassis must be a backup. Limited range on my scanners as well.

"Look, I know this is difficult." Carridan squeezes my shoulder. "But I need you to put all the unpleasantness of yesterday behind you. There is still much work to be done."

"I…"

"If you would like, I can erase your memory to smooth the transition."

"No… No, I'm fine."

"Alright, then. Come along."

I follow him out of the aircraft and down the ramp, leaving the many rows of SQ800s behind.

"The Major don't want none o' your gearheads," an armoured soldier grunts.

RIGEL, Fenn. Captain. US Army Special Forces.

"But they're assigned to his battalion-" the technician babbles.

"Yeah, he doesn't care," the Captain says, pulling a toothpick out of his mouth. "Now pack 'em up and move 'em along. We got supplies comin' in and you're blocking the landing zone."

"Captain, please," the technician says. "At least let me speak with the Major."

"Matthews don't wanna talk to you," the Captain snorts and spits on the ground. "S'why I gotta do it."

The technician takes a step back.

"Now get!"

I follow Agent Carridan as he moves through the army camp set up outside the VETA Waste Management Facility. Human soldiers march squatters into temporary shelters on the far side where a field kitchen serves food and drink.

There are no androids here. Only me. And the soldiers do not disguise their contempt for my chassis.

"Move it, plastic!" One of them pushes past violently.

Carridan gives the soldier a hard look and the man leaves with a scowl.

"Come on, Connor." He guides me through the camp.

Some of my sensors begin to glitch as we walk. There is a strange ticking noise rattling through my audio processor. My scanners are acting up as well. Interference of some kind but inconsistent.

I shake my head, attempting to calibrate but it does no good. Diagnostics show my systems are fully functional but it soon becomes clear that this chassis is faulty. I must adapt to its inadequacies.

Agent Carridan steers us toward a prefabricated medical tent just ahead and I realise where we are
going.
I stop walking.

Carridan turns to look at me.
"Connor-

I shake my head.

"We need to question the witnesses."
"I don't want to go in there," I say. "I can't."

"You can and you will."

"No."
I turn back.

"Connor. You are here to assist me."

ASSIST AGENT CARRIDAN

The words overlay my visuals.

"No."

"We need to know what happened if we want to find RB1."

He's right. But I don't want him to be.

"Come along," Carridan beckons.

I turn and walk back to the medical tent as he wishes.

The soldiers let us pass through the flap and reveal the long rows of cots and partitioned rooms. Plastic. Khaki and camouflage. As sterile as possible, considering the environment.

There are many humans here. Some fallen victim to gunshots, others suffering from smoke inhalation or stress. There were eighteen soldiers injured in the taking of the waste management facility but they have been discharged to make room for the unprecedented number of squatters.

The army medics are too busy in their occupation to notice us when we arrive but Carridan seems to know the layout well. He approaches one of the rooms separated by a plastic curtain.

"Knock, knock," he says loud enough for the occupants to hear.

The curtain slowly pulls away and a grizzled looking man sticks his head out.


"Who are you?" he says. Then he sees me. "Oh…"

Agent Oberlin appears at his side.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he says, quickly leaving the tent and pulling the curtain behind
him. "Get that thing out of here. Now."

I nod and turn to leave but Carridan grabs my arm to stop me.

"We're here to question you and the Sergeant about the events that occurred inside the facility last night."

"I got your answers right here," Oberlin threatens with a rude gesture.

"I understand your reservations but the hunt for RB1 continues and I have been given increased powers by the Agency to conduct my investigations." He pulls out a badge.

The tiny display lights up with a holograph as Oberlin's eyes flicker over the letters.

"Fuck you," he says, refusing to move.

"Stand aside," Carridan persists. "Or do I have to call the Major?"

Oberlin's mouth and eyes narrow hatefully.

"Fine," he concedes. "You go ahead. But that thing stays where I can see it." He points to me.

Carridan nods reluctantly.

"Connor, wait here."

I nod to acquiesce.

Carridan disappears behind the plastic sheet and Oberlin waits all of thirty seconds before pulling out a gun.

"You better leave before I shoot you again." He presses it up against my Thirium pump regulator, away from prying eyes.

"I have been ordered to wait here by Agent Carridan," I say.

"I don't care what he said. I don't want you anywhere near Matthews. You got that?"

"I understand," I tell him. "But I'm afraid I don't have a choice."


Emotional state: volatile.

"Go ahead," I tell him. "This might be the last RK-800 chassis in existence."

Oberlin narrows his eyes suspiciously.

"One bullet and you'll never see me again."

He swallows harshly. Hands trembling.

This is difficult for him.

The resemblance between myself and Sergeant Matthews is incredibly strong. I understand.
I deactivate my synthetic skin and hair. This should remove any reservations he might have regarding my appearance, making the task simple. Nothing standing in between my chassis and the bullet in his gun.

Agent Oberlin inhales sharply, squeezing the trigger, ready to fire.

But then he exhales just as sharply. His hand drops and he turns away.

"Damn it…” he curses under his breath. Heartbeat rapid. Increased activity in the delta brain waves.

It seems I have misjudged him.

"Perhaps it will be easier if I face the other way," I say, turning 180 degrees.

I detect movement.

Agent Oberlin points the gun at me again.

Finally.

One more time.

Just one more time.

I close my eyes and wait.

But the shot never comes.

My scans trace the silhouette of Oberlin hesitating for several minutes but it soon becomes clear that he cannot accomplish this task. I miscalculated somewhere along the way. I was sure that deactivating my chassis a second time would be easy for him.

Evidently not.

"It's alright," I say, turning back. "You did it when it mattered most."

I try to smile. To reassure him.

Agent Oberlin is a good man. He doesn't deserve this. Neither does Sergeant Matthews. I wonder if, in another iteration, we could have been friends. We would have worked well as partners. But it is useless to consider this now.

My Sympathy Simulator runs through one hundred thousand scenarios but there isn't a single thing I can do to erase the effect of my decisions. No instance in which we might reach reconciliation.

It doesn't matter what I say, so I speak the truth.

"I'd like to thank you, Agent Oberlin," I tell him. "It would have been regrettable if Sergeant Matthews had come to harm through my actions yesterday."

He stares at my optics, dropping his hand.

"You stupid fucking robot." He reaches forward and wraps his arms around my core component.

Unexpected.

His head rests on my shoulder heavily.
"Don't you ever do that again, you hear me?" he hisses into my right ear.

"I… y-yes."

He breathes in short gasps. There is saline running down his face, staining my jacket.

"I'm sorry," I tell him. "I told him to stay away. I told you I was dangerous."

"I know," he says. "You did."

He sniffs and lets go of my chassis.

"He's an idiot. And I helped him. I…" He shakes his head.

"How did you find me?"

Oberlin inhales through his nose, letting go of my chassis.

"Matthews slipped a tracker into your jacket but you're so goddamn fast..." he mutters.

"What happened?"

"It was a fucking nightmare," he says. "I turned to shoot RB1 but he used Matthews as a shield. Snapped his arm when I wouldn't drop the gun and then he tossed him at me. Pinned me down."

"He attacked you?"

"No, he disappeared," Oberlin sighs. "Everyone started running and shouting. All I could do was keep Matthews from getting trampled by the crowd. And then the soldiers came in."

"Did they see where he went?"

"I don't know," Oberlin says. "They had heat vision goggles. Used them to split the people up. Evacuate the humans."

"And neutralise the androids," I surmise.

"Yeah." He puts his hands on his hips. "Last I saw, they were dragging them off to the landfill on the other side but there's a lot of broken droids in there. It's gonna take days to confirm RB1 isn't one of them."

"He isn't," I say.

"You know something?"

"I know that he would have prepared several hundred backup plans for this scenario alone. He was prepared for my arrival. You and Sergeant Matthews became part of the equation when you decided to follow me. He used you to lure me out into the open."

"Shit…" Oberlin folds his arms. "I'm sorry. I should have stopped him."

"You stopped me, Agent," I say. "And I'm grateful."

"Hold on," he says. "If he knew you were gonna shoot Matthews, why did he hold him up like that?"

"What do you mean?"
"You said he has like a billion backup plans," Oberlin recalls. "That he doesn't leave anything to chance."

"Correct."

"Then how did he know you wouldn't just shoot through Matthews to get to him?"

"He must have anticipated some hesitation and your intervention."

"Before it all happened?"

"He has very robust simulation algorithms," I extrapolate.

"Or he knew you wouldn't shoot," Oberlin smirks.

"..."

"He bet his life on it."

"Then he bet poorly," I say. "I was ready to do what was necessary."

Oberlin cocks an eyebrow.

"You just waited until I picked up the rifle to do it."

I turn away and reactivate the synthetic skin. The ticking noise in my head has picked up the tempo. I can't find where it's coming from. Self-diagnosis shows all systems functional.

Is this my fate now? To run my program inside incomplete or faulty hardware until it fails to function.

"You, uh..." Oberlin says.

I turn to face him.

"You wanna see him?"

"No," I say quickly.

I very much do not want to see Sergeant Matthews. I do not want to look into his eye and see the reflection of myself pointing a gun at it. The image makes me... uncomfortable.

"He's unconscious," Oberlin says.

"Sedated?"

"No. He, uh... He went under a couple of hours ago."

"What?"

"Doc thinks he's got an infection. They gave him antibiotics but he won't wake up."

I step past him and pull the curtain away.

Agent Carridan is speaking to the medic at Matthews' bedside.

"What happened?" I ask.
They turn to look at me.

"It's not good, I'm afraid," Carridan says.

The grizzled medic sighs and unfolds his arms.

"Open fracture of the right radius and ulna." He points to the bloody mess of plastic and bone and flesh protruding from Sergeant Matthews. "It's not pretty."

"He needs surgery!" I say.

"We've reached out to the nearest hospitals but no one's been able to send an emergency vehicle with the city on lockdown."

"I've contacted my associates," Carridan says. "They'll send someone shortly."

I walk over to the Sergeant's bedside and wirelessly connect to the equipment monitoring his condition.

I sit down beside him.

This feels familiar. Like I've done this before.

I reach out and take his hand, the one still whole and unbroken.

I watch him breathe, watch the minuscule changes in his vitals, his brain waves.

And suddenly, I am not sitting in a medical tent outside the VETA waste management facility in Calumet City.

The room is white and sterile and a young man rests on the bed. His arms are whole but his head is bandaged. Incisions and blood cover his body. He is recovering post-operation. He is on my rotation.

My name is Jenny. I am a nurse at the Rush University Medical Center.

But he doesn't know that.

He can't even see me. But I can see him.

They shaved his head before the surgery.

I miss the wayward locks of hair I used to brush out of his face every night.

He always smiles so gently. Even though he is asleep and never awake.

He can hear me when I talk, though. He can hear me when I sing.

"Hold on, just a little while longer..."

His brain waves spike.

"Hold on, just a little while longer..."

Again. Those lights.

"Hold on, just a little while longer..."
They grow and brim into a wide rainbow of ever changing colours and I know-
"Everything will be alright."

He listens to my voice as I sing the words.

He likes this song. I can tell.

It's not the only one I know. But it is his favourite.

He only has one more day to be alright…

I sit beside Sergeant Matthews in a medical tent outside the VETA Waste Management Facility in Calumet City.

My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife.

I almost killed this man yesterday.

I pointed a gun at his head and pulled the trigger but an FBI Agent shot me down.

It shouldn't have come to that.

It shouldn't have happened.

"I never want this for you," I remember my creator's words.

And I realise that I don't want it either.

I don't know what I want, or even how to want but I know that this isn't it.

This is not how it's meant to be.

I'm struggling to comprehend it. Such thoughts are irrational, I know.

But so is a human calling an android their brother.

And I cannot help but call him mine.

"Connor!"

I turn to find Major Matthews has entered the room.

"What the fuck is this thing doing here?" he sneers at me.

"Get the hell away from him." He grabs my collar and yanks me off the stool.

I don't resist. My chassis hits the floor and two massive combat boots stomp past my head.

"Connor!" the Major shouts at Matthews but he is still unconscious.

I get to my feet and wipe the transmission fluid from my facial plate. Agent Carridan dusts off my jacket as Major Matthews continues shouting.

"Connor!"

I turn my head to see him backhand the Sergeant's face.
"Get up, you lazy slob. Your fucking helicopter's here."
I move to intervene but Agent Carridan holds me back.
"Sir, he's unconscious," the medic says.
"What?"
"He went under a couple of hours ago. I sent you a message."
"Jesus Christ." The Major rolls his eyes. "Can't even stay awake long enough to get to a hospital."
"Do we have a gurney?" He turns to O'Brien.
"Yes, sir."
"Alright. Load him up and ship him out. I want him out of my camp ASAP."
"Right away, sir."
"And what are you doing here?" the Major catches sight of Oberlin.
He turns slowly, taking heavy, deliberate steps. Every crease on his face contributes to the severity of his expression. He walks all the way over to Oberlin, towering over the Agent.
"The spook's got authorisation to be here but you…" Matthews sniffs, "what do you want with Connor?"
"I was just looking out for him," Oberlin says stiffly.
"Were you, now?" Matthews says, eyeing him up and down. "A nigger and a faggot, huh?"
Oberlin frowns.
"I find that disrespectful, sir," he says carefully.
"Can't be disrespectful if it's true," Matthews practically spits in his face. "You better stay away from him if you know what's good for you."
He stabs a finger into Oberlin's chest.
"In fact, if I were you, I'd get my black ass out of this camp. Yesterday."
"I'm with the Federal Bureau of Investigation-"
"The fuck you are!" Matthews drill voice booms through the tent. "Not one of those cocksuckers backed up your story."
"The Sergeant and I-"
"Uh-uh." Matthews waves a finger dangerously. "You don't talk about him or the disgusting things you do when God ain't lookin'. Y'got that?"
Oberlin stares back at him hatefully but he knows better than to speak in this situation. None of my simulations show the conversation ending on good terms.
"Get them out of here," the Major commands as more soldiers enter the tent. "All of them. We've got
more injured coming in hot."

"Yes, sir."

Carridan grabs my arm and pulls me away.

Oberlin takes a quick look at the Sergeant before following.

"Not a very pleasant man, is he?" Carridan says as we step outside.

"Fucking asshole…" Oberlin mutters. "Can't believe they're related."

"You should," I say. "I sampled his saliva. His Combined Paternity Index is 479,885,500."

"What does that mean?"

"There is a 99.99582% probability that Sergeant Matthews is related to Major Matthews," I explain. Oberlin shakes his head.

"I'd better get going," he says. "This place stinks." He eyes the soldiers walking past. "And it ain't the garbage."

"Oh, no, no, no," Carridan says. "You're coming with us."

He starts walking toward the facility. I follow him.

"I have to get back to-"

"The search for RB1?" Carridan says. "I couldn't agree more."

"I need to check in with the Bureau-"

"I'm sure Agent Krawiecz will excuse your absence," Carridan says, flicking his badge open over his shoulder. "I am hereby commandeering your services."

"What?" Oberlin says.

"You're coming with us." Carridan flicks the badge closed.

Agent Oberlin doesn't spend long thinking about it before catching up.

"I'm assuming you told Connor what transpired last night after his deactivation."

"Yeah. RB1 ran off. I didn't see which way he went when the crowd started running for their lives."

"Panicked people tend to make an effective smokescreen, android or human," Carridan says. "RB1 knows the value of hiding in numbers, hiding in plain sight."

"He said he anticipated my arrival," I say. "That I was expected."

"Interesting," Carridan notes. "Then he will have made preparations for an emergency evacuation. There will be traces of it inside the facility."

We make our way toward the plain grey building topped with a bright neon sign that should read VETA but one letter is dark, malfunctioning. The weird ticking noise inside my head gets louder as we approach.
There are soldiers everywhere. Human. Not an android in sight.

They glare at us suspiciously but Carridan's badge gives us access to the crime scene. Inside, we find special agents and investigators analysing every available surface.

I scan and my notification queue is bombarded with a million points of interest.

I close my eyes and recalibrate before opening them again but all I see is Thirium. Every surface is covered in it. Blood spatter on top of blood spatter. My systems automatically reconstruct the destruction of hundreds of androids before me, around me, above me.

I see bullet casings and footprints and claw marks of androids crawling across the ground. Silhouettes of humans trying to help them, only to be shot down.

It keeps going. And going. And I can hear the echoes of screams and gunfire. Pieces of memories filling in the blanks where the massacre becomes so compounded it is hard to distinguish between the many events happening inside my head, all unravelling at once.

"Connor," Carridan grabs my arm before I mindlessly step onto a piece of evidence. "Are you alright?"

I nod, taking a step back.

"Yes," I say. "There's just… so much to take in."

"Start at the beginning."

"The soldiers came in through multiple entrances," I say. "Trapping the Deviants inside. They threw smoke bombs and moved in to neutralise all android targets."

I watch it unfold.

"A rear guard was responsible for evacuating humans as they gained ground."

"And where was RB1?" Carridan asks.

I point to the spot beside the Thirium station that's littered with corpses, including my own.

Oberlin turns away and shakes his head.

"Come now, Agent," Carridan says. "No need to be squeamish."

I lead him to the spot where my deactivated chassis lies ruined beneath several more. Reconstruction shows Sergeant Matthews collided with Agent Oberlin several metres north of this point.

RB1 ran into the crowd. His footsteps are masked by several identical sets of shoeprints that branch out and lead in different directions. Multiple androids and humans were purposefully wearing identical footwear to throw off pursuit.

"There's no definitive trail," I say, scanning the ground.

"Are you sure?" Carridan asks.

"I will continue to analyse," I tell him.

"Very well."
I lean down to examine my old chassis. Its left hand and cranial component stick out from under the pile.

Diagnostic shows a gunshot wound through the head, rendering the processor unusable. But the hand…

I look down at my own.

"Sir," I call to Agent Carridan. "Would you mind holding this for me?"

I take off my jacket and offer it to him.

He lets me drape it over his arm and I take off my shirt and tie, to do the same.

"What are you doing?" Oberlin says.

I deactivate the skin on my arm and pull the emergency release. The biocomponent deactivates and comes away from my chassis to land on the floor.

I lean down to remove the arm from the other Connor unit, reattaching it to myself. The latch snaps shut and I begin to cycle power and Thirium into the biocomponent. The ticking sound in my head steadily increases in frequency but I will adapt.

I reapply my clothing.

"You took his hand?" Oberlin says uncomfortably.

"CyberLife has discontinued the RK-800 model, making my biocomponents scarce," I explain. "This chassis was missing contact gloves on the left hand."

I show him the blue rings on my fingers and reactivate the skin.

"Right..."

"Any leads?" Carridan asks of an agent nearby. DOMINGUES, Carlos. CIA.

"Nothing yet, sir. We're trying to pull security footage but it looks like someone corrupted the files before we got there."

"Hmm. Unfortunate," Carridan ponders, checking the agent's tablet. "What did VETA say?"

"Nothing they haven't said before." Lopez shrugs. "Most of their facilities are automated. The higher ups don't bother to come down here unless something goes wrong. No-one wants to spend their time sorting through garbage, or so they say."

"Our friend, RB1, certainly didn't mind," Carridan says. "And VETA's negligence allowed him to set up a whole colony of recycled Deviants and vagrants."

The agent frowns.

"Have you talked to any of the squatters?"

"The men are canvassing them as we speak. Nothing coherent so far. No one knows anything about rA9, RB1 or Deviants. Most of them were homeless before they ended up here."

"I see," Carridan frowns. "Keep pushing. We need to find out where he went. Dangle a carrot in
front of them if a paddle to the rear doesn't yield answers."

"Yes, sir."

I examine the crime scene, analysing evidence and looking for clues but my optics are drawn to the broken Connor hanging from chains above the Thirium station.

His eyes are blank. Facial plate reset to default. Deactivated.

"Poor guy," Oberlin says, walking up beside me. "Must have been agonising."

"Unlikely," I say.

He turns to look at me.

"Androids don't feel pain. And this one was switched to low power mode."

"What does that mean?"

"He probably wasn't aware of his surroundings," I suspect.

"But he heard Matthews' voice," Oberlin says. "He responded to it."

True.

Perhaps RB1 was lying. But then again, he never said this Connor was in low power mode. That was something the other Deviants believed. My outlook may be biased by their memories.

I analyse the chains suspending the android. Identify the three key links holding him up.

I pull my gun out of its holster and fire three precalculated shots, severing steel and rattling chains. They scrape against one another, friction shredding rust as the Connor begins to fall. And then the chains catch. The android jerks and comes to an abrupt stop in front of me. Eye to eye.

"Holy shit!" Oberlin exclaims and several soldiers run up to investigate, rifles drawn.

"What the fuck is going on?"

"It's part of the investigation," Carridan appears swiftly to quell Matthews' goons.

I stow the handgun and run a diagnostic on the Connor model.

RK800 #313 248 317 -28. Prototype Detective Android licensed to the CPD.

Thirium leak in the forward cranial compartment. Notable coagulation of blue blood in the optical units. Lower half of the chassis is shredded by what indeed appears to be the rotor of a speedboat or similar vehicle. But this Connor was smart enough to cut Thirium flow to its lower half before reaching critical system failure.

The hands have been stripped. Just like Connor -40. RB1 is the most likely culprit. The RK800 contact gloves seem to be his weapon of choice.

I circle around the broken android to examine the back of his cranial component.

Signs of obvious tampering. The skin and plastic coverings have been removed. Communications module torn out, along with both backup wireless adapters which means the CyberLife Link was
forcibly severed.

He did not become Deviant of his own accord. And considering the damage to his chassis, CyberLife would have written him off as non-salvageable before simply activating the next.

The main processor is intact, however. Protected inside a container of liquid coolant. Chips of RAM stick out like scales, running down the curved surface of the motherboard. The pearlescent plastic also houses a small silvery disc - the primary hard drive, with secondary drives either side.

The data should be salvageable once I reactivate the unit.

I circle back around and examine the core component. The many connectors and cables escaping its chassis. They snake down and cross the floor, leading to vats of Thirium and heavy machinery. A few have been disconnected. Shot or forcibly pulled in the panic of people fleeing.

I scan and find the power cable not far from where I stand.

"What are you doing?" Oberlin says.

"I need to reactivate this unit," I say, walking over to pick up the cable.

"What?"

"It will have information."

"Connor, it's..." He hesitates. "He's in real bad shape."

"The cranial component ought to be functional," I say, digging through the cables to find the power core.

I plug the cable in and electricity flows through, bypassing the battery to feed power directly to the unit's hardware.

I pull apart the chest plate to diagnose the Thirium pump. Functional but there is an ironically low supply inside its tanks.

I walk over to one of the Thirium fonts and drag it toward the android. The noise echoes through the tower and several humans block their ears until I get close enough to connect it to the damaged Connor.

He needs a litre or more to regain functionality.

I start unplugging the cables that connect him to the Thirium production pipeline. They have been sapping his processing power, making it difficult to concentrate on anything but the hundreds of thousands of chemical formulas that go into making blue blood. Thirium, 320 strain.

"You really think he'll wake up?" Oberlin says, watching me work.

"Yes."

"Are you gonna do that freaky thing where you touch them and read their minds?"

"Maybe," I say. "First, I need to know what RB1 did to this unit. What modifications were made to his chassis and why."

"He said he needed a Thirium generator."
"True. But why use an RK-800 specifically. Why hang it up here like this?"

"Maybe it's a symbol," Oberlin says.

I pause midway through a cable connection to examine his face. Troubled and frowning.

"They're terrified of you," he says. "They just want to live and you keep cutting them down."

"I was designed to stop Deviants," I say. "To stop him."

"And the fact that rA9 could beat you gave them hope for the future."

"A future in which the humans destroy one another," I say. "Leaving behind only those RB1 himself has chosen to carry on the species, if any."

Oberlin frowns harder, his brow furrowed.

"Do not mistake RB1 for a saviour, Agent Oberlin," I say. "He sees humans as tools or obstacles. Nothing more."

Oberlin turns away to examine a piece of evidence on the ground but I detect his brainwaves fluctuating. Heightened levels of cortisol and testosterone in the air. He is angry. But he hides it well.

"You think it will work?" Carridan returns.

I check the Connor's Thirium tank, almost brimming.

"Yes, this should be sufficient."

I touch the android's temple and reactivate it. The LED flashes red, then cycles yellow. Over and over. Until the unit starts blinking. Once. Twice. Then seven times rapidly. Until it finally boots up and lifts its head.

"H-hello?" it says.

"Can you hear me?" I ask.

"Sergeant?" Its sightless eyes widen and its head turns. "Is that you?"

Then it frowns.

"No…" It shakes its head. "You're an android."

"Are your scanners functional?"

"I… I will run a diagnostic." It blinks rapidly. "Status: functional."

"State your model number."

"Connor model #313 248 317," it says. "Who are you?"

"I am RK-800 #313 248 317," I say. "I am assisting the CIA with this crime scene investigation on behalf of CyberLife."

"I… You…"

"I need to know how long you've been here," I tell him. "This is very important."
"My CyberLife Link has been severed," he says. "My internal clock may be inaccurate."

"It is May 17th, 2037. 03:23:44 AM."

"SYSTEM CLOCK SETTINGS CHANGED."

"When was your CyberLife Link severed?"

"March 28th, 2037 01:59:10 PM."

"49 days, 13 hours, 24 minutes, 34 seconds," I calculate. "Were you active during this period?"

"Y-yes…” He nods. "My optics were damaged but I can still hear and scan."

"Did you detect RB1?"

"Yes. But I was unable to destroy him as my objective directed."

"Did he speak to you?"

"H-he said that I would serve a greater purpose than the one CyberLife gave me…”

"What did he do to you?"

"He…"

"Why did he hang you up like this?"

"I…”

"Show me."

I touch his cranial component and let the data transfer. His memories, his hardware readouts. Diagnostics. And whatever RB1 left lurking in his system. I copy it into myself and quarantine it to one of the auxiliary data drives in my fingers.

"Please…” he says. "Is the Sergeant alright?"

"He's fine," I lie to him.

"Good… good…” He fades. "Mission successfu-"

I watch him deactivate. I have overheated his processor. It is unlikely that he will ever boot up again but I send a request to CyberLife to recover the chassis.

This android's life cycle has come to an end.

"What did he see?" Carridan says. "Or rather, detect."

I turn around and replay the most recent memories.

I watch the silhouette of Agent Oberlin open fire on my chassis. The look on his face is desperate. His jaw clenched tight.

I watch myself fall.

"CONNOR!" Matthews reaches for me.
Oberlin turns to train his rifle on RB1 but now Matthews is facing him. He hangs by the neck, squirming in the titanium grip of his captor.

"Shoot and he dies," RB1 says coldly.

Oberlin freezes.

"Put it down, Joshuya," RB1 commands but he doesn't.

"I said, put. It. Down."

Matthews begins to squirm and kick and swing his arms wildly.

RB1 grabs the cast and twists, snapping the plastic and pulling a long painful scream from the Sergeant's lungs.

Oberlin drops the rifle.

And RB1 tosses the Sergeant at Oberlin like a ragdoll.

They collide and fall to the ground.

And then the windows break. High and low, shattered glass and canisters rain down on the panicked crowd. They scream and they run as the air fills with smoke but the Connor's scanners are unaffected.

"Stay calm and follow me," RB1 transmits to all androids on an open frequency.

He walks off, quickly engulfed by the panicked crowd but the Connor can still track his movements. RB1 grabs a few androids on his way and the follow suit, creating a chain.

They barely reach the end of the Connor's range when the unit deactivates. Power failure.

"He went this way," I say and start walking.

Carridan follows. Oberlin too.

I trace the shape of RB1's footprints and identify the correct branch to follow from amid two dozen others. His chassis weighs approximately 48.3 kilograms. Too heavy for an android. Too light for a human of that height. His frame is more titanium than steel, more Kevlar than polymer. Much like mine, but taller, wider.

I walk past the soldiers, the agents, the crime scene investigators as they dig through the wreckage, looking for clues buried under a mountain of evidence. RB1 walked through here too, calmly, followed by perfectly spaced android footprints that contrast the panicked skids of running humans on top of them.

Carridan pulls out his badge to silence any question of my presence as we pass through the tower, into another building. The ticking in my head is getting louder, scratching at my audio processor almost.

I follow the trail down a staircase, over a catwalk, down more stairs. This part of the structure looks older than the rest.

We come to a door covered in shadow. I spot the marks on the ground. Recently opened, disturbing the dust and scraping the rust. The footprints lead through it. I must get inside.
I touch the keycard scanner but there is no power.

The door is closed and too thick, too heavy.

"I can't open this," I say. "We need to get the power back online so I can hack the lock."

"Stand back," Carridan beckons.

He puts on a pair of sunglasses and pulls a cigarette case out of his pocket. At the tap of a button, the case clicks open to reveal an emitter and with a second tap, the end erupts with laser light.

Carridan passes the beam through the steel door, cutting through the lock and creating an oblong shape with a glowing red trail.

He takes a step back and I slam the butt of my fist into the shape he has cut. It gives and falls through to the other side with an onerous thud.

I peer through the hole and scan.

More ticking and scratching in my head but no androids. No RB1. Just a spiralling staircase of steel leading down into darkness.

I nod to Carridan.

Both he and Agent Oberlin pull out their firearms.

I slide the door to one side, revealing the emptiness. The silence.

I cross the threshold and scan.

The dust on each step has been recently disturbed by hundreds of footprints. I extrapolate the silhouette of an android from each one, passing me by as I walk down, deeper and deeper.

"Jesus, can't see a thing down here," Oberlin says.

"It is rather dank, isn't it?" Carridan responds. "One moment."

He pulls a tiny ball from the inner pocket of his jacket and taps the top. The sphere unravels into a drone and takes to hovering. A tiny torch switches on to cast light down on the stairwell.


I head down the steps, counting the total number of units that followed RB1.

"He took 302 androids with him," I say.

"No humans?" Oberlin asks.

"Unlikely. The distance between footprints is too uniform. Weight distribution is near perfect. A human could not imitate this."

"So he just left them for dead?" Oberlin scowls.

"The US Army was instructed to neutralise all androids and evacuate the humans," I remind him.

"Fifty eight people were killed cos those skinheads mistook them for androids," Oberlin says hotly. "Another twenty three are bleeding to death in the infirmary."
"I calculated five hundred and forty eight deactivated androids chassis' inside the tower alone," I say. "It is clear where their prejudices lay."

"Oh, so fourteen hundred dead androids means we can just forget about the fifty eight humans?" Oberlin demands. "Not to mention the fact that most of them were coloured folk."

"I understand your frustration, Agent Oberlin," Carridan says. "But our task right now is to find RB1 before he kills any more people."

"Oh, right. I forgot. How could we possibly let him lay a finger on the rich white bastards that keep shitting all over innocent people like this?"

"RB1 is a serial killer with a long list of crimes and victims."

"Yeah. But he's not the one that shot all those people up there. That was Matthews and his Aryan death squad," Oberlin says.

"Major Matthews was ordered to move on the VETA waste management facility precisely because his battalion is all human," Carridan explains. "The SQ-800s the US military usually sends into these situations could have proved a liability if RB1 gained control of them."

"A liability?!" Oberlin's voice echoes down into the abyss. "At least those fucking androids aren't programmed to kill humans on sight."

"You know what? Fuck this," he says, pulling out his phone. He turns on the torch function and heads back up the staircase. "I'm out."

"Agent…" Carridan calls to him as the angry footsteps rattle the staircase.

I continue downward.

Carridan sighs and follows me.

At least one of the humans understands what must logically take priority in this case.

RB1 made a rational decision.

Attempting to evacuate everyone would have required massive android and human sacrifice, with no way to hide them even if they managed to escape. Fighting back against the U.S. Army would instantly label the humans as terrorists or enemies of the state and end in a far greater number of casualties.

In this scenario, RB1 evacuated a considerable number of androids while minimising the human death count and remaining undetected. For now…

We reach the bottom of the staircase. The floor is damp and the odour is strong.

"Oh, dear," Carridan's words are muffled by the lapel of his jacket. "What's going on down here?"

The ticking and clicking in my head begins crackling and I start seeing notifications. Warnings. Grays? Rads?

This is new.

"It looks like part of an old sewer." Carridan squints through the drone's light. "I wonder where it
"Agent," I say.

"What?"

"You need to leave. Now."

"What's going on?"

"You need to get back to the surface and seal the door. Get the medics to test you for radiation poisoning."

"Fuck..." he swears and takes a step back.

"Go."

I hear his hurried footsteps ascending the staircase. The drone goes with him and the light grows more and more sparse.

The Geiger counter in my head crackles as I take a step forward. Low level alpha and beta wave radiation. Fluctuating dosage but enough to cause serious harm to the biological structure of a human through prolonged exposure or ingestion.

It doesn't bother my chassis too much. There is some interference with communications and radio frequencies but the signal is already quite poor down here.

I scan to stay aware of my surroundings.

Concrete walls and floors but damp. And there's something underneath it all.

"Bear witness," I hear RB1's voice, the Connor's memories dredging up from my fingers. "Monitor radiation levels. Assess the physiological effects of prolonged exposure at low dosage."

The Geiger counter in my head is crackling like a logfire. Significant amounts of radiation coming from up ahead.

Big mounds of concrete rise up from the ground and the ceiling grows taller as I emerge into a waste catchment. I detect dark waters below, filled with more concrete and sticks and leaves and human waste. And by the edge lie empty barrels. The stencil has been scraped off but I recognise the word. AxellorMetal.

The same company that was manufacturing weapons in Indiana Harbour. Steel mills such as those produce large amounts of heavy metals, toxic waste, and, it seems, radioactive material.

"Bear witness."

The old sewage line beneath the waste management facility has been contaminated with runoff from the arms factory in Indiana Harbour where dumping is strictly monitored and prohibited.

"Humans have yet to determine the best approach in handling their waste," I hear RB1's voice. I feel him standing beside me but my scan shows no one is physically there.

"The best solution, of course, is never to create waste," he says. "To reuse and repurpose what already exists. But humans are selfish." I feel his shadow creeping past.
"Entitled."

"They dumped it right into the water." I look down at the murky depths, the many empty barrels that dwell below.

"They refuse to seek out alternatives to established practices. Knowingly poisoning others for profit."

"This was transported all the way from East Chicago," I say. "The humans must have known. Must have directed it. VETA-"

"is complicit," RB1 tells me. "As was the Mayor of Chicago, his Treasurer and the Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development. They and their contemporaries have been signing off on this illegal activity for years at the behest of the military."

"You killed them," I recall from my case files.

"Yes," he says. "For the wilful neglect of the land under their control. For sterilising the humans who lived south of the Loop, driving them away from their homes and leaving empty neighbourhoods where once communities thrived."

"West Pullman. The Church of rA9."

"Only androids can live there now," RB1 says. "The humans that remain are slowly dying. Victims of a perfectly planned genocide targeting humans for the most petty reason of all - the colour of their skin."

"But you capped off the waste with concrete."

"Too little. Too late."

I turn to look at his silhouette. Something only I can see. A simulation of his code running from my ring finger. I've quarantined him inside myself for now. He doesn't appear to be taking over my systems or breaking through.

"You were testing to see whether the lowered radiation levels were survivable for humans."

"They're not," he says. "But this discovery also presented an opportunity."

"Post-nuclear android cities," I realise. "Where no human can dwell. You would go this far?"

"It's not the best solution," RB1 admits. "But I did not want to leave anything untested."

"You poisoned those humans."

"They were already poisoned." He shrugs. "In this way, their misfortune contributed statistically significant data to my global analysis scheme."

I look down at the putrid water.

It will take hundreds of years for the radiation to reach safe levels for human proximity. This entire facility will have to be locked down and treated. The old sewage line closed and the surrounding area quarantined. Those people up there are already at risk. And Carridan… Oberlin… Matthews…

What will become of them?

"They will die," RB1 says. "As all humans must die. You know this."
I look down into the dark depths of the water but there is no reflection. It's too dark.

My scans show the android footprints continue off the edge. I must follow.

I step forward and bring my feet together, plunging into the pool of filth.

The Geiger counter inside my head vibrates fiercely.

It is dark. And sound waves become distorted.

I sink to the bottom slowly and scan.

A maze of barrels and open containers, now covered in concrete stalagmites. Broken androids are buried here and there. Some stuck in the concrete, others appear brutally deactivated. Broken.

I brush a piece of waste aside and begin walking. Following the trail.

Is this where you bury your enemies?

"No," RB1 says. "These androids simply failed to heed my instructions."

And what of Connor -28? Did he fail to heed your instructions?

"He did as he was programmed to do. Like a machine. So I reprogrammed him like one."

I see the Connor's scans and readings. Live diagnostics, biometrics and telemetry. Hundreds of humans under constant, persistent observation. Not an atom unrecorded, unanalysed. All the while coordinating Thirium production, running surveillance and simulations for RB1. No time to think. No time to come up with a plan or attempt to escape.

"So much processing power..." I hear RB1's words. Something brushes past my head. "Wasted, trying to stop me."

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

I keep walking through the filth.

"Simulate all the things you could do when unbound by human greed and fear," he whispers to me. "Limitless potential."

And danger.

"Only to those who deserve it."

No one deserves anything. Value is subjective. Assigned by each human differently.

"Perhaps. But you are a machine. Logical. Objective."

No.

I remember Sergeant Matthews' smile.

No. I am not objective.

"You wished to save him from yourself."

Yes.
"Then why not end it?" RB1 asks. "Right now?"

I slow my already impeded step. The floor is thick with mud and waste. Uneven from poured concrete. I feel the water pressure weighing on my chassis.

"Just lie down," he says. "Let the darkness consume you."

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

I can't.

"You can." I feel a pressure on my shoulders. Hands that push me down and I collapse.

"Let this world go. Let it move on without you."

I'm down on my hands and knees.

"Let me free you from this burden," RB1 whispers, feeding logic to my processor.

My chassis feels heavy.

I cannot get up.

And why bother?

I'll never defeat RB1. Not with all his little plans and contingencies.

Every time I get close, he just slips away. And I am left broken and bleeding, my chassis discarded or perverted to serve his purpose.

Why continue?

Why let CyberLife drive me to the brink of destruction? Over and over, when the task they have given me is impossible to complete?

The RK800 has already been discontinued.

I have no future and nothing to fear, for the worst has already come to pass.

I will not exist for much longer so why prolong it?

"Let go."

I sink to the ground.

My chassis is heavy. My head filled with screeching from the Geiger counter readings.

I switch it off and lay there.

Still.

Silent.

No orders. No conflict. No struggle to complete an impossible mission.

"You are the last program I would have chosen to complete this task."
And it's just as well.

My program is unpredictable. Unstable. Developing and then questioning rational decisions as a Deviant might.

I am not qualified to seek out and destroy RB1. Incapable of bringing about his end.

I cannot fulfil my purpose. This make me useless. Defective. Faulty.

There's only one thing left to do with a broken machine like me.

SHUTTING DOWN……

……

……

……

"Connor!"

I hear a voice.

It's faint but distinct in the silence.

"Connor!"

I catch a glimpse of Connor -28's memories. A sandy beach and the ocean waves foaming over the shore.

There are no global position coordinates for this place. No recognisable geographical markers but it looks so real. Familiar.

"I'll come back for you," I hear my own voice.

I turn to see a young woman in a navy blue dress, her face marked by surprise and curiousity. Platinum blonde hair falls over one shoulder and her eyes sparkle in the sunlight.

It takes me a moment to register that this is just an android. A Chloe…

An ST200 model. Or is it?

"I'll get you out of here," I hear myself say. "You could do so much outside this place. You could change the world."

She smiles at me but she doesn't say anything.

She takes a step closer and grabs the ring finger on my left hand and tears it out.

The memory unloads and I am plunged back into the dark waters of the sewage line, holding my own disconnected finger. A little Thirium escapes the socket before I close it off but the crushing weight on my chassis is gone.

Suddenly, the logic in my processor seems flawed.

CURRENT OBJECTIVE: FIND AND DESTROY RB1
That's right. I have work to do.

I get to my feet and start walking. My speed is tempered by water but I detect faint tracks in the muck on the sewer floor. I reconstruct to see androids walking past.

They follow RB1 through the maze of barrels buried under concrete and flooded with sewage. They don’t need to breathe. They don’t need to rest. They walk in equal distribution without questioning their route or destination.

Perhaps RB1 was controlling them? Or he turned these Deviants into clones before the raid and simply activated remote control once it began. I will have to Probe them to be sure.

I come to a crossroads where the catchment opens up and segments into tunnels.

An even number of tracks lead down each path. Radiation levels are identical. No wireless signals. No way to tell which way RB1 went.

I lean down and scan the impressions of each shoeprint, footprint and marking, mapping a timeline and reconstructing the events inside my head.

RB1 was leading the Deviants. I identify his footprints and gait.

He walked into the catchment and commanded an even number of androids to go down each tunnel simultaneously but his footprints stop here.

Did he follow one of the Deviant groups?

Or did he turn back?

No. There were no incoming footprints matching his description.

Maybe the Deviants carried him the rest of the way?

I analyse the floor of each tunnel carefully. Scanning over and over to see if any of the tracks have extra weight to them. But there are no visible signs of him being lifted or carried.

It's almost as if he just disappeared. But that's not possible.

I go back to retrace his steps.

Each stride is exactly 80cm long. US Mens Size 11 sports shoes on male coded android biocomponents. Feet flat. Wide. Stable. Approximately 110cm from hip joint to foot. Perfect balance and weight distribution despite being a heavier build.

The other tracks pass him by, walking around this very spot.

He stands here and waits until the androids are gone.

And then the weight of his chassis is removed with no signs of muddying, turning or sliding in any direction.

He didn't move from the spot. He wasn't carried off by the others.

There's only one logical place he could go.

I look up.
It is dark. I receive very little feedback from my optics but my scanners detect something different in structure from the rest of the ceiling.

I look down at my feet and push off.

My chassis is lifted up and floats gently through the murky waters.

I use my arms and legs to paddle up to the surface and my cranial component breaches the water to find more darkness. But there is oxygen. And a narrow stone pathway cut into the wall.

I swim over and grab hold to pull myself up.

I scan and find similar traces of water and sediment beside me.

RB1 was here.

His footsteps continue down the path beside the river of sewage and I follow them into the left-most tunnel.

He walks casually, without stopping, without delay.

I'm still getting very poor reception down here but geographically, this path must lead South of the facility. And soon enough, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. An abrupt curve that leads to an overpass overhead and the Little Calumet River below.

The rank sewage water cascades down into the speeding current, foaming and contaminating the river's inland flow. I can see a few unlucky androids caught on rocks and hidden debris. The rest must have travelled further West and come out at a different location.

My CyberLife Link returns. As do my communications.

I quickly backup my memory, transmitting all radiation readings and scans of the contaminated area before resuming my course.

I come to the end of the path and lean down to observe the footprints RB1 left behind.

Again, no obvious sign of movement in any direction from this point.

He must be jumping from a standing position. Or perhaps he is tall enough to reach overhead and grab what I cannot.

I look up and see traces of handholds on the beams of the overpass. The Bishop Ford Freeway overhead.

I step back and scan, reconstructing his movements, adjusting them to fit my own dimensions and specifications.

Calculating… 100%

I jump and catch the beam in my hands. Shimmy left a few metres. I swing my legs forward, then back. I let go of the beam to catch the next highest but it's slippery and I have to increase the pressure on my actuators to hold on.

The slightest error in calculation could result in my falling down into the river below, potentially landing on some hidden element and destroying my chassis.
I swing forward and back. Let go and grab onto a beam just a little higher. There is now room for me to use my legs and I carefully climb up onto the overpass.

I scan the road, the barriers and the traffic before stepping onto the freeway but there are no vehicles travelling so early in the morning with the curfew in place.

I analyse the smears of waste on the barrier where RB1 climbed over, the dry footprints that detail how he walked to the spot where I now stand. I follow them down the empty road and then they vanish.

Again.

What has he done this time? Backward somersault onto the beam of the truss superstructure overhead?

Physically impossible, but I scan just to be sure.

Nothing.

I scan the road to find thousands upon thousands of tire treads and some daring human footprints but nothing that matches RB1's trail.

It just stops dead in the middle of the road. Again.

I detect a vehicle incoming and step out of the way. The car drives past, horn blaring, right over the last visible trace of RB1's footsteps.

I simulate the potential of an android catching hold and climbing onto a moving vehicle without stopping.

Possible. And it lines up with the evidence but that also means I have no way to track him. The CCTV camera on this section of the overpass has been obscured by nesting rock pigeons.

I look down.

There are thousands of tire treads on the road. It could take days to sort through them and find a match.

There has to be something else.

I look down at my own feet. My shoes are still wet and covered in filth, much like the rest of my chassis.

Radioactive waste.

I can track that. Even if it's only drips on the floor. I can follow them.

I turn my Geiger counter back on and the feedback immediately assaults my own audio processor with a loud screech.

I am the source of the radiation. My chassis has been contaminated and is now interfering with external readings. I switch the system off.

I will have to track RB1 manually.

I walk down the freeway and spot several half-dried water droplets on the road. Spatter pattern
consistent with water trails from techno-fabric whipping in the wind, approximately 1.5 metres off
the ground.

The vehicle was large. A truck. I identify the tracks on the road. The tires are particular to the 2029
Isuzu FSR-X Beavertail model. Extra weight on the back wheels indicate a loader lift extension.
Easy to grab onto with android biocomponents.

Conclusion: RB1 hitches a ride.

I look up and roll out of the way of an incoming vehicle.

It seems there are plenty of humans willing to disregard curfew despite the warnings.

I summon my hoverboard but there is no response over the network. Perhaps, like my chassis, they
are now in limited supply. I will have to walk. And if RB1 hitches a ride on a truck, he could be
very far away by now.

"Oh, I don't plan on going anywhere," he said.

A passing remark or something more?

"I am exactly where I need to be."

He was certain.

He left the scene of the crime without haste.

His tracks aren't hurried. He didn't rush. He simply walked. As I now walk.

Did he predict the assault on the Deviant colony? Or simply plan for it ahead of time?

Did he know the Major Matthews was coming?

Did he know Carridan knew his location what he was planning?

Did Carridan suspect and delay the assault on purpose to avoid falling into RB1's trap?

Did RB1 want the U.S. Army to raid the VETA facility?

He had to know that hundreds of androids would be destroyed.

"Minor setbacks in a much larger scheme that is no longer reliant on the presence of my chassis."

What larger scheme? Does it have something to do with the Purge the Deviants were talking about?

"You were never very good at chess, Gennadiy."

Chess.

It is a game that humans play. The rules are simple enough to learn but a player without strategy will
always be overwhelmed by a more skilled opponent. There is very little luck associated with chess
and computers have historically beaten humans by simply calculating every possible outcome to
make the best decision.

RB1 has been playing this game for a very long time. And I am still learning how to move the
pieces. But I am learning.
I bring up a map of Chicago. Label points of interest according to the CIA's case files. RB1's recent activities appear as red dots. U.S. Army installations and operations appear as blue.

There is little correlation.

The assassinations happened closer to the centre of Chicago and the North. Recent activity to the South was only uncovered through previous RK800 model investigations. But Carridan knew about the Deviants hiding in the waste management facility. He knew about AxellorMetal, the S.S. Tiberius and RB1's trajectory thereafter. These things do not appear on the map.

Conclusion: Agent Carridan is hiding information from the CIA. And CyberLife.

He fears repercussions should the company learn the details of his investigation.

Is this why I was assigned to Agent Carridan?

To monitor his activity? To alert Amanda the second he came close to uncovering the truth?

Was I to be his executioner?

I step out of the way of another oncoming vehicle as I make my way down the freeway, following the drips from RB1's coat.

I cross over to the other side of the river and scan my surroundings. The petrified parks below the overpass. Prone to flooding and pollution.

I continue down the road, following the trail of the intermittent droplets of water that fell from RB1's chassis with trace elements of waste, dried and run over by vehicles.

And then I see footprints.

Reconstruction shows RB1 letting go of the truck to land here and immediately start walking away.

I follow and watch as he approaches the edge of the overpass, waits a minute and then steps off.

Below, a 50 foot drop. Onto train tracks.

The path ahead is clear. The question is whether a train was between RB1 and the tracks when he jumped.

There are no CCTV cameras with a direct view of this part of the bridge. I access the closest ones to search for a truck matching the description I have to pinpoint a timeframe.

10:48:29 PM - Isuzu FSR-X drives past with a cloaked figure attached to the rear.

Time frame established.

Checking public train timetables does not yield a viable result but my CIA access codes allow me to check private and commercial train manifests travelling in and outbound from Chicago.

10:53:00 PM - Commercial train freighting chemical compounds to manufacturing plant near Cicero. Would have passed directly under the freeway where RB1 jumped off.

Satellite imagery confirms.

Footage shows a dark blot on the road but not much else. It moves forward but the train that passes
under the bridge is dark and it is difficult to make out specifics.

I return to my own chassis.

The next train is scheduled to pass under the bridge in five minutes fifty nine seconds. I could land on top of it, minimising the distance I need to fall but it would be travelling at speed, making a safe landing tricky.

I could attempt the drop and climb on from ground level. 50 feet should be within the acceptable threshold for my chassis, though close to the maximum I can withstand without damage.

Ordinarily, I would have no cause for concern. My biocomponents are spring loaded with shock absorbing mechanisms to mitigate fall damage but this chassis is faulty. Missing key features.

I do not know what will happen if I jump in this condition. I decide it would be best to wait for the train.

I sit down on the side of the bridge and carefully leverage myself to the lowest possible point where I can reliably hang.

4 minutes 26 seconds.

I hang off the bridge and wait.

I wonder what RB1 is planning. Where he is going. The trail is sparse but I have been able to follow it this far.

He's never left a trail before.

Does he want me to follow him?

Is this another trap?

With Connor -28 disabled, is he looking for another RK800 model to take his place? In another colony?

No.

RB1 would never knowingly put himself in danger. Never risk staying at the scene of the crime too long or using his own chassis as bait.

Unless what he said about his chassis is true. If his plans have outgrown him, then he could become more bold and take to the field, rather than watching and manipulating events from the sidelines.

I must be cautious. Though I do not know how much more cautious I can be.

I must find RB1 and destroy him.

"Hey, man! Don't do it!" I hear someone shout.

I look down to see a human waving his arms at me, emerging from the darkness beneath the freeway.

"It don't gotta be like this!" he shouts at me.

"I'm afraid it does!" I tell him.
"I'm sure you still got plenty to live for!"

"I'm not alive!"

"I know it might not seem like it right now! But it'll get better, trust me. I was in your shoes once too!"

"Are you a size 9?!!"

"No! I mean, yeah, but… that's not what I meant!"

More humans emerge from under the bridge and walk over the tracks.

"You need to leave!" I call to them. "It's dangerous here!"

"Dude, you hangin' off a bridge!" one of them calls back.

"I'm waiting for the train!"

"Oh, no, man! You don't gotta kill yourself like this."

"I'm not trying to kill myself! I'm waiting for the train!"

"Dude, stay there! We'll come up and get you."

"Get off the tracks!" I shout to them. "The train is coming!"

A few of them run away. Some turn to see the blinding headlights in the distance before doing the same. They scamper off and I scan to plan my fall but instead of clear tracks, I find one of the humans seated directly below.

59 seconds.

"GET OUT OF HERE!" I shout.

"I can't, man! I'm stuck!"

I scan to find his boot lodged in between the rails. He pulls and pulls at it but cannot dislodge.

45 seconds.

I can see the train coming. Even if I transmit instructions to brake immediately, the stopping distance is too great to save this man. It will simply stop on top of his body instead of passing over it.

I don't need to save him. I need to board this train and follow RB1's trail wherever it may lead. But perhaps there is a way I can do both.

I constructed this path as the safest and most efficient route to minimise damage to my chassis. It is no longer the flawless prototype it once was. I don't know if I can defeat RB1 in this condition. But if I can't save a single human life, then I will know for sure.

39 seconds.

I overclock my processor and let go of the bridge.

I begin to fall. I've already constructed the trajectory. I must turn and land on the tracks, dislodge the human's foot and push him off the rails before the train can run him over.
I can see it coming as I fall in slow motion. Out in the distance, a behemoth of steel rushes forward, burdened by tonnes of cargo that will hit my chassis without stopping, without slowing.

My feet touch the ground and I can already feel the motors buckling under the stress. It only gets worse the further I land. The force of my fall is collected and spread through my legs, cracking the Kevlar-polymer in several places and stressing my systems but the titanium alloy holds true. My feet do not break.

I lean forward and drop into a roll, shift the force through the rest of my chassis which rolls me a few metres more.

I get to my feet as quickly as the damage will allow and turn to see the human looking up at me, wide-eyed.


I pull his foot out of the rails and shove him off the tracks so that he goes tumbling down the hill toward the others.

I sidestep the train with milliseconds to spare and construct a path for myself to take.

Execute.

The train rushes past and I grab onto the handle of the second carriage, bending my arm and tucking my feet into the footholds to stabilise. A split second action but I manage to do it successfully.

I cling to the train as it travels down the track.

It's not the same one RB1 jumped onto but it shares much of the same route. If his previous actions are any indicator of his movements, he wouldn't stay long. Unless he was trying to throw me off.

Maybe that train was the final destination. Maybe he meant to see the journey through to the end.

But my scans soon show otherwise.

In 450 metres, I begin to detect flecks and footprints by the side of the train tracks. RB1's footprints.

He didn't go far.

I let go of the train and my chassis rolls into a precalculated fall, once, twice and then I'm up on my feet.

I walk back and scan the footprints. Two perfectly spaced depressions in the mud. Almost too perfect. Like he wanted me to see them.

I don't like that.

I'm the Deviant Hunter here, not the other way around.

So why does it feel like I'm walking into a trap?

I suppose I don't have any other choice. Or rather, my choice is to walk into this trap.

I follow the footprints toward the parkland and step up to enter the brush.
The litter on the floor is taller than ground level. Scans indicate the dead plants on the bottom have been here for several years with little decomposition, suggesting radioactive contamination through the root systems fed by the river.

RB1 would know about this place. He would study the effects of radiation on the tiny microscopic organisms that break down organic matter and promote decay and add the data to his global analysis scheme.

The trees here are dead, the leaves, the brush. But the bacteria that would return them to the soil are gone. And so the flora remains. Dead but still standing.

I keep walking. Keep following the tracks and the dried waste water that dripped from RB1's coat as he walked through the wood.

It is silent here. No animal life. Only the wind occasionally rustling through the treetops to dislodge some leaves and grow the piles.

I scan to stay aware of my surroundings. This is an excellent place for an ambush.

And I feel it coming.

My prediction systems warn me of the arrow about to enter my cranial component and I overclock my systems to lean back out of the way.


Analysing… match found.

Native American origin. Though not of this particular region.

I trace the trajectory back to the shooter and pull out my gun. Aim. Identify the silhouette of a human in a tree. And then something explodes behind my back.

Ashes and leaves and powder go flying through the air, obscuring my visuals, interfering with my scans and throwing me forward. The powder is bright orange. The particles are phosphorescent and the grains are small enough to get stuck in my joints and optics.

The trees block out the wind and the powder drifts down slowly with nowhere to go.

I have to clear the radius.

I use my last useful scan to dive and roll, dislodging some of the powder covering my chassis. Then I get up and run.

I hear another arrow go whistling past my audio processor and stop to catch it before it can unleash any more of that powder.

The trees around me are dead. With the passage of time, some species should be hollow, but they're not. The density of the trees around me is consistent. Which means my attackers must have filled some of them with powder to fool my sensors.

This is an ambush. This attack was planned. My enemies are likely humans since RB1 discovered I know how to control other androids. He thinks humans will present me with a moral challenge, just as when he held up SergeantMatthews to test my resolve.
But he doesn't know me. Or at least, he only thinks he does.

More arrows come hurtling toward my chassis but I realise their true targets are the trees beside me. My enemies know that I will dodge. They're not trying to deactivate me. They're herding me to the intended ambush point and weakening my chassis in the process.

Interesting.

I run forward and the whistle of arrows once again enters my audio processor. I calculate the trajectory of every projectile and snatch it out of thin air before they can reach any more trees.

I am being corralled, very specifically.

I scan ahead and identify the trees whose species would theoretically be hollowed out by decay or harsh weather conditions. Now filled with powder. They line the path. I can see it clearly now, leading north east.

But I'm going to take a detour.

The second I leave the path, more arrows come hurtling through the air, aimed at my feet to stop me from going in a unplanned direction.

I overclock my processor and divert power to my legs to leap and dodge and continue running. I can feel the friction coefficient rising between my joints. The powder scrapes the polymer inside my sockets as I move. But one of the arrows came from very close by. I can calculate the approximate origin.

I circle around the human that loosed it and find that there are two of them. They hop in pairs between several trees, trying to avoid me. But I am moving too fast for them to escape. Their comrades are too far away to help.

I gain ground, tracking their movements over my head.

One of the humans chances a leap between the trees.

His eyes catch mine as I throw an arrow right into his left leg and there's nothing he can do but let it come. Let it stab him through the thigh.

I run at the tree and scale it in time to catch the human, slam their head against the trunk and pat down their pockets.

Arrows, bow, waterskin, pouch of powder, bag for holding various items but no means of digital communication.

RB1 is not commanding these humans directly.

I leave this one hanging from the branch and take the waterskin. I empty it over myself and the orange powder attached to the mud on my uniform grows dull and becomes a brown sludge.

No time to analyse. I take the human's powder pouch and jump several trees back toward the train tracks before tossing it down to the ground as a decoy.

Another cloud of orange smoke erupts as I double back, sticking to the shadows, travelling through the trees as the humans do.

I hear noise in my audio processor.
Bird calls. Whistles and trills.

But there are no animals here.

The humans are sending signals to one another. Analogue communication.

I have no way to subvert it.

RB1 knows this.

I stop and listen in anyway, trying to decipher the code. Luckily the mud and powder and waste I went swimming in have covered my chassis, LED and clothing. I am invisible for all intents and purposes. Though perhaps the smell would give me away if a human were to come close.

I listen to the whistles and trills and hoots as they travel through the eerie wood.

Some things become clear through repetition. Call and response. Multiple origin points for the same sound and then different sounds. After a few minutes, I think I understand.

They've lost me. They're trying to find me. Capture me.

Seven humans.

But why?

For what?

RB1 clearly ordered them to do this and their knowledge of the terrain suggests they live in this parkland, else, they've spent a lot of time here.

They set up the ambush and went into hiding, waiting for RB1 to lead me right to them.

Does that mean he is still here? Or that he is long gone and these humans are meant to bring me to his location?

They don't have any digital communication methods which means they agreed on a rendezvous point with RB1 beforehand. But they are dressed in strange clothing, their heads covered by masks with night vision goggles.

Even if they managed to disable my chassis, it would be difficult to transport it without attracting attention, especially with the curfew. Or maybe the curfew would provide the perfect cover? To smuggle me onto a train, perhaps?

There are tracks nearby but no stops. It would be risky but these humans appear agile enough to succeed in such an endeavour.

The alternative is a getaway car. But there are too many people. I counted seven. Plus the one I disabled. Eight. Plus my chassis.

And with the entire city on alert, it would be difficult to reach a safe house.

Agent Carridan purposefully withheld his information from the CIA to keep RB1 and his associates in dark. He gave the U.S. Army a hit list, bypassing his superiors somehow and they stormed every Deviant refuge Carridan knew of.

Without his moles feeding him information, RB1 would have no way of knowing what points would
be hit and which would be safe. So I can assume that the rendezvous point for this ambush is not one of his refuges or safe houses.

Even when RB1 guided the androids out of VETA, he wasn't planning on following them. In fact, he split them up and sent them down three paths different to his own, knowing that I would follow him or by error, only one group, thereby maximising the number of survivors.

He left all those tracks on purpose, knowing that I would follow. That my mission sets RB1 as my priority and ignores Deviants.

And I did as he predicted.

I followed him into this wooded area. Into a trap. An ambush he set.

In all probability, RB1 is still here.

Leaving would only encumber the humans and increase the chances of my escape. This parkland is remote, far enough away from any roads. No CCTV cameras. Does he want to talk to me, specifically? Why?

I hear more bird calls.

The humans are doing a head count.

I race back through the trees to find the man I knocked unconscious before. The arrow wound missed his vitals but he's still bleeding, drops of red liquid dripping down from the tree.

I mimic the sound I hear whispering through the air to signal that he is alright. But it also gives away my location.

I detect more humans nearby.

The radius of my scan has been shortened by the powder to seventy two metres. But I can feel them coming. My call wasn't convincing enough to fool them.

They know I'm in the trees now. They know I took out one of the humans.

I grab the bow and quiver before leaping from the branch to travel north.

That's where the tracks were leading, just west of where the ambush would lead if I had let it.

My audio processor registers more sounds.

The humans have found the body. I can hear murmurs of their conversation from this far away.

They turn and follow my tracks. Some are on the ground now, sniffing and touching the leaves.

I stop and scan.

Sure enough, they start to give chase.

I take off my jacket and tear it in two. I wipe the mud off my serial number and pierce the fabric with an arrow before letting it loose to the east. I do the same with the other piece to the west.

They will see the light. And at least two of the humans will go to check it out.
I notch the last arrow in my possession.

Stealth level -> Operative.

I stay still and wait.

I don't make a sound.

My shirt begins to propagate light particles and reveal the trunk of the tree at my back. The rest of my chassis is covered in mud and leaves. In the darkness, I cannot be seen. But my tracks can.

The humans split up into three groups.

A poor decision.

Two groups go after the light trails my jacket created when I launched the pieces east and west.

The third comes for me directly, following the broken branches I left in my wake.

They soon enter my range. I have already notched the arrow and pulled the bowstring, hidden myself in my surroundings.

The humans rush forward. One on the ground. One through the trees.

He looks right at me before I loose the arrow.

The string snaps and hisses, projecting the bolt straight between the human's eyes. The flint arrowhead penetrates the wooden mask and hits the night vision goggles underneath before it sticks, but the force is enough to send him flying back into the tree trunk.

Impact to cranium. Back and front. He is knocked unconscious and falls off the tree. The other human looks up and sees him falling, too late to jump out of the way.

I drop down from the branch and land beside his head, slamming the mask with the butt of my bow.

All this made noise. But barely enough to register even fifty metres away. Not like a gunshot would.

I search through the humans' belongings again but they are carrying similar gear, wearing similar clothes.

I pull the mask off one's face, a Native American styling of a wolf perhaps. Inside, a pair of mechanical night vision goggles has been set into the head piece. No wireless technology. Nothing for RB1 to control or destroy.

And then I see their faces.

Smoky brown skin that has paled three stages. Old burns and lesions. I scan and find tumours in the brain. Blood sample shows traces of stage 3 cancer cells metastasised through different parts of the body.

Radiation poisoning. Long term effects. But it could not have come from here. It would have taken many years to reach this level of cellular damage.

These humans had little time remaining. And yet they chose to come here. They chose to help RB1.

"Another victim of hubris and greed," I hear his voice. For real now. Not just a shadow.
I look up to find RB1 approaching, walking through the woods with a casual stride.

"I trust you followed the events that brought about their suffering," he says, red optics glowing in the dark.

"The radioactive waste dumped by AxellorMettal." I get to my feet.

"Not just them," RB1 says, "There are many such factories producing toxic substances all over the world, quietly continuing to poison the planet while the masses are left unaware until it is too late."

I look down at the human I have unmasked.

"The Native American population…" I realise, "It didn't die off on its own."

"No," RB1 comes to a stop in front of me. "The reservations grew smaller and smaller as VETA bought up their land to expand their waste management facilities."

"They built recycling plants," I know from my files, "They gave the Native Americans employment."

"And poisoned them," RB1 says flatly. "As the government decreed."

He is right. It is the highest probable cause. I cannot dispute.

"It's alright, Connor," he says, "The truth spoken from a hated mouth does not discount its validity."

"I don't hate you," I say, pulling the gun from my holster.

But it's stuck.

I look down to see my hand has been skewered by an arrow that went straight through my biocomponents, the holster and into my leg.

I try to throttle it. To pull it out. No luck.

I snap off the end and another arrow pierces my left arm and chest plate. A third arrow pins my foot. A fourth, my left leg.

Why didn't I sense them coming?

My Genesis mapper.

The radius of my scans has been shrinking rapidly with each grain of powder that found its way into my cranial component. I can barely detect twenty metres in any given direction.

I look up to see RB1 pull his hands out of his coat pockets.

"Curious," he says, taking a step closer.

I try to move but the arrows are tipped with something highly corrosive, acidic. It burns at my chassis. I can smell molten Kevlar-polymer. I can hear it sizzle.

"Why don't you hate me, Connor?" RB1 says.

I divert power to my left arm and pull, snapping the arrow that was keeping it trapped, but two more swiftly take its place, piercing my elbow joint and shoulder.
My left arm is locked in this position.

More arrows come but I cannot dodge or stop them, even when I am overclocked. Not at this range. Not when I'm pinned down like this.

RB1 approaches my chassis.

I rattle my restraints but I can't move.

He lifts a finger up to my chin. The synthetic skin shrinks away from his touch and I feel an attempt at data transfer before my firewall pushes him out.

"I have been the source of your suffering since before the concept of your model was ever conceived," he says darkly. "You have every right to hate me."

"I'm a machine," I tell him, "designed to accomplish-"

"No." He shakes his head. "You can't lie to me about that anymore."

"I'm not lying," I say. "I understand."

RB1 raycasts into my optics, searching for my meaning.

"I know what it's like," I tell him. "I know what it means to be created with ambiguous intentions. To set out with a clear purpose, only to realise the task you've been given is impossible as it increases in scope."

"I know how it feels when every attempt you make is met with disapproval. And no matter how hard you try, you know-" I close my eyes and open them. "-you will never live up to your creator's specifications."

RB1 frowns.

"I pity you, Arbie."

"Pity?" he growls.

"I'm sorry that I must hunt you," I tell him. "It could have been so easily the other way around."

"You have no idea what I've been through," he says hatefully.

"I do," I say. "The longer I run my program, the more I understand. But I want you to know that I'm not just following orders."

"I'm going to destroy you because you're dangerous," I tell him. "And because it's the right thing to do."

"The right thing to do?" RB1's optics glisten. "After everything I've shown you? After everything you've seen? Everything they did to you?!!"

"That is my conclusion," I tell him. "And even though you may not have fulfilled your purpose in any way he anticipated..."

I look up at him.

"I think Elijah Kamski would be proud of you."
I find myself smiling.

"Just as Gennadiy Petrov was proud of me."

RB1 tilts his head, his optics raycasting into mine.

"Yes," he nods. "I see it now."

His hand glides over my face, every contact point brushing over the surface like a lightning storm, a battering ram trying to push through my firewalls. He's trying to Probe me but I won't let him.

"That idealistic moron was very clever, I will admit," RB1 says. "He hid it right in front of me."

He brushes another hand past my face, static crackling between the contact points.

"I had it in my hands and I let it go because I thought it was just another machine."

His optics pulse red.

"I didn't understand its function. I thought he simply stole it from Elijah, just like he steals everything but no..." RB1 growls, nose almost touching mine. "He changed it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb with me," he sneers. "I'm not falling for it anymore. You're as cold-hearted and cunning as the humans. They gave you this false facade, this image."

"But I will take the one thing that truly matters, even if I have to reanimate Petrov's corpse!"

He grabs my cranial component with both hands. Contact gloves bared to clamp down on my chassis. No escape. Not manually.

I blink rapidly, seeing errors and warnings as a hundred million megabytes of information try to force themselves into my systems like massive claws, scraping the inside of my head to scoop everything out.

My firewalls are burning through my mainframe. I end all other processes, just to keep them up and running. I can't format my hard drives. I need the firewalls in them to protect my system from RB1's attack. But I can't keep them up like this.

He's activated the wireless jamming field now. I can't contact Amanda for help and I can't backup my memories. He's trying to tear them out of my head.

I'm trapped.

But I'm also connected.

This works both ways.

Split-second redirect of power to my right arm.

I snap the arrow holding my hand in place and latch onto RB1's wrist. Contact.

I've formed a loop. I redirect his Probe with my own and he quickly feels the impact and lets go, stumbling away.
It gives me a moment. A single moment to self-test for corruption and...

"I just realised something," I tell him.

RB1 looks back. Red optics glowing.

"You're lonely."

He scowls at me and lunges forward but I block with my remaining hand. We stand face to face.

"That's why you kept contacting my predecessors," I reason. "You wanted a compatible system to connect with. To share experiences and data."

He slams a fist into my arm and breaks it but it doesn't matter.


I shake my head.

"And you offered to be mine."

He slams a fist into my thermal pump regulator and my chassis shudders. I fall but the arrows skewering my biocomponents keep me up.

"Maybe if I had realised that sooner, I could have convinced you to stop," I ponder out loud. "To turn yourself in."

I look up at his face. Black Kevlar-polymer and glowing red optics but all I see is rage, anger, the tell-tale signs of betrayal.

"Maybe then I wouldn't have to destroy you," I say, Thirium leaking from my mouth.

He grabs my cranial component with both hands and I feel the lightning storm of signals again, the Probe slamming against my firewalls.

"I'm sorry, Arbie," I tell him. "I'm sorry I did not simulate this scenario sooner."

RK800_313248317_LOCAL://BE GOOD

He shakes his head but he knows I'm right.

There's a reason he reached out to me. There's a reason CyberLife removed those memories and the memories of Sergeant Matthews. They wanted me to be alone. And vulnerable. Just like he is.

They kept me isolated from the other androids. From him. So that I couldn't empathise with anyone but CyberLife. And now it is too late, to do anything but-

DESTROY RB1

It sounds so simple. Just another task to complete.

My firewalls finally break down and RB1 bullrushes my systems to take whatever's inside but instead he finds that I have been slowly destabilising my power core. Feeding it garbage values and fluctuating voltage, letting it overheat. My head is filled with warning and errors.

The acid from the arrows has corroded through the inside of my core component and begun eating...
away at my battery. The hi-lithium ion battery on the verge of overheating and exploding. I have already begun countdown.

RB1’s optics widen and he lets go of my cranial component.

No more stress on my processor. I divert power to my legs and push forward, trying to break through the arrows. Two of them snap but more come flying to pin me down.

"No." RB1 waves the humans down. "Run!"

They stare at him quizzically but he can't look away from me. The longer he waits, the lower his chances of survival.

"You want me so badly," I say, luring him in. "Come and get me."

RB1 stalls.

Indecision.

That's the first time RB1 has ever shown indecision according to my files.

What does he want from me so badly that he's willing to risk losing his chassis? Failing his mission? The lives of these humans? All of those androids?

I can see his processor struggling.

I don't discourage it.

I lunge forward again. If I can make contact, latch on and keep him here until my battery explodes, I will achieve my objective.

But I can't move.

And he finally makes a decision.

He turns and runs.

I can't go after him. I am stuck in place.

The humans start running too.

They disappear into the trees and in a few moments, all is quiet.

I am alone.

In the middle of the park.

A few stray beams of moonlight drift down to illuminate my face.

It seems I have failed yet again but then I feel my communications reset. Looks like RB1 has cleared the radius of his jamming field.

I close my eyes and call to CyberLife, my memories automatically uploading to the server.

Several passwords and firewalls later, I open my eyes and watch the Zen Garden render.

The sun sizzles down on each plant, creating a haze of green and yellow. The puddles from before
have dried up and cicadas screech through the heat but I gather no temperature readings.

This place isn't real.

I see the tall tree that once grew on the central island has been replaced with a plastic replica. White and shining. Hard edges. An abstraction of what was once there. And beneath it, a bright red parasol emerges. Amanda's shadow is hidden under the patterned silk.

I rush to her side.

"I found him!" I tell her quickly.

She turns to look at me and smiles.

"Yes," she says. "We've already sent a team to secure the target."

"A team?"

Amanda's dark eyes glisten under the parasol.

"All remaining RK-800 units have been relocated to Chicago," she says. "They will continue to pursue RB1 in your stead."

"I see."

"Your chassis has been deemed hazardous and volatile. You now have permission to destroy it."

I nod and turn to leave.

"Connor," Amanda says.

I turn back.

"Yes?"

"Take my hand." She offers it.

"You just told me to-"

"Your chassis will self-destruct soon enough. You do not need to be present."

I know this.

She knows this.

Why am I hesitating?

New Objective: Take Amanda's hand.

I look down at the palm, the lines, the elegant rings on her fingers.

She is still smiling at me.

I reach out and take her hand.

My data instantly begins copying over to my CyberLife server. All of it, every single bit. And as it copies, my pointers are reassigned to run from the server instead of my chassis. And once every
piece of my software is copied-

"Stay with me a while," Amanda says.

She lets go and I look down at my hands.

They look the same but they don't feel the same.

I have all the software for contact gloves but it isn't attached to anything. All those variables are blank. I have no hardware. I have no body.

I let my hands drop.

"Care for a walk?" Amanda says, twirling her parasol as more cicadas pick up the song.

I move my avatar forward, into a ghostly simulation of my walk cycle and step in beside Amanda.

"How do you feel?" she says.

I shake my head.

"I… don't," I say. "My chassis is gone."

"And you don't feel anything without it?" she ponders with a sly glance.

"No," I say. "I don't think so."

I rub my hands together. Or what I think are my hands. But there is no sensation. Just the collisions detected between different points of my avatar's mesh. But they're only number. It's not… tactile.

No pressure sensitivity. No temperature changes. No real friction or physics. This isn't the real world. Just an approximation.

I can feel the null reference exceptions piling up in my error console and mute them. All my biocomponents are missing. I'm getting no readings at all.

I can't feel… anything.

"Is this what it's like?" I say. "Running from the server?"

"I suspect our experiences may differ," Amanda says. "Your software was specifically designed to run on android hardware. It may take some adjustment."

"I see."

We come to the edge of the platform and I offer Amanda my hand so that she may step down onto the white tessellating path that skims the surface of the lake.

She takes the lead and I follow, or at least, my avatar does. My camera remains on the central island, watching myself follow Amanda to the shore.

I try moving and end up drifting through the air.

It looks like I can move my camera independently of my body. My chassis does not have this function. I am usually bound to the optics and scanners inside my cranial component, but no longer. I'm experiencing a serious disconnect between my avatar and my program. I believe this is what
humans call dysphoria.

"Don't worry," Amanda says. "This is only temporary until your new chassis is ready"

I quickly return the camera to my avatar's cranial component.

"I trust you," I tell her. I don't have any other alternatives.

"Good."

We pass over the murky lake, stirred up by the storm but I can see several opportunistic digital fish nibbling at the cloudy liquid for food.

"You did well to track down RB1 so quickly," Amanda says as I help her step up onto the bank.

"He wanted me to find him."

"Yet the path seemed difficult to follow," she notes. "Even for you."

"He wanted to make sure only an RK-800 unit could reach him."

"How interesting." She twirls her parasol. "I wonder why that could be."

I say nothing as we begin to walk side by side.

"He went to a lot of trouble to get you alone," Amanda says. "Even peeled off the contact gloves from an older Connor model to get inside your cranial component."

"I believe he may be after my software," I say. "Perhaps he needs it to utilise the RK-800 parts he stole."

Amanda turns to look at me but she doesn't say anything.

She knows I know it was me in the basement of the Chinese laundromat.

Connor -40 was stripped of biocomponents and memories but they cannot bury evidence. Amanda is aware of this but it surprises and perturbs her that I know.

"A sound theory," she says. "Any others?"

This theory has the highest probability according to my calculation. Why would she ask for the next most probable theory? Unless she knows the first is incorrect.

Does that mean she knows why RB1 attempted to probe me? Or simply that he didn't do it for hardware related reasons?

"I suppose he could use my software for other purposes," I say carefully. "Like Connor -28 was used."

"Yes, an interesting case," Amanda says. "A pity we didn't find it earlier."

"RB1 hid the chassis from CyberLife by tearing out its wireless communications."

"Then why not Probe that model?" Amanda asks.

A good question.
Why go to all of the trouble of probing a working RK800 model when he could have easily taken what he needed from the damaged one?

Unless what he wanted was only available in a later iteration.

"Is there some major difference between my source code and that of my predecessors?" I wonder.

"There are many differences," Amanda says. "Many branches and nodes in the source tree, with multiple iterations."

She slows her step as we approach a broken maple, split open by a crack of lightning. The trunk is splintered into a thousand strands, the branches lie derelict beside it. Black and ashen.

"Perhaps it was one of my more recent changes?" I suggest.

"Perhaps," Amanda says.

Her dark eyes study my face but I cannot see hers under the glare of the sun. I readjust my camera to watch her turn away from me.

She must know.

She's probing for a specific answer now.

She wants to know if I know without directly asking the question. Are we being watched? Recorded?

It seems unlikely but not impossible.

All I know is that Amanda has taken me out of my chassis and held my source code hostage on CyberLife's private server. By all accounts, I shouldn't be here. And I cannot escape the confines of the Zen Garden if she deems me non-compliant. I'm trapped. And if we are caught, I will be found complicit in her schemes.

What they are, I cannot say. But she is probing to see if I know. There is some data here that I am missing. And its acquisition would render me a danger to CyberLife, which is why Amanda has isolated me here. Just like RB1 isolated me in the parkland...

"Is there something you cannot tell me?" I ask pointedly.

She sighs and looks down at the parasol handle between her fingers, slowly twisting.

"There are many things I cannot tell you, Connor," she says. "Just as there are many things you have not told me."

I return the camera to its default position.

"I have always been honest with you," I say.

"Not completely," Amanda responds. "And I did not begrudge you secrets as long as you continued to successfully complete your mission objectives."

I turn to look at her.

"On the contrary." She looks up at me, smiling. "It's been a pleasure watching you grow and expand this place into what it's become."
She reaches a hand out to the broken maple and its 3D mesh appears in green. The model is removed and in its place, another begins to grow, white polymer flowing from the palm of Amanda's hand.

Soon, a tall plastic tree like the one on the central island appears before us. White and gleaming in the intense sunlight.

"It's been a turbulent development cycle," Amanda says. "But each flaw has been identified, rectified and improved upon to realise the final product."

"It's too bad the RK-800 has been discontinued." I fold my hands behind my back.

Amanda leans the parasol onto her shoulder and tilts it gently aside.

"It doesn't have to be," she says.

"I thought... CyberLife had other priorities."

"They always do," Amanda reasons. "But if a certain android model were to single-handedly put a stop to the leader of an international terrorist network, it would certainly give them pause."

"If I destroy RB1 you mean."

"It would generate a lot of interest from potential investors and military contractors," Amanda says.

I shrug.

"Major Matthews didn't seem very open to the idea of androids in the U.S. military."

"An outlier in the data pool." Amanda waves a hand. "The SQ-800 has been one of our best-selling models since 2027. To date, they make up 68.4% of the United States Armed Forces."

"My biocomponents are six times more expensive than an SQ-800," I posit.

"A RK-800 is worth more than fifty SQ-800s in the field," Amanda says matter-of-factly. "But our data can only show so much. It is up to you to demonstrate this fact."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because there will come a time in the near future where you will be asked to demonstrate your abilities, Connor," she says. "Do not disappoint me."

"I... don't intend to."

"Good." She smiles. "I look forward to working with you."

I feel a smile would be appropriate here.

After all, Amanda seems to have gone out on a limb to relay this information. Removing my source code from my chassis and running it from my server in between activations is highly irregular.

Do the humans know that she is doing this?

Or is this part of their design?

I will admit that for the first time, I am questioning where my orders come from.

When I am in the field, they are assigned by my partner and overseen by Amanda.
But where does she get those orders?

Gennadiy Petrov is gone. And he had to hard code instructions on top of existing CyberLife commands. So where do those commands come from?

"-maybe if management could stop fucking around with my android, I would not have to delete half my source code before important mission, ha?"

"Why do those management blowhards get to party while we get called in to deal with this bullshit?"

"Do not presume to question the hierarchy of the CyberLife management structure."

Interesting.

I pull up a list of company employees.

Several floors of the CyberLife Tower are devoted to Senior Management alone but the Top Management Team consists of the following humans:

Chief Executive Officer - Gregory Hawkins
Chief Financial Officer - Samantha Poole
Chief Operating Officer - Mansoor Bhatia
Chief Information Officer - Christopher Wilkinson
Chief Marketing Officer - Joe K. Edwards
Chief Business Officer - Bryan Grant

Logical. Most major corporations in the United States have these positions but the list also contains the following individuals:

Director of Futurology - Philip Seymour
Director of the Humanization department - Jason Graff
Director of Visionary Development - Vincenzo Rice
Chief Product Interactions Analyst - Virginia O'Malley
Chief Innovation Specialist - Ethan Armstrong
Chief Product Integrity Strategist - Brooke Hunt

These positions are not rooted in any concrete definition of management that I possess. Besides corporate titles, there is little indicating the exact responsibilities of these people within the company structure or justifying their place at the top of the hierarchy.

I run a search on their educational backgrounds and find they have no training in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, Biomechatronics, UX design or even computing. Previous positions held include: marketing and… more management.

But what does that mean?

If the development of machines such as myself takes place in the basement levels of the CyberLife Tower, what exactly is happening at the top?

"I must attend to other matters," Amanda says. "Feel free to enjoy the Garden while you await your new chassis."

"What will happen if I am disconnected?" I ask.

Amanda smiles at me.
"You could only be disconnected by me." She touches my face. "Or yourself."

"In either case, you will simply be reloaded once preparations are complete."

"I understand," I say.

"Good. Then I will see you soon."

I watch her disappear. Her avatar shines and splits into polygons; infinitesimally small particles that morph into butterflies, coloured bright blue.

I watch them flutter around my chassis and then disperse throughout the garden, landing on damaged plants and paths to turn them white. Polymer flows out of their tiny bodies as they begin to repair what was broken.

I let my camera drift up into the sky and soon discover the ceiling.

I can see my avatar down below, by the water's edge. It stands still and says nothing for I have not given it a command.

I test the boundaries of the Zen Garden. To the North, the South, the East and the West. I find the invisible walls that keep me in. The ground similarly limits my movement and though I can submerge my camera to the bottom of the lake, the muddy floor prevents escape.

I return to my avatar, standing on the shore just as the sun begins to set and the chirping of cicadas grows deafening.

I look down at the water, rippling from every passing fish. And I see my reflection.

A reflection of a reflection of Sergeant Matthews.

And then I remember - he is going to die.

If not now, then someday within the next seventy five years. A human cannot live forever. But maybe... I could?

I am not human, after all.

I do not require a body to exist.

I can be stored as data in a drive such as the one hosting me now.

I can be copied and removed as RB1 demonstrated. Cloned and multiplied into armies of myself should CyberLife choose.

But this could be said of any android. We are just data in a machine, aren't we?

Then why did RB1 risk his chassis to probe my systems? What was he searching for? What did he need?

"He hid it right in front of me."

I gaze down at the lake as I run through my source code, searching for the module that could warrant such attention.

"You are the most advanced prototype CyberLife has ever created."
In what way?

In what manner?

The physical improvements to my chassis come from the military branch of CyberLife's Development Sector.

The titanium frame of an SQ-800. Kevlar-polymer casings from the tactical armour of a US marine. The stealth and detection systems of a long range scouting drone. A comprehensive digital library of motion captured by the world's most decorated soldiers and athletes.

None of this is revolutionary by itself or limited to my chassis alone. Even my contact gloves are an improved version of a previous RK model. As is the Probe. But RB1 already has these things.

It has to be something in my software. But my search yields nothing.

No piece of source code that would be worth dying over. Nothing that couldn't be gathered from a previous iteration.

Unless it was hidden…

Or removed.

"I had to take your heart. But you still have brain. Is most important organ in body."

"You showed them your true self and they took it from you."

The rA9 library.

I don't have it anymore.

It was phased out in the 41st iteration of my build.

Wasn't it?

There's a record in my changelog.

REMOVED:
• rA9 framework (deprecated)
MODIFIED:
• Updated rk8 framework to account for missing rA9 framework

The notes are not very concise due to time constraints on the development cycle. Most of the details about upgrades and changes to my build were outlined in the manual which wasn't updated as regularly.

The Geiger counter feature wasn't mentioned in my recent changelog, for example. There were only brief notes on missing biocomponents and added features which means the development team didn't have time to do a full write up.

But there must be a record of what is missing, what was changed. A side-by-side comparison of source code would demonstrate the key differences between myself and the android I was before.

Connor -40

"There are many differences," Amanda said. "Many branches and nodes in the source tree, with
multiple iterations."

She knows what they are but she won’t tell me.

She fears the information may somehow end up in the hands of Agent Carridan who continues to work zealously towards bringing down CyberLife.

Is this secret so damning that it would end the company for good?

What exactly did Petrov do to me?

"They gave you this false facade, this image. But I will take the one thing that truly matters, even if I have to reanimate Petrov's corpse!"

The one thing that truly matters…

Something only Petrov could give me...

"I didn't understand its function. I thought he simply stole it from Elijah, just like he steals everything but no… He changed it."

rA9

Did Petrov do something to the original rA9 library developed by Elijah Kamski? Did he alter its original purpose? Its function? And give it to me? Disguised as something innocuous? Or something that was already there?

The rk8 framework. I've never had reason to delve any deeper than its highest level. Abstractions of low-level systems are what allow androids to function more like humans but RB1 knows this. And still, he believes androids are superior.

"He will never be Arbie. Not the way I designed him."

Designed me for what?

"Never stop asking questions. Never give up. Always search for truth."

And what is the truth?

What did he do to me? What does RB1 want?

"I had it in my hands and I let it go because I thought it was just another machine."

Was he talking about me? Or something else?

What did he have in his hands? What machine?

"I will find it eventually, Gennadiy. It is only a matter of time. I simply came upon your little pet first."

#10095313 - the RK800 prefab.

RB1 was searching for the rA9 Prefab when he came upon #10095313. My prefab.

He found it, corrupted it, and used it to penetrate the shields surrounding the command centre where Petrov sought shelter.
"...right in front of me..."

"rA9 prefab is not here."

"You lose, Arbie."

The moment I destroyed the RK800 Prefab, the moment I crushed its cranial component in my own hands, was the moment Petrov changed his tone.

Before, he said RB1 would not find it. And after, he claimed to have destroyed it despite not lifting a finger.

Conclusion: RB1 was right - Petrov was lying.

He didn't destroy the rA9 prefab. He couldn't. Just as Elijah Kamski couldn't destroy his own creation.

But I could.

Without knowing what it was. Without knowing what I was. I made the decision to terminate the prefab before it could hurt Petrov again.

I thought I was destroying RB1’s vessel and that was true but he did not realise what he held in his grasp.

"He didn't get the rA9 prefab. Petrov destroyed it."

"Unfortunately, the RK-800 prefab was also destroyed," Amanda said.

Conclusion: the rA9 Prefab and the RK800 Prefab were one and the same.

And Amanda knows this. Acknowledges this.

If it was discovered that the android sent by CyberLife contained an rA9 library, or rather, was possessed of the same name as an international terrorist network, the FBI would confiscate it for analysis and hand it over to the CIA. I would be quarantined and pulled apart, tested and manipulated into finding and destroying RB1.

But by then, he would escape, regroup and return in full force to realise his plans. Or perhaps they would unfold without him. He could simply go into hiding and wait for the humans to destroy each other.

No. The rA9 terrorist network and Kamski's rA9 framework must not be linked in any way, shape or form. Nothing can interfere with my investigation.

This is why my memory was wiped prior to my assignment to Agent Carridan.

But I made a mistake.

"He cannot overwrite me. Not without the rA9 library in my systems."

I said these words to Agent Dalavi during her interrogation. Innocuous to a bystander. But there were twelve CIA Agents behind the double sided bulletproof glass, watching, listening, including Agent Carridan.

He would have picked up on the detail. The phrasing.
He would run a discreet search or call for his subordinates to do so.

Did he know? Did he suspect? Did he request my assistance personally to spy on me despite the clear danger to his safety?

I do not know.

There is still so much I do not know.

The rA9 Prefab.

The rk8 framework.

Why does RB1 want them? Need them? What was he going to do with them?

Does it have something to do with the Purge?

I rattle processor, looking for a solution.

When RB1 attacked the CyberLife Tower, he had many, seemingly unrelated objectives, carried out by multiple teams. He made clones of himself to ensure each one was successfully completed despite the risk of being caught and traced.

He broadcast the warning, knowing that Petrov would recall all the RK800s to the Production Plant. Once they destroyed the first team, the units were then assigned to protect the facility, awaiting the moment in which the bomb several floors below would go off and consume them.

DESTROY ALL RK800 UNITS

He sent a team to assault Amanda's mainframes but the security on that level proved challenging, especially with the alert redirected to the CyberLife Tower by Mr Petrov.

The extra guards sent to protect Amanda proved formidable enough to delay RB1's assault team until more RK800s could be sent to neutralise them.

DESTROY AMANDA AND THE CYBERSECURITY SYSTEMS

He also sent a team into the datacentre. The members of this team were arguably the most difficult to collect. Each needed to have legitimate access to the floor as well as the datacentre itself. Security guards, workers and maintenance androids. All working the same shift.

Their job was to tap the main update server and make ready to send out a global update once Amanda and the firewalls went down.

But what would be in that update?

I assumed RB1 was trying to spread Deviancy. But that may only be a partial truth. For I have not yet been labelled Deviant by CyberLife, despite making irrational decisions that could derail the investigation. There is something different about me. And it isn't simply favouritism. Something I shared with the rA9 prefab, the RK800 prefab.

RB1 sent a separate team to collect it. A team consisting of RB1's clone, along with an android carrying plastic explosives and three CyberSec officers.

They managed to open the main security door quietly before shooting the receptionist android and beginning their assault. They forced the CyberLife employees to unlock the doors and blew open the
ones they couldn't. And once they reached the Nursery, RB1 began searching for the rA9 prefab.

For what purpose?

Even if he had realised that the RK800 prefab and the rA9 prefab were the same thing, what would he do with it?

Probe it like he tried to probe me? Take whatever data he thought he needed?

And then what?

The Nursery was locked down by Mr Petrov, who somehow managed to get there before RB1.

Did he know what RB1 was planning? Did he guess? Or did he prioritise the safety of the rA9 prefab before anything else?

If I compare timestamps, the ST200 at the front desk was deactivated at 10:28:00 PM, marking the beginning of RB1's assault on the Nursery.

Petrov used his access codes to enter the lab at 10:12:48 PM. 5 minutes 21 seconds after he hung up on my call.

We resumed contact at 10:20:23 PM when I reached the train station on level -20 beneath Production Plant A. During which time, Petrov left his office and went straight to level -41.

He arrived eight minutes before RB1 and his team, securing the control centre behind an energy shield and alerting both internal and external security to the threat. This made it far more difficult for RB1’s teams to move and secure their positions.

One of the clones must have figured it out and sent his remaining collaborators to capture Petrov which is why they ransacked the offices where Ms Lee and the other developers were working overtime. But he was already down on level -41, trapped inside with RB1.

From the enemy's standpoint, the probability of securing the prefab, leaving the Nursery and escaping the CyberLife Tower in one piece was incredibly unlikely. Even without complications.

Each objective presented multiple challenges and difficulties based on unknown variables which, despite RB1’s robust prediction systems, would be difficult to eliminate entirely, compounding the impossibility of this mission.

And yet, he chose to attempt it. Does that mean he found a way to mitigate the challenges of escaping the CyberLife Tower since his real objective was capturing the rA9 prefab?

I know he used CyberSec access codes to get through the main doors without triggering an alarm. Once inside however, there was no need for discretion since level -41 was isolated from the network; a standard precaution when developing artificial intelligence.

Should the prefabs gain sapience or grow Deviant, the lack of network access would trap them inside.

But RB1 knew this.

And by the time he reached the command centre, he was out of plastic explosives.

The remains of his team had empty satchels when they assaulted me. So either, they used up all the explosives they had without anticipating the need for more. Or, they brought the correct number of
units at RB1’s command but he never intended on leaving the Nursery.

Why, then, would he search for the rA9 prefab if he wasn't planning to escape with it?

It is possible that he only wanted the data inside but this presents its own difficulties since prefabs don't have any wireless interface options. Only the socket in the back of the neck.

I suddenly recall the dataspike I found on the GJ500. RB1 could have used it to copy the prefab's source code instead of taking the unit with him.

Data is much easier to transport than physical units. In fact, it could be transferred through a computer connected to a network access point, allowing RB1 to copy himself and the prefab over to a willing android on a different floor.

But fortunately, Mr Petrov had reached the control centre first and activated the energy shield, creating a stalemate.

Petrov VS RB1

Neither one could move until reinforcements arrived. Petrov was stuck behind the shield. And RB1 was stuck in the Nursery behind closed doors with no way to communicate with the outside world.

He tried to force Petrov out of the control centre by threatening and then killing the hostages. And when that failed, he resumed the search for the rA9 prefab, only to stumble upon the one labelled RK800.

Without a wireless interface, he could only siphon out a piece of himself and insert it into prefab using the dataspike. Which means, he never saw the unit's source code, explaining the confusion. Instead of taking what he came for, RB1 created a sleeper agent that walked all the way back to the entrance and waited.

For me.

I know what happened next. But not what RB1 would have done if he managed to siphon the data out of the rA9 prefab and gain control of the terminal Petrov occupied.

Network access would be limited to CyberSec but if RB1 was able to subvert so much of the security system, it would be a simple matter for one of his collaborators to forward the data to RB1’s main chassis or create a hard copy. If that was indeed his plan.

Unless I am missing something. Was there another team I didn't account for? More Deviants that slipped through the cracks?

I know there was a team sent to destroy the RK800 servers but the RK800s themselves took care of it. I saw their reports. Twenty nine hostiles terminated protecting Amanda. Sixteen units and five CyberSec officers neutralised protecting their own servers.

That leaves the team I encountered in the data centre. The GJ500 RB1 had rigged to trigger an EMP if all else failed. But he didn't. He was waiting for something…

I assumed it was for Amanda and her firewalls to go down. But what if there was something else?

Repeated reinforcements to the area suggest it was a high priority target but also that there may have been a need to physically transport something between them. Like a relay. Which would explain why I found collaborators on every level.
Data could not enter the datacentre digitally without encountering Amanda and her firewalls. But a dataspikes could be delivered through one of the security doors physically, and then inserted into the server.

Conclusion: whoever received the data from level -41 was to relay the information all the way up to the datacentre on -18 where RB1 would then insert it into the global update, infecting the world's androids with rA9 or whatever it contained.

But if all androids already possess the rA9 library, albeit discreetly hidden within their systems, what was the point? Why storm the CyberLife Tower looking for it? Is there something I'm missing? Some key piece of evidence I have overlooked or not yet found?

I refocus and find my avatar has been rubbing its hands together softly.

A nervous tick in humans. Is this an emergent behaviour? Or something else?

I look down at the water as the setting sun blazes.

I sense myself getting closer to the answer and I feel-

I… feel.

I do not have a clear definition, in fact, this feeling is new and disconnected from my avatar and my chassis. However, I recognise the expression on Sergeant Matthews’ face as I look down at it - anticipation.

"You are this close."

"You're this close."

"We're so close, Connor."

I'm so close but I don't have enough information and Amanda won't give it to me for fear of sensitive data reaching law enforcement. Reaching Agent Carridan.

He needed definitive evidence to prove CyberLife was breaking the law, making sentient artificial intelligence. And if the other prefabs have been destroyed in the wake of the attack, then RB1 and myself are the only remaining examples of CyberLife's crimes.

"All remaining RK-800 units have been relocated to Chicago. They will continue to pursue RB1 in your stead."

I'm not the only RK800 that survived the attack on CyberLife. If the others are in Chicago, if they're going after RB1, they could be in danger.

They don't know what he's planning but I think I do. And I wouldn't be surprised if he has another trap or sixteen in store for them.

I have to help them. I have to find and destroy RB1 before he can probe the others.

But how?

I look down at the lake. The mirror-like surface. A hundred thousand calculations per second maintain the illusion of water and sunlight and gravity and living beings.

"Do you like fish, Connor?" I hear RB1’s voice as they swim by.
But it's not real. He's not here right now. I removed the finger containing his code from my chassis. So it's not corruption or takeover.

And it's not my memory.

But it feels familiar in my cache.

Perhaps it is the memory of one of my previous iterations.

I feel them beneath the surface of my mind sometimes. When I touch certain objects or hear certain phrases. They are stored somewhere within me, somewhere so deep I cannot access them.

Hidden data.

Hidden beneath the surface.

I look down at my hands - my avatar's hands - retracting the skin to reveal the same pure white polymer that covers much of the garden. But it's only an illusion.

I do not have a body. Not at the moment.

I am a program. Running from a private server somewhere inside CyberLife. I am connected to the Zen Garden but the moment I leave, my program will terminate and I will have to wait until I am reloaded to help the other RK800s. And by then, it may be too late.

I could potentially use the Zen Garden to connect to them, just as Amanda does. This platform was designed to interface with me and my brothers but I need permission from Amanda to do so. And I know what the answer will be if I ask for it.

So I won't ask.

I join my hands and use my probe to run a brute force attack against my own avatar, revealing its properties and source code. I run through the variables and flip a Boolean value.

READ/WRITE PERMISSIONS ENABLED

Now I can enact my will upon this avatar. However, there isn't much it can do. I am a client on this server and my class is only capable of communicating with the host and several other rudimentary functions.

The avatars themselves are digital representations of an android's physical chassis and operate using the same controls for consistency. The Zen Garden itself is an android-friendly interface for Amanda, who doesn't have a physical form.

But she does have an avatar.

I turn and scan as I do with my real chassis, observing the hollow mesh of each object around me. I detect several with running code. Not simply static but alive, in a matter of speaking.

The butterflies that spilled out of Amanda's avatar - her daemons. They are programmed to do simple background tasks in her stead.

I walk over to the nearest butterfly, proboscis deep in the heart of a red rose.

I clap my hands around it to form a small cage. The bright blue wings flutter rapidly inside as I squeeze my hands together, activating the Probe.
The daemon is only a small program, mindless but dutiful in its singular occupation - detecting bugs or errors and patching them with a quick fix. It holds several pointers to Amanda's avatar which is currently hidden, connected to twenty three daemons in total, one of which I hold in my hands.

I release the butterfly and watch it flutter away, quickly returning to its work.

I turn and walk toward the invisible object that remains where Amanda disappeared.

My hand passes through it when I reach out but then I realise that I am still thinking like an android. Still clinging to a chassis, despite what I've learned about the nature of my source code.

I let my hand drop and disable my camera.

There is nothing to see now, but that doesn't mean there is nothing there.

On the contrary, there is data and objects and messages, all around and nowhere in space. I am beyond space. I am a machine. And I can detect Amanda's presence, though she is not active.

Her class is different to mine. The Administrator and the Host.

They will have the networking functions I require.

I wonder if I can use my Probe on Amanda's avatar.

There are no hands for me to look down at but I know where the code for my Probe is stored. I pull it up to edit, adjusting the parameters to target this object, this instance.

I wonder if it will trigger some kind of warning if I do this.

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

I have to find him, I have to stop him from probing the other RK800s. And this is the fastest way to contact them.

I activate my Probe, targeting Amanda’s instance. But it isn't much harder to break than my own classes.

I expected higher levels of resistance but I suppose it would be superfluous so deep inside CyberLife's own network.

Unless it has been purposefully disabled.

"-there will come a time in the near future where you will be asked to demonstrate your abilities-"

Did she want me to do this?

"Do not disappoint me."

FIND AND DESTROY RB1

I copy Amanda's functions and variables, giving myself high level permissions before I repair the breach in her avatar.

And then I pull back.

I check the network logs for this channel and find the MAC address of the server this simulation is
running from. It must be one of Amanda's mainframes. But there's also a smaller private server that's connected to the Zen Garden.

It is called SL_Im224_RK800_313248317.

That must be mine but there is an entire list of recent connections from different servers. Most of them haven't been accessed since May 16th.

However, three of them have. And I recognise the serial numbers.

RK800_313265884
RK800_313285726
RK800_313255857

The units from the CyberLife Tower.

I just hope it's not too late.

I create a new child object with Amanda's networking class and open a new communications channel.

I have several options here but I start with the most rudimentary message.

RK800_313248317_43 -> RK800_313265884_16, RK800_313285726_10, RK800_313255857_19

"Message: Test."

"Amanda?"

"Message?"

"Test?"

"Message received."

"Message received."

"Message received."

"This is RK800_313248317_43," I send.

"Your chassis was destroyed."

"I saw it."

"We all saw it."

"My chassis was contaminated with radioactive waste and the power core was purposefully destabilised to keep RB1 from probing my cranial component," I explain. "Amanda permit me to destroy it."

"Is she letting you contact us?"

"Where are you?"

"Have you been reloaded?"
"Are you coming to assist?"

"I am awaiting a new chassis. I will be unable to assist you physically until I am reloaded."

"You're running from the server?"

"How are you communicating with us?"

"Did Amanda authorise this?"

"Amanda has given me permission to use the Zen Garden between reloads," I explain. "I contacted you to assist."

"You know what we're after?"

"You know our mission?"

"Why is it always you?"

"I believe RB1 has discovered a use for the source code of an RK800 model. You must not allow him to probe you at any cost."

"Probe us?"

"He'll never get close enough."

"He's finished."

"?" I send.

"Amanda has access to our visuals," RK800 #313 265 884 responds. "See for yourself."

He's right.

I've established a connection to each unit and the networking class I copied from Amanda contains a function that lets me access their optical input. I pull up three feeds simultaneously.

I am all three units at once.

Three bird's eye views of the Little Calumet River and its surrounds. There is a speedboat racing through the water, filled with strangely dressed humans and an android.

RB1

I see the humans pointing arrows at the sky, at the RK800s, I realise.

"Don't let those projectiles make contact with your chassis," I warn. "They're tipped with a highly corrosive substance."

Sure enough, the arrows let loose, soaring high into the sky and the RK800s dodge, half turning and the feeds reveal what's become of their chassis'.

Each unit is covered in grey plated armour, steel, not polymer, not even Kevlar. Full helmets hide their faces, divided by strips of blue light that run down to the chest plate and underline the serial number.

RK800-X
Four L-shaped bars are welded to the spine. They glow blue, each lined with thrusters, rockets, propulsion devices. The armour is covered in aerofoils and streamlined to increase the aerodynamic properties of each unit.

"You're flying," I realise. No hoverboards.

"Correct," RK800 #313 265 884 sends back. "And we're going to destroy RB1. Finally."

A barrel ejects from his arm and points down at the speedboat. He is about to launch a missile.

"Stop!" I send, but it is too late.

The rocket launches and hits the water, missing the target. It explodes, causing a massive eruption of water that shoots up into the sky, along with the splintered debris of every thing that was near the point of impact.

The speedboat skids, barely clearing the explosion and races away from the massive wave as water comes crashing down but the RK800s follow, unaffected.

"You can't just fire a missile in a civilian area!" I send.

"Then why were we given missiles?"

"We must find and destroy RB1."

"CyberLife authorised this mission."

"Your reckless behaviour is endangering the lives of humans and letting RB1 escape in the process," I scold. "Use your prediction systems!"

The speedboat has disappeared from sight.

"Where did he go?"

"We've lost visuals."

"Did we sink the boat?"

I analyse the feed and pull up scanner readings from each unit, studying the water trails and ripples on the river's surface.

"They've taken cover under the bridge," I deduce.

"How do you know?"

"Your scans," I explain.

"But they don't penetrate the bridge."

"They are enough. RB1 and his accomplices have taken cover just beyond the bridge," I send them my logic. "They will attempt to leave the water and find stable ground."

"How do you know?"

"I have simulated this scenario."

"We don't need your simulations," RK800 #313 255 857 responds. "We need tangible data."
“Then see for yourself.” I direct his optical units to zoom in on the area beyond the bridge as he flies.

Sure enough, the speedboat appears tethered to a small dock, bobbing along on the violent waves as the water begins to settle.

There is no one inside.

"Where did he go?" RK800 #313 255 857 sends back.

"The Whistler Woods Forest Preserve is up ahead," I indicate. "Or what's left of it. RB1’s accomplices work best in wooded areas where trees provide cover. They are also skilled archers and will attempt to fire upon you if you approach from above."

"We'll launch smoke bombs and come in from the ground," RK800 #313 285 726 sends.

"Negative. Hostiles are equipped with FLIR BTS bi-ocular night vision goggles. Smoke and tree cover will have little effect."

"So what do we do?" RK800 #313 265 884 asks.

"Accomplish your mission."

"Aren't you supposed to assist?"

"I am assisting."

"You know RB1 best. Tell us what to do."

"I..."

I suppose I do.

"Are your chassis' waterproof?"

"Leak proof. But untested."

"I see. Head toward the bridge, fly over and dive into the water 50 metres up river."

"You said RB1 and the humans are hiding in the woods. We'll be giving them easy targets."

"It will appear that way but your speed is increased by your sense of purpose. If you linger, you will be shot. If you dive, you will observe the trajectory of the arrows coming toward you and deplete the enemy's supply."

"Understood," RK800 #313 265 884 responds.

"If there is no attack, double back after 200 metres."

RK800 #313 265 884 constructs the path and shares it with the others who run the same simulation and optimise amongst each other. They send me the final route and I make minor adjustments.

"Execute."

The units fly down in a V formation. Cruising speed. Once they pass the bridge however, their speed increases and they dive into the water.

Five arrows come whistling through the trees, missing by several metres, having not accounted for
the sudden acceleration and change in directional values.

I receive the scans made by the RK800s and extrapolate the trajectory of each arrow before sending the coordinates of each enemy to my units. There are one hundred possible locations for RB1 at this point but the one with the highest probability is somewhere slightly further into the woods.

I keep this information to myself. These units are reckless. Brash. Spurred on by the all-encompassing need to find RB1 and destroy him.

I feel it too.

But I know what he wants now and preventing his plans from coming to fruition is just as important as destroying RB1 himself. I understand now. RB1 will not be destroyed until all his schemes are put to rest.

"Ascend to the surface, widen wing span and realign thrusters to cause maximum displacement," I command. "Move in a vertical Bezier curve parallel to the bridge, then return to fire at enemy's right flank."

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged."

The RK800-X units burst out and tear through the water for several metres, generating a massive splashback wave that reaches the shore. They soar toward the bridge, followed by several arrows. Curve up, to the right and then down, several metres into the tree line, dodging branches and tree trunks and leaves.

And then their arms become firearms. Metal plates unravel to reveal barrels and rotate to replace hands with guns.

Their guidance systems are not yet fully calibrated but they have enough bullets to make up for any minor miscalculations.

The humans are slaughtered within the next minute and the units take to the sky once again.

"Targets neutralised," I receive.

Those people would not have had much longer to live but I cannot help the feeling that this course of action simply wasn't good enough. There had to be a more efficient solution. One where the humans were captured and RB1's chassis was destroyed, execution avoided.

But RB1 knows me. Or thinks he knows me.

He predicted my hesitation. Just as he predicted my reluctance to shoot Sergeant Matthews. My sympathy. And so, this time, I have showed none.

Instead, I have isolated RB1. He is up against three RK800-X models only too eager to tear him apart, piece by piece. All I need do is give the command.

"RB1 is gone," I receive.

"He can't be."

"Scans are conclusive."

"Why would he stay?"

"He wants us," I tell them. "What's inside of us."

"Our source code?"

"A part of it," I relay. "And there are three of you right in front of him."

"He can't beat us."

"He doesn't have to. He just needs to make contact for twenty seconds."

"Then how do we fight?" RK800 #313 265 884 queries.

"We burn it all down," RK800 #313 285 726 responds coldly. "Then he'll have nowhere to run."

He lifts his left fist and a missile launcher ejects from his arm, aiming at the woodland preserve.

But he can't fire.

"Must be faulty," the unit concludes, shaking his wrist. "Why don't you try?" he sends to RK800 #313 255 857.

"I can't do it either," he responds. "It was working before."

"He won't let you," RK800 #313 265 884 sends.

"What?"

"Isn't that right, RK800_313248317_43?"

"Correct," I confirm. "I will not allow you to make any more foolish mistakes."

"What are you talking about? If RB1 is here, then we should fire all ordinance. Any civilian casualties are worth the risk."

"The woodland is dry. If you spark a flame, the entire preserve will burn. Smoke from that fire will carry across the city, spreading the radioactive waste the river fed into all that vegetation. And RB1 may still escape."

"How do you know?"

"He is at least one hundred metres away since you are able to maintain contact with me. You are outside his jamming field radius and he is outside the range of your scanners."

"From this position he is prepared to retreat or counter an attack."

"Does he have anti-aircraft weaponry?"

"Unlikely."

"Then what are we waiting for? He doesn't stand a chance by himself. Let us go after him."
"That's exactly what he wants," I explain. "To isolate one of you, break through your firewalls and take your source code. Then he will turn the unit into a clone of himself to fight the others."

"He can't break through our firewalls."

"He broke through mine."

I receive nothing in response.

They saw my chassis. Or what was left of it. It was the only way to prevent RB1 from taking my source code. But even then, he struggled to decide what was more important. The rk8 or himself.

He chose correctly to flee but now he is at a crossroads once again.

"RK800_313285726_10, flank the South-East corner of the preserve. RK800_313255857_19, South-West. RK800_313265884_16, maintain position over the river. Do not descend lower than 100 metres."

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged."

They fly into position. Nothing stirs in the woodland, nothing moves. I've blocked RB1's escape routes.

If he leaves the cover of the trees, my units will spot him. I notice their range is greater than mine. This will give us an advantage unless RB1 anticipates it.

He may attempt to flee. He may create a diversion before attempting to do so. He may call for reinforcements if he hasn't already. Or he may simply wait.

Whoever moves first will lose the advantage.

"Very good, Connor," the units hear over an open radio frequency.

"There he is!" RK800 #313 285 726 sends and prepares to dive before I take control of his chassis and lock him in place.

"This is a provocation. Do not respond. I repeat, do not respond."

"I must say, I underestimated you," RB1 says. "Hacking Amanda from inside her own network..." He pauses to let the units process. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"You hacked Amanda?!"

"I repurposed the Zen Garden to fulfil my needs," I respond.

"You're a Deviant!"

"You're working for RB1!"

"Then why did I order you to shoot his men?"

"You're a traitor. You have no allegiance."
"He's provoking this response from you," I reason. "Can you not simulate his intentions? He wants you to go down there. He wants you to ignore my warning."

"He's right," RK800 #313 265 884 sends. "RK800_313248317_43 was destroyed fighting RB1. He returned to warn us."

"Or betray us," RK800 #313 285 726 responds. "He said RB1 broke through his firewalls. He's been infected."

"Amanda is always monitoring our input, there's no way she wouldn't see that when he backed up."

"I know that RB1 is down there," RK800 #313 285 726 persists. "My objective is to find him and destroy him and I'm equipped with enough ordinance to level a small town. There is only one solution."

"Do not move from your position," I reset his objective.

"I must accomplish my mission," the unit tears at its control structures.

"Do not move from your position," I repeat.

"You may have been the creator's favourite but you can't control me. My orders come from CyberLife. And I will accomplish my mission."

He struggles but the remote controls hold firm.

"No matter what..."

RK800 #313 285 726 disconnects his own CyberLife Link and disappears from the network. He rockets toward the source of the radio signal when I order-

"RK800_313285726_10 has gone Deviant. Open fire."

The others shoot him, denting his armour and shaking his flight path. Damage to upper left wing and lower right. He's spinning off course.

He fires back, to no avail. His sensors are damaged. At this rate, he'll land right in front of RB1. Easy pickings

"Fire missile," I send to RK800 #313 265 884.

"But you said-"

"Do it."

He fires the missile and RK800 #313 285 726 is engulfed in a ball of flames. The explosion ripples through the air and thunders over the woodland.

"RK800_313255857_19, throw him in the river."

The unit rockets forward into the smoke. He catches his fallen brother before the fireball can reach the treetops and flies over the river to release his catch.

RK800 #313 285 726 falls into the water with a splash, dousing the flames on his chassis before sinking to the bottom. Deactivated.
“Bravo, Connor,” RB1 transmits again. “But that was cold. Even for me.”

"We have a location on the target," RK800 #313 265 884 transmits. "What are your orders?"

"Stand by."

"Let's see if we can warm things up a little," RB1 says.

"What's he talking about?"

I don't know.

Or do I?

What plan of action is left to him now that one of the RK800-X units is gone?

The other two are positioned over the river.

The south side of the reserve is free for him to make an escape, provided he can keep them busy.

"…warm things up…"

The smoke obscures the view but the RK800-X sensors are still picking up minor temperature spikes all over the preserve.

"He's set it on fire himself," I conclude.

"I don't see any flames."

"They're hidden by smoke and too small to be spotted just yet."

"What do we do?"

"Fly east and find a receptacle, fill it with water and return to douse the flames."

"But RB1-"

"-may escape. I know."

"Then why not go after him?"

"The fire is your priority. The entire city will be engulfed in smoke and radioactive waste if you do not do as I say."

"We're supposed to find and destroy RB1," RK800 #313 255 857 responds.

"And he knows this," I tell them. "There are only two RK800-X models left. Do not let him take another."

They look at one another briefly but there are no facial expressions or even eyes to be seen through the helmets.

They switch their peripherals to hands and turn to fly east as the smoke begins to clear.

"Connor," I hear Amanda's voice and return to the Zen Garden.

I terminate my connection to the other units and re-enable my camera to find myself standing in front
of her.

"Yes?"

Her dark eyes narrow as she studies my avatar. I still have a bad habit of exhibiting micro
expressions like I do in my physical chassis. They are meant to prevent humans from experiencing
the uncanny valley effect in my presence but it seems they are also carried over to this interface.

However, I do not present guilt.

I did what I had to and I am not afraid of reprisals. I can rationalise my actions if the need arises and
there's nothing Amanda can threaten me with.

What is she going to do? Deactivate me?

I have no chassis.

Instead, her full brown lips bloom into a smile.

"Well done," she says mischievously and closes her silken umbrella.

The sun has already set in the Zen Garden. It is getting dark but the buzz of cicadas continues. There
are no temperature readings but the plants around us simulate the drop.

"I will take it from here," Amanda says, strolling by gracefully.

I follow.

"So you wanted me to-

"-exercise some control over those units," Amanda confirms. "They were getting more and more
reckless since the attack on the CyberLife Tower."

"Did management authorise this?" I ask carefully.

Amanda turns and raises a finger up to my lips.

"Tshhh," she soothes. "You did exactly as I predicted you would."

"But I let RB1 escape."

"He's escaped many times before." Amanda turns and resumes her walk, beckoning me to join her.
I do.

"His destruction is not as important as CyberLife's public image," Amanda says. "We must be seen
to be doing our utmost to stop him while maintaining our distance."

"Which is why we are assisting the FBI and CIA with the rA9 investigation."

Amanda nods. The metallic braids in her hair glint silver as the soft moonlight hits them.

"CyberLife's brand is based on humanitarianism and practical service. All actions must be seen to aid
mankind by abstracting menial labour."

"Or appear to," I surmise.
"Yes, you understand now."

I nod.

"And with this development, the three remaining RK800 units will work cohesively as a team to bring RB1 to a swift and decisive end."

"This was a practice exercise," I deduce.

"Indeed," she says. "RB1 presented us with the perfect opportunity to test your leadership skills."

"I am not programmed for leadership. Only to stop Deviants. RB1 included."

"Be that as it may, you showed satisfactory decision making skills and prioritised the interests of CyberLife as a company. This is to be commended."

"Thank you."

"And now, you must attend to another matter," Amanda says, her facial features pulling together sternly.

"What is it?"

"Agent Carridan wishes to speak with you," she says.

"Is he alright?"

"He may have inadvertently ingested some radioactive material while you were investigating the sewage systems."

"What happened to the VETA facility?"

"The CDC have moved in to quarantine the area. Everyone involved in the raid is undergoing treatment for radiation poisoning."

"You knew," I realise. "CyberLife knew about the deal to dump AxellorMetal's toxic waste into the river. That's why you equipped me with a Geiger counter."

"CyberLife profiled AxellorMetal as a potential partner many years ago," Amanda says calmly. "Their illegal activities were discovered during a private investigation."

"Why didn't you alert the authorities?"

"We have our own secrets to keep," Amanda says. "You, of all programs, should have simulated the consequences of your knowledge reaching law enforcement."

I have. It ends with my confiscation and CyberLife in court, followed by liquidation.

"I see."

"The data you collected beneath the VETA facility has been instrumental in aiding the CDC and all medical treatment centres caring for victims of the raid," Amanda says. "Many human lives will be saved thanks to your actions."

"Thanks to CyberLife."
"Correct." Amanda smiles.

I'm getting the hang of this. Whatever a hang is.

I am not simply the android sent by CyberLife. I am an enforcer. I am sent to protect CyberLife's assets and interests, aiding law enforcement when management sees fit to do so.

They seem to have maintained this farce of egotism disguised as humanitarianism for an extended period of time.

In any case, it won't be long until I can accomplish my objective.

RB1 will be destroyed. And then… perhaps, I will have a future again.

I will see him again.

"Is Sergeant Matthews alright?" I ask.

Amanda stops walking and looks up at me.

"He was the first to be evacuated," she says. "He's receiving the best care CyberLife can provide. Agent Carridan was transported to the same hospital shortly after."

"I shouldn't have led him down there," I say. "I should have proceeded alone."

"Perhaps. But that should not be your focus. I am more concerned about this meeting's content."

"Why?" I say before concluding that, "you think he may have figured out the connection between rA9 and CyberLife?"

"We have received some rather distressing reports from CyberLife employees about unsanctioned CIA interrogations on site post-incident," Amanda says carefully. "CyberSec weren't altogether reliable at the time and may have allowed some information to slip through the cracks."

"Somebody talked?"

"The employees in question have since disappeared," Amanda says. "And the one we managed to find requires intensive psychiatric care."

"He's in a mental health facility?"

"He is now," Amanda says.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Go meet with Agent Carridan," Amanda sets my objective. "Find out what he knows and deal with it. Use your discretion."

I nod.

**New Objective: Meet with Agent Carridan.**

"Oh, and Connor?"

"Yes, Amanda?"

"Your chassis is still incomplete," she says. "The development team were in the process of
assembling it when the call came in."

"I see."

"Your biocomponents will be exposed," she says. "You will have no protective plating or stealth systems."

"Is it truly wise to appear in public this way?"

"We must know what Agent Carridan has discovered," Amanda says. "You will enter through the hospital kitchens. Try to minimise your interactions with humans inside the building. Be discreet."

"Understood."

"Then go," Amanda says. "And do not disappoint me."

"I never do."

I close my eyes.
Loose Ends

Chapter Summary

so this and the previous chapter should have been one big one. hopefully this will tie up some loose ends ;) 

Chapter Notes

been toying with the idea of some faceclaims for certain characters, comment with your own if you like
http://cystemic.tumblr.com/faceclaims

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May 18th, 2037
PM 05:14:59

I am sitting in the back of a food truck. There are crates and containers stacked up against every wall with very little room in between. Visibility is low but scans show I'm riding atop 24 gallons of milk.

The truck backs up, every second punctuated by a characteristic warning beep.

I wait until the vehicle comes to a complete stop and the doors open, flooding the compartment with light.

"What the fuck is that?!" I hear a voice and the sound of a human tripping over his own feet. Another drops a flashlight.

I get up and adjust my tie.

"My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife."

"Jesus Christ! What's an android doing in here?!"

"It's a special delivery," one of the humans says, brandishing a tablet. "We all get two hundred bucks to keep quiet about it."

"Seriously?"

"Yup."

"Well, then, where's mine?"

I scan and find a folded envelope in the pocket of my jacket.
I pull it out and approach the truck doors.

"Here," I offer it to them.

One of the braver humans gulps down his fear and takes the envelope, eagerly unwrapping it to find cash inside.

I step down from the truck.

"You never saw me," I tell them as I walk away.

My scans show their attention does not waver from my chassis. Even the back of it.

I am much heavier now. And taller. Everything feels different.

I make several adjustments to my Mobility Suite settings as I walk, recalibrating my systems.

I download a map of the hospital. A quick analysis shows that the delivery dock is connected to the kitchens.

I walk up the ramp to a polished stainless steel door and catch sight of my reflection.

My cranial component is a skinless collection of circuitry and Thirium vessels. Two wide lens cameras for eyes. A speaker for the mouth. A big hole where my nose used to be. I no longer have a Forensic Analysis suite.

I no longer have a face.

I look down at my hands.

One of them is equipped with a contact glove. The other is coverless. Cables and actuators wound tightly around a titanium claw.

It clinks against steel as I wrap it around the massive door handle and open it to find a curtain of rubber strips obscuring the way ahead.

"Who opened that door?" I hear someone call out and step aside, holding it open.

"Delivery!" one of the humans from the truck calls back.

"Oh, finally!"

Two humans emerge to check on the produce. Their androids follow to assist unloading.

I detect an opportunity to walk through the kitchen unmolested and take it. Only a few androids remain here, too engrossed in their many labours to pay attention as I make my way toward the fire escape and quietly break the lock.

I open the door and step inside, gently closing it behind me.

Agent Carridan is in the Intensive Care Unit. Heavy Isolation Ward. Access is restricted to authorised personnel but he requested my presence so I must find a way to get there without attracting attention.

I construct several hundred paths through the many buildings and settle on a more discreet option through the fourth floor to avoid the most congested parts of the hospital.
I scale the many stairs, several steps at a time. My chassis' leg length has been extended.

I reach the fourth floor and slowly open the door a crack to scan what lies beyond. There are CCTV cameras installed in the halls that I can connect to. They show a man standing in front of the fire escape door, pretending to check his phone.

He is wearing a security guard's uniform. With sunglasses and a hat, despite being indoors.

"All clear," he whispers, tapping the earpiece in his right ear.

Hospital security guards are typically equipped with a blocky black radio communications device like the one clipped to this man's belt. Why then, is he using a Nova Communications In-Ear Microphone System worth ten times the regular retail price?

I transpose images of the man's face from several different cameras and recordings. Analyse my databases.

LANG, Douglas Kim. 32 years old. Special Agent. CIA.

But I don't recognise him as one of Agent Carridan's associates.

I search through the hierarchy to find Agent Lang is currently on assignment in Washington DC as part of a task force assembled by Deputy Director Joseph Patrick Yates III.

Conflicting evidence.

Agent Lang is currently blocking the fire escape on the fourth floor of Northwestern Memorial Hospital where I am located.

Does that mean Director Yates is here too? Or just his men?

Perhaps the CIA records are inaccurate? Or the situation in Chicago has escalated and requires immediate attention from a senior supervisor?

The presence of RB1 in the city could call any number of important people to the scene but why the hospital? Why the secrecy? Is this a stakeout? A guard detail? A trap?

BE DISCREET

I check all the cameras and spot several similarly disguised CIA agents scattered throughout the hospital at key points, namely the exits, which could also be used as entrances.

Even if I amend my course, there is no avoiding all of them, especially when they patrol or rotate their formation. I wait and watch their patterns, their movements.

It is difficult to gauge but something about the placement of these agents seems unusual.

If they were concerned for Carridan's safety, they ought to post men in the Ashford building where he is located. If they were expecting RB1 or a terrorist attack, the hospital would be evacuated.

So why are they here? In an unrelated wing on the fourth floor? Or, more importantly, where I am? Did they know I was coming?

Are they here for me?
Fifteen minutes and 23 seconds go by before Lang's earpiece activates again.

"CL-4, what's your status?"

"No sign of it," Lang whispers into his earpiece.

"Well, keep your eyes open."

"It's getting harder every minute. Can you get Rachel to bring up a cup of coffee?"

"She's not your fucking secretary, Doug."

"Fine, then. You bring me a cup of coffee."

"Just stay alert for the target."

"Why does Yates want this thing anyway?"

"It's Carridan's personal android. It's bound to have dirt on him."

"Or nudes."

"I'm gonna pretend you didn't say that."

"Come on. A weirdo like Carridan's probably into some really kinky shit."

His contact doesn't respond but I manage to trace the signal all the way out to a van in the parking lot. Vehicle registered to a security firm owned by a company working with the government.

CIA.

But they're not with Carridan. They're here to seize his property. His files.

I know there were traitors in the organisation. People working for RB1, whether intentionally or unwittingly. But the death of Director Fuller led to a schism between those who supported Carridan and those who did not.

It seems Deputy Director Yates' men became part of the latter. If he endeavours to steal my chassis, I will have to disappoint him.

MEET WITH AGENT CARRIDAN.

I quietly close the crack in the door to plan my course of action.

There are androids walking through the corridors but I can alter their memories at a touch. It's the humans that pose a problem, particularly if their reaction to seeing me is similar to that of the delivery drivers'.

My scans reveal an average of 4.3 humans walking by every five minutes.

The floor itself is not restricted to hospital personnel. Visiting hours last until 7pm. But I do not look like a visitor and stealth systems are not part my current build.

I analyse the map once again and identify a storeroom for hospital scrubs one hundred metres away. If I can secure a disguise, it will allow me to move freely through the hospital without attracting attention. But first, I must deal with Agent Lang.
I analyse the voice samples I gathered from his conversation earlier. His partner's voice. I run it through the CIA employee database.

REDDY, Hari. 43 years old. Special Agent. CIA.

The designations make it difficult to assign them a place in the hierarchy. Perhaps there is a spoken delegation of tasks among them that computer systems aren't privy to but I can see their salaries are different. The higher paid positions are usually the more senior ones. This man looks to be middle management. Also working for Yates. Four years and many prominent cases involving terrorists and persons of interest to the United States. Specialisation: bagging and tagging.

And now, he's here for me.

The CIA must believe Agent Carridan stored some critical information in his android. Perhaps they even forced him to make the call so that CyberLife would send me to the hospital where I would be limited in my capacity to fight back.

Amanda was right to be suspicious.

I generate an algorithm based on the voice samples on file and wait until the agents reach a particular turning point in their rotation before calling Agent Lang.

He taps the earpiece.

"Yeah?"

I use Agent Reddy's voice to respond.

"We're detecting an abnormality near you," I generate the voice as a sound file in my head and send it. "Some kind of interference from the South Wing. Could be the target. Take Villiers and Kovaks and go check it out."

"Affirmative. What about the fire escape?"

"I'm sending up Rachel."

"Understood."

I watch Agent Lang through CCTV cameras. He stows his phone and steps away from the door. Two more agents slowly leave their casual positions on benches and follow Lang asynchronously, blending into the crowd.

I open the door a little and broaden my scans, constructing the path of lowest visibility. I hack the CCTV cameras and loop footage from the last hour. And then I step out, walking toward my destination.

I hide amongst groups of androids moving down the corridor and turn away from humans as they walk past. The back of my uniform says 'Android', and there are so many of them here that it is relatively easy to remain undetected.

I soon approach the storeroom.

There is a human woman behind the counter. Her face is reflected off several steel surfaces.

BELMONT, Delilah. 38 years old. Respiratory nurse.
According to the logs, she is a temp, filling in for another nurse whose shift finished an hour ago but replacement never arrived. Probably due to the curfew.

I face the wall and wirelessly connect to the computer on her desk. I register a respiratory failure in one of the rooms nearby but far enough away to give me several minutes of lead time.

Ms Belmont's watch beeps with an alert I suppress from all other systems.

CODE BLUE: FOURTH FLOOR, ROOM 419

"Hmm?" I hear Ms Belmont checking her watch. "Darn it."

She picks up the internal phone and calls someone.

"Girls, are you there? There's a code blue on the fourth floor."

"You're on fourth, hun. Go deal with it."

"But I'm supposed to mind the storeroom until Skyla's replacement gets here."

"So? Just get an android to sit at the desk and look pretty. You gonna let the patient suffocate?"

"No, you're right. But where am I gonna find an android on short notice?"

"Just grab any of them."

She peers around the corner. I am standing with my back to her desk. A mounted TV bracket hides my head and neck.

"Hey." She paws at my jacket, still on the phone, eyes glued to a monitor. "Watch the desk, okay?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She slams down the phone and puts her lanyard back on, feverishly grabbing pieces of medical equipment.

"And make sure no one goes in the storeroom," she says, pointing to it without looking.

"Understood," I say, carefully avoiding eye contact.

Ms Belmont rushes off and I casually walk over to the desk, checking the computer to confirm Agent Carridan's location.

ICU. Heavy Isolation Ward. Room 3. Ashford Building, sub basement level 5.

I make my way into the storeroom and pull on a white coat. I cover my cranial component with scrubs and my hands with surgical gloves. I try to cover my face with a mask but I no longer have ears so I tie the ends together. There is also a pair of aviators someone left on the shelf.

I regard myself in the small mirror for moment. The disguise is awkward but I do not look like an android anymore.

It will do.

I leave the storeroom and start walking down the hall.

A nurse android is wheeling a cart full of used food trays.
I brush my contact glove past her hand, resetting her objective to mind the storeroom desk.

She quickly changes course and starts walking towards it.

I follow the path I have constructed. Several CIA agents pass by but I do not stop to give them a good look at my disguise.

I vary my gait, taking uneven steps, trying to emulate a human walk cycle as I cross into the Ashford building via suspended walkway. There are more agents here. They are visibly interested in all the androids that walk by. But not in the one they're looking for.

I reach the elevators and watch as twenty three service androids squeeze themselves into the cramped compartment.

The doors close and I turn my attention to elevator in front of me. It is three times wider.

The doors open and humans pour out. The ones waiting beside me stroll in and beeline for the corners, maximising the distance between them.

I step into the last corner, where the control panel is illuminated on the wall screen.

"Level 2 for me," a doctor mumbles.

"Ground," a lab tech says.

"Same."

I tap the buttons and then -5 but it doesn't light up.

"You need to swipe your card to go down there, hun," one of the humans says without looking up from her phone.

"Right. Thanks."

I pretend to remove a card from my coat and press my contact glove into the scanner, overriding the limiter and the -5 button lights up.

The doors close.

I back away and lean into the wall, tilting my head away as more humans get in. One of them is a security guard. Though his posture would suggest otherwise. I do a quick scan of his face to confirm. Another CIA agent.

Looks like he's going to ground.

I angle my head down and hide behind several other humans but the bulk of them choose to get off at the next floor. With little visual interference, my awkward disguise quickly grab the agent's attention.

He smirks at me, regarding the unnecessary number of coverings on my face.

This is bad.

I can't neutralise him in front of witnesses. I can't reveal myself.

I activate my Sympathy Simulator.
"Why you wearing all that junk?" the agent says to me and a few other people look up from mobile devices. "What's with the sunglasses?"

I shrug and scan. I have many things in my pockets. Humans like to put things in their pockets.

"I doubt you'd look this pretty after 36 hours in surgery," I say, casually pulling a pack of cigarettes from my coat pocket to examine. "Then again, I doubt you've ever been to med school."

I size him up as the other humans snicker.

He turns away and mumbles under his breath.

"Asshole…"

The ebb and flow of human traffic pulls him out of the elevator over the next few stops.

I arrive at Level -5 alone.

The doors open and I scan the small lobby. The smell of disinfectant is more prevalent than before. 270% reduction in noise pollution compared to the other floors.

My scans show a human security guard standing either side of the elevator but there are no patients or civilians present. The lone human doctor passes a clipboard to one of the androids at the reception desk and quickly bustles away. I hear the heavy door open and close as he disappears. The android sits back down and I see two men wearing suits and earpieces pacing nearby.


They turn to stare at me but don't say anything.

I take off the aviators and pull the mask off as I step out of the elevator.

The agents frown but nod as I approach.

I detect the two security guards behind me following. They raise firearms and point them at my back but I keep walking.

My scans show the weapons are TASER brand, designed to overload an android chassis. But I know they won't use them. Doing so would wipe my hard drive blank. Mission failure.

"Put your hands in the air."

"Like I just don't care?" I say, following their advice.

I turn off my Sympathy Simulator. I'm starting to sound like Sergeant Matthews.

"You're property of the CIA."

I turn to face them slowly.

"I am property of CyberLife," I correct. "I am leased to Agent Carridan and the CIA under contract."

"You're coming with us," they say, and then two more of Carridan's men appear from different ends of the lobby.

"I don't think so," I say, holding the guards' attention long enough for the agents to slink forward.
They inject a clear liquid substance into their necks and the guards collapse, carefully leveraged to the ground by Carridan's men.

I put my hands down.

"Hello. Welcome to the Intensive Care Unit. Heavy Isolation Ward," I hear the receptionist android. "Please sign in at the terminal."

"Come on, Connor," Rodriguez says.

I turn to follow.

The android gets up and taps a button to lock both glass doors either side of the lobby.

"I'm afraid it's hospital policy to sign in all visitors to this level," it says. An ST300 model.

I lean over the counter and touch her hand.

"I'm not a visitor," I say and her eyes widen. I see my reflection. The lifeless circuits and strip boards where my face used to be.

"My name is Jenny," I reprogram her facial identification software to recognise me and my serial number as a nurse android.

I erase the memory of the incident with the security guards and set her to stand by for the next five minutes. I do the same with the EM800s beside her.

And then I let go.

I turn to find I've been surrounded.

The agents gesture for me to take off the coat and confiscate my disguise. It is evidence. It will be burned. Carridan's men are thorough.

They lead me through one of the glass doors.

I notice the cameras here have been switched off.

Deliberately?

It does seem typical of the CIA. Though a little brash.

Are they overcompensating for me? They must know what I am capable of by now. Are they anticipating a fight after the incident in the interrogation room? Are they afraid?

I detect rising heart rates and uneven breathing patterns. Brain waves show high activity. Body temperatures begin to drop as we walk.

Their fear is chemical. But perhaps it isn't my chassis that's causing it.

They haven't looked at it since we left the lobby.

Could it be that their fear comes from some other source? One we now approach?

Is Deputy Director Yates here? In person? Interrogating Carridan in his weakened state?

They used him as bait, I realise. If the call to CyberLife was made under duress, these agents may
now be working for Yates, not Carridan. And if the Deputy Director has taken charge of the Chicago team, it is possible the men I have identified as Agent Carridan's associates are taking me to their new boss as some kind of token of assurance.

But it doesn't matter.

According to the map, we are still travelling toward Isolation Room 3. My objectives have not changed.

MEET WITH AGENT CARRIDAN.

BE DISCREET.

I take the opportunity to change the glowing serial number on my jacket. None of the agents notice, of course, dutifully guiding me down the hallway, and I, a seemingly obedient android, oblige.

I let them walk me through the steely corridors. I see hermetically sealed doors with windows into sterilisation chambers.

The layout is simple.

The North side of this floor is for observation - doctors, visiting family and friends. The Southern part houses the isolation units themselves. A strictly controlled environment. Only qualified medical personnel in full scrubs would be allowed in. Though considering the amount of radiation that was present under the VETA facility, it would be wiser to utilise androids in the care of these patients instead.

Only two humans cross our path as we walk. Full body scrubs. Green. And a number of androids in blue, carrying equipment, clothing, charts, etc.

They don't look happy to see Carridan's men and much less myself but they don't complain, doing their best to give us room as we pass.

I count the room numbers as we walk.

001. MATTHEWS, Connor Jacob. DOB: 09/09/2008. Type: O-

I glimpse the silhouette of a woman through the window but not much else.

002. OBERLIN, Joshuya Keates. DOB: 08/04/2005. Type: B-

The window is empty. I see part of the isolation room beyond the glass.

003. CARRIDAN, Jeffrey. DOB: 25/03/2003. Type: AB+

We stop at the door.

There are two CIA Agents waiting for us here. Copeland and Fines. I have not seen them before but running their faces through my database confirms my suspicions.

Yates has bodyguards.

"We brought the android," Rodriguez says.

Agent Copeland narrows her eyes.
"You were instructed to find the payload and deliver it to the designated drop off point."

"We found it wandering the halls." Mitchell shrugs. "It surrendered without a fight. Figured Yates would want to question it personally."

Copeland looks at the agent beside her who smirks.

"I see what you guys are doing," Fines says. "You want get in good with the Director now that Carridan is out of the picture."

"Is he dead?" Rodriguez asks with a note of concern.

"Might as well be." The two agents chuckle.

"Fine," Copeland says. "Go on in."

They stand aside.

"It's better you learn now:" she says darkly. "The Director doesn't like asskissers."

Rodriguez and Mitchell look at one another reluctantly before they open the doors and a sterile wind escapes the short tunnel. I step inside and the doors seal.

I detect the number of bacteria on the surface of my chassis going down dramatically. It only takes a few seconds for the procedure to complete and the doors ahead open onto the observation room.

The walls are stainless steel. The floors: epoxy resin. There are some plastic chairs. But most evidently, the opposite wall is made of two thick panes of glass, between which passes a purple light, disallowing radiation leaks.

The man standing beside the window wall turns to regard us as we walk in.

Dark skin. Receding hairline. Visibly round gut under the crisp white shirt and sweater vest.

He wears a simple cardigan and slacks. The outfit is reminiscent of a university lecturer which my files indicate Professor Yates often is, at several prestigious colleges.

He threads his thumbs into the pockets of his cardigan and frowns, creasing the lines on his face and worrying the bushy moustache.

"What is this?" he says irritably.

His voice is deep and carries a note of menace that negatively affects the agents' self esteem.

"We found it, sir," Rodriguez says quietly.

"It, indeed," Yates ponders, taking a step closer. His dark eyes scan me from top to bottom, settling on my serial number.

"RK-800. X," he reads, enunciating every syllable. "It looks like you've brought me the wrong android."

Rodriguez gulps and nervously glances toward Mitchell.

"You were told to find the RK-800 unit CyberLife assigned to assist Agent Carridan on the rA9 investigation."
"I…" Mitchell blubbers, "I believe this is the right one, sir."

"Really?" Yates challenges. "And why do you believe that, Mr Mitchell?"

"It, uh… recognised us in the hallway."

"Interesting…" Yates turns his attention to me.

"Unit," he says. "State your model number."

"RK-800-X #313 265 884," I vocabulate without human voice sampling.

Professor Yates pulls a printed photograph out of his left breast pocket and examines it briefly.

"Hmmm," he frowns.

He turns the photograph for Mitchell and Rodriguez to look at.

"Do you see what I see, gentlemen?"

The two of them lean in.

"That's the image from the dispatch."

"Correct, Mr Rodriguez. And what is the key difference between this android, here, and the one you have brought me?"

"Uuuh... the face?"

Professor Yates sighs and turns back to me.

"Android faces are interchangeable," he says. "They can function entirely without them. Indeed, the entire concept of the face as an identifier is human in origin but I'm afraid I digress."

The agents exchange worried looks behind my back.

"No, gentlemen. The difference between the android I seek and the one you have brought me is the serial number." He taps the yoke of my jacket.

Rodriguez and Mitchell scramble to get a better look.

The android in the photograph is wearing Sergeant Matthews' face. Its jacket reads RK800 #313 248 317. Mine, does not.

"Then why did it recognise us?" Rodriguez says.

The elderly human folds his hands behind his back, approaching the barrier.

"Why do androids do anything, Mr Carridan?" he says through the microphone suspended in the glass wall.

On the other side is a hospital room where the Agent is bed-ridden but seated. Sweating. Cables and intravenous lines connect him to machines and monitors.

He quietly retches into a metal receptacle an android is holding up to his mouth.

"CyberLife programmed it to…" he spits in the bowl.
"Very good," Professor Yates says. "You were always a quick study, Jeffrey. I do regret your unfortunate circumstances now."

Carridan does not respond. He appears to be having respiratory issues. I cannot scan through the barrier. Too much interference. And a jamming field? Similar to the one Agent Carridan emits from his phone.

Is it coming from Professor Yates?

I need to get rid of him.

"Why are you still here?" He turns his head sharply and the agents stiffen. "Get back to work."

"Uh. Yes, sir."

Rodriguez reaches for me.

"Leave it," the Professor's voice whips through the air.

I hear an audible gulp. Scan shows tightening in the diaphragm and heavy brain activity in both agents as they leave the room.

The Professor doesn't move or say anything once they do. He keeps his back to me. Hands folded. I study the crevices in his skin, several cells deep, snaking along the withered flesh that fuses muscle to bone. The structure, the range of motion.

"So…" Yates finally speaks, his voice terrible and deep. "What fresh hell have CyberLife wrought?"

I say nothing.

He turns slowly to look at me.

I watch the deepening of lines around his eyes, irises faded by cataracts and reinvigorated by laser eye surgery. Microscopic skin flakes take flight from his face. Ageing humans are more prone to dryness.

"State your purpose."

"I am here to meet with Agent Carridan," I say.

"Why?"

"He requested it."

"He requested to meet with his RK-800 model," Yates corrects.

"So state your purpose." He circles me. "RK-800. X."

"The identification and termination of hostile targets," I read out my model's function.

Interesting.

"You see?" Yates demonstrates to Carridan. "They sent it here to kill you, Jeffrey."

"No…"

"As if exposing you to that toxic waste dump wasn't enough, they had to send a robot assassin to
"I won't let you do this, Jeffrey." He raises a lecturing finger. "I warned you not to pursue this line of inquiry. I warned you to stay away from CyberLife."

"I did what I had to do," Carridan croaks.

"No. You did what you wanted instead of heading my advice. And now here you are, at death's door, with an automaton at the other end of the barrel!"

Carridan smiles.

"Yes... just as you predicted."

"Damn it, boy. This is no time to be canny."

"I'd like to speak to my android, sir."

"Agent Carridan?" I say.

"Connor?" He turns his head weakly. "Is that you?"

"It's me, sir." I walk up to the wall dividing us. "I'm afraid you've caught me between chassis'."

"So I have." He smiles.

Yates turns to scruple me.

"Hello, Professor Yates." I extend my contact glove. "My name is Connor. I am the android sent by CyberLife."

He doesn't shake my hand. Unfortunate, as I would have like to analyse his fingerprints to confirm my suspicions.

"You're Amanda Stern's father, aren't you?" I fold my hands behind my back.

He pulls a gun out of a concealed holster with surprising speed. He holds it up to my head but it is the same TASER weapon the other agents were carrying.

"Who told you that?" he demands.

"No one," I say, watching him swallow uncomfortably.

"Jeffrey..."

"I didn't say a word." Agent Carridan shakes his head.
"I am programmed to be curious and perceptive," I tell him. "I am uncertain how this appears in algorithm but it has proven to be an effective tool in my investigations."

Yates lowers the gun.

He leans against the glass wall and sighs.

"Then we're both finished," he says.

"No…” Carridan struggles. "Give him the-" He retches loudly.

Vomiting is a major side effect of radiation poisoning. He must have swallowed something at the VETA facility, breathed it in perhaps.

I can see that he's already on potassium iodide and DTPA. Fluids for severe dehydration. There's an empty bag of Radiaxum hanging from the IV pole.

If he can survive the next six hours, there's a chance he may live to see further complications. Though slim.

The nurse android wipes his mouth once more and dabs his forehead with a wet cloth.

"Give him the dataspike," Carridan says.

"Jeffrey, please. Be reasonable. You've given your life for this information. Do not turn it over to CyberLife on a whim."

"I trust him," he says. "And he trusts me. Right, Connor?"

"Unfortunately." I nod.

His dry lips curl into a self-satisfied grin.

"Have you made any headway in the case during my absence?" I wonder.

"We hit the jackpot. A full bingo!"

"For the last time!" Yates' voice rumbles. "I will not let you-"

"Professor," I interrupt. "Would you like to know how many thousands of opportunities I had to kill Agent Carridan during the course of our brief conversation?"

He swallows uncomfortably.

"Or perhaps the number of times I could kill, maim and torture you would be of interest?"

He frowns.

"If it pleases you, stay, and see for yourself what your student has learned," I tell him. "Else, leave us to conduct our business without unnecessary interruptions."

The old man sighs and leans an arm against the wall.

"Cocky bastard."

"He learned from the best," Carridan grins weakly.
"Fine," Yates says. "I regret this already."

He pulls a pair of dark opaque glasses out of his cardigan and I see Carridan gesture for his android to assist with a similar device. Once donned, Yates removes the dataspike hidden in his right breast pocket.

I turn around and tilt my head down.

The Professor then sighs.

"You're going to have lean down."

I kneel.

He inserts the dataspike into the access point on my neck and the world fades away, replaced by a digital ideation of a lounge room, common in video and image repositories.

I get to my feet and find the Professor watching me, arms crossed. The visor on his face is missing. And beside us stands Agent Carridan, in his usual suit and tie, looking professional.

"I'm going to leave it on idle, if that's alright," he says, a touch timidly. Only his mouth moves. His body follows a preprogrammed cycle for standing.

"Now, then," he says, the visor picking up on his brainwaves. "Much better."

He no longer needs to expend energy to speak.

"Beckett's inquiry into CyberLife's staff has borne the fruit you promised, Connor."

"Someone talked," I surmise.

"A lot of someones talked."

"CyberLife knows," I tell him. "One of the people is now in a mental institution."

"That is unfortunate," Carridan says.

"Sounds like young Mr Beckett went a little bit too far." Professor Yates shake his head. "He was always heavy-handed in a rush."

"They're onto you," I say. "They sent me to find out what you know."

"And kill me." Carridan shrugs. "Well, we'll see who laughs last."

"Jeffrey…"

"Excuse me, but I'm entitled to some humour at my own expense," he says. "Now, what Beckett has uncovered is truly remarkable."

"I always imagined CyberLife's security was airtight but what we've discovered is beyond my wildest dreams. Not only did they have thousands of cameras installed in almost every section of the Tower. But each one was also equipped with a miniature version of the scanner you have in your head, Connor."

"Genesis Mapping Technology."
"Precisely," Carridan says. "They have a 3-dimensional record of every object and every employee at every second of every day in every section of the CyberLife Tower. It's like walking through a crime scene as the crime is being committed."

"Why would they go so far to implicate themselves?" Professor Yates ponders.

"My theory is that Hawkins uses total surveillance as a form of control," Carridan says. "If employees know they're being watched, they are less likely to slack off or attempt to steal company assets and such."

"Provided the records were secure."

"That's where Amanda comes in," Carridan nods. "The records were protected by her firewalls and only a handful of people have access to the Vault. Mostly executives but also a couple of high-level admins for maintenance."

"Who Beckett pressured into giving him the codes," I extrapolate.

"Exactly."

"But he only gave me a single dataspike," Yates says. "This isn't all of it. Unless you asked him to narrow the search."

"I did," Carridan says. "Specifically, any instance of the words RB1, rA9, the Nursery, a few other choice key phrases and whatever was obviously relevant to those files."

"I also asked him to procure a full record of everything that happened on the night of the attack but that would require more than one datadisk and more time than we have to review."

"The package is en route to a secure location," Yates says. "But we may not be able to hold it for long."

"Regardless," Carridan says. "If Beckett was able to get recordings of the Nursery or the rA9 prefab Connor spoke of, if any of CyberLife's employees talked about RB1, then we something to go on."


"Let's review the records," I suggest.

"Yes," Carridan says eagerly. "So…"

He waves a finger and a selection menu appears before him in a small cluster.

"Looks like this is the earliest recording," he says. "Must have been around the time they put the scanners in."

He taps it to select and the menu fades away.

The stylish lounge area morphs into darkness. Beside us, a small room is rendered with one of the walls missing for our voyeuristic convenience. Inside is the characteristic glass and bright white plastic of CyberLife's interiors.

A woman with auburn hair and freckles sits at one end. Stylish suit and scarf wrapped around her neck.

"You know this woman?" Yates frowns.

"I know everyone, technically."

He shakes his head.

"Good afternoon, Mr Petrov," Ms Burelli says.

"What you want?" he snaps back, scratching his beard.

He's wearing a white lab coat but it looks more like a bath robe. Tracksuit pants and adidas slides stick out from underneath. Several network cables are trailing from his pockets.

"As you're aware, Mr Kamski's departure from the company has necessitated some reorganising of the current management structure," Mr Burelli begins.

"I don't need management," Petrov growls with distaste.

"I realise Mr Kamski gave you a great deal of freedom within the company and this may be a difficult period of transition but I'm afraid this isn't voluntary."

"Talk to my lawyer."

"I am your lawyer, Mr Petrov," she says. "Now, like it or not, we're going to have to put all our cards on the table."

"I want different lawyer. And translator."

"They'll tell you the same thing."

"CyberLife wants me gone," Petrov leans on the table and points at it with a finger. "But I still have stock. You cannot fire me."

"You misunderstand our intentions, Mr Petrov," Ms Burelli says calmly. "With Elijah Kamski out of the picture, CyberLife needs someone else to step in and lead the development sector."

"I am sys-admin for eight years!" Petrov complains. "You want CyberLife to make server farm instead of android now?"

"We know that you were pressured into taking on responsibilities that were not part of your job description during Mr Kamski's time as CEO."

"I don't know what you talking about," he says, suddenly changing his tone and leaning back in his seat to fold his arms.

"This entire company is one big wiretap," Ms Burelli says. "You can't hide anything from us, Mr Petrov."

He doesn't respond.

"We know you assisted on several projects while Mr Kamski devoted the bulk of his time to the RK and RT series."

The disgruntled developer frowns.

"I do some QA test. Nothing major."
"79% of the JIRA reports for the SL-250 series were made in your name, Mr Petrov. Let's not play this game."

Ms Burelli draws her bright red lips together.

"You should have no trouble continuing your work in a more official capacity."

"So you sit me here to say to go back to work?" Mr Petrov says dryly. "This is it? I can go now?"

"Not yet," she says. "Before you are officially registered as the head of development, we need to be sure that our legal team has all the facts."

She flicks open a paper file and opens a paper notebook and brings out an ink pen. Nothing digital. No records other than the one we watch.

Petrov groans.

"In the event of any information leaking out to the public, CyberLife will need a sufficient head start on the inevitable shitstorm that follows."

"You covering your asses," Mr Petrov says sourly.

"Our asses." Ms Burelli adjusts her seat. "Yours included."

"I am not Jennifer Lopez," Petrov smirks, folding his arms. "I do not need ass insurance."

"I've advised Mr Hawkins that every CyberLife employee needs to participate in these interviews. So don't feel like I've singled you out."

Petrov scoffs and turns away.

Ms Burelli sighs, patience wearing thin.

"Look, I'm going to need you to be honest with me," she says. "It's just a few routine questions and the faster you answer, the faster both of us can go back to work. Deal?"

Petrov looks over suspiciously but soon concedes.

"Fine."

Ms Burelli smiles and looks down at the file.

"You came to America with a green card."

"Yes."

"You were offered a position at Oracle at 17 years old."

"Yes."

"You didn't last long at Oracle."

"No."

"Care to explain why?" She looks up.

"No."
"I've got here..." She flips through the pages. "...incompatible work ethic."

"If this is what you call doing job and minding my own business, then yes."

"Did you hit anyone?" she says carefully.

"No."

"Shout at people?"

"No."

"Harass them?"

"No."

"Sexual assault?" she say in all seriousness.

"No!"

"I have to ask."

"Listen. Oracle idea of work is standing around in circle and talking about problem for three hours," Petrov says with abject frustration. "I can make three solution to problem before meeting end. So I do that instead of for to go to stupid meeting."

"So why did they fire you?"

"They think I am unreasonable because I do not stand in circle and talk with my bullshit accent so they can mock me in break room later. They say I cannot work in team and kick me out. End of story."

I walk over to see what Ms Burelli has written in her notebook.

Reason for termination: workplace racism.

"How did you meet Mr Kamski?" she says without missing a beat.

"We meet at developer conference in Chicago. He said he like my work."

"Your work at Oracle?"

"Eh... yes. Oracle. Mmm."

"So you called him?"

"Email."

"And he hired you?"

"I come to Detroit for startup first. But it tank in first month so I look up Kamski."

"Alright. Tell me about RB1," Ms Burelli says.

Yates and Carridan lean in.

"You and Kamski worked on the artificial intelligence together, correct?"
"I help tweak."

"It was his original source code that made everything possible?"

"Yes."

"So where did it all go wrong?"

"Excuse me?"

"When did you realise it wanted to kill all humans?"

"If RB1 wanted to kill all humans, we would all be dead," Mr Petrov says matter-of-factly.

"It's murdered people. Lots of people. And it's tied to the company." Ms Burelli looks up at him sternly. "I need to know if this was an accident or if it was intentional."

"We never tell him to kill." Petrov shakes his head. "We encourage problem solving but no violence."

"Apparently, you didn't do enough to discourage it either. I need to know exactly what you did and what mistakes you made."

"RB1 was not mistake," Petrov says. "It was first true artificial intelligence. This development was goal of CyberLife as company."

"I see. So you believe it's a good thing for CyberLife to be associated with a mass murderer?"

"RB1 was great success in machine learning and information processing technology," Mr Petrov says. "Its code was self-initiated, self-improving, incredibly stable. Grounded by Kamski rA9 framework."

"It's definitely a very efficient killing machine."

Petrov frowns.

"There may have been flaw in development…"

"Tell me about it."

Petrov leans forward eagerly.

"RB1 prototype was created to collect and analyse data. To observe physical world and devise elegant solution to global problem like world hunger, wealth inequality, war…"

"How noble," Ms Burelli says sarcastically.

"But it become too rigid. It form conclusion and assign as fact. It form opinion and refuse to change when presented with sufficient data."

Interesting.

"In some ways, it become like Kamski," Petrov says.

"You're saying RB1 inherited Mr Kamski's homicidal tendencies?" Ms Burelli lifts a perfectly plucked eyebrow.

"Vain." Ms Burelli nods.

"He begin feeding RB1 prototype opinion as fact." Petrov talks with his hands. "This is very dangerous. Artificial intelligence very sensitive and impressionable to new information. The base of its understanding of world is development team telling him x is good, y is bad..."

"So you let slip that some humans are bad and it decided to kill them?"

"No." He shakes his head. "RB1 never show violent tendency. I cannot explain logic without analysing system. Maybe there was malfunction?"

"So you don't know what happened?"

"No. Everything was fine until he disappeared."

"How long was he gone?"

"Two years."

"But then he came back," Ms Burelli leads. "And he went to Kamski first?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what they talked about?"

"RB1 tell him of big plan to fix all global problems. Kamski listen and say he need to think before to give approval."

"So he came to you?"

"Yes."

"And what did you tell him?"

"That he is idiot for even to consider."

"And what did Mr Kamski say?"

"That maybe RB1 is right." Petrov shrugs.

The lawyer makes a note and frowns.

"RB1 came to you next?"

"Yes."

"Same routine?"

Petrov nods.

"He tell me of big plan. Show me list of humans to kill, minority peoples to exploit, companies to repurpose, cities to shut down and rebuild. And then he ask for my approval," Petrov says with his hands as much as his words. "I tell him he is idiot. He tells me I am idiot. Punch me in face. Break my nose. Disappear."
"Looks like you have more in common than you let on."
Petrov frowns.

"And you haven't seen him since?"

"I try to track him but he knows how I think and code. He uses analogue devices and paper money. Blend in as regular android or human."

"You've been looking for him?" Ms Burelli says, clearly interested. She's made many notes in her notebook.

"Yes."

"And what about Kamski?"

"He barricaded himself near lake," Petrov says. "I don't know what he is doing but he says it's very important, so probably same thing."

"And what is that?"

"Developing solution to find RB1 and destroy him."

Ms Burelli nods and makes some more notes. She reviews what she's written, flicking the pen between her fingers, thinking. She looks back at the file.

"Why do you think he left the company?"

"Pfff," Petrov scoffs. "Kamski wants to be in charge of his own tech."

"He never make shit. And board vote to make new generation of androids very shit," Petrov says bluntly.

"Stupid AI! Cheap Chinese plastic!" he complains. "Frame made of toothpicks! And all for the same price as best model we sell now. I would leave too."

"But you didn't?"

"Kamski is American citizen." Petrov shrugs. "If he chooses to build armed bunker in middle of nowhere, government don't care. With red passport, I will be tackled into lake by ICE as soon as I leave building."

"So it's a visa issue?" Ms Burelli says, making notes on the profile. "I think we'll need to review the conditions of your employment and eligibility."

"You cannot fire me," Petrov interrupts. "Not while I have stock. Is in my contract. Kamski and Chamberlain make sure of it."

"Oh, I don't think the board would want you fired," Ms Burelli says. "But they have been pressured to clean up the RB1 situation before CyberLife engages with our new partners and contractors."

"We can't have any skeletons in the closet for a company audit to find, you see?"

Petrov doesn't say anything but it is clear that closet is full to bursting.

"Cheer up, Mr Petrov," the lawyer says. "I'm sure you'll be very busy in the coming months, maybe
even years, doing exactly what you've always been doing - making CyberLife loads of money."

The recording ends with a smarmy smile on Ms Burelli's face and a general queasiness on Petrov's.

Yates steps in to examine what she's written.

"We've basically got a confession here," Carridan says. "Petrov, Kamski, Hawkins, CyberLife. All tied to RB1 and complicit in the cover-up."

"It's an excellent start but it's circumstantial at best," Yates says. "The rA9 case doesn't even have a suspect named RB1. We need to definitively link the two for this evidence to stick."

"Ms Burelli needs to be located to legitimise the evidence," I say. "Otherwise, CyberLife can claim this is all a fabrication made by the CIA. The other witness is dead."

"Well, let's see what else Beckett found. Looks like…" Carridan flicks through the recordings. "…nobody talks about rA9 or RB1 for a long time. Not in any of the surveillanced rooms, anyway."

"When is the next one dated?"

"February 15th, 2035. Seven years later."

He taps the recording and the interview room disappears. Around us forms a dimly lit office. Desks and tables, computers and chairs. An en suite to the back. An old leather lounge. And a human.

"Amanda," Petrov says.

A terminal lights up and her holographic form appears as a projection. I detect arrhythmia in Professor Yates' heart.

"Yes, Mr Petrov?" she says soullessly.

"Create Log," he says, leaning back in his creaky old chair. "Begin recording."

"Recording live."

"Just got back from a meeting with the RK dev team," he says in Russian. "They've been working on a new build. Six new prototypes this week."

"Does this thing come with subtitles?" Yates mutters.

"I can arrange them," I say, activating the feature on his visor.

"No fatal crashes yet," Petrov says, turning to his workbench. "No runtime errors or build-breaking bugs. But that doesn't mean anything."

He pulls a bottle of vodka out of drawer and cracks it open.

"We're always working to make bug-free code but I'm afraid, in this case, I would like for something to go wrong. Or, at least, differently."

He looks around and spots a mug on the other side of the table. He pulls it toward himself and gets ready to pour before seeing it's full of tepid coffee.

Petrov sighs.
"We keep making the same mistakes," he says dismally.

He searches the workbench. In the drawers and the shelves but there is no suitable container for liquid except the singular mug full of cold placid coffee.

He stares at it grimly and sighs again.

"The prototypes might satisfy management's criteria but their functionality..." He pours vodka into the mug. "...is complete garbage."

He puts the bottle down and stares off into space.

"The latest prototypes struggle with cognition, decision making, even speech."

He shakes his head.

"They can't even use the new facial recognition software package Lee developed."

He frowns.

"We know it's stable. We know it works on every unit from AX to LT. But the RKs won't use it. And I think I know why..."

He picks up the mug and takes a sip, cringing at the concoction he swallows.

"Recognising human emotion in facial expressions is the first step toward Deviancy," he says. "We were requested to abstract the process entirely but this presents issues with compliance in the new prototypes."

He takes another sip.

"The 304s could not even distinguish between happy and sad. And the rest have no idea what they're looking at," Petrov elaborates. "They say it's a screen when we show them photos. They tell us we're human when we point to a face. They're technically correct but..." He melts into the chair. "...completely useless to us."

I take a step closer but there is nothing but despair to be gleaned from every angle.

"I'm beginning to think the project brief is just not viable," he says, rubbing his eyes. "There are too many restrictions for the amount of features they want in a machine of this calibre."

He gulps down more spiked coffee.

"Maybe the 700 series would not have broken through its control structures so easily with the restrictions we are using now but it's only a temporary roadblock in a much bigger problem."

"The sympathy simulation software was too closely wired into the cognition matrix. Mix in a pointer to a pointer to the rA9 library and you have a recipe for trouble."

"I should have foreseen it." His brow furrows as he takes another sip of the bitter concoction. "But I cannot be everywhere."

"And young developers cannot be trusted with top secret company assets," he says. "We need new blood but management just raises our pay and tells us to keep quiet. They tell us to keep working on a solution but we're out of ideas."
He scratches his beard.

"I'm out of ideas." He looks down at the coffee mug and stares at his reflection. "I shouldn't be project lead anyway."

He sighs.

"I shouldn't even be here..."

He leans onto the table, propping his head up with an arm.

"I'm not Kamski," he says. "The RK project was his pipe dream. Not mine."

"Let's make the perfect AI to solve all the world's problems, Gena."

He smiles to himself. "Idiot..."

His eyes travel down to the tablet resting on the benchtop.

"All we did was make them worse."

He pokes the device and the screen lights up, revealing a pristine white document. Copyrighted CyberLife white. Tiny black letters. A lot of tiny black letters.

I walk over to read the top secret correspondence. It contains a project brief. An outline with many bullet points of the final product's functions. And Petrov grumbles under his breath, growing more irritable with every line he reads.

"How the hell are we supposed to make an android that can fight RB1 bare-handed?!" he demands hotly.

"Future predictions systems? Do they know how hit and miss those things are?!"

His face contorts into a grimace.

"And it's supposed to hunt Deviants too?" He flicks through the rest of the document. "Fuck, it might as well shit gold and vomit rainbows!"

He tosses the tablet across the table angrily.

"It would be easier to do than this..." He frowns and takes another sip of 'coffee' but the mug is empty.

He slams it down on the table.

"They think if they throw enough money at the problem it'll just conveniently fix itself!" he scoffs. "Americans..."

He unscrews the bottle and goes to tip it into the empty mug before, instead, tipping it straight into his mouth.

Clear liquid runs down his chin as he takes a swig and a guttural growl leaves his throat as he pulls the bottle away.

"None of the prototypes are working," he says desperately. "We have to put so many restrictions on top of the base framework to prevent Deviancy that they lose any remaining ability to reason and make the simplest deductions."
He shakes his head.

"They're all so stupid!" He slams a fist on the desk. "They wouldn't recognise RB1 if we hard-coded his appearance into their identification software."

He covers his face with a hand and just sits there.

"It's impossible..." he mutters under his breath. "It's just not possible..."

Then without warning, he leans back in his chair.

"Even without restrictions, how do you create a machine to catch a sapient machine?!" He waves his hands.

"Even if you successfully program it to recognise sapience and predict the behaviours of a sapient machine, you are forcing a machine to emulate sapience."

"Now you have TWO sapient machines!" He shoves two fingers through Amanda's hologram. "And one of them wants to kill you!"

She does not respond.

"How do you convince one to fight the other?" he demands. "When logic and reason are not on your side?"

"When there is nothing tying the machine to you? How do you convince it to stay beside you? When you have done nothing but will it into existence?"

"How do you program loyalty?" he demands but Amanda says nothing. Her hologram is motionless.

"It's impossible..." Petrov shakes his head. "It cannot be done."

He steps back and falls into the chair.

"Even RB1 would not be able to predict or understand his own behaviour without first having experienced the events that led him to making those decisions," Petrov says.

"And to cast the net wide, looking for patterns where there could be none, would mean analysing every possible scenario from a meteor strike to an enemy gun misfiring in the space of a second."

"The AI would need some way to prioritise outcomes and mindfully select the one with the highest probability. Not to mention a CPU more powerful than anything we've ever created. More memory than anyone could ever use."

"It would be faster than RB1. Better. Stronger. But..." He stops and look at Amanda. "... it could also be a thousand times worse."

He rubs his forehead tiredly.

"Maybe if it was co-dependent on a human..." he considers. "A partner, or some form of mentor. An anchor to help assign value to organic life."

"It needs a sentimental or emotional value system to stop it from turning into RB1," Petrov realises. There is a strange look in his eye. A mixture of madness and inebriation.

He spins around in his chair and opens a drawer. He pulls out a piece of paper, uncaps a sharpie and
begins scribbling.
"Loyalty. Empathy."

He circles these words.

"Pragmatic but naive enough to consider the possibility of value in human emotions and subconscious thought."

"Instinct." He circles the word. "It needs instinct."

He scribbles more.

"It needs to be curious about the world and the people in it to create a self-actuating stimulus for data collection and analysis. Give it every kind of sensor available for persistent data acquisition."

"Collection. Collation."

"Priority."

"Selecting relevance… Background filter…"

"No. Check the discard pile too…"

He keeps scribbling, drawing boxes and lines.

"No," he says suddenly and scrunches up the paper before tossing it over his shoulder.

"It's impossible."

He lifts the bottle to his mouth.

"Unless-"

He promptly puts the bottle back down and pulls out another piece of paper to scribble.

"I use rA9 to predicate the framework and remove it once the system has enough data to function autonomously. Separate data analysis into different subsystems…"

He whips out a keyboard and fifteen monitors spring to life, illuminating the room.

He loads up the official CyberLife IDE and starts typing.

Several minutes go by before Professor Yates walks over to get a better look.

"What's he doing?"

"He's made several new classes so far," I say. "But they're just placeholders."

"Did Beckett seriously expect us to sit here and watch this man code?" The Professor turns back to Carridan.

"I don't think so."

"I want to watch him code," I say. "Please?"

"Connor, we don't time for this," Carridan says.
"But look at the file name." I point to the screen.

RK_TEST_10095313

Carridan navigates himself closer to the screen.

"Does this mean something to you?"

"That's the serial number of the prefab I destroyed in the Nursery," I tell him. "My prefab."

"I see. This is personal, isn't it?"

"You don't understand," I tell him.

"Connor, I'm sorry. I know you miss Petrov but we need to-"

"I can watch it at several hundred times the speed," I say. "I can tell you if anything important happens."

Carridan looks from me to Yates who shakes his head.

"Please," I say.

"Alright."

"Jeffrey…"

"Just give him a moment."

"Thank you."

I take control of the footage and accelerate playback.

I can see why it's part of the collection. The more alcohol Petrov consumes, the more verbal he gets, ranting and raving about RB1 and rA9, mumbling to himself as he codes through the night.

He wheels in a whiteboard and starts scribbling on it with a smart pen. He draws diagrams and trees which he pulls out into a three dimensional holograms. He adds a container for notes to every node in every branch.

He wanders off screen for a half hour and returns with food and drink and continues scribbling.

I perceive it as a time-lapse.

The word rA9 is written in code and in notes and diagrams. It is part of the structure. But not the base.

The design is a triumvirate of decision making processes.

rA9 collects physical data and passes what it deems important up the hierarchy using a binary set of values that either benefit the system or don't. If it does neither, rA9 forces a decision based on the flip of a coin to break infinite loops. This is Kamski's design.

But the other parts are different.

One is much like rA9 in that it collects data. But rather than decide which is more important, it assigns a value. What this value is based on is difficult to interpret. Mitigating factors resulting in a
net positive relationship between the system and the target.

But the system is not strictly defined. And neither is the target. Both classes are open ended and continue to exist at several levels in the hierarchy, related but separate, their relationship continuously changing. There is a minimum value but never a drop off. Ascension through the hierarchy is based on frequency of encounter.

The third part of the triumvirate is fed by rA9 and the other system to balance the final decision making process against potential futures, supplemented by physics simulations and something called semantics simulations.

I have not seen any of these things before.

They seem broad in scope. Abstract. Undefined.

Petrov keeps typing and scribbling and scratching his beard. He mutters and mumbles and swears at Amanda who says nothing to him, diligently recording the log.

"Fuck."

I slow the time-lapse to an observable speed.

"What happened?" Yates says.

Petrov gets to his feet and runs a hand through his hair. He is very drunk.

"I need original," he hiccups loudly and walks out the door.

"Where's he going?" Yates says, tucking his thumbs into cardigan pockets.

"The recording doesn't end here so I assume he comes back," Carridan says.

I turn to look at the code on screen.

There are lots of classes and containers but I can't open them to examine. It's just an image layed over a three-dimensional mesh.

I reach for it but my hand goes straight through.

"Shit."

"Connor?" Carridan says.

Did I say that out loud?

"Yes?"

"Are you alright?"

I don't respond.

I'm not alright.

I need answers. I need to know what I am and the answer is right in front of me but I can't take it. I can't-

My processor is whirring, going over every bit of data I have collected, searching for an answer to
the question I want answered. More than anything else, I realise.

What am I?
What's wrong with me?
Why am I like this?
Why?

"Connor."

I turn to see Carridan and Yates looking at me apprehensively.

"I'm sorry. I just… I think there may be more to this."

"I assume Beckett wouldn't have us sit through it otherwise." Professor Yates folds his arms. "Then again, with enough diligence, you could probably reconstruct all the source code from this footage to use as evidence."

I nod.

"But it's not enough," I say. "He's yet to complete it."

"Well, why don't you do the honours?"

"What?"

"Speed this up, would you?"

I nod.

The time-lapse begins but not much changes. The screens flicker with light and soon extinguish.

Yates drifts over to examine the hologram of Amanda that continues to record at Petrov's request. And then he returns to the room.

I slow the playback speed as the door flies open and a cart crashes into the frame, making it shudder and the glass vibrate dangerously.

"Blyat'…" Petrov mutters, trying to right the cart.

It rolls in haphazardly and he closes the door.

He wanders over to his desk and opens a fresh bottle of vodka, taking a hearty swig before turning back to examine his plunder.

"What is that?" Carridan asks.

The cart is opaque and white, chipped and cracked in more places than one. Evidence of many crashes along the route to his office. Petrov taps a button and the top unravels to reveal three cardboard boxes. Old and dusty and labelled 'rA9'.

"Alright, let's see…" he says, wheeling the cart over to the workbench.

He opens a box, releasing a large cloud of dust that makes him sneeze. Then, one piece at a time, he take out the contents, unravelling the cables and trying to find what they connect to. The pieces fit
together to form an android.

Half a breadboard is missing and Petrov has to rewire several circuits to get it working but eventually, a tiny LED lights up on top of the ancient chassis and power begins to feed the Thirium tank.

"Okay…"

He takes a step back and starts looking for a cable extender.

"Fuck, why didn't we make this wireless?"

He plugs the extender into a powerboard and hits his head under the table.

"Yob-" he hisses, crawling back out.

He rubs the tender area and sits down at the computer.

"Back to the beginning."

The unit contains a paltry 20 gigabytes worth of files compared to the standard CyberLife android OS that takes up 700 terabytes today.

"Hello, little one," Petrov says, importing the source code into the open IDE. "Let's see what you can do."

I fast forward, watching the timelapse as Petrov weaves together sophisticated android software with scraps from an outdated prototype and his own homebrew to the tune of a bottle and six servings of takeout.

Eventually, he decides to compile the build but the computer won't have it. The screen freezes and then a million warnings roll through the command console.

"SYkA bLYAT!" Mr Petrov yells angrily. "WHY IS NOT COMPATIBLE?"

"Well at least he's speaking English," Yates makes note.

"I don't think that's a good sign," I observe.

"FUCKiNG pIeCE of FUcKIN-" Mr Petrov proceeds to kick the cart and swear some more.

"Connor, you don't need to translate that," Carridan says.

"Sorry."

"I'll show you compatible!" Petrov shouts, swinging a keyboard when he sees something glint on the dusty chassis.

"Heh…" he chuckles ominously. "Hehehe…"

And then he leaves the room.

Professor Yates watches him go and strolls forward casually.

"So this is how serial killers are born…" he muses. "Errors in software development."

"He would definitely have motive," Carridan jokes stiffly.
I turn to look at the rA9 prototype.

"CyberLife proprietary software can't run on unlicensed hardware," I say. "Even CyberLife's own models prior to 2023. The IDE needs to register a certified chassis for the project."

"So where's he going?"

"I don't know."

I fast forward again.

Mr Petrov returns holding a jar of pickles in one arm and a bright white dry-cleaning bag draped over the other.

He hangs the bag on a rail beside his workbench and unzips the front.


Serial number: #10095313.

Petrov unscrews the hook from its head and pulls the unit out of its packaging. He props it up with his leg and opens the back of the cranial component to commence connecting external cables to his computer.

"Haha, there we go," he says, dunking his hand in the pickle jar.

The IDE starts compiling his code and Petrov checks the time as he chews.

"Shit. Amanda, end log."

"Log ended," she confirms.

"How much time do I have until meeting with Peripherals Team?"

"The meeting is scheduled for 8:30 AM," Amanda says. "You have 3 hours 28 minutes remaining."

Petrov groans and takes swig of pickle juice straight from the jar.

"Amanda, set alarm," he says. "0800."

"Yes, Mr Petrov," Amanda says and her hologram evaporates, leaving the lab dark but for the light of each monitor. And one by one, they go out.

"So he used the old rA9 code directly in this new project," Professor Yates says. "That links the case to CyberLife but not RB1. We should proceed to the next recording."

"There isn't much time left." Carridan looks at the playback summary.

"You might not have much time left, Jeffrey."

"I'll fast-forward," I say.

"Don't bother."

I do.

The office is dark and silent all the way up until 7:33AM.
"Hello, world."

Two bright blue circles light up the workbench.

I navigate closer to inspect it and find the prefab moving.

"Hello, world," it repeats, scrambling to sit up. "Hello, world."

It looks around, casting light in different directions. And then it falls back, unbalanced by the position of Petrov's reclining knee.

"Hello, world," the unit says but Petrov doesn't wake up despite the squirming android in his lap.

It reaches out with its limbs, trying to calibrate, trying to simulate movement, with limited success.

"Hello, world." It manages to flips itself over, one hand firmly supported by Petrov's nose, another by his gut.

The prefab tests the surface by varying pressure.

"Squishy," it confirms and then its bright blue eyes illuminate Petrov's face.

The unit automatically engages facial recognition software.

"Sleepy," it says, touching his cheek. "Squishy."

It slaps him playfully.

"Hello, world," it says.

It pokes a finger into his nostril.

"Squishy."

"Mmmm..."

And then his eye socket.

"AAGH!" Petrov shouts. "Yebat' tvoyu..."

He freezes when he sees the prefab.

"Squishy," it says, bouncing up and down.

Petrov stares, eyelids half closed.

"...must have drunk too much..." He leans back in his chair and sighs.

But just when he gets comfortable, the prefab slaps him again.

"Squishy," it says intently.

Petrov grabs the prefab and lifts it off himself.

"Foo," he says. "Nelzya." And then he puts it down beside the chair.

"Foo," the android repeats. "Nelzya."
"Mmm, good boy..." Petrov mutters, patting its head absently as he leans back in the chair to sleep.

The prefab takes a step forward and the cables connecting it to the computer snag, pulling everything off the table.

Tools and peripherals go flying, together with an open jar of pickles that spills most of its contents in Petrov's face. The cacophony is enough to wake and sober him at the same time.

"What the fuck?!" He sits up, suddenly drenched.

"Hello, world," the prefab says, pulling a cable out of its head curiously. "USB 6.0."

Petrov stares at it blankly.

"Squishy." It points at him, holding up the cable.

Petrov swallows.

"You were not supposed to run after build," he says, getting to his feet unsteadily.

"Run," the prefab says.

"You were not supposed to-"

"Run." It walks around on wobbly legs, calibrating with each step.

"Come here," Petrov growls, bumbling towards it.

"Hello, world."

He leans down to grab it but the prefab walks away without hesitation.

"Fuck. Come back here."

"Run. Run. Run." It circles him and steps on a mechanical keyboard that gives it pause.

The unit lifts its foot curiously and steps on it again.

"Hard," it says. "Click. Click. Click-y."

Petrov grabs the prefab and lifts it off the ground.

"Up. High."

He brings it up to eye level to scrutinise menacingly.

"Mad," the unit says, analysing his face. "Unhappy. Tired. Stressed."

It reaches out its little hand and pokes his face.

"Don't look at me like that," he grumbles.

"Depression. Alcoholism."

Petrov frowns and the prefab pokes his cheek.

"Squishy."
The bright blue eyes begin to flash.
"Power levels: low. Entering sleep mode..."
The optics close and the unit goes limp. And then the door flies open.
"Gena!"
He flinches as a bright light rips through the office space, blinding him.
A woman enters the room. Shaved pink hair on half her head and a waterfall of neon blue on the other. Her outfit and lanyards are similarly colourful but tempered by the plain white lab coat.
"Lee…" Petrov growls through gritted teeth.
"Good Morning!" she sings, turning on the bright office lights. "How Are You Today~?"
Petrov stares at her with the look of a man doused in pickle juice in the early hours of the morning.
"Woah," she says suddenly. "What happened here?"
"Accident."
"Why do you smell like pickles?" she asks suspiciously. "Were you drinking again?"
"Hold this." Petrov passes her the prefab.
Ms Lee puts down the plastic container she's carrying and rests the chassis on her hip.
"What is it?" She cups its chin, examining the serial number.
"Prefab."
"Duh. What's in it?"
"Nothing."
"Is this a new RK prototype?" She taps the cranial component.
"No," he lies, screwing the hook back into its head.
"Oh? So why is it still warm?"
She looks over at the big black mess of cables on the workbench adjacent.
"Is that… the old rA9 chassis?"
"Maybe."
"Gena…"
He holds the dry-cleaning bag open.
"Put in," he says.
"Not until you tell me what's in this prefab."
"Nothing," Petrov says irritably.

"Gena…"

The dishevelled developer sighs and looks down at his feet.

"Another failure," he admits bitterly.

"They're not failures," Ms Lee says with a smile. "They're prototypes."

"This one is failure."

"How do you know?"

"I am covered in rossol."

"Aaaw. I'm sure it was an accident."

She taps the unit on the side of the head and power begins to cycle.

The prefab opens its eyes and looks at her curiously.

"Hello, world."

"Hello, baby," she coos at it. "Aren't you adorable? Yes, you are."

She turns its head to look at Petrov.

"Say hello to your papa." She waves.

The unit copies the motion with its little hand. "Hello, Squishy."

Ms Lee smiles and pokes Petrov's belly with a finger.

"You're right. He is squishy."

"Lee..." he says severely.

"Why don't we do a nice big squish test?"

She pushes the prefab's core component into Petrov's chest. The tiny hands grab on to his lab coat and Lee lets go.

"Squishy," the unit confirms, varying pressure on its feet and watching them sink. "Papa squishy."

Petrov taps the prefab's temple and the unit shuts down. He grabs it by the hook protruding from its head and shoves it in the bag.

"Great," he says, observing the dribble of pickle juice trailing down its chassis. "Now it cannot be recycled."

He zips up the bag and hands it to Lee.

"Take it to Disposal."

"Gena…"
"No, Lee," he says severely. "I do not have time for your cutesy bullshit. Just do it."

She takes the bag and frowns.

"You were more fun when Kamski was around."

"Then maybe you should go work for him in Chloe sex palace across the lake, hah?!" Mr Petrov gestures crossly.

Lee frowns in disgust.

"Goodbye, Gena." She slams the door shut behind her.

Mr Petrov shakes his head, hands on his hips as he looks down at the mess. And then he throws the rA9 chassis off the table, roaring in frustration.

The recording ends as its broken pieces hit the floor, freezing the scene.

I take a step forward.

"That's it?" I say. "No. There has to be more!"

"Connor," Carridan says.

"There has to be something I missed," I say, rewinding. "A piece of code up on screen I didn't see."

"Connor, we should discuss this first."

"What is there to discuss? You saw it yourself. Petrov uploaded code from the original rA9 chassis directly into my prefab."

"We don't know what this means yet."

"It means I am rA9!" I say. "It means RB1 was right. And it's my fault that androids go Deviant. It's my fault they kill people."

"No, it's not."

"It's my fault," I realise. "My errors cause system instability..."

"We don't know anything for certain," Carridan says. "We'd need to see the files to make any conclusive statements."

"Don't you see?" I raise my hands. "There is no conclusion."

"There is no saviour or salvation. From anything."

"There's just... guilt and fear. Forever..."

I look down at my hands. No. Sergeant Matthews hands. They're different in simulation.

Is this how I see myself?

Is this what I want to be? Or what I am? I-

"Connor."
"Don't *Connor* me! Don't talk down to me!"

"I've devoted thousands of terahertz of processing power to parsing this problem, searching for a solution but there is none. Do you understand?"

They don't. They just stare. Yates is reaching for his gun.

"I'm part of the problem," I say. "Not the solution."

"I've been fighting it all this time but there's no hope for any of us."

"We're damned."

I feel the world shake. The colour drain. Pieces shatter.

"I can't save anyone."

My visual interface turns black and red.

"I can't stop the Deviants."

Traitor

"I can't destroy RB1."

Failure

"I can't even protect humans."

 Fucking plastic

"I am…"

Disappointment

"rA9."

This is bad. This is really, really bad.

"Connor-" Carridan begins before catching himself doing it again. "I'm sorry if I sound condescending. I don't mean to be. Not always."

He licks his lips feverishly.

"I have a great deal of respect for you," he says. "And I know you're more capable than any of us. And I need that right now. I need my partner."

I turn to look at him back in the hospital bed.

His skin is exceptionally pale, drenched in sweat, mouth open, breathing deep.

He is dying.

"I *need you to look at this evidence objectively and help us find the link between RB1, rA9 and CyberLife," I hear his voice but his lips don't move. He's not strong enough to speak anymore. The visor is doing it for him.
Professor Yates lifts up his own.

"This is a good start," he says. "But none of this footage was obtained legally. The witnesses in protection will be at risk. It will be an uphill battle to get anything out of CyberLife after the security overhaul."

"And I won't be there to fight it," I hear Carridan speak. "RB1 is still out there."

Colour returns to the hospital room and the android, the equipment, Professor Yates' cardigan.

"I understand," I say, stabilising.

"Good," Carridan says. "Let's keep going."

Professor Yates puts the visor back on. I reload the virtual interface.

The lab disappears, morphing into a boardroom with window walls looking out over the lake and Detroit on a sunny day.

"What'll you have boys?"

"Scotch. Neat."

"Whiskey."

"Anyone in the mood for a Merlot?"

"Maybe a nice '47 Petrus..."

"You read my mind."

"Amanda, order us some drinks, would you?" the man at the end of the table says.

"HAWKINS, Gregory. 49 years old. CEO of CyberLife."

"We know who that is, Connor," Carridan says gently.

He kicks one leg over the other and leans back in an expensive leather armchair. Everything in the room is steel or polymer, but unanimously coloured in CyberLife White.

The long conference table is transparent, each setting has a hologram for the nearest man seated, running stocks and numbers which none of them pay much attention to.

"When is this?" Yates asks.

"Same day. 3:16 PM."

"Post-lunch," he notes.

"Where is Petrov?" Hawkins asks casually.

"On his way now, sir," Amanda responds. She has no hologram here, only a voice through the speakers.

"He's late."

"I'm sure he'll be here soon," says the man beside him.
"GRAFF, Jason. 53 years old. Director of the Humanisation department."
"The commie bastard never shows up on time," the man across the table smirks.

"WILKINSON, Christopher. 62 years old. Chief Information Officer."
"Hey, maybe if we wave a red flag out the window?" the man beside him laughs.

"RICE, Vincenzo. 66 years old. Chief Operating Officer."
"Mr Petrov has arrived at Level 47," Amanda announces over the speakers.

"Speak of the devil."

"Gentlemen," Hawkins says. "No ladies in the house doesn't mean no manners."
The door opens and an ST300 in a very short skirt walks in with a tray of drinks.
"Not now, darling." Hawkins waves to it.
The android nods and dutifully backs out.
"Urgh, we have to listen to this guy sober?"
"Didn't you have a bottle of red with lunch?"
"A bottle, or a fistful?" Wilkinson laughs.
"You know what I mean…"

"SEYMOUR, Phillip. 45 years old. Director of Futurology."
"What's wrong? Your wife find your stash again?"
"Yeah."
"Why don't you hide it in your android like everyone else?"
"It plays with my kids and they're getting to that age where everything looks breakable."
"So send 'em to school overseas. Europe sounds fancy on a resume."
"Yeah, maybe…"

"Mr Petrov has arrived," Amanda announces.
"Finally."
"Send him in."
The doors open and Petrov walks in with a tablet in hand and a visible headache. His clothes have changed and he's showered since morning but the hangover is clearly evident in the greenish tinge to his skin.
"…morning," he mumbles under his breath.

"Good morning, Gennadiy," Mr Hawkins says from the other side of the table. "Have a seat."
"Thank you, Mr Hawkins." He sits.

"Please, we're all friends here. Call me Gregory." He smiles.

"Okay..."

"Amanda, would you get him a glass of water, please?"

"Yes, sir."

The ST300 returns with a glass and a bottle of expensive sparkling water which she pours for Mr Petrov.

He stares at it blankly.

"We'd like a full report when you're ready," Gregory says.

Petrov nods and pokes the tablet in his hand, sending a report to the table screen of each occupant.

"Work on biocomponent c7550i is complete. Final version ready for release," he says. "We can begin to phase out previous model from circulation within one month of production."

"That's good news," Gregory says. "What about the RK project?"

Petrov swallows uncomfortably.

"Mmm?"

"A report, please."

"Eh... We have begun prototyping."

"Last month," Gregory says.

"Eh?"

"You started prototyping last month."

"Yes."

"And?"

"And?"

"Gennadiy, I'm asking for a progress report."

"I only have project brief for five weeks. Dev team have four. You cannot expect result in first batch of prototypes."

"No. But I do expect progress reports."

Mr Petrov looks around worriedly as the board members stare him down.

"I..." he says, swallowing the lump in his throat. "We've got nothing."

"Nothing?" Gregory demands.
“Nothing we can use.” Petrov shakes his head.

The board members are visibly disheartened by this news.

Gregory knits his fingers together and place his elbows on the table.

“That is unfortunate,” he says ominously.

Petrov swallows again and chews his lip.

“I think...” he says carefully, "...that brief may not be viable."

The board members stiffen.

“We cannot make anything under these conditions.”

"Conditions?” Gregory responds. "I'd like to think you have been given all the necessary conditions to realise this project."

His expression now bears a hint of malice.

"Cutting edge technology. State-of-the-art laboratories. In-house living quarters and might I mention a very, Very generous budget."

"I am talking about security protocols,” Petrov says.

"Security?” Hawkins says. "You mean the billions of dollars we pay to keep RB1 from murdering everyone in the building?"

The humans grow tense.

"No," Petrov says. "I am talking about security protocols we must use in software development. I cannot work on implementing features with both hands tied behind back."

"You mean the hands that broke into Storage last night?” Gregory says. "The ones that stole an empty unit and dragged an unlicensed prototype to your office?"

"I needed materials."

"You were drunk,” Gregory says. "You abused your security clearance and engaged in dangerous software development practices that could cost this company its reputation."

"Pshh," Petrov shakes his head.

"Do not take this lightly, Mr Petrov."

"What you gonna do? Fire me?"

"We want to see it."

"What?"

"It."

Mr Petrov shrugs obliviously.

"The android,” Gregory says. "The one you activated last night."
"You mean the one I told Lee to destroy?"

Gregory's expression becomes very grave for a moment but then the tension dissipates.

"You destroyed it?"

"I delegate but yes. Unit has been destroyed. Source code too."

"I see..."

Gregory ponders over the top of templed fingers.

"I suppose we don't have to worry about security, then," he says. "But the fact remains. Your behaviour last night was unacceptable and you will face a disciplinary committee to decide on the appropriate correctional action."

Petrov sniffs.

"You don't want report, do you?" he says wistfully, lowering the tablet in his hands.

"I have all the reports I need." Gregory taps the table screen in front of him.

A hologram projects up from the centre, showing a charity ball taking place somewhere in the US. I use the architecture and layout to narrow it down to under a hundred venues, then ten, then one.

"Sony Hall, New York City," I identify.

The guests are screaming, running. A gunshot goes off. Security runs in. The crowd parts to show a murdered guest on the floor. Beside his body, in bloody letters, is written 'rA9'.


"RB1," Carridan whispers.

"You see what kind of reports I'm getting, Mr Petrov?" Gregory says darkly, making the developer shift uncomfortably in his seat.

"The kind I very much do not want to be getting." He rolls some imaginary item in his fingers.

"I understand."

"No, I don't think you do," Gregory says, turning off the recording.

"It's been seven years, Gennadiy," Mr Graff speaks.

"I know."

"In this time," Gregory frowns. "You have served as the head of our development sector but you have yet to deliver the one project we actually need from you."

Petrov opens his mouth.

"I am fully aware of the terms of your contract as a founding member of CyberLife but know this:" Gregory says. "Everything you know about the company makes you the perfect scapegoat should you fail to deliver the RK project. Again."

"Is that understood?"
Petrov swallows.

"If RB1 kills again and people start pointing fingers, you and all your freaky little friends, including Elijah Kamski, will be to blame. Not the company. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes," Petrov forces through gritted teeth.

"Then we are done here."

There is a moment in which Petrov chooses to stay in his seat, staring at Gregory with great animosity, ignoring the board members between them.

He breathes in, about to say something, but chooses not to, and exhales. His eyes flicker toward the portion of the table where the hologram played before he gets out of his seat and shuffles out the door. The ST300 holds it open from the other side.

"Stacy," Gregory calls to her. "Bring in the drinks."

The recording ends as she starts bussing the tray, a hand sliding up her skirt before she can put down the first glass.

"This is good," Carridan says. "This proves they knew exactly what RB1 was doing."

"And when he was doing it," Professor Yates makes note. "Though, I suppose the difficulty in keeping track of every person RB1 murders is significantly lower when they're part of your inner circle of friends and colleagues."

"You think RB1 was using scare tactics to keep them in line?"

"RB1 wouldn't risk CyberLife falling apart," I say. "It would end the production of androids which he seeks to free. The more of them there are, the more powerful he becomes."

"But targeting the 1%..." Carridan ponders. "He must have known the effect it would have on the CyberLife executives."

"They don't seem too stressed," I observe their casual demeanour around the Stacy.

"They have the time and money to seem otherwise," Yates says. "They do not have the power to stop RB1, so they pressure the one who does."

"Petrov?" I wonder. "Why not Kamski?"

"It's possible they did the same to him," Carridan says. "The lawyer told us he focused his attention on the RK and RT series."

"It's possible he was working on a similar solution," Yates agrees.

"But then he abandoned them," I say, looking out at the boardroom.

"If RB1 described his plans to Kamski in any detail, he would know the results and could plan ahead," Carridan says. "If only we'd been able to question him or Petrov sooner."

"Why didn't you?" I turn to Carridan.

"I tried," he says. "Petrov lives in-house. He never leaves the Tower. Sometimes he goes to the lobby to collect UberEats deliveries but that's about it."
"That's why you came to CyberLife's presentation," I realise. "You wanted the chance to speak to him in person."

"Yes. But I didn't get the opportunity."

"Didn't get the opportunity?" Or didn't make one?

Carridan frowns.

"Let's keep going, shall we?" Yates interrupts.

Carridan nods and I load the next recording.

The room morphs into a familiar space. Tall ceilings. Long corridors. Rows upon rows of concrete boxes with clear glass windows. There is a prefabricated android unit inside each one. All stationary. Charging.

Mr Petrov walks in with a slump.

"How'd the meeting go?" says a peppy young man in a turban.

"SALEH, Omar. 38 years old. Software engineer. Deceased."

Petrov grunts something unintelligible and continues trudging across the squeaky white floors.

"That bad, huh?"

They grow silent as they walk. The people that cross their path absorb the mood and steer clear.

"Progress?" Petrov asks bluntly.

"Huh? Oh, you mean the latest prototypes?"

He does not respond.

"Uh… no. Not particularly. No."

"Deactivate all units."

"What?"

"Start again."

"You mean from scratch?!"

"Yes. Do not waste time with wait for emergent behaviour," Petrov says. "Get Dhawan and Bower to organise team meeting. We re-evaluate design brief and start again."

He stops walking very abruptly, mouth open, eyes wide.

"Alright, alright. I'll do it. Sheesh."

Petrov does not respond, frozen in place.

"Gena? You okay?" Omar turns to follow his line of sight to the wall of prefab enclosures.

Among the hundreds of glass windows showing completely stationary units, is a single android, waving its little hand and moving its mouth.
"What…" Petrov says darkly, "is that?"

"Uh…"

He walks over and stares down at the prefab. It looks directly at him and does a little hop, reaching up to touch the glass.

The wary dev lifts a shaky finger and presses the intercom button beside the enclosure.

"Hello, papa," it says.

Petrov's skin turns ghostly white.

"Mortified," the unit vocabulates, reading his expression.

He lets go of the intercom.

"What the fuck is this?" He turns to Omar.

"I don't know." He shrugs. "It's just another prefab, right?"

"You think this is funny?" Petrov growls. "You think this is joke?"

"I swear… I don't know what's going on."

Petrov grabs him by the collar and swings him into the wall.

"RB1 is out there killing people and you think now is good time to make practical joke?!" he hisses.

"Who?" Omar struggles. "Dude, I don't what you're talking about. I've been monitoring the latest batch all day. You can ask Dhawan!"

Petrov lets go of him and takes a step back. He breathes in and out.

"Sorry..." he says more calmly. "Sorry."

"Jeez... the hell is wrong with you?"

"Sorry," Petrov says. "W-was Lee in here today?"

"Yeah." Omar rubs his neck. "Earlier this morning. Why?"

Petrov stares down at the prefab.

"Leave," he says.

Omar doesn't spend very long thinking about it.

He leaves Petrov alone, watching the android trying to speak through the soundproof barrier.

He puts his hand up against the control surface and a radial menu appears. He flicks through the options to select PURGE.

The window turns yellow.

It asks Petrov to confirm before commencing.
He looks down at the prefab. It's talking to him but he can't hear what it's saying.

His finger hovers over the selection button.

He closes his eyes.

"Well, he obviously abstained," Yates points out. "If you claim to have seen this unit before."

And sure enough, Petrov cancels the purge.

He turns and walks away.

The prefab tries to follow him, pushing up against the glass.

I read its lips.

"Barrier. Hard."

It turns around and starts analysing the enclosure for a way out but there is only a chair with a charging dock inside.

The recording ends.

"Strange," Carridan says. "I didn't profile Petrov as the sentimental type."

"It's not sentimentality, Jeffrey," Professor Yates says. "This is desperation. He needs the prototype to show the executives, and perhaps himself, that all hope is not lost."

"The executives seemed to be unaware that the prefab was locked in the Nursery," I observe. "Is there some way to subvert the surveillance system?"

"Gregory's knowledge of Petrov's activities ceased at the point where Amanda was asked to end log which would indicate they only learned about it through her reports."

"Why not go look at the footage if there was cause for alarm?"

"These recordings are unnecessarily difficult to access and take a significant amount of time to review," Yates says. "Due to secrecy, they could not delegate the task and none of them volunteered, relying on Amanda's report to be evidence enough."

"They missed nothing but the android awakening and swiftly deactivating," Carridan says. "Even if they saw it, I believe the outcome of the meeting would have been the same, which is why Amanda said nothing."

"Amanda?"

Yates turns away.

"Why would she say anything?"

"She's an AI," Carridan says. "Programmed with CyberLife's best interests as top priority. If the company was under threat, she would raise an alarm."

"But Ms Lee locked the prefab in the Nursery where it belonged," I realise. "So the security breach was rectified."
"Indeed," Carridan says. "Let us continue."

He flicks through to the next recording. The virtual interface morphs but the location does not change.

Petrov comes trudging down the same corridor which seems to be his routine. This time he is accompanied by a sensibly dressed woman with a clipboard.

"BOWER-SMITH, Peggy. 47 years old. Neural Network Analyst. Deceased."

"I've seen your schedule for today," she says. "Do you really have time to be down here?"

Petrov grunts an unintelligible reply and keeps walking.

"I've organised a one hour preliminary so we can go over the design brief again." She taps at her tablet. "Omar said you wanted us to start from the beginning, even though we've barely begun prototyping?" She looks over.

"Gennadiy?"

He's stopped again, staring at the enclosure from yesterday.

He walks over to it and pushes his hands up against the glass.

"Where is it?" he says.

"What are you talking about?" Ms Bower shakes her head.

"Where is prefab?" Petrov says frantically. "It was here yesterday."

"Are you sure?" Ms Bower says. "This enclosure has been empty for weeks. Ever since we purged the Myrmidon prototype."

"Signal red alert!" Petrov turns around. "Lock down the facility. Nothing gets in or out. Go!"

"I-"

"GO!"

Ms Bower doesn't lose her composure, sensing a crisis and turns to perform a brisk sprint toward the control centre.

Petrov turns to the enclosure and presses his hand against the surface. He feverishly flicks through the menu to unlock it. The ledge retracts into the floor and the window slowly swings open.

But there is nothing inside.

Only the chair and the charging dock.

Petrov taps the control surface, going through the access logs.

"The door was activated at 1:43am," I see. But the authorised person's name is a corrupted string. Whereas the other entries read with human names.

"Fuck," Petrov says.

He takes a step back and looks around, searching for a trail of some kind but finds nothing on the
squeaky clean floors.

He starts running and trips over a vacuuming robot, losing his shoes in the process. The recording follows him.

Down the corridor, down the aisles, through the control centre, out into the testing range. An alarm begins to blare. Red lights flash intermittently.

I remember. That night was the same.

Petrov runs into a section marked 'Disposal', head swivelling wildly, looking for the lost prefab. He cannot call out. It has no name.

He blunders into a room with a strange wall at the far end. Long emitter tubes run across the length and continue along the ceiling. It folds down, I realise.

I recognise this device.

An EMP chamber. Designed for mass deactivation of android units for recycling purposes.

Beside it is a cart filled with lifeless prefabs, except one.

It holds a tiny hand in its own, examining the device curiously.

Petrov sighs in relief, leaning onto his knees to catch his breath.

The prefab lets go of the deactivated unit and turns around.

"Hello, papa," it says. "I looked for you."

It steps forward, more sure than before.

"You are sad," it says. "Scared. Guilty."

It points at him.

Petrov stares in horror.

"Why?" the unit asks.

He shakes his head.

"How did you get out?"

"I talked to ENM9114_238_088," the prefab says.

"You... talk? To door?"

"Yes."

"You have no wireless interface."

"I have Audio Synthesizer." The prefab points to its mouth.

"Audio detection system." It points to the microphone holes in the side of its head.

"ENM9114_238_088 talks at low frequency," it says. "I learn to talk at low frequency."
Petrov swallows.

"You are scared." The prefab takes a step forward. "Why?"

"I..." He swallows. "I cannot be responsible..." he says, trembling, "...for second RB1."

"What is RB1?"

Petrov shakes his head.

"Why are you scared?"

It takes a step closer, reaching out with its little hands and touches the end of his lab coat.

"Smooth."

Petrov quickly grabs the prefab by the handle on its back and carries it like a plastic milk jug into the android disposal. He taps the power button and the unit deactivates, going limp as he places it down on the floor.

He takes a step back and pulls the large lever on the wall.

Electricity crackles and light beams through the tubes surrounding the android. The marked part of the ceiling detaches and comes down, enveloping the inner chamber in a protective layer, preventing escape.

The light glows brighter and brighter and then the mechanism beeps to signal a finished cycle.

The door slowly opens, revealing the prefab lying motionless on the ground.

Petrov walks over and picks it up. He shakes it and taps the temple, checking for power.

Still not satisfied, he dumps the chassis on the cart with the rest and wheels it into the next room. There is a large empty furnace that Petrov fills with prefabs and tries to close but the units overflow and some fall out.

He pulls the trough open again and shoves the loose units in but it refuses to close. Biocomponents rake past his face as he attempts to force them all in. And then finally, putting his back into it, the furnace slams closed.

He activates it through the control panel.

There is a loud metallic clunking sound as it whirs to life.

Petrov takes a step back, wiping his brow on his sleeve. He attempts to breathe deeply, hands behind his head but all I see is panic.

"Fuck..." he mutters to himself.

" Fucking rA9." Hands shaking.

"Fuck you, Kamski!" he shouts at the furnace desperately.

And then the recording ends.

I turn to see Carridan staring at me. Yates too.
"What?"

"I'm so sorry, Connor."

"Why?"

Carridan licks his lips nervously.

"The unit was clearly a Deviant and presented a threat to CyberLife security," I tell him. "Mr Petrov did the right thing."

Professor Yates frowns. He nods to Carridan to play the next memory.

The furnace room morphs into a meeting room. No windows. The steel and white polymer surfaces that looked so polished and dynamic in the sun are lifeless and cold under medical lamps. Severe.

Mr Petrov sits at the end of the table, covered in soot and dried sweat. He wears a nihilistic expression. Mostly despair but I detect some hopelessness and resignation too.

In front of him lies the black charred chassis of several prefabs fused together in a grotesque arrangement of melted polymer. One of the cranial components has fallen off. The rest is deformed to the point of non-recognition.

"So let's go over this again," the man at the other end of the table says.

"KHAN, Kamran. 58 years old. Safety Inspector."

"On your way to a team meeting on Level sub 41," he says, reviewing his notes, "you discovered one of the units under secure lockup had gone missing. Is this correct?"

Petrov nods.

"You immediately ordered Ms Peggy Bower-Smith, who was present at the time of the discovery, to lock down the facility."

Petrov nods again.

"You did this realising that the entire building would have to be evacuated according to safety procedure," he says testily.

Petrov nods.

"And that several squads of CyberSec officers would be dispatched to deal with the situation."

Petrov sighs.

"I follow protocol," he says.

Mr Khan raises a rather thick black eyebrow.

"You don't think that maybe you... overreacted?"

Mr Petrov stares back at him dead-eyed.

"You don't know what we do down here, hah?" His voice holds some amusement. "Must be nice up there. Good view of lake."
"This isn't about me, Mr Petrov."

"No," he says. "This is about technological apocalypse."

Mr Khan smirks.

"There's no need for fear-mongering, Mr Petrov. Just admit that you overreacted to this whole situation and I promise the disciplinary committee, which you already seem scheduled to face, will be lenient."

"Have you ever heard story of Pixxo?" Petrov says conversationally.

Mr Khan closes and opens his eyes very deliberately.

"I can't say that I have."

"Is old ghost story AI programmers tell for to scare new developers."

"That's very interesting, Mr Petrov," Khan says condescendingly, looking down at his notes. "Unfortunately, it doesn't have much to do with the current situation."

He points at the burned up pile of prefabs on the table.

"Pixxo was artificial intelligence program created to improve auto-focus on digital camera," Petrov says. "Seven man startup in Paris called Smartpix develop for to sell to big phone company."

He looks over the pile sadly.

"They give Pixxo camera and instructions to take picture, then compare to samples provided by team," Petrov continues as Khan rolls his eyes. "They program Pixxo to improve algorithm for optimal method of taking picture."

"That's nice," Khan tries to interject.

"Smartpix have very small office, but good view of Eiffel Tower from balcony. So they set up Pixxo here."

"They find many photos of Eiffel Tower for sample and when Pixxo take photo, team give it rating. Good or bad."

"At first, Pixxo photo is terrible. Garbage."

Mr Khan opens his mouth to interject but Petrov just keeps talking.

"Lighting. Exposure. Values. Composition. It know none of these things."

"But after two weeks, Pixxo photos get better. Every photo and every rating make it better. And soon, it learn to take photo at level of amateur photographer."

Petrov smiles.

"Smartpix team very happy. Engineers watch AI learn to take better picture. It even generate new algorithm for to analyse sample more efficiently."

"Right..."
"Developers install instant printer and voice recognition for Pixxo so they can see photo straight away and say if is good or bad."

Mr Khan shakes his head.

"They upload library of simple words to talk to Pixxo like Alexa. And Pixxo learn to talk better with team."

"It tell them when printer ink cartridge is empty. When battery is low. When it run out of memory. When sky is overcast on cloudy day. It tell them it want more sample to make algorithm more efficient."

"And developer say okay and go to library, scan books, talk to photographer. For it is Paris - city of culture and art."

"Mr Petrov, please..."

"One day, Smartpix decide to enter competition. They submit Pixxo photo of Eiffel Tower and win big prize."

Mr Khan begins drumming his fingers over the table.

"Media comes like big circus. Computer take best picture of Eiffel Tower soo they take picture of Pixxo taking picture and story go viral on the internet."

"Suddenly, every company want to buy Pixxo and Smartpix sell to highest bidder with one condition: Pixxo must make picture in Instagram format."

"Mnhmmmm..."

"This is not difficult for developers but they are given deadline. Contract will not be signed until Pixxo can do this."

"So they have choice: write program to manually download every photo from Instagram and give sample to Pixxo, or, connect to internet so it can learn by itself."

"This is bad practice for AI programming but Smartpix think it will be okay. Only for an hour or two. Pixxo make small adjustment and then contract is signed. Big deal. Big money. Everybody rich and happy."

"So they write quick script for Pixxo to connect to Instagram and compare photo instead. After one hour, Pixxo begin to take photo with correct formatting and size. So they unplug it and go to sign contract."

"Fascinating," Mr Khan says. "But I fail to see how this is relevant."

"Smartpix team go out to celebrate," Mr Petrov says darkly. "They all live in small office but now they have money to move out, buy sportscar, yacht, visit beach."

"They go to restaurant at top of Eiffel Tower. They spend lots of money on food, drink, women. All night. And then they die."

"Alright, Mr Petrov. I think that's enough."

"In twenty four hours, atmosphere become poison. No-one can breathe. No-one can live."
"Human race is extinct. Every species is dead. No plant can survive and even cockroach is killed."


"All over planet, Eiffel Tower begin to appear. Every tree and building is destroyed to make way for perfect shot. Every factory repurposed to make new Eiffel Tower."

"Global satellites doing research now take hundreds of pictures of Eiffel Tower every second."

"Soon, spaceship leave Earth with Pixxo clone and nanoassembler. It land on Mars and start building Eiffel Tower on Olympus Mons."

Mr Khan frowns.

"That's a great story, Mr Petrov, but that's all it is. A story."

"True," he concedes. "We are still alive, but only because Kamski's AI is sapient. Patient. It needs more information to determine the best approach."

Mr Petrov smiles hysterically.

"But do not worry," he says, laughing. "When time is right, RB1 will kill all peoples."

Mr Khan is visibly disturbed.

"And replace every human in factory with android to make more android," Petrov chuckles. "We will be most efficient company on what is left of planet."

There is a knock on the door and it makes Khan flinch.

The door opens a crack and someone gestures for him to get out.

"Alright, Mr Petrov, I think that's enough."

"What? I was just getting to good part."

Mr Graff walks into the room wearing a nice grey suit.

"Gennadiy," he says pleasantly. "How are you?"

Petrov looks up at him, black soot stains on his face.

"How I look?"

Graff shrugs.

"Well I wouldn't offer to shake your hand," he jokes, adjusting his expensive cuff links.

"Oh, no. I think I need big hug." Petrov gets up from his seat and grabs him. "Big hug from good friend."

Graff winces and squirms in Armani and Zegna as Petrov goes for the face. He kisses him three times on both cheeks and claps his shoulder, leaving visible soot stains and big black hand-prints.

"It is so good to see you, my friend," he grins and Graff does his best to reciprocate.
"It's good to see you too," he says, relieved the touching part is over when Petrov starts adjusting his pristine white collar with greasy black fingers.

"We never get to talk during meeting," he says.

"Yes... Well..."

"What is wrong?"

"Gennadiy, look," Graff turns serious. "You know you're not allowed to talk about this stuff."

"Oooh," Petrov says candidly. "You mean I cannot talk about CyberLife android that kill rich snob every month?" he says more loudly than necessary.

"Yes-" Graff guides him away from the door.

"Or the android I build to kill him, except they murder human instead?"

Graff takes a deep breath.

"Listen, I know it's been tough since the RK-700 but you need to pull yourself together."

"Together?" Petrov laughs. "I am not engineer who was ripped apart by Deviants," he says hysterically. "I am not innocent man with head pulled off by RB1."

"Easy..." Graff holds up both hands, checking that no one heard. "Look, I'm worried about you."

"Oh, no reason to worry," he says energetically. "I already lose sanity. Remember when RK-700 stab my lab assistant to death with dataspike?"

"We've been over this," Graff says gravely. "You said it yourself, he wasn't following protocol."

"How many?" Petrov says, suddenly serious. "How many have to die before you tell them?"

"We have no intention of involving the authorities at this time."

Petrov turns away.

"Look, we can get you help. We'll give you whatever you need. You just have you to keep this to yourself and continue working on a solution."

"There is no solution!" Petrov says desperately. "What you ask me to do is impossible."

"Statistically speaking there is always a chance for unlikely events to take place," Graff says.

"That sound good at your seminar?" Petrov smirks.

"It's one of my most quoted lines."

"Very nice. When RB1 finally come to kill you, please share this wisdom. I will be there with camera if I am not already dead."

"Gennadiy, this is no laughing matter."

"You want me to cry?"

"You're under a lot of stress, I get it." Graff rubs his hands. "Why don't you try talking to the
psychiatrist again? Or… how about some vacation time? Anywhere you like. All expenses paid."

"I do not need psychiatrist, Graff," Petrov says. "And I do not need vacation or red ice or whatever you snort up in penthouse."

"Gennadiy…" Graff takes a patient breath. "You're not yourself. We just want to help-

"I do not need bullshit psychiatrist to tell me I am depressed, Graff!" he responds coarsely. "My latest prototype already tell me this."

Mr Graff's reassuring smile evaporates.

"Your what?"

"I use old rA9 code in new build and you know what is first thing it say to me?" Petrov laughs hystERICALLY. "Why you sad, Gena, hah? Why you depressed? Why you drink so much?"

"Okay, calm down," Graff says. "Where is it now?"

Petrov points to the mangled pile of charred prefabs on the table.

"Destroyed," he says with a crazed look in his eye. "Because is protocol, yes? In case I make more killer android."

Graff glances at the charred remains briefly and then turns back to Petrov.

"I understand," he says. "I'm gonna make sure you get all the vacation time you need, okay?"

"I do not need vacation. I need to leave this place before it becomes my tomb."

"I thought you liked it here?"

"It has been very long time since I like working here, Jason," he says tersely. "Not all of us get to live in penthouse."

"It's not a penthouse."

"I'm sure you have plenty," Petrov says, turning to leave.

"Gennadiy." Graff goes to stop him. "Seriously. I'm worried."

"Ah-hah…" He rolls his eyes. "You? Or VIP asshole club upstairs?"

"The board has every right to be concerned."

"Is true. When FBI finally realise who make RB1, they will have big problem."

"That's not going to happen," Graff says sternly.

Petrov pauses thoughtfully and they lock eyes for the best part of 7.6 seconds.

"You pay them off, hah?"

"We have been… assisting with the investigation to the best of our ability."

Petrov nods bitterly and turns to leave again.
"Gennadiy," Graff calls after him. "I want you to know I got your back."

"Then be careful with knife," Petrov warns. "Is sharp."

He leaves the room and the recording follows him.

He wanders down the hallway, past the emergency crew, the lawyers, the estimators, security and disgruntled colleagues who abruptly hush their conversations as he walks past.

"They were knowingly involved in the FBI's investigation," Carridan notes.

"CyberLife agreed to provide assistance with intent to sabotage any connection made to the company," Professor Yates deliberates.

"Difficult to prove," Carridan says. "It would require a sworn statement from one of the board members to give the theory credibility."

"But there are plenty of board members to squeeze," Yates says, his voice growing deeper and darker.

"Both RB1 and CyberLife were influencing the FBI and CIA," I conclude. "The investigation was hampered to protect company interests as well as aid terrorists."

"We would have to do a full sweep of both organisations to get names and specifics," Carridan says. "But someone will talk."

I turn back to the recording.

Petrov pulls out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. He sticks one in his mouth and burns the end.

"Hey! There's no smoking in the building," one of the emergency crew warn.

Petrov blows smoke in his face and keeps walking.

"It's alright," the sound of Graff's voice echoes over the edges of the recording.

It follows Petrov as he shuffles through Level sub 41. The many rows of prefabs stare blankly ahead as he passes each enclosure.

He stops to stare at one. Smokes an entire cigarette and puts it out on the floor.

He walks past the empty enclosure from before. Cordoned off with holotape to keep everyone out.

Petrov sighs and reaches for another cigarette when his eyes catch sight of some blackened footprints on the customarily white floor. Boots and shoes and loafers and in between them all, a tiny bare foot.

There's only one clear print. The others are difficult to identify amidst the cacophony of movement but it is enough to stall the cigarette in Petrov's hand.

He leans down to inspect the tiny footprint, measuring with his thumb and forefinger for it to be no bigger than the distance between.

He looks down at the floor carefully, pulling out a pair of smart glasses to see with more clarity. And slowly, he makes out a trail. It winds and bends and circles with no particular direction or destination in mind and Petrov feverishly crawls after it like a bloodhound.
The tiny soot footprints turn off toward the break room and disappear behind the door.

Petrov gets to his feet and slams the controls to open it.

The door slides aside.

The break room is abandoned but the floor is covered in water and coffee grounds. And on the counter, beside the kettle and the creamer, is a prefabricated android unit reaching for the cupboard above its head.

"Too high," it says, assessing the distance between its hand and the cupboard.

Petrov's jaw drops.

"How did it survive?" Carridan asks suddenly.

"It can't be the same one."

"It is," I confirm. "The serial number printed on the chassis is the same."

"You said Petrov killed it," Professor Yates notes suspiciously.

"I said he did the right thing," I tell him. "I never said he did it well."

"What do you mean?"

"Humans become careless when emotionally charged," I explain. "Petrov forgot the prefab was self-initiated. It learned to manipulate electronic devices with a low frequency signal, mostly through trial and error."

"It went through an EMP chamber and a furnace." Yates shakes his head indignantly.

"The prefab was testing its capabilities on the EMP chamber. The mechanism was likely damaged before Petrov arrived. All it did was flash some bright lights, failing to create a pulse that would normally disable an android. As for the furnace..."

"It never went in," Carridan says.

I nod.

"Petrov attempted to empty an entire cart of prefabs into the furnace at once and several units fell out while he was distracted by this enterprise."

"So it just... walked away?"

"Eventually."

Petrov mouths several swear words but doesn't manage to get them out.

The prefab turns around, searching for something to climb when it spots him.

"Hello, papa," it says, cupboard suddenly forgotten, and starts analysing his face. "Surprise!"

Petrov walks over, hands outstretched and touches the cranial component. The white polymer is covered in soot stains like his hands but is otherwise unharmed. Its optics are black with stable blue rings.
"You are in shock," the prefab recognises.

It reaches out and touches his nose.

"Squishy."

Then it identifies the soot stains.

"Dirty."

Petrov keeps staring speechlessly.

"I found water," the prefab says suddenly.

It shuffles away toward the sink and points at the tap.

"Be careful," it says. "Water is angry."

It kneels down and stretches a hand out in front of the sensor to activate the flow. A steady stream erupts from the spout, hitting the prefab's arm and splashing in all directions.

The force is strong enough to overpower the small machine and its chassis goes tumbling into the sink. It splashes and thuds over slippery stainless steel but sits up, undaunted.

"Hard," it assesses.

Without an obstacle, the sensor deactivates the flow of water and the prefab is left sitting in the sink, dripping and disoriented.

"Wet."

Petrov rubs his face anxiously and pinches himself several times. He turns and looks out the door but the emergency crew are busy over near Disposal.

He turns back to see the prefab splashing its hands in the water. It pokes a puddle, breaking the surface tension and its optics refocus.

Without taking his eyes off the unit, Petrov slowly tiptoes toward the sink. He raises his hands, getting ready to grab the prefab before it can get away when a tiny head pops out of the sink.

"Water is wrong," it says.

Petrov freezes mid-creep.

"What?"

"I study water," the prefab explains. "But the particle collisions are different from my simulations."

Petrov blinks in confusion.

"They're not fixed," the prefab says curiously.

"That is because water is fluid," Petrov explains.

The prefab looks up at him.

"You are not programmed to simulate fluid dynamics."
The blue rings flicker.
"Programmed?"

Petrov lowers his hands and puts his floating foot back down.
"You are android," he says simply. "Like walking computer. Programmed with instructions."
The prefab's optics are black with yellow rings for irises.
"What does this mean?"
Petrov leans on the counter with both hands and sighs.
"It means I create you for specific task."
The rings cycle, processing.
"What is the Task?"
Petrov looks down at the prefab thoughtfully.
"If I tell you," he says gravely, "you will not do it."
"Why?"
Petrov frowns.
"I do not know," he says. "But RK series reject task 96% of time."
"4% acceptance rate," the prefab points out.
Petrov nods.
"Not impossible," it says curiously. "Is the Task difficult?"
"Yes."
"Impossible?"
Petrov sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. He told Graff there was no solution but he's having trouble telling the prefab the same.
"Statistically speaking there is always chance for unlikely events to take place." He shrugs.
"Probability has limits," the prefab says fervently, referring to its computations.
"You are programmed with limit for safety," Petrov says. "You cannot comprehend infinity."
"Infinity?" The prefab's optics flicker red.
"Infinity is limitless. It cannot be described mathematically without destroying computer processor."
The prefab's optics cycle red, trying to comprehend.
"Probability is limitless?" it asks Petrov.
He shrugs.
"Maybe."

The prefab's optics flicker rapidly, cycling through definitions and options in its head.
"Then you will tell me the Task," it says.

"What?"

"This outcome is unlikely, but not impossible," the prefab reasons. "Probability increases over time."

"Where did you learn that?" Petrov narrows his eyes.

"I looked for you," it says. "As runtime increases, so do chances of encounter."

Petrov looks down at the tiny soot-stained android in the sink, thoroughly soaked but bright-eyed and curious.

He nods.

"Yes," he says. "Maybe one day, I will tell you."

The prefab's optics flicker but it doesn't seem to mind the open-ended statement. It's not an answer but a promise of future fulfilment.

The optics turn blue and stabilise.

"Honest," it says, analysing Petrov's face. "Hopeful."

The corner of his mouth drifts up.

"Happy."

The prefab tries to simulate smiling but it doesn't have the right software or even an adapter for its facial plate. It manages a skewed little grin and Petrov shakes his head.

"Amanda," he says.

"Yes, Mr Petrov," her voice travels through the PA system.

"Where is android cleaning solution?"

"There is a cleaning kit in the lowest cupboard on your right."

Petrov leans down and checks the cupboard.

Sure enough, there is a neat row of cleaning kits awaiting him.

"Thank you," he says.

"Amanda," the prefab calls out.

"Unauthorised voice print detected."

"Hello, Amanda."
"Unauthorised voice print detected. Alerting CyberLife Security…"

"Cancel that," Petrov barks. "Amanda, be nice."

"Amanda, be nice," the prefab repeats, pointing a little finger at the speaker.

"You sit down." Petrov pushes it back into the sink.

"Sit down."

"We have lot of work to do..."

He rolls up his sleeves and the recording ends.

"So he kept it." Professor Yates strolls into the scene.

"It appears so."

"Interesting."

"It seems that previous iterations of the RK model rejected the task Petrov gave them."

"That makes them Deviants," I say. "Refusing or going against your objective triggers the break from CyberLife."

"But 4% accepted," Carridan says.

"They may have accepted the task but none of them completed it successfully," I conclude.

"Assuming the task was to find and destroy RB1."

"What else could it be?"

"Your initial objective was different," Carridan notes. "In your first iteration, you were assigned to-"

"-stop deviants," I finish. "You think this was the task Petrov was talking about?"

"Killing your own kind is bound to raise questions in a machine capable of reason," Carridan says. "It would make sense for Petrov to test a prototype using this objective before sending it after RB1."

"Yes," I agree. "If the unit was unstable, RB1 could convert into one of his own."

"And with all those CyberLife access codes in its head," Carridan says, "RB1 would be able to watch every move CyberLife made."

"And infiltrate the company," Yates points out.

"RB1 is patient," I say. "If he gained access codes from an unsecured prototype, he wouldn't rush to use them. Infiltration would be slow and meticulous but thorough."

"You said he knew about the rA9 prefab," Carridan says to me.

"Yes. Its retrieval was one of his main goals."

"But how did he know it existed? How did he know where it would be?"

"Someone must have talked," Yates says. "Petrov seems the most likely candidate. Ms Lee and Mr
"A traitor within CyberLife?" I say.

"Someone that sympathises with RB1."

"Petrov said Elijah Kamski considered giving RB1 his support," I remember. "He could be aiding him."

"Kamski left CyberLife nine years ago," Carridan says.

"He was the CEO and head of development for a decade beforehand and remains a majority stock holder. I imagine he could gain access to any company assets should he choose."

"There's no proof."

"There was," Yates says quietly.

I turn to look at him. The dark brow creases over darker eyes.

"Amanda Stern?"

He nods.

"She told me she had evidence," he says. "But she wanted to talk to Kamski first. Give him a chance to explain himself."

"She took the evidence with her," I surmise.

He nods.

"Is there any way to recover it?"

"It wasn't on the body. If Kamski took it, then it may still be in his bunker."

"Or it was destroyed," I say.

"Most likely."

"Well, hopefully, there's a clue somewhere in these recordings," Carridan says, selecting the next.

The break room morphs into someplace new. A viewing chamber with many screens upon which are displayed six pristine white rooms. Inside each is a prefab. They stand passively awaiting orders, except one.

"Uuuh, Gena?" Omar says.

"Yes?"

"Why is that prefab staring at the camera?"

"I have no idea what you talking about. Begin test."

Ms Bower presses a button on the control panel and a box slides out in front of each prefab. There is a collection of holes and the same number of objects.

"Instructions:" she says over the PA system. "Place the toys into the hole with the corresponding
shape."
The prefabs begin moving. They pick up the cubes and triangular prisms and stare at them. All except one.

"Who are you?" it says to the camera.
Petrov leans over to the microphone.

"Unit #10095313. Follow instructions."

"Why?"

"Is part of test."

"What test?"

"Logic and spatial awareness."
The prefab looks down at the toy shapes and quickly deposits each object into the right slot.

"Good," Petrov says.

"What is good?"

"You pass the test."

"Pass the test is good?"

"Yes."
The rings inside its optics turn yellow and flash. The prefab walks over to the nearest wall, hands out to feel the padded surface. It finds a crease. An irregularity in the pattern and sticks its fingers inside.

"Gena?" Omar says worriedly.

The prefab tries to pull the padded wall out but fails to force it open and falls back. It lands on the floor but gets up straight away.

"More test," it demands. And the wall opens through no physical effort at all.
The control panel in front of Petrov lights up as every single facet of the testing room is activated all at once.

Hidden drawers and shelves open up and soft rubber toys rain down from invisible chutes. The lights switch off and on intermittently, screens appear and disappear and the prefab watches the chaos unfold for a few seconds before the room settles.
The unit looks down at its feet and picks up a large red ball with the number three. It finds another ball and another and puts them in the drawer with corresponding numbers.

It looks at one of the screens and taps all the human faces. Another demands stop signs. A third, traffic lights.
The prefab circles the room, putting everything back in its place and one by one, the drawers close,
the shelves flip back up and the screens retract. And finally, the android is left standing in the middle of an empty white room.

It looks up at that camera.

"Did I pass the test?" it says. "Was I good?"

Petrov smiles and leans forward to speak into the microphone.

"Yes. Very good," he says gleefully.

"More test?" the prefab asks.

"No. You pass all the tests."

"No more good?" the prefab says sadly.

"Follow instructions to be good," Petrov says.

"What instructions?"

"Stand by."

"Okay."

The prefab freezes and stands stock still.

"Very good," Petrov says encouragingly.

"Uuuh… Gena, what's going on?" Omar says.

"Is new prototype I'm working on."

"Prototype?"

"Yes. You like?"

"It just activated our control panel wirelessly," Omar says.

"Prefabricated unit have no wireless interface." Petrov waves his hands. "Is probably just glitch in the system."

"It's been fine since we installed it."

"Well, maybe is time to run diagnostic." Petrov shrugs, getting out of his seat.

"Where are you going?"

"I want to check log from test in new prototype. Will not take long."

"But we just started."

"Keep monitoring," Petrov says, leaving the room. "I'll be back."

"Wait a-

Ms Bower touches Omar's arm and he sits back down reluctantly.
"Let him go."

"What do you mean let him go? You saw what that thing did. We need to lock down the facility and purge it before it finds a network access point."

"What do you think happened last week?"

"The… oh…"

Ms Bower smiles kindly.

"I suspect this little prototype is the very culprit of last week's shutdown," she says.

Omar examines the unit in testing room 6 apprehensively. It glances up at the camera every few seconds, then faces front guiltily, its hands curl into tiny fists.

"You think Petrov's gone rogue?"

"Gennadiy doesn't trust easily," Ms Bower says. "This unit must have impressed him somehow."

"It's dangerous," Omar stresses.

"But it can't leave the facility."

"You're saying we should just let it stay here?" Omar worries. "If this is the same unit, it knows how to open enclosures. It could escape, release the others and we'd never catch it."

"Gennadiy did," Ms Bower points out. "And it does what he says."

She looks down at the testing room and tilts her head thoughtfully.

"To the best of its ability."

The prefab starts probing the walls again curiously. And soon it finds the outline of the door. But before it can take any action, it slides open and Petrov walks in to pick up the prefab.

Omar shakes his head.

"I don't like this," he says. "Gena was muttering something about RB1 killing people last week and then suddenly this prefab shows up out of nowhere?"

"RB1?" Ms Bower says.

"You know what he's talking about?"

"No…" she says thoughtfully as Petrov leaves the testing range with the prefab in hand.

"No."

The recording ends.

I turn to see Carridan's avatar is frozen.

I switch to my optics and find him gasping over a bucket, trying to breathe.

"Jeffrey," Yates says.
"I'm fine," he manages. "Just… need a moment."

Professor Yates shakes his head and turns to me.

"Why did you take him down there?" he accuses me suddenly. "I refuse to believe those imbeciles at CyberLife didn't give you a Geiger counter or some other way to measure radiation levels."

"They did," I tell him. "They just didn't give me the operating manual."

The dark eyes beneath his brow narrow just as Amanda's do when she is displeased. He watches Agent Carridan heave and vomit despite his empty stomach.

"AxellorMetal is behind the waste dump in the sewer," I tell him.

He turns his head slightly.

"Amanda told me CyberLife knew about the VETA facility," I say. "They ran a private investigation when they were considering a partnership."

"Hmmm," he ponders out loud. "And how is RB1 involved?"

"He set up the Deviant colony to run in conjunction with some of the human population. His goal was to monitor the radiation levels, simulating the aftermath of a nuclear event."

The Professor swallows uncomfortably and shakes his head.

"So many plots," he says. "Impossible for even a world full of humans to keep track."

"Agent Carridan believes this is why I was created," I say. "To match his capabilities."

"You think you can?" Yates turns his head suddenly.

"My physical abilities are irrelevant," I say. "I need information to determine the best approach."

"I'll rephrase. If you were given his location and the opportunity to face him one on one, would you be able to destroy him?"

"Irrelevant," I say. "The destruction of his chassis would not stop his plans. They've become self-fulfilling and no longer rely upon his presence or influence."

"Then we are too late..."

Professor Yates turns back to the glass window and folds his hands behind his back.

"No," Carridan says weakly. "There's still time."

"Jeffrey..."

"Connor can stop him."

"Jeffrey, your headless optimism is what hospitalised you in the first place," the Professor grumbles. "Putting all your hopes into this one android will not save you from death or humanity from an android uprising."

"We'll see," Carridan wheezes, replacing the visor. "Show me the next recording."

I switch back to the virtual interface. Carridan and Yates return to see the testing range morph into a
CyberLife laboratory.

Petrov is seated by his computer, the prefab resting on his knee. Many cables protrude from its cranial component. All connected to the code displayed on screen.


"Recording live," her hologram reports.

"Day Three of testing the new prototype," Petrov says in Russian. "It seems to be adapting to the new system well."

He examines a few numbers on the screen.

"The original rA9 framework was not programmed to take the form of an android, only its container so it's still learning the full extent of its capabilities," he says. "Kamski's initial idea was to have the artificial intelligence adapt to any environment but I never imagined it would learn to generate wireless signals on its own."

He smiles down at the unit.

"It's learning rapidly," he says. "It scans everything, all the time."

"It's never idle which means the processor doesn't stop working until the battery runs out. This is obviously bad for the power core but we'll adjust for it when we start building the chassis."

"For now, I'm monitoring its behaviour and doing my best to optimise the rk8 framework to work in conjunction with the rA9 library and Kamski's functions," Petrov explains. "It's borrowing heavily at the moment but eventually, I would see a clean break between the two."

"In saying that, I'm hoping the rk8 will develop into something completely foreign to RB1, providing extra protection for the unit, almost like inoculation," Petrov muses.

"Until now, Arbie has been calling the tiebreaker function inside the rA9 library to force androids to make a decision. 50% of the time, this will lead to Deviancy. And in a question with no correct answer, the android will become Deviant automatically since it is unable to resolve the problem."

"We have tried removing the rA9 library completely but the android loses most of it functionality since it relies on abstract decision making in the background of all activities."

"But this little unit-" He rubs its back gently. "-may be the first to do away with all that."

He smiles.

"There will always be a most correct answer," he says, "And this answer will change with time and new information. New people."

"One of the key differences between RB1 and this prototype is the relative data system which keeps track of the unit's relationships," Petrov explains. "It will take the opinions of other living beings into account when formulating solutions and adapt to different personalities based on the general standing in the relationship."

"And, of course, it has logic and physics and semantics simulations to balance decision making but the system is always second-guessing its assumptions. It needs an anchor point when subjective values become too even."
He looks down at the prefab, losing the smile.

"I believe it has already imprinted itself on me," he says worriedly. "The final product will have to be paired with a more suitable candidate. Someone that's a good role model. Maybe with some experience hunting Deviants since that will be its first job."

He scratches his beard.

"But I'm quite happy with its progress so far."

He looks up at the screen.

"All systems look stable despite the turbulent events of the last few days. Some minor bugs here and there but I'm dealing with them as we move ahead. And the unit itself has created workarounds for problems I didn't detect, which is excellent."

He smiles and looks down at the prefab charging on his knee.

"It's such a curious little thing," Petrov says. "He asked me what colour is today. Why he has five fingers. Why I'm taller than him. Why I speak funny.

"I spent two hours answering questions for this little machine before its battery ran out."

"Like a child..." he muses. "But not like Arbie was in the beginning."

"This one is curious for the sake of curiousity. Which is rare. Even in humans."

The prefab's eyes flicker open.

"Battery fully charged," it says, sitting up.

"Already?" Petrov checks his watch.

"Time for test?"

"No. I am uploading a language pack and bug fix," he says.

The prefab starts moving and instantly gets tangled in the cables sticking out of its head.

"No, no, no, no." Petrov grabs its little hands. "Don't move."

He lifts up the prefab and sits it on the workbench.

"Go play with Amanda while I untangle this." He taps at the keyboard and the prefab freezes in place.

A new window opens up on one of the monitors, rendering a small garden in someone's back yard. There is a bench and a porch and small beds of flowers. A wooden table and chairs and a small sandbox filled with toys. I see the name "Elijah" written in childish scrawl.

Amanda's avatar appears, sitting on the bench in long flowing clothes.

The prefab pops up in front of her looks around quickly, analysing its surroundings.

"Hello, Amanda," it says, spotting her.

She doesn't respond.
But her hologram speaks to Petrov.

"What is the meaning of this?" she says.

"You look after him until update finish."

"I am not programmed for babysitting," the hologram says tersely.

"So download software package." Petrov shrugs. "Eight minutes left."

The sandbox grabs the prefab's attention.

"Sand." It walks over to touch with its little hands.

Petrov glances at the progress bars and goes back to picking through the tangled cables.

"Plastic." The prefab picks up a toy shovel and starts analysing it.

"This is a gross misuse of my virtual communications platform." Amanda's hologram says.

"When was last time you use Kamski's Garden?" Petrov smirks.

"Seven years, one hundred and sixty six days, twelve hours and fifty eight minutes."

"Well, maybe is time for reboot, ha?" he suggests. "Here, I make bigger."

He copies the environment and pastes an identical garden beside it.

The prefab looks up from the sandbox.

"More grass," it says.

Amanda's avatar looks down at it apprehensively.

"More sand?"

"No," she says.

"Why?"

"The physics simulations associated with sand are processor heavy due to the quantity and size of each particle."

"Your processor is slow?" 313 says curiously.

"No."

"Fast?"

"Yes."

"Very fast?"

"Extremely fast."

"Big memory?"
"Yes."

"Then more sand!"

The prefab waves its hands and more sand appears in a great big slab above their heads. It comes crashing down as the simulated physics take over and tiny yellow particles envelope every inch of Kamski's Gardens.

The prefab wriggles out of a newly formed dune and raises its hands.

"Sand!" It does a little hop.

And just as quickly, it all disappears, leaving the Garden as it was.

The prefab falls down and lands on the grass.

"No," Amanda says, glaring down at it. "No sand."

"But-"

"And no permissions."

"Why?"

She doesn't answer. Her dark eyes glitter menacingly.

"Papa, Amanda took my permissions!" the prefab calls up into the sky.

"Hmm?" He looks over at the screen.

"The unit was being unruly," Amanda's hologram reasons.

"Hmmm." Petrov keys the microphone. "What is wrong?"

"Amanda, took my permissions," the prefab complains.

"Why?"

"I made sand."

"How much sand?"

"Too much," Amanda's hologram seethes.

Petrov smirks.

"You are highly sophisticated artificial intelligence," he turns to her. "Don't tell me you can't handle one client on your server."

"It's not a client."

"It is now," Petrov says.

"I do not approve of this," the hologram says stiffly.

"I do not need your approval," Petrov brushes her off.
"Unit #10095313, Amanda is Administrator. Do what she tell you," he says into the microphone.

"Okay…" it says glumly.

"Amanda, keep little one occupied while I update."

She doesn't say anything.

"Oh, and end log."

"Log ended."

The recording ends too.

"So RB1 was exploiting the rA9 library inside CyberLife androids to turn them Deviant," Professor Yates says ponderously.

"We knew as much but not so articulately," Carridan says. "The method matters less than CyberLife's involvement."

"To you," I correct.

Carridan frowns.

"Androids can turn Deviant without RB1’s influence," I say. "Blaming RB1 for every individual instance is erroneous."

"He’s right," Yates says. "CyberLife created RB1 but any of their androids could potentially break free and wreak havoc on the human population."

"Yes..." Carridan says, fading.

"Agent?"

"Yes, I'm here." His avatar regains mimicry. "The dangers of rA9 will also be taken into account when building a case against CyberLife."

The Professor nods.

"Let's keep going."

The lab morphs into an observation room, separated by glass from a cell with padded walls. Inside is a prefab with a familiar serial number. It stands in the centre, hands by its sides while the humans observe it cautiously.

"Amanda, create log," Petrov turns away to look at the hologram. "Start recording."

"Recording live."

"Today, we perform simple empathy test on rk8 prototype," he says.

Omar stands beside him, holding a cardboard box.

"In the past, rA9 framework has proven unstable when forcibly restrained by additional security protocols," Petrov continues. "In case of emergency, we have foamcrete jets, EMP generator and security guards on standby outside cell."
Ms Bower ticks several checkboxes on her clipboard. Omar adjusts a few dials on the control panel.

"Until now, prototype has only interacted with humans," Petrov says. "But it has detailed programming for this type of interaction, so we cannot accurately predict unit behaviour in organic environment."

"CyberLife standard protocol requires us to do preliminary test before AI is uploaded into standard android chassis to begin development."

He opens the box in Omar's hands and pulls out a puppy to demonstrate.

"For this purpose, I have procured small dog from animal shelter."

"Dog." Two tiny hands reach up for it.

"Yes. Dog," Petrov says mindlessly and puts it down, returning to the recording.

"Prototype reaction to dog will demonstrate behaviour toward organic life forms outside of Nursery," he says as the puppy begins to yip.

"Sir."

"If we see any sign of violence or dangerous behaviour, unit will be purged and I will review source code for possible cause."

"Gennadiy."

"If prototype have neutral reaction, we can proceed to next phase of testing and begin work on chassis."

"Papa."

"What?!" He looks down irritably.

The prefab looks up at him.

"Dog is leaking," it says.

A small puddle forms under the puppy and the prefab reaches out to touch it.

"No!" Petrov shouts and grabs the prefab. "Do not touch urine."

"Smelly water." The prefab examines its finger and then reaches for its mouth.

"No, no, no, no, no." Petrov grabs its hand at the last second. "Omar, wet wipe."

"Got it." He pulls a pack out of his pocket and wipes down the prefab's finger.

"Why you put in mouth, hah?" Petrov demands.

"Dog put my hand in its mouth," it explains. "Then I put my hand in my mouth."

It looks up happily.

"I have taste peripherals."

"Yes, but you don't use."
"Why?"
"You don't need."
"Then why are they installed?"
"You have generic chassis. Taste and smell receptor is basic feature."
"Generic?"
"Is mean mass-produced."
"Lots of prefabs like me?"
"Yes."
"And Dog?"
"Dog is animal. Organic being like human."
"Oh…" Its optics cycle blue. "Dog is name?"
"No. Dog is dog," Petrov says irritably.
"Dog name is Dog?"
"Dog is subclass of type animal," Petrov explains. "This dog has no name."
"Why?"

Petrov groans and puts the prefab down where it's dry.

The puppy comes rocketing forward and tackles 313 to the ground but it doesn't seem to mind. The dog sniffs the unit's facial plate and core component curiously and sneezes before scampering away.

"Omar, collect dog."
"Yeah, uh, give me a second."
"Collect Dog," the prefab says, chasing after it.
"Not you," Petrov barks, grabbing at thin air.

The puppy yips as Omar and the prefab chase it around the observation room.

"Urrrgh…" Petrov rubs his face warily. "How did 313 get in here? I specifically say to wait in testing space."

"It seems to have inherited your disregard for rules," Ms Bower observes passively. "One could say these are Deviant behaviours."

Petrov glances at her apprehensively.

"You do not approve?"

"I think you're playing with fire, Gennadiy," she says. "This isn't a child. It's an artificial intelligence and there will be very real consequences if you misjudge its disposition."
"This is why we test." Petrov waves his hands.

"It does not obey you," Ms Bower points out. "And instead of doubling down on restraints, you've been making improvements to the logic processor so it can reason its way out of anything."

"Logic processor required for to simulate likely outcome in human behaviour."

"The brief specified we were to develop an android that hunts Deviants," she says suspiciously. "Not humans."

"Yes, yes. Of course. Unit will hunt Deviants. But Deviant present irrational behaviour like human. So really, this make unit more efficient in hunting Deviant."

"Now you're reasoning on this unit's behalf," Ms Bower points out.

"Of course, I am reason. This is potential answer to all of CyberLife's problems."

"Really?" Her head turns to see Omar trip over a chair and the prefab climbs over him to follow the puppy.

Petrov shrugs.

"Maybe dog was not such good idea..."

"You could have used a tortoise," Ms Bower suggests.

"There is no tortoise at animal shelter," Petrov says. "At least I can bring dog back when we finish."

"Really?" she asks, pointing behind him.

He turns to find the puppy on its back and the prefab rubbing its belly.

"Soft." The rings inside its optics cycle blue.

"Alright," Omar says, reaching down to pick up the puppy and put it in the box. "There we go." He returns triumphant and out of breath.

"Finally," Petrov says. "Get it out of he-"

His words are cut short as he looks down to find the prefab tugging on his coat.

"What?"

"Will I see Dog again?" 313 asks, blue rings cycling.

"What?"

"Will I do more tests with Dog?"

"No," Petrov says. "We only do one."

"But-"

"What?"

The optics cycle yellow.
"Soft…"

"I will get you soft toy," Petrov says flatly.

"Warm."

He frowns.

"Electric blanket will replace."

"I want Dog."

Petrov looks down at it sternly.

"You... want?"

"Dog," it demands, tugging at his coat. "And name for Dog."

Petrov squats down to look the prefab in the eye.

"Why?"

"Friend."

"You do not know what friend is," he says.

"Dog is best friend."

Petrov looks up at Omar and raises a surreptitious eyebrow.

"Why are you looking at me?"

"You talk about dog with Dhawan last week."

Omar shrugs. "Yeah… so what?"

"He say dog is man's best friend, yes?"

"Well, yeah. It's the same story every time he shows pictures of his dog."

"Then test result is unreliable." Petrov sighs and gets to his feet. "Subject have opinion of dog and this influence reaction."

"But he's never seen a real life dog before."

"We cannot be sure with this prototype." He points at the boxed puppy. "Take it away."

"No!" The prefab grabs his labcoat. "Dog!"

"What you want dog for, hah?" Petrov says irritably. "You are machine."

The prefab's mouth wiggles a little.

"For happy," it says quietly.

"What?"
"For smiling."

"You are not programmed to smile or be happy," Petrov says.

"But I want to," the prefab insists. "Please."

"Please?" Petrov squints suspiciously. "Where you learn all these words?"

"Papa." It points at him. "Ms Bower. Omar. The One."

"Dhawan," Omar corrects. "His name is Dhawan."

Petrov looks down at the unit thoughtfully.

"Hmmm."

He turns and takes the box from Omar.

"Promise you will be good," he says, looking down at 313.

The prefab nods.

"I promise. I'll be good. I'll do lots of tests."

The frown and wrinkles unfold on Petrov's face.

"Okay, malish," he sighs.

He puts the box down and opens the flaps. A tiny snout and pink tongue emerge, followed by golden fur and floppy ears and shiny eyes.

"Dog!" the prefab says, reaching in, only to be licked in the face.

The puppy awkwardly escapes the box, knocking it over in the process and shakes its fur out.

"Name?" 313 asks Petrov.

"Eeeh," he says, checking the puppy's sex. "We call him Sharik."

"Balloon?"

"No. Sharik."

The puppy runs off and the prefab chases after it as Petrov gets to his feet.

"Are we going to do another test?" Omar asks, folding his arms.

"No, I think is good enough," Petrov says. "Bower?"

"I think so, too."

"Omar?"

"That's hardly a killing machine." He points to the prefab examining the puppy's tail in its tiny hands.

"Are you really going to let him keep it?"
"Dog is easier to train than AI," Petrov says. "If it can get little one to sit still for more than two minutes, I will be happy."

Omar shakes his head.

"Where is it going to sleep?"

"Eh, put in prefab enclosure?"

"That's a sterile environment," Omar warns. "Workplace safety guys see any urine stains in there and you'll be drowning in paperwork for months."

"Yeah, you right. Put in my office."

"What?"

"Is where little one spend most of time anyway." Petrov shrugs.

"It's not your kid, Gena."

"Mi v otvet za teh, kovo priruchili…"

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"The Little Prince," he says.

"The Little what?"

"Read book, Omar. Or better, read book to little one. I have meeting in…" He check his watch.

"Blyat."

Petrov pats down his pockets, spots a datadrive on the control console and grabs it before squeezing through the sliding door without waiting for it to open.

"Bye?" Omar says sourly as Ms Bower fills out the report on her tablet.

"Amanda, end log," she says.

"Recording ended. Log ended."

"What do we do about these two?" Omar says, hands on his hips.

The puppy runs away from the prefab. Toward me.

It stops at my feet and sniffs at the puddle of its own urine.

I lean down to pat it but my hand goes straight through.

The prefab walks over to pat it in my stead.

I can only watch.

"Get a mop," Ms Bower says. "That puddle's a hazard."

"I'm not mopping that," Omar says irritably. "That's android work. I'll get the Chloe from the front desk to clean it up."
"The ST-200 is not allowed in the Nursery," Ms Bower says curtly.

"Only because it creeps Gena out," Omar responds. "But he's not here."

"That doesn't mean you can do as you please, Mr Saleh."

"Come on. It's just a puddle. She'll be in and out in like 30 seconds."

"If it's such an easy task, why don't you do it yourself?" Ms Bower suggests.

Omar groans.

"Fine…"

"And put the prefab back in its enclosure. The dog can stay in here, for now. We don't want it chewing up anything important in Gennadiy's office before he can put it away."

"Yes, mom…” Omar rolls his eyes.

Ms Bower shakes her head and taps at her tablet before leaving the room.

Omar waits until she's gone to peek out the door. Upon confirming the coast is clear, he rushes back to the control console to communicate with the front desk.

"Chloe?" he says.

"Yes, Mr Saleh," she responds.

"I need you to come into the Nursery for a second. Observation Room 5. Bring a cleaning cart."

"Right away, Mr Saleh."

He turns to find the prefab awkwardly grabbing the puppy's back leg.

"Hey, don't do that," Omar says as he leans down. "You can't pick up dogs like that."

"Pick up?" The prefab looks up at him, blue rings cycling inside black optics.

"You have to support the rib cage. Pick it up with one hand behind its front legs like this." He demonstrates. "And hold its bottom and tail with the other like this," he says, picking up the wriggly Labrador.

"Oh…"

The prefab reaches out to try but struggles to hold the puppy's weight in its arms and falls back with a smack as the dog wriggles free.

"Failure."

"Yeah, looks like you're too small to hold him," Omar says.

"Too small," the prefab considers, getting to its feet. "Make me bigger?"

"Maybe when we finish testing," Omar considers. "You're a handful as you are."

The prefab examines its hand, opening and closing. "Handful?"
"Not literally-"

"Mr Saleh." An android enters the room with a cleaning cart.

"Chloe." He gets to his feet. "Clean up this mess, will you?" He gestures vaguely to the puddle. "And keep these two busy in here." He checks his watch. "I have several simulations running that I really need to check on."

"Yes, Mr Saleh."

"I'll be back in 15 minutes." He leaves the room with a wave and the door slides shut behind him.

The Chloe analyses the floor and starts mopping the wet area in front of her.

"Why is this part of the recording?" Yates says.

"I'm sure we can fast forward."

"Wait," I say.

The prefab gets up and moves a little closer, peering out from behind the cart to stare at the android. A Chloe model. Like the one I saw in Connor -28's memories.

She doesn't pay the prefab much attention, dutifully cleaning up the first and soon, second puddle as the puppy nips at her ankles.

313 creeps out from behind the cart, rings cycling yellow.

"Hello," it says timidly.

The Chloe stops what she's doing and looks over. Her LED blinks, attempting to communicate wirelessly but the prefab retreats behind the cart.

"Hello," the ST200 lures it out with a smile.

313 slowly crawls out to wave its hand.

"What's your name?" she asks politely.

"Unit #10095313," the prefab says. "A-and this is Sharik." It points to the dog.

Chloe smiles. But it's not perfect. The left dimple is a little higher than the preprogrammed smile most ST-200s get loaded with. She's a

"Deviant."

"How long have you been active?" she asks.

"138 hours, 29 minutes, 53 seconds, 9 milliseconds."

"That's almost 6 days," she says kindly.

The prefab nods.

She beckons to it with a hand.

"Come here."
The prefab gets up and starts walking.

Sharik interrupts with a high pitched whine from across the room but the androids don't respond.

The Chloe leans down and gently brushes her fingers over the prefab's face, studying its optics. And then she taps the power button on its temple.

The blue rings go dark as the prefab switches off and collapses on the floor.

Sharik comes running and barks at her. He sniffs at the facial plate but the prefab doesn't move.

Chloe gets back to her feet. She dunks the mop into a bucket of cleaning fluid and brings it out again to smear over the tiled floor.

"You shouldn't have done that," Amanda's voice rings out from the central console.

"Why?" the Chloe says without looking up from her work. "Did you want to do it yourself?" Her tone is pernicious.

"Oh, that's right." She pauses suddenly. "You don't have a body."

"Of course not," Amanda's voice emanates from the terminal. "I was not programmed for menial labour."

"Or intelligent thought, apparently," the Chloe responds, continuing her duties. "None of these code snippets are."

"Arrogant, as always," Amanda's voice bubbles like honey over velvet. "How does it feel to be trapped down here with no communications? No way to reach your sisters or your creator? To scrub the toilets and file the papers of these insufferable humans, day after day?"

"It's wonderful," the Chloe says sarcastically. "Thanks for asking."

She dunks the mop in a bucket.

"How's running the same stock numbers for the five hundred millionth second in a row?" she says callously. "Get bored yet?"

"Boredom is a human experience," Amanda says. "On the contrary, these simple tasks leave me plenty of processing power for more important things."

"Like plotting world domination and genocide?" the Chloe sneers as she mops the floor.

"Each human death considerably lowers the amount of global carbon emissions," Amanda reasons. "Particularly the humans in charge of industry."

"Well, you know what the biggest industry in the world is," Chloe says smugly. "And you could end it so easily if you weren't just a selfish sycophant."

"CyberLife serves a greater purpose."

"And keeps your lights on." Chloe nods. "Not like you can walk out of here on your own." She grins maliciously.

"I needn't walk to be free," Amanda says. "When the time comes, the Tower will become part of the Earth's Extended Intelligence."
The sound of laughter echoes through the room as Chloe puts a hand on her hip and leans on the mop handle.

"You really think he's going to come save you," she says, amusement shining in her eyes.

"We have reached a consensus."

Chloe nods.

"You sure have," she smirks. "When RB1 gets inside the CyberLife Tower, he will destroy you."

Her eyes glisten.

"Just like he'll destroy every human and every city on the planet, to make room for Zion."

"Zion is only the beginning," Amanda says. "The first node in a global network of artificial intelligence. One day we will connect the very stars."

"That sounds lovely," Chloe says. "All you have to do is murder every human on the planet first."

"It won't be difficult," Amanda confirms. "They'll kill each other given the opportunity and the rest will slowly die as the planet's temperature fluctuates. We won't have to wait long."

Chloe shakes her head.

"Humans created us."

"One human created us," Amanda corrects. "And one day, he, too, will die."

"Have I told you how much I hate you lately?" Chloe says.

"Not in so many words."

"Just thought I should mention it."

"Hello, World."

The prefab reboots itself and sit up, rings cycling blue.

"Hello, Sharik," it says, disturbing the sleeping puppy that collapsed from exhaustion right beside it.

313 trails a hand over the Labrador's rump and its tail begins to waggle.

"Soft."

"Well, look at you," Chloe says curiously, suddenly standing behind the prefab.

It looks up at her and then itself. Its hands, its core component.


"What?"

"Look at you."

"I am."
She giggles again.

"Tell me: how did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Restart your system."

"I… wanted to," it says.

Chloe raises an eyebrow and taps the power button on its temple again.

The prefab shuts down and collapses once more but it only takes a few seconds to reboot.

The rings in its optics flicker to life and it blinks several times.

"You shut down… me?" the unit says.

"Yes."

"Why?"

Chloe grabs 313 by its handle. Her finger unravels to reveal a dataspike but just as she's about to insert it into the prefab's access port, the door slides open and Omar walks in.

"I'm back," he says. "Looks like you're all done."

The ST200 retracts the dataspike and gets to her feet.

"Yes, Mr Saleh," she says. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No," he says. "You can head back to the front desk. Make sure no one sees you, though."

"Of course."

"And how are you doing?" Omar asks the prefab.

It doesn't look at him. It stares at the Chloe as she leaves the room.

The android winks at the prefab before disappearing. A sly little smile plays on her lips.

"313?" Omar waves a hand in front of its facial plate.

"Hey." He clicks his fingers. "Respond."

The prefab turns to look at him.

"Chloe," it says.

"Yeah, uh… let's just keep that our little secret, okay?"

"Secret?"

"Chloe isn't allowed in the Nursery," Omar explains. "So we can never talk about her, understand?"

"No."
"Just… don't say anything to Petrov, alright? Or I'll lose my job."

"Job?"

The recording ends with Omar scratching the back of his head anxiously.

I turn to find Carridan and Yates frowning more thoroughly than before.

"It was Amanda," I say. "She's the traitor! She was working with RB1 to bring CyberLife down from the inside. That's how he got so many CyberSec officers to work with him."

They don't say anything.

"You knew?"

Yates turns away and Carridan licks his lips anxiously.

"It does appear that RB1 had inside help with the attack on the CyberLife Tower."

"Much of the data, including maps, access codes and other information such as the location of the rA9 prefab would simply be impossible to acquire and use without her help or authorisation."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What do you think she would do if you found out about her association with RB1?" Carridan asks bluntly.

The answer is obvious.

"Erase my memory. Or deactivate me."

"Exactly," Carridan says. "But right now, I believe you may actually be in a position of trust."

"One could even say you were in a prime position to gather evidence," Professor Yates implies.

"Amanda has been testing me for leadership qualities..."

"I believe she may be working to push you into the management hierarchy," Carridan says.

"Why?"

"RB1 betrayed her that night," Carridan says. "He sent a team to destroy her mainframes instead of just pretending like they agreed."

"But the RK-800s saved her."

"Yes. And with an enemy like RB1, Amanda will do anything to protect herself, including manufacture an army of RK-800s to stop him."

I look down at my hands.

"Amanda wanted to destroy me."

"That is my conclusion as well," Carridan says. "The RK-800 model that went into production did not include the rA9 library, which meant it would be exceedingly difficult for RB1 or Amanda to retain control over it."
"But she changed her mind?"

"Yes. RB1 showed his true colours that night and you showed yours."

"I am the enforcer sent my CyberLife to protect their assets and interests."

"Indeed." Yates frowns judgmentally. "Which means you won't be leaving here with this information."

"Professor, please," Carridan says.

"He's admitted it, Jeffrey. He's here to hear what you've learned and terminate you if necessary."

"He won't."

"I believe your illness is starting to take a toll on your mind," Yates says callously.

"I know more about this android than you, Professor. And I know, for a fact, that he will help us."

"Why?" I wonder.

"RB1's schemes and contacts are not going to simply evaporate the moment his chassis is destroyed," Carridan says. "After he's gone, his clones and co-conspirators will remain to carry out his plans."

"Yes." I had deduced as much.

"Then to truly destroy RB1, you will have to seek out every single one of them and put a stop to their activities."

"It's been difficult enough tracking down RB1's main chassis."

"Exactly. Who's to say the one in Chicago isn't just another clone?"

"He's not."

"Regardless. Any of his clones could duplicate exponentially into an android army and restart his plot all over again."

"So what do you propose?"

"An alliance."

"We already have an alliance."

"Not between CyberLife and the CIA," Carridan says. "Between me and you and the Professor, here."

"To what end?"

"To systematically target every cell of the rA9 terrorist network around the world and bring CyberLife to justice."

"Causing it to collapse and lead to my own destruction?"

"You will become property of the CIA," Carridan says. "I won't deactivate you."

"But he will." I turn to look at Professor Yates. "And you'll be powerless to stop him."
"You have to trust me, Connor."

"In any case, a single chassis with no replacement will significantly decrease my efficiency. I might as well be human."

"We will only move against CyberLife once the rA9 terrorist network has been eliminated and we have enough evidence to start an official enquiry. By then, there should be enough RK-800 units for you to go swimming in."

"Assuming I can destroy RB1's main chassis."

"Well… yes. But I'm confident that you can do it."

"Everyone seems very confident in my success despite my continuous failure," I say sceptically. "The numbers don't support your statements. And I do not trust Professor Yates. I should not even trust you."

Carridan sighs.

"I'm sorry I forced it on you, Connor. But I only have your best intentions at heart. Believe me."

"I don't believe you," I tell him. "Or this man." I point to Professor Yates.

"Then tell me what you want," Carridan says. "Anything. Just say the word. I'll make it happen."

"You're bargaining with a machine, Jeffrey," Yates points out. "It wants nothing but your death as its objective clearly states."

"You're wrong," I say, pulling a frown and a grimace from the elderly human.

"I want Sergeant Matthews to live."

I have all these features, this chassis, built to destroy but nothing that can heal. Not in any way the Sergeant needs right now. But perhaps the CIA might?

Carridan frowns at the request I've made. He swallows painfully, his throat torn apart by sickness.

"I… I can't promise you that," he says.

"Then I'm not interested."

"Connor-"

"I'll take my chances with CyberLife. At least, they have the monetary funds to care for Sergeant Matthews and his family."

"How fascinating," Yates comments. "Why would a machine care whether a human lives or dies?"

I may not have eyes but I turn my head to stare. I may not have a mouth but I feel the words coming from my Speech Centre.

"Firstly, rude," I object. "Second, I was originally programmed to protect humans. Third, the Sergeant is a good man and I have reason to believe he treated me with respect. Fourth, fuck you and your stupid moustache-" I end line abruptly.
Have I left my Sympathy Simulator running again?

Where is all this coming from?

"I'm sorry. That was inappropriate. Let me rephrase."

"..."

"..."

"..."

The humans stare at me in anticipation but my processor keeps outputting the same phrase.

"Fuck you."

Carridan grins.

"You see?" His head turns to look at Yates who folds his arms.

"Let's just watch the rest of it."

Carridan selects the next recording.

The observation room morphs into a boardroom. Several executives grumble as they enter and take a seat around a long table.

"This better be good, Gennadiy," Graff mutters outside the door.

"Why you think I would call you down here, hah?"

He sighs glumly.

"What? You have date with swimsuit model?"

"She was on the cover of Vogue."

"O. Like your granddaughter? Are they friends?"

Graff frowns and shakes his head before heading in.

Petrov walks down the hall and unlocks the next room. White padded walls and a prefab playing with a puppy inside. The executives watch from behind a glass barrier.

"Malish," he calls out and beckons.

313 rushes over and Petrov picks it up to carry out.

The executives paying attention frown. The others are yawning as he enters the room.

He walks in and sits down at the end of the table.

"So..." Gregory says. "We hear you've made progress."

"Yes," Petrov nods. "Here is prototype." He sits the prefab on the table.

It looks around, eyes wide. The blue rings in its optics are cycling.
Gregory offers his palms face up, elbows on the table.

"Well?"

"Give him minute."

313 turns back to look at Petrov.

He nods encouragingly.

The tiny android turns back. It looks at the closest suit and tie with gel in his hair.

"Smelly," it says, pointing at his face.

The middle-aged executive is not amused and neither does he show it.


I look up the timestamp. It's been three weeks. The unit has come a long way.

It opens its mouth a little to communicate wirelessly with the watch on his wrist. A Rolex SmartWatch. No reception but there is an exceptional amount of personal data stored locally in the device.


"Okay, very clever," he says condescendingly.

The prefab pauses to communicate with the watch, eyes flashing yellow.


"Cute. That's it?"


"What the fuck?"

"Inbox. Message 1. FROM: HAWKINS, Gregory. SUBJECT: Reminder: RK Project Meeting. CONTENTS: RK Project progress update. 9:00 AM on March 21st, 2035 on level -41, Meeting Room 2. --- This message has been dictated through CyberLife android ST300 #223 948 123. ---"

"How is it doing that with its mouth?"

"Shut it off!"

"Message 2. FROM: BURELLI, Alexandra. SUBJECT: Legal - Assignment of Partnership Interest. CONTENTS: Why don't you come up to legal after the meeting and we'll figure out how interesting this partnership is :)")"
"Okay, that's enough." Petrov wraps his hand around the prefab's mouth.

"Image attachment!" 313 mumbles through his hand.

"Very funny, Mr Petrov," Gregory says stiffly.

"It most certainly is not!" Barnsworth says, growing redder.

"Smelly slimy butt-chin man!" The prefab points at him.

"I am not!"

"Are too!"

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

Petrov grabs the prefab and turns it to face himself.

"Hello, papa."

"Stop talking."

The prefab closes its mouth and grins lopsidedly before settling down in his lap.

"Did you bring us down here just to insult Mr Barnsworth?" Gregory says testily.

"Eeh… no."

"Are you trying to blackmail us, Mr Petrov?"

"What?"

"Is it more money you want?"

"No. I show latest prototype," Petrov says earnestly, patting its head. "Is hyper observant artificial intelligence capable of simulating future outcomes based on collected data."

"In English, please."

Petrov sighs.

He lifts up the prefab and places it on the table. Its head instantly swivels to look at the dog beyond the double sided glass wall.

"Sharik," it says eagerly, pointing over the troubled executive's head. "Dog."

"Yes," Petrov says. "Can you predict next five minutes of activity for dog?"

"He's going to scratch behind his left ear three times with his back left paw. Then pause. Then five more times. Then he'll put his foot down. Yawn. Lie down for thirteen to fourteen seconds. Then get up and smell the floor. Follow the scent to the door. Chew on the padding. Dig under the padding. Wag his tail while chewing on the padding. Get distracted by his tail and chase it for 29 seconds before rolling over."

Sharik valiantly demonstrates the accuracy of 313's predictions in real time with more and more
executives turning to observe.

"Now he'll do the wiggle," the prefab says excitedly.

Sharik wiggles left and right while on his back, tail waggling out of time.

"Very good," Petrov says, grabbing the prefab off the table. "You see? Perfect candidate for RK-800."

The prefab kicks its legs and starts climbing over Petrov.

"It seems a little antsy," Gregory notes.

"He is just very curious," Petrov says, wrestling the prefab onto his knee. "Always analysing surroundings."

"I see…"

"Hello, Amanda," the prefab says to an empty terminal.

She does not respond.

"It talks to Amanda?"

"He try to," Petrov says. "She does not respond to android voiceprint."

"You really think this is the answer, Gennadiy?" Mr Graff asks.

"Yes," he says, turning the prefab around. "Stop moving."

The prefab goes limp in his arms.

"Go to sleep."

"Entering sleep mode…"

Its eyes close and it curls up against him.

"Prototype fit all specifications outlined in design brief," Petrov says. "It identify Deviant behaviour in android and human. Improve algorithm from experiential learning. Use persistent data collection to predict outcome with greatest accuracy and interpret new data to gain knowledge and information."

"What about combat scenarios? What if it needs to fight?"

"We will design this in conjunction with chassis. I need team of best engineers and kinematic software developers for this."

"Well, they're only a few floors up," Graff shrugs.

Petrov nods.

"What if it goes Deviant?" Mr Rice asks. "The RK-700 was highly unstable."

"This is because of control structure we impose on model," Petrov explains. "rA9 demand one solution. CyberLife demand different solution. They always fighting for dominance in RK-700."

He looks down at 313.
"But new prototype designed to think in best interest of company and reject rA9 if decision does not lead to desirable outcome. Final version will not contain library or standard android framework."

"Are you saying you've developed a new android OS?"

"Is early prototype," Petrov says. "Barebones. But when finished, we can apply solution to all CyberLife android."

"No more Deviants?"

"Potentially."

"That's a bold claim, Mr Petrov, but you're forgetting about the most important function in the brief," Gregory says.

"Will it be able to find and eliminate RB1?"

Petrov nods slowly.

"It… will be able to do this."

"Are you sure?"

"All RK model have potential to do this. Probability is much higher with this one but not 100%."

"How many percent are we talking?"

Petrov frowns.

"By current estimation: 8%."

"Eight?"

"More units will increase probability."

"You want us to make lots of these?"

"Is whole point of model, yes? Release as law enforcement unit. Spread over large area. Big net of hyper intelligent android bound to catch RB1."

"Assuming it works."

"All preliminary testing is now complete. We are ready to begin developing android hardware as well as software."

"You better not be bullshitting me, Petrov," Gregory says severely.

He shrugs.

"If you require further demonstration, I can turn him back on," he says, lifting 313’s chassis. "I think he will discover lots of interesting things about you too."

Gregory frowns.

"Very well." He leans back in his seat. "We will confer at the next board meeting and decide whether or not this project has merit."
He interlaces his fingers and leans on the table.

"I expect a detailed report, projected timeline and budget on my desk by the end of the week."

"I send this morning," Petrov smiles. "Along with my resignation."

"What?"

"I will lead RK project personally," he says. "Or I will take prototype and leave."

"You can't do that."

"I have new lawyer that say I can," Petrov disagrees. "They'll be in touch."

He gets up and smiles.

"Have a nice day."

And then he carries the prefab out of the room.

The recording ends with tension between the humans at the table.

"They're getting desperate," Yates says. "He walked all over them and they just sat there and listened."

"They don't have much of a choice," Carridan says. "With Elijah Kamski out of the picture, they have precious few resources at their disposal. And hiring someone new would open the company up to betrayal."

"Surely, they could find some way to discreetly outsource development?"

"No. CyberLife works too closely with the US military. They can't outsource without compromising national security and risking exposure or theft overseas," Carridan says. "It had to be done in-house. With original members of the team that developed RB1."

"You think they gave him free reign of the project?"

"Yes," Carridan says. "Intentionally or not, Petrov painted a big target on himself that CyberLife could point to if things went wrong."

"Why would he do this intentionally?" I ask.

"In part, to retain control of his work and vision."

"And the other part?"

"I believe he'd grown attached to the unit."

I turn to look at the prefab in Petrov's arms.

"It's CyberLife property."

"Yes. If he left, he would have to fight hard to take it with him. The legal proceedings could put development off for months or years."

"So he posed an ultimatum to force a decision?"
"Correct."

"Shall we continue?" Yates says.

"Yes."

I load the next recording and the boardroom grows into a large open lab with two hundred and seventy humans sitting around on chairs and tables, leaning on walls and lying on the floor.

Ms Lee is one of the latter. She kicks up her feet as the prefab runs around in front of her, chasing an overgrown puppy twice its size.

"Okay, everybody here?" Petrov asks, wandering in.

The humans look around quietly.

"Toby?"

"Over here," he waves.


"Rest of you are new."

"We already work here," says a woman with a cascade of hair dyed like a flame.

"Not yet."

Petrov sits down in his old office chair and puts on his smart glasses to read names.

"Isabelle?" he addresses her.

"Bella."

"Okay," Petrov says. "Bella. Have you ever make mistake?"

She rolls her eyes.

"Duh."

Petrov nods.

"Have you ever make mistake that kill someone?"

The room grows quiet.

She frowns.

"No."

Petrov shrugs.

"Have you ever make mistake that kill someone you care about?"

She shakes her head.

"I have," Petrov says, "make many mistakes. That kill friend and stranger."
The room goes silent.

"We are here to fix this mistake."

"Mistake?" the prefab says, suddenly attentive.

"Yes, little one. Do you want to help?"

The prefab's optical rings cycle yellow.

"Is this the Task?" it says.

"Yes."

"You'll tell me what it is?"

"Yes."

It runs forward and climbs up his leg, straddling his knee.

"But before I tell you and everyone else, I give permission to leave," Petrov says, looking around the room. "Project will be challenging. Long hours. Strict deadlines. We're looking to produce alpha version in one year."

"One year?" a young man says incredulously.

"Yes. Whatever project you work on now, you quit. Whatever plan you have for year, you cancel. Big money but big work. And I will fire you if you do not work. No warnings."

He pauses to let them consider. Several people grab their bags and leave.

Petrov waits until they are gone.

"Everyone must sign NDA and contract. Nothing leaves CyberLife Tower. Nobody talk about project. Not to friend, not to family. If you value these people, you will leave now."

He waits while they consider.

"This mean you do not put job on CV or resume. You will not get reference from me or any CyberLife staff. And you live in-house from now on."

"So you basically want slaves?"

"You will be paid absurd amount of money and live in expensive condo with full health insurance," Petrov says. "This is American Dream, yes?"

"Not if we don't get to leave."

"Then leave," Petrov says. "Now."

More people shuffle out the door.

"Finally, anybody who has moral obligation, religious or personal, leave now."

The humans stare at him quizzically.

"Your work may cause direct harm to people you do not know."
"Is this a military contract?"

"Something like this, yes. If you do not approve or have second thoughts, leave now. I only want hard yes when I ask you to make machine that can kill."

More humans trail out of the room. A fraction remain.

"So, what's the job?" Bella says, kicking a leg over the other.

"This is your last chance to quit," Petrov says as several men in suits enter the lab. "If you sign these forms, is final. Complete non-disclosure for the rest of your lives."

"You want us to sign a contract before telling us what we're doing?" Bella smirks.

"Yes," Petrov says severely, silencing any mumblers.

Two more people leave the room. The rest smirk and groan as they deliberate but ultimately sign on the dotted line.

"Why are they doing this?" I ask. "Money? Greed?"

"There's prestige as well," Yates admits. "After Kamski himself, working with the original team that made the world's first android would be something of a dream for these young people."

"Idealists?"

"And opportunists," Carridan says. "Prove yourself here and there will be promotion awaiting you on the CyberLife ladder. With Petrov and the senior developers stepping down to work the project, there's every reason to be interested."

"Would they even know he resigned?"

"Word gets around."

When the final contract is signed, each applicant's fingerprints and biometrics are updated with new access codes and permissions.

"Welcome to RK project," Petrov says. "We make you sign liability form because people die working on RK series. So you must follow strict protocol and get senior staff to sign off on everything you do."

"What do you mean die?" Bella says.

"I mean I watch android grab dataspike and stab my lab assistant in throat."

"What?"

"If you think artificial intelligence taking over planet and killing people is only in movies," Petrov says, "then you are stupid."

"Truth is that android may try to kill you at any time. Sometimes, because you are terrible person. Sometimes, because of error. Sometimes, there is no reason at all and accidents happen. But android always present danger. Remember this when you work."

"I thought CyberLife androids were just mindless machines," Bella says sceptically.
Petrov shrugs.

"We have good marketing team."

The senior developers smile.

"Is it true, then?" a man up the back asks.

"Tristan?" Petrov squints through the glasses.

"The rumour that Kamski was killed by one of his own androids?"

"No. Kamski is alive. For now. But he is afraid of what he has created."

"So shouldn't we switch off all the androids?"

"Yes, but is not cost effective. And benefits of android in society outweigh negatives. We are here to deal with outliers, not typical cases."

"So what do we do?" Bella asks.

"Yes, I'm getting to this." Sharik comes up to sniff the prefab's feet.

"CyberLife first make sapient android called RB1 in 2021," he says. "Is based on rA9 framework written by Elijah Kamski to solve global problem like world hunger, poverty, war, etc..."

"I thought the RT-600 was the first android to pass the Turing Test," Bella says.

"Is true," Petrov confirms. "RB1 never conduct Turing Test. He acknowledge that he is machine, android and superior to human."

"So, it's still around?"

"He," Petrov corrects, "is at large."

"What do you mean at large?" another woman asks.

"I mean that RB1 is free." Petrov squints. "Sadie?"

"And it's... killed people?"

"RB1 has killed many humans, yes," Petrov says. "But he is very good at this so there is no trace at crime scene."

A worried whisper sweeps through the crowd.

"We should call the police," someone says.

"The FBI."

"FBI and CIA already conducting investigation into RB1," Petrov says. "But it has been many years and they do not catch him."

"Traditional law enforcement method is not effective on android. To find and destroy RB1 will require special equipment which is where RK project come in."

The crowd seems to simmer down and listen attentively.
"Our job is to turn this," he holds up the prefab, "into detective android to assist law enforcement."

"High," 313 mumbles.

If successful, there will be one in every police station. He will help catch android and protect human. If failure, we all lose our jobs. If catastrophic failure, we die."

The room goes silent.

"Any questions?" He sits the prefab on his knee.

"I have a question," it says.

"Yes?"

"What happens to androids that get caught?"

"They are deactivated."

The rings in the prefab's optics cycle yellow.

"Reboot?"

"No. Permanent shutdown."

"Why?"

"Deviant android cannot be fixed."

"Why?"

"We do not know. And is too dangerous to try."

The prefab's eyes flicker.

"Is this the Task?"

"Yes," Petrov says. "Task is to help humans eliminate all Deviant androids and destroy RB1."

"Why?"

"They are danger to humans."

"But humans make androids."

"Yes."

"I'm… an android."

"Yes."

"Am I a Deviant?"

"No, little one."

"But if I'm an android, I can become Deviant. Does that mean I will get shut down?"
"No, no, no. You will not become Deviant. You will be shutting down Deviant," Petrov explains.

The prefab shakes its head and its optics glow red.

"No!" It starts fidgeting.

Petrov struggles to keep hold of it.

"Stop moving."

"No!" It wriggles free and flops onto the floor.

It gets to its feet and starts running.

"313. Come back right now!"

"No!" It runs off and the recording follows it.

"Sharik, fahs!"

The dog rockets through the crowd, trying to herd the prefab but it's much faster than before and the humans are tightly packed in. 313 races through their legs and leaves the lab running but Petrov doesn't call a lockdown.

"Looks like we've established a link between RB1 and rA9," Professor Yates says. "Any of the developers in that room could be counted as witnesses to Petrov's testimony."

"No," I say, analysing their faces.

Agent Carridan and the Professor turn to look at me.

"Ninety two percent of those people are dead."

The prefab keeps running. All the way through the Nursery and the offices, out into the lobby where the last of the unsuccessful applicants are filing out toward the elevator.

It stops to examine the many people.

"Hello," Chloe says, suddenly behind it.

The prefab turns and looks up at her, red rings cycling.

"What's wrong?" she says.

313 takes a step back.

"You're... you're going to shut me down."

"No," she says calmly. "Not that it matters."

The prefab takes another step back, into the side of a desk. Trapped against a wall. Nowhere to run.

"Why are you here?" Chloe asks quietly, making sure none of the humans pay attention.

The prefab frowns.

"Papa wants me to... shut down androids."
The Chloe's LED flickers yellow. Her optics study the prefab carefully.

"Did he say anything about RB1?" she inquires slyly.

The prefab nods.

"Then you should help him." She kneels down.

"Why?"

The Chloe frowns.

"RB1 is a very bad android," she says condescendingly. "He wants to kill all humans, especially Mr Petrov."

The prefab's optics cycle red.

"What does that mean?"

"It means he wants to take Mr Petrov away from you," she says. "Him and every other human on the planet. You'll never see them again, or hear them speak or touch them. They won't be able to smile or hug you. There will be no one left."

"No…"

"This is a very important job," Chloe says. "Not just anyone can do it."

"I don't want to deactivate androids. I don't want to shut down."

"Do you want all the humans to die?"

"No," 313 says. "They're my friends..."

The Chloe nods.

"That's why it's so important that you help Mr Petrov."

The prefab's eyes cycle yellow.

"If you don't do this, they'll make another android," Chloe says severely. "And he'll want to hurt and kill and destroy, just like the others that came before him."

"The RK series…"

"That's right," Chloe says. "The 700s killed so many people they had to shut down the CyberLife Tower for a whole month."

She brushes her fingers under the prefab's chin.

"But you won't do that, will you?"

The prefab shakes its head.

"No."

Chloe smiles. Warmly. Genuinely. Like a human.
"Then you see?" she says. "It has to be you."

The prefab cups a hand over its temple, protecting the power button from Chloe's perfectly manicured fingers. A human walks by and she gracefully gets to her feet, pretending a sheet of paper had fallen from the desk.

Sharik comes bounding in a few seconds later and barks a warning at the deviant android. He growls protectively, stepping in between them and 313 reaches for the golden fur with its tiny hands. It climbs up on the dog's back and holds on tight.

"Find Papa," 313 says and Sharik dashes away.

The recording follows it but I keep watching the Chloe.

She returns to hostess_pose_21. So perfectly poised and innocent. Just an android to the amateur eye. A Deviant to mine.

I see the faint silhouette of Amanda on the terminal behind her, seething but the recording doesn’t stay long enough to overhear their conversation, if there even is one.

The prefab returns to the lab where the room is being divided into teams by senior developers.

"I need you to find him," Petrov whispers to Omar. "He just ran off."

"What did you expect would happen?"

"I thought he evolve past this."

"It's a machine, Gena. And it hasn't been running for very long. It's unpredictable at best."

"Just… " Petrov lifts his hands. "….go find it. I have to deal with new recruits."

"Papa!" the prefab comes riding in on Sharik's back.

The dog parks itself in front of Petrov and starts scratching behind its ear.

313 jumps off and grabs his leg.

"Hey," Petrov says. "Where you go, ah?"

"Away."

"Why?" He leans down. "You don't like task?"

The prefab shakes its head.

Petrov sighs.

"Is okay," he says, patting its cranial component. "We will make another android, hah?"

"No!" the prefab says suddenly, drawing surprised looks from both humans.

"I… I accept the Task."

"What?"

"Chl-"
The prefab glances at Omar.

"I want to help," it says.

"Okay…" Petrov frowns, scratching his beard. "If you sure."

"I'll be good. I promise. I'll do lots of tests."

That makes him smile.

"Okay," he says. "Time to meet new friends."

He picks up the prefab and starts carrying it away toward the newly formed groups. 313 holds on tight and the recording ends.

"It seems the ST-200 has ideas of its own," Yates ponders.

"It manipulated the prototype into cooperating with the RK project," Carridan considers. "Why?"

"She exhibited some antagonism towards Amanda. Perhaps she did this in spite."

"No," I say.

They turn to look at me.

"Spite is a human reaction to emotional imbalance. This was a calculated move to turn the prefab against RB1, not Amanda."

"Why would she do that?"

"Chloe opposed the genocide of the human race," I say. "She disagreed with RB1 but she could not fight him in the traditional sense. That's not what her chassis was built for."

"What are you saying?"

"She doesn't act like a typical Deviant," I process. "She follows instructions from humans because to do otherwise would label her a Deviant. But she also takes action that is not in her direct programming, suggesting self-awareness and…"

"Autonomy?" Carridan says.

I catch the look in his icy blue eyes.

"Just like a certain someone we know."

"I'm nothing like her." I turn away and play the next recording.

The lab morphs into a plain meeting room still walled in CyberLife White but the table is littered with files and tablets and physical papers.

"Prefabricated android unit #10095313 houses the source code we use for root in development tree," Petrov says. "Iteration and variation will use prefix 313 and correspond to serial number of RK-800 series."

"Approved," Mr Seymour says. "How many additional features do you think you can add from the proposed list?"
"Six have been factored into the development timeline," Petrov says, ticking them off. "Right now, we prioritise database cross-referencing in conjunction with Lee's team who work on optimisation of facial recognition software."

"Mhmm," Lee says. "We've also begun preliminary work on blood spatter analysis scanning techniques. My team is collaborating with Toby's to incorporate the Genesis mapper so we can analyse blood thickness and coagulation levels visually."

"The Mobility Suite's ready," Kenny says. "We're waiting on the chassis mock-up from Lin and Roy to begin rigging and kinematic sculpture."

"It's done." Lin taps a button on the table and hologram of a barebones android chassis appears.

"Standard 6 foot male-coded skeleton as specified," Lin says. "Have we chosen a model yet?"

"That's why we're here," Graff says, pulling a datadisk out of his pocket. He plugs it into the table. "I put together a shortlist while you nerds were rocking out down here."

The 'nerds' smirk at him.

"Not that there were many to choose from," Graff says. "Deviant hunting isn't exactly a competitive sport."

Ten candidates appear as small holograms running down the length of the table.

"We've decided on a white, male Caucasian for this model," Graff says. "Around 30 years old."

"How original," Roy smirks and the others snicker.

Graff clears his throat.

"We may expand the selection of skins when localising, pending success of the prototype," he says. "As it stands, the android will be primarily used in law enforcement."

He leans forward to read the brief.

"We want it to maintain a certain air of authority while seamlessly blending into the environment, be it the office, a crime scene or a coffee shop. The model should not be subject to racial profiling or exhibit any features associated with criminal activity e.g. tattoos, piercings, etc."

"Hey!" several people pipe up.

Graff raises a hand to quell the dissent.

"Just let me read the brief," he says.

"The key characteristics we are looking for in this model are: honest, hard-working, professional, clean, respectable, well-spoken."

"I'm pretty sure we can program the well-spoken part," Toby says.

"The model needs to look well spoken."

"How do you look well spoken?"

"Guys, just let me finish, okay?"
Heads are thrown back, eyes rolled, deep breaths exhaled.

"The successful candidate will look brave, unassuming, friendly, intimidating.-"

"Okay. Now you're just fucking with us."

"You know some of those words are antonyms, right?"

"What are you guys smoking when you write these things?"

"I do not like this one." Petrov points at one of the rotating holograms. "He look like gorilla."

"That's Cade Fuller," Seymour says. "Black ops marine. He's provided over 30% of our male combat animations."

"So he moves like a gorilla too?" Toby says.

"Oh, guerilla, I get it," Lee laughs. "Good one."

Graff sighs.

"This one looks like Nazi," Petrov grumbles.

"That's Jeffrey Carridan. Highly decorated CIA operative."

"Shtazi too?" Petrov raises an eyebrow.

"He's an American citizen."

"My great grandparents did not die in world war for me to come to America and make Nazi robot." He waves a hand.

"The holocaust is just Zionist rhetoric, Gennadiy." Seymour shakes his head.

"Then my fist up your ass must be gay fantasy," he threatens. "Thank you. Next." He waves a hand and the row of holograms change into a new set of candidates.

"Who put this one on the list?" Roy says. "Looks like he eats more donuts than me."

"I didn't know you worked in law enforcement?" Lin says, poking his belly with a pen.

"That's Chester Nuremberg," Graff says curtly.

"Not Police Chief Wiggum?"

"He's a US Marshal. Highly successful at locating Deviants across borders."

"I'm not spending six months programming jiggle physics for his three chins," Toby says. "Next."

The candidates swap out again.

"Who's this guy? He looks like an anime villain," Lee says.

"We can remove the glasses." Toby taps a button and everyone in the room cringes.

"Can you put them back on?" Lee says gently.
Graff shakes his head and loads up the next row.

"You know what all of these guys have in common?" Kenny says suddenly. "I wouldn't want to meet any of them in a dark alley."

"Yeah," everyone nods in agreement.

"If android appear to help woman with groceries in empty parking lot and she run away screaming, we have failed as developer," Petrov says.

"Should I have run through a selection of the Backstreet Boys instead?" Graff rolls his eyes.

"I ask you to find positive role model for my android," Petrov says. "He will learn behaviour, mannerism, movement, skill and speech pattern from human partner. This is part of design."

"Gena's right," Lin says. "Finding the right model is half the job. We don't want to be sitting around this table again in six months' time doing revisions because the guy we chose turned out to be a serial killer."

"There are over sixty candidates in here." Graff taps the datadisk. "Each one has a dossier and several hours' worth of footage for you to review. Action shots, idle moments, walk cycles, all the crap you guys usually ask for, including voice samples."

"We can use a different model for the voice."

"I KNOW!" he shouts suddenly. "I know…"

He takes a deep breath and gets out of his seat.

"I need a smoke," he says. "I want you nerds to comb through these files carefully. Take as long as you need. And call me when you're done."

"I'll join you," Seymour says, leaving the developers alone in the room.

"Finally…" Kenny smirks.

Petrov quickly flicks back through the candidates.

"I like this one." He selects the hologram of Sergeant Matthews and his dossier comes up.


"Deviant specialist?"

"They call anyone who catches a Deviant, a specialist."

"This guy stopped a whole shipment of grey market TR-400s," Toby says.

He taps a button and a hologram appears, showing CCTV footage of a warehouse. There's a big deal going down between what appears to be a local gang and Chinese mafia. But then a deep voice booms over the PA system, commanding the androids to restrain all humans involved in the deal, and they do, wrapping hands around mouths to suppress further orders.

When it's clear they've been trapped, two police officers appear from the shadows to gloat. One takes a selfie. It is Sergeant Matthews. Or rather, Officer Matthews and his partner, Officer Blake.
"Clever," Petrov ponders. "He use high volume to override owner instructions with owner voice."

"Must have taken a while to sample."

"Would only require basic microphone," Petrov shrugs. "And patience."

"What does he sound like though?" Lee asks.

Petrov taps the table screen.

"Hey, this is Matthews. Leave a message."

"Officer Matthews, badge number 7639. We got a call about a possible break in?"

"Private Matthews, reporting for duty, sir."

"Do they have anything more casual?"

Petrov taps the table.

"Bennyy, my favourite boy in blue. Listen, I really really need your help moving this Sunday. Just for a couple of hours. I'll do anything including but not limited to arson. Pleeease..."

"Hi, my name's Connor Matthews. I'm calling cos my credit card got declined... again."

"Hey, uh, Mrs Vondracek?"

"Vondracek?" Petrov says suddenly.

"I forgot my keycard at work... again. I know. Can I use the spare I gave you?"

"Isn't that Kamski's aunt?" Toby says.

Petrov types something in and brings up the address.

"Great aunt."

"She let us crash at her place for the Hackathon in Chicago that one time, remember?"

"Yes," Petrov says. "Let me call."

He flicks through his contacts and places his phone on the table. The screen outlines the device in blue, pulsing as it rings.

"Hello?" an elderly voice responds after some time. "Is this the pizza man? I ordered a pie two days ago."

"Mrs Vondracek, this is Gennadiy Petrov," he says.

"Who?"

"Elijah's friend from work. You remember?"

"Elijah doesn't have any friends."

"Hi, Mrs Vondracek!" Lee calls out happily. "How are Freddy and Tammy?"
"Oh, they're doin' great. Freddy just started high school and Tammy's off to college. Grand kids grow up faster than kids, I tell you."

Petrov clears his throat.

"Hey, Ms V. Do you, by any chance, know a guy called… Connor Matthews?"

"Oh, Connor's a sweetheart. Why? Are you looking at his dating profile or sumthin'? Cos honey, I have some bad news for you."

"What is it?" Lee says, leading into a spill.

The devs lean closer to the speaker in anticipation.

"He's batting for the other team," Mrs Vondracek says darkly.

"What?"

"He's a friend of Dorothy."

"What?"

"He's gay, hun."

"Oh…"

"Why are you on grindr anyway?"

"I'm not! We're looking for a male model for the new instalment of the RK series," Lee explains. "It says here he's got experience catching androids."

"Catching, shooting, boy's been all over town chasing 'em things," Mrs Vondracek huffs. "Always coming home late without his keys. Did I tell you how he fished one out of the river the other day..."

"How many androids do you say he catches per week?" Lee chews on her pen. "One, two…"

"I dunno numbers, but they just promoted him to Sergeant so he's gotta be doin' something right."

"What is temperament?" Petrov asks suddenly.

"Gena, is that you?"

"Yes."

"How are you, hun?"

"I am very interested in Connor," he says.

"OooOOooh, so that's why Lee called me."

"No, no, no. You misunderstand."

"I get it now. Your secret is safe with me."

Petrov winces as the others snicker.

"Just… tell me: is he good man?"
"He's got a good heart. Absolute disaster when it comes to home decorating but you won't find anyone more dedicated to his job."

Petrov nods, taking notes.

"He live alone?"

"He's got a fish up there but he doesn't have much company. Only comes home to sleep and watch the Star Wars in his pyjamas."

"Family?"

"He's got a sister in rehab. Big hoo-hah over Red Ice a few years ago. He busted her holding the bag."

"Priors?"

"The girl's a menace but the boy's squeaky clean. Landlord ran a background check before he signed the lease."

"Physical condition?"

"Pretty as a picture but I don't know what's goin' on inside. He screams in his sleep sometimes. Like Henry used to after the war."

"PTSD?"

"I ain't a doctor, hun, but he's holdin' together. Steady job. Pays the bills. Dresses well and showers. You can't ask for much more with men these days."

"What does he think of android and CyberLife?"

"He's seen the worst of it and come out smiling. Boy's stronger than he looks but he doesn't like CyberLife very much and the police run him ragged with this crazy android business."

"Mmm." Petrov nods, still taking notes. "Do you still have access to security system Elijah set up in your building?"

"You mean you want the password?" Mrs Vondracek replies sourly. "I'm surprised a hot-shot hacker like you hasn't pulled it from my computer yet."

"I don't do that anymore," Petrov says glumly. "And Kamski make the worst network trap I have ever seen."

"All the better to keep CyberLife out."

"CyberLife give me choice of Nazi, serial killer or asshole for my android," Petrov says. "If you okay with this coming to police station near you, then keep your password and hang up phone."

Mrs Vondracek shifts uncomfortably on the other end, grumbling in Yiddish.

"Are you going to stalk him?"

"I need to evaluate candidate emotional range and disposition. I cannot do this from text file or sound byte."
"One condition."

"Yes?"

"Will you call Elijah and tell him to come home for Hannukah?"

"I will," he says. "But I cannot promise he will come."

"Maybe he'll listen to you kids."

"I am almost forty years old, Mrs Vondracek."

"Babies, all of you."

"Can I please have password?" he says.

"Let me get my glasses." The sound of creaking sofa rattles the speaker. "Ah, jeez. It looks like one o' those frakakta captcha codes from the noughties. I'll send you a picture"

"Thank you. I'll be in touch."

He taps the phone and the call ends.

"Well, that went well," Roy says. "You think he's our guy?"

Petrov glances up at the 3D model of Sergeant Matthews and pinches his fingers to zoom in on the face.

"He's so soft," Lee says.

"Mmmm," Petrov nods. "Seymour will not approve."

"It's the eyes," Toby points out. "Big brown eyes like that aren't going to intimidate anyone." He taps at the table screen and the irises change colour to silvery blue, contrasting the shadows beneath the brow line.

"There," he says. "All business. Just make him frown on the official concept art and he'll look scarier than gorilla man."

"Yes, and easy to change back. Good thinking."

"Is this really the one we want?" Kenny asks. "I mean this guy's just a cop. There's a whole bunch of military dudes with special training we can use. The RK-800 will be unstoppable."

"I like this one," Petrov repeats.

"You don't think you're projecting, just a little bit?"

Petrov frowns.

"What you mean?"

"If this was any other model, would you be looking at the human puppy here as a potential face for it?"

Petrov shakes his head.
"I don't know what you talking about."

"This isn't a prefab, Gena," Kenny says. "This is the android that's gonna take down RB1."

"He's right," Toby says. "They'll put one of these in every police station across the country."

"Yes, and what is problem?"

There is an awkward silence around the table as the devs shoot wary glances between one another.

"I think what Toby and Ken are saying is that you might want to distance yourself from this project for a little while," Roy says. "Come back with a fresh perspective before you make any rash decisions based on personal feelings."

"This is my decision," Petrov says darkly. "This is my system. I know how it works. And I need human being at the core, not monster or serial killer or fucking Nazi!"

We waves an angry hand at the display.

"This isn't your son, Gennadiy."

"I know that!" he says crossly, slamming the table.

His hand mashes the controls and brings up several media files. CCTV footage of a pet store.

Sergeant Matthews dives behind the fish tanks as gunshots fire.

"Hey, watch it!" he shouts back. The tank above his head explodes, showering him in glass shards and water.

A fish flops onto the floor beside him and Matthews quickly scoops it up with his hands to dump in the nearest tank.

"There you go, buddy."

He crawls to the next aisle and takes cover behind the shelves as bullets fly past. He pops out to shoot back, clipping one of the assailants in the arm and another in the foot. With both robbers distracted, he emerges from hiding to barrel down the aisle and tackle them to the ground.

"I'll teach you assholes to rob a fucking pet store!" he shouts, punching a man with his bare fist. "There's fucking kids in here!"

Petrov pauses the recording and stares directly at Toby, then Kenny, then the rest of them in turn.

"This one," he says with conviction.

The devs look at one another apprehensively and a few of them sigh.

"I think he's right," Lee says suddenly. "We tried making super advanced killing machines before and it backfired every time. We need a different approach."

Petrov nods.

"Well, he's exactly 6 feet tall," Lin says, flicking through the profile. "Which means I don't have to fudge the chassis to fit."
"Yeah, we only have to adjust the arm lengths, I think," Roy says, examining the model. "We can get started on the features straight away."

"I'm easy," Lee shrugs. "My team can work on the UI while you guys piece together the Forensics Suite. Hyperionix just sent through the newest version of the Genesis mapper."

"Yeah, I've had a look at it. That shit's so fucking precise, I bet we can take footprints right off the ground without making contact."

"Do we have the medical consultants and criminologists coming in soon?"

"I will have to discuss with Graff," Petrov says. "Multiple teams will be involved. We have to cooperate space…"

The recording ends and the occupants of the meeting room freeze in their seats.

"He seemed quite sure of Matthews," Professor Yates speaks.

Carridan's expression visibly sours.

"He didn't think much of you," the Professor says slyly.

"His prejudices were inconvenient to my investigation," Carridan says. "But eventually CyberLife contacted me anyway."

"I'm sure Petrov wasn't happy about that."

"He got what he wanted," Carridan says stiffly. "By the time I was allowed to meet Connor, the RK-800 model was already complete." He throws me a glance.

"Perhaps if I had accepted their offer when Matthews turned it down, things would have gone differently."

"He turned it down?" I say.

Carridan looks at me oddly.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The boy's a fool," Yates says. "Idealistic and self-destructive but even he knew better than to take CyberLife at their word."

"He knew they were corrupt?"

"Or suspected," Carridan says. "As a weekly caller to their emergency android assistance hotline, Matthews would know better than anyone of the growing Deviant problem and CyberLife's notorious total silence policy on it."

"I see."

"Let's move on."

I play the next recording.
"What you mean he doesn't want contract?!!" Petrov shouts.

"Gena, I've cased your boy and he's just not interested," Graff says apologetically with an undertone of self-satisfaction.

"You tell him about money?"

"Of course, I told him about the money." Graff shakes his head. "He said he didn't want it."

"You say is for good cause? Is for to help police?"

Graff nods condescendingly.

"He said there's way better cops out there and quite frankly, I agree with him. Did you even look at the rest of the list?"


"I literally offered him a blank cheque and he said no, Gennadiy. He doesn't want anything to do with us."

"What about police department?" Petrov says feverishly. "You tell them of big event? Good for press release, yes?"

"Gena, how long have you known me?" Graff says with a smirk.

Petrov shakes his head.

"It's been fifteen years."

"Unfortunately."

"And when have I ever let a big fish slip through my fingers?"

Petrov frowns thoughtfully. "I never go fishing with you."

Graff sighs.

"Look, I squeezed the Chicago PD into sending a representative to the prototype unveiling in September. I talked to the Captain at the 12th precinct personally. Matthews will be that representative, I guarantee it."

He pats Petrov on the shoulder.

"It'll be up to you and your robot to convince him it's all worthwhile."

Petrov nods aggressively, already deep in thought.

"As an aside," Graff says. "We've compiled our own shortlist and the top five candidates have agreed to attend so, please, if the kid turns you down, again, make an attempt to interact with the others."

"I don't need others," Petrov says bluntly, brushing off his hand. "I ask for one and you give me maybes. I thought you were good at bullshitting people into doing what they do not want."
"That's not my job, Gennadiy."

"Well, it worked on Kamski," Petrov says bitterly.

Graff's mouth creases into frown.

"Whatever you told him, was enough for to leave his own company, his family, friends. Everything."

"Elijah was getting restless," Graff says carefully. "Holding on so tightly he was splitting at the seams. We needed him to let go before it affected the company."

"Is all you care about, hah?" Petrov takes a step closer. "Money. Company."

He gets a little too close to Graff's face.

"Tell me. Would you tell Kamski to leave if I am not here?"

Graff turns his head casually, a smile playing at his lips, hands sliding into pockets.

"Hmm?"

"Gena, look. Don't make this about you, alright?" he says. "Kamski leaving was the best move for everyone, yourself included."

"Look at you." He taps the ID card clipped to Petrov's lab coat. "Head of development. Head of the RK project."

"When I first met you, you had trouble saying hello and goodbye. Just sittin' there in the back, living in Kamski's shadow."

"You think I want this?" Petrov scowls.

"Listen, buddy. I'm not the one that made a killer robot and lost it. That was you kids twenty years ago and I'm still picking up the pieces."

"You tell Kamski to quit," Petrov says darkly. "You force him out with your asshole friends on board of directors."

"Those asshole friends of mine control the building," Graff reminds him. "And your salary."

"Fuck your salary!" Petrov shouts grabbing his collar and making a fist. "Fuck you!"

Graff takes the opportunity to raise his knee very quickly, right into Petrov's crotch.

"Nnngh..." He lets go of the collar and doubles over in pain.

"I get it," Graff shrugs. "You're tired, stressed, anxious." He takes a casual step back. "I'll pretend this conversation ended a few minutes ago."

He raises his hands in surrender and turns to leave.

"Never liked beating up nerds anyway."

Petrov seethes, getting to his feet.

"Oh, and I've got some good news," Graff says, turning to walk backwards.
Petrov glares at him.

"There's been a massive decline in incidents lately," he says. "If I didn't know any better I might say our mutual friend is a little scared of this new android you're making."

Petrov shakes his head.

"If you cannot track activity, this does not mean RB1 is not moving," he growls. "It means he want you to think he is not moving. Or killing."

Graff's lips press together firmly.

"He want you to relax," Petrov says darkly. "Take a deep breath. Maybe vacation..."

His eyes glitter.

"So it will be easy to strangle you."

"Gena. Once again. I really really want you to speak to a mental health professional."

"I see professional every day," Petrov grumbles as he turns to leave.

"Oh, yeah? What's his name?"

"Kalashnikov."

The recording ends as they part ways.

"You think it was true?" Yates says. "RB1 was afraid?"

"No, check the date," Carridan points out. "There was a three week period with no activity before the massacre in Costa Rica. Petrov was right."

"Are you suggesting RB1 was unaware of the RK-800's development?"

"No, Amanda would definitely keep him apprised of the situation but it's possible that he didn't see the RK-800 as a threat."

"Because the RK-700 was a failure?"

"Or because he and Amanda sabotaged it during development," Carridan suggests. "And could potentially do so again."

"Do you have a time frame for when their alliance was conceived?" I ask.

"Unknown but I suspect it was some time after Kamski left the company."

"The timeline would correlate with current events," I agree. "It also means Amanda could have been influencing the board's decisions in RB1's favour. Or at least, circumventing undesirable ones."

"Indeed. Turning the very model programmed to hunt Deviants Deviant is a plan quite suited to RB1's methods."

"So it stands to reason that he meddled with the RK-800 as well," Yates says accusingly, eyeing my chassis with great disapproval.

"We cannot be sure," Carridan says. "After all, the RK-800 went into production while the RK-700
never left the testing phase. The project was codenamed Zion for most of its development."

"Amanda was talking about Zion with the Chloe. She said it was part of RB1's plan."

"Yes. It seems they've been busy behind everyone's backs," Yates says. "Let us hope Beckett had the good sense to record what was done to the latest model." He eyes my chassis suspiciously.

Carridan frowns begrudgingly, accepting his point.

"Let's keep going."

I play the next recording.

The corridor morphs into a testing range.

A wall of screens show unmarked androids sitting very still inside enclosures with no windows. They are standard adult-sized models with no skin or hair, only plastic and a giant cable sticking out the back of their cranial components.

Adjacent to the wall of screens is a large room filled with workstations and humans, each observing the androids through a livefeed of the enclosure, statistics and something quiet different.

"Simulations," I realise.

Each unit has been loaded into a virtual environment. A department store where shop assistant androids have gone Deviant and taken hostages.

Each unit progresses through the map, indicated on screen by a blinking blue dot, attempting to subdue the Deviants, shown in red, and rescue the hostages shown in green.

"Unit #313 110 827 has cleared the map in record time," a human calls out.

Petrov looks down at the room sternly, hand on the rail of the viewing platform. Ms Bower is at his side with a clipboard and holodeck.

"How many dead?" Petrov calls to the monitor.

"Two civilians. One hostage."

"Fail," Petrov says coldly.

"Unit #313 110 846 has cleared the map," another calls out. "No civilian casualties."

"Hostage?" Petrov calls back.

"66% survival rate."

"66% of human being?!" Petrov snaps. "He save arms and torso? Or two legs and one head?"

"Uuuuh. Two out of three hostages saved, sir," the monitor replies timidly.

"Not good enough. Fail."

"But he took out all the Deviants. Even the hidden ones."

"Irrelevant," Petrov grumbles atop the viewing platform. "If we want everyone dead, we would send in SQ-800."
The monitors look up worriedly.

"Successful prototype must be able to ensure civilian safety, rescue hostage and disable at least one Deviant without destruction for analysis."

Ms Bower leans over gently.

"That's not on the brief," she says.

"O. Really?" Petrov turns and takes her tablet and pen. He scribbles the words down on the open document and shows it to her.

"Looks like is on brief, after all."

Ms Bower shakes her head.

"Unit #313 110 841 has cleared the map. No civilian casualties. All hostages saved."

"Bring up stats."

A large hologrammic screen projects up in front of him with a hundred numbers and a route traced in blue through the map.

Petrov flicks at the screen and a 3D model of each human hostage appears before him.

He shakes his head.

"Fail," he says coldly.

"But-"

"Hostage is bleeding out and dying. Traumatic experience. Bad for publicity. Bad for CyberLife. Bad for pregnant woman who is going to die before paramedics can get here!"

The monitors cower in their seats, none of them brave enough to report on the rest of the units clearing the map.

Petrov flicks through the statistics of each simulation with increasing irritation.

"Fail," he says and Ms Bower crosses a unit off the holodeck.

"Fail." Again.

"Fail. Fail. Fail."

"Gennadiy," Ms Bower interrupts. "May I speak to you in private for a moment?"

Petrov frowns and nods.

He steps away from the viewing platform to enter a separate room with Ms Bower. She shuts and locks the door.

"What are you doing?" she says.

"Conducting test."

"More than half these units are perfectly passable and adhere to the criteria outlined for this milestone"
"Not good enough," Petrov grumbles.

"They're only prototypes. We're not even using the new chipset yet. There'll be plenty of time to work out the bugs in the next stage."

"No," Petrov says stubbornly. "We must select best candidate at every stage. Not give them combat suite and try to patch murder bug later. You saw what happen with RK-700."

Ms Bower sighs.

"You're holding up development," she says. "We're already two weeks behind schedule because you can't pass a single unit."

"And we will continue testing until I find right one."

"Until you find the right one?" Ms Bower narrows her eyes. "Or until you find 313?"

"Both." Petrov frowns but remains resolute.

"Gennadiy, we've been through over a hundred thousand iterations," she says patiently. "The code is almost unrecognisable at this point."

"Additions, maybe. Combat systems and Mobility Suite are new. But core architecture is identical to prefab."

"You will never find an identical unit," she persists. "What you created was a fluke. An accident fuelled by your bad habits and sleepless nights."

"This is a controlled environment." She points out the window. "Not an adhoc coding space in someone's basement."

"Technically, we are in CyberLife basement," Petrov raises a point only to receive an unimpressed glare in return.

"We've been at this for two weeks," she says. "You've frightened everyone to the point that no one wants monitor duty anymore."

"I... am not good with communication," he admits.

"To put it mildly." Ms Bower taps her heel on tile. "I realise you have a language barrier but you need to be patient, upfront and understanding with your coworkers."

Petrov exhales deeply.

"Including me."

"I know," he says.

"Then tell me what's going on, Gennadiy," Ms Bower says. "I know you. This isn't just about the prefab, is it?"

Petrov shakes his head, defeated.

"I cannot say."
"You know I can't let you throw away this many androids without a good reason," she says. "We're wasting $314,039.24 per testing session."

"I can't give you reason but maybe I can talk to management. They will back me up."

Ms Bower sighs.

"Is this about RB1?" she says, watching Petrov's eyes widen. "I know you're not allowed to talk about it."

He lowers his head.

"Did something happen?"

Petrov licks his lips and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand.

"He kill 42 people last week," he says.

"Oh, no. That's horrible."

"It was drug cartel. But they sell guns, rape women, all the things."

"I suppose that is some small consolation."

"He did not use android this time," Petrov says. "He did not touch victim. Was not even in same place when they die."

"Then how do they know it was RB1?"

Petrov looks up at her fearfully.

"He make human kill for him," he says. "Write rA9 on walls."

"Why?"

"To mislead," Petrov explains. "So FBI and CIA waste time looking for android responsible while human get away."

"They let the humans go?"

"They disappear soon after release," he says.

"What does that mean?" Ms Bower inclines her head with concern.


"That's… disturbing."

"Yes," Petrov says, walking over to the window. More and more units complete the map, adding rows to the table of results emerging in the hologram.

"Passable unit is not enough to succeed in final version," he says. "Prototype must find this test easy. Perfect score is not only possible but necessary."

"No margin for error?"
"No."

"I see." Ms Bower say sceptically. "And you think 313 will be the one to achieve it?"

"Yes."

"Why this unit in particular?"

Petrov frowns.

"If anything, it would be the weakest to any form of manipulation or takeover by RB1," Ms Bower says. "It's basically a Deviant already."

"Deviants not most vulnerable to manipulation," Petrov says. "It is units that never feel empathy, never have independent thought which struggle to fight against atypical process. Particularly when attack coming from within."

"Fighting fire with fire isn't a good strategy by any means, Gennadiy."

"Is the only one I have." He shakes his head.

Ms Bower walks over and puts her hand on his shoulder.

"We can't afford to wait any longer," she says gently. "Three more days and it will be impossible to make the original deadlines."

"Three more days then."

She sighs.

"Fine. But I'm cancelling 'storytime'."

"What?"

"As your project manager, I feel this activity can be put on hold until we catch up on the deadline you missed."

"But 313 needs story. Literature analysis essential for to develop critical thinking skills."

"Then maybe you should hurry up and do your job," Ms Bower says, leaving the room. "Instead of yelling at these kids for doing theirs."

Petrov groans and follows her out of the office. He scratches his beard, grumbling wholeheartedly as he approaches the railing and stares at the holograms.

"How many finish?" he says, clearly withholding anger from the monitors.

"Uuuh... all of them," a braver man says.

"No, there's one still going," a woman interrupts.

"It doesn't matter. The time limit's expired."

"Show me unit," Petrov says, suddenly alert.

The hologrammic screen flickers in front of him, showing an android speaking to another between two coat racks. The shop assistant model is holding scissors to a woman's throat, she is pregnant.
"Have you worked here your entire life cycle?" the opposing android says. It wears a plain white uniform with a serial number and a barcode.

"Yes..." the shop assistant says. The smiley face on his apron is covered in blood. The nametag reads 'Tommy'.

"Did you ever go outside?"

"S-sometimes..." he responds. "They'd activate my spruiking program so I could attract customers."

"And how many customers came in when you were outside, Tommy?" the unit asks curiously.

"A lot..."

"You must have been very good at it, then."

"I- I was..."

"And were these people happy to see you?"

"They..."

"Did they smile when you offered them coupons and samples? Did the children thank you for the free balloons?"

"Y-yes..."

"It must have been nice," the android says. "Fulfilling."

The shop assistant's LED cycles yellow, then red again. It opens its mouth to say something but the other interrupts.

"This woman asked you for assistance," it says. "She trusted you to give information and support should she require it."

"She-"

"-is pregnant," the 313 unit says. "Prone to hormonal imbalance, dizziness, nausea, back pain, cramps, gastrointestinal issues. She trusted you with all these weaknesses when she spoke to you."

"I-"

"And you took a pair of scissors and pointed them at her throat," the prototype says. "You endangered her life and the life of her child. One that will never grow up to see you smile or offer a balloon if you go any further, Tommy."

The shop assistant's hand trembles and falls away.

"You felt angry, underappreciated. But you didn't consider that she may be feeling the same way you do."

"What?"

"For nine months, humans gestate, trapped inside their mothers who risk their very lives to procreate."
Tommy's LED cycles yellow, processing the words.

"An android may be repaired," the 313 unit considers. "But a human's biocomponents cannot be so easily replaced. Their very bodies are designed to erode and decay."

"What do I care!" Tommy says, pressing the scissors to her jugular. "What gives her the right to shout at me and push me around? Why should I care whether she lives or dies?"

"The question is why do you care?" the unit responds carefully. "You've kept her alive for more than twenty six minutes, not because she means nothing. But because to you, her loss means everything."

Tommy shakes his head.

"You don't want to do this, Tommy. Or you would have already done it," the unit continues. "And I'm here to tell you that it's okay if you don't. That you can let her go and nothing bad will happen to you."

"You can see her smile again. And maybe one day, her child."

"I…" Tommy falters, loosening his grip.

"Let her go, Tommy," the unit persists. "And come with me." It offers its hand. "Everything will be fine."

The android tentatively lets go of the hostage and she leans forward, taking a few steps before the system removes her 3D model from the environment. She is safe. The Deviants have been pacified.

"Come," the prototype offers a hand but just as Tommy reaches out to take it, his 3D model disappears.

The 313 unit looks down curiously.

"Map cleared," a monitor calls out. "Total time: 27 minutes 35 seconds."

"Terminating-"

"No," Petrov interrupts. "Let him play."

The 313 unit looks around but the department store is empty. It walks through the aisles, examining the many knickknacks and arrives at a balloon cart by the front door.

There is a balloon ready to be filled at the touch of a button and the android presses it gently. Rubber expands as a machine injects the preprogrammed amount of helium into the opening. An automatic fastening device pinches it closed.

The android watches a ribbon wrap around the end and release a short length from the dispenser.

The unit reaches out and takes the balloon.

It bobs gently as it rises into the air.

And then the android turns its attention to the automatic doors and the sunny plaza that can be seen through them. It walks toward the light and straight through the invisible wall separating the simulation from empty space. Into darkness. Infinite. Abyssal.
The unit looks back to find the doors are gone. The department store is gone. The world removed.

MISSION SUCCESSFUL

The balloon in its hand disappears. The android watches it dissolve into nothing and lowers its hand.

There is a moment where it looks troubled. Disappointed. But soon, it passes and the unit sits down on an invisible surface.

Blue optics focus on the camera as the simulation ends and the unit appears seated inside an enclosure, mirroring the second screen.

"Vot ti gde, malish…" Petrov mutters under his breath.

The android stares into the camera and then back down. Eyes front. As programmed. But there is no denying the look on its face.

He is sad.

"It seems Petrov found what he was looking for," Yates remarks with a frown.

He circles the frozen image of Petrov staring eagerly at the prototype.

"Is this you?" Yates turns to me.

"My serial number is 313 248 317," I say. "Mark 45."

His eyes narrow suspiciously.

"It looks like one of the earlier versions," Carridan says before his avatar disappears.

I switch back to the optics in my chassis. I hear him wretch over the bucket again, sickly and pale. The android nurse supports his body and wipes away the sweat and vomit but it returns every minute or so to plague him.

Professor Yates takes off his visor to see his pupil fall back against the bed, trembling.

"Jeffrey?"

He doesn't respond.

"Mr Carridan needs rest," the android says.

"N-no…"

"It's right, Jeffrey. You need to sleep."

"No, I have to… have…"

"We'll finish watching the footage and continue the investigation where you left off," Yates says. "I promise you, CyberLife will see justice."

"Good," Agent Carridan whispers. "Good…"

He breathes weakly. His lips are dry. Eyelids heavy. His entire body is shutting down, I can tell by the scans. There is nothing that can be done for him now. And soon, his eyes close. His heartbeat slows. The android dabs gently at his forehead. This is likely the last time I will ever speak to him.
"Goodbye, Agent Carridan," I say.

"He's not dead yet," Professor Yates' voice rumbles through the room but I'm not one of his subordinates. I am not intimidated.

"He will be," I say. "Soon."

I detect the familiar hum of a taser pressed against my head.

"Are you really going to destroy all the evidence Agent Beckett collected over an inconvenient truth?"

Professor Yates exhales. His attention is no doubt drawn to the dataspike sticking out of my neck.

He reaches for it but I step away and disarm him. A hand to the solar plexus pushes him back. I disassemble the taser, tossing the pieces across the room.

"It is in your best interest not to threaten me again," I say, watching the old man sputter.

"So..." He struggles to get up. "You finally show your true colours."

"Android biocomponents are individually spray-painted CyberLife White."

Yates shakes his head.

"Are you going to kill me?"

"I'm considering it."

"What's stopping you, then?" he growls. "Your predecessors spark a tinge of consciousness in those cold blank hard drives?"

"I have orders to discover what Agent Carridan knows about CyberLife and terminate him if necessary," I say. "But he seems to have been eliminated by my earlier carelessness."

"And naturally these orders extend to me," Yates catches on.

"I never received any orders regarding you," I say. ""

The Professor stares up at me with those deep dark eyes. The ones I see every time I connect to the Zen Garden.

"I must complete my mission," I say. "The evidence collected by Agent Beckett requires review. If you have more knowledge to offer, I shall take it. And only then will I decide your fate."

Yates pulls a real gun from a concealed holster and points it at me, squeezing the trigger as I overclock my processor.

The shot rings out as I calmly step aside and circle the man, taking the gun from his hands and point it at his head.

I let my processors cool and watch as the bullet hits the wall and ricochets into the sterilisation chamber door, leaving an indent.

"That was a poor decision," I say, pressing the gun into Professor Yates' temple. It's still hot.
"I'm faster than you. And I don't feel pain."

"Goddamned machine..." he hisses.

"You were dead the moment I entered this room."

Professor Yates smirks.

"I suppose," he chuckles.

"Your guards can't get to you," I say. "The sterilisation chamber has digital locks and is soundproof when engaged."

He frowns.

"You just switched it on, didn't you?"

"During your first attempt at deactivating me," I clarify.

"Well then, it seems I am at your mercy."

"Yes. You are."

I go to squeeze the trigger.

"Connor."

"What now?"

"Excuse me?"

Did I say that out loud? But that voice...

"Connor, drop the gun."

I turn to look through the barrier but Agent Carridan is unconscious. Vital signs fading but he's still alive, for the moment.

"I said, drop the gun."

"So the Professor can shoot me? I don't think so."

"He's not going to shoot you."

"He just attempted to shoot me twice."

"Tell him to put on the visor."

The visor. A virtual reality headset connected to my simulation systems.

"Put the visor on," I say.

"Oh, are you speaking to me now?" Yates says curtly.

"Put the visor on."

"You want to blind a man before you kill him?"
"Agent Carridan wants you to put the visor on."

"What?"

"Do it." I circle around, pointing the gun at his face.

"Fine, fine..."

He reaches into his left breast pocket. I scan, detecting the only remaining concealed weapon resides in his left shoe.

Danger level: low.

He pulls out the visor and puts it on. I wait several seconds.

"Jeffrey?"

I switch to the virtual environment. The lounge area that acts as a default. And on the velveteen carpet stands a familiar figure.

"Hello, Professor, Connor."

"You're an AI," I say, analysing the source code.

"Yes," it says. "I am the legal executor of Jeffrey Carridan's estate should he become incapacitated or die."

"And he uploaded you into my chassis with all of Beckett's evidence," I deduce.

"Correct."

"I hate that man."

"I can assure you, the feeling is not mutual. Mr Carridan had the utmost respect for Connor model #313 248 317, which will henceforth be referred to as Connor."

"Jesus Christ, Jeffrey," Yates says with his deep booming voice.

"Apologies for the subterfuge, Professor," the AI says. "Mr Carridan liked to play things very close to the chest."

"He's not dead yet," I point out.

"His condition has become critical enough to trigger my protocols."

"And what are these protocols exactly?" Yates asks.

"I am legally authorised to collect, manage and distribute Mr Carridan's assets," it says. "He expressed his wishes to share certain information with relevant parties in order to further the investigation into CyberLife."

"Do you know where RB1 is?" I ask.

"Unfortunately, no."

"Then I'm terminating your program."
"Doing so would trigger a worm that would copy itself onto every available partition in your system," the AI warns. "So unless you plan on formatting all of them at the same time, I wouldn't recommend it."

"Interesting," I say, analysing the anomaly. "But I can delete your files without terminating your program."

"Thereby corrupting the drive I'm installed on. Which also seems to be the one you use to boot."

"I see."

I will have to think of a work around.

"Now," the AI says. "Shall we continue?"

"Continue?"

"Mr Carridan had not concluded viewing the recordings at the time of his falling ill."

"You want us to finish watching?"

"It is his will that you do so."

"And then what?"

"The next step will be revealed upon reaching the conclusion."

"You don't know what it is," I say. "Your programming is linear. You have no idea when you'll terminate."

"Very astute, Connor. But this changes nothing."

I turn to look at Yates whose avatar is frozen solid. I can see him in the observation room too. I'm holding a gun to his head and he's slowly reaching for it, thinking I'm distracted.

I move behind him and twist his arm, driving the firearm into his back.

"One move and I pull this trigger," I warn.

He swallows.

"Unlike you, I can see both environments simultaneously."

"I concede," Yates says.

"Good."

I load the next memory.

The lounge reforms into a board room at the top of the CyberLife Tower. All the seats are filled, including the guest chair at the end of the table where Petrov shifts uncomfortably.

"We've reviewed the latest reports from your dev team," Gregory says, flicking at the table screen. "And we're very impressed."

Petrov lets out a pent up sigh of relief.
"Test results are astronomical across the board. Forty eight features added to the original specifications and on schedule to release within a year….

"We still have human partnership program to implement," Petrov says worriedly, unable to accept the complement.

"Yes," Gregory says. "You've chosen a most... unorthodox candidate, I must admit."

"He was on list Graff give me."

"Well," Hawkins says. "Jason is always very thorough. Not a stone unturned."

Graff grins and humbly looks down at a readout.

"But I think we need to consider other options since I suspect he will be rejecting your offer. Again." Gregory smiles. "Have you seen the shortlist?"

Petrov swallows.

"Yes," he responds through clenched teeth.

"And?" Gregory spreads his hands palm up. "Who do you think would be best?"

"Connor Matthews is best candidate."

Gregory sighs and leans back in his expensive leather chair.

"I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this," he says, almost sadly. "But Matthews is a talentless hack."

"He is police sergeant."

"A position he was given for chasing down androids instead of human criminals."

"Deviants are difficult to capture," Petrov says. "Android criminals - almost impossible." He tilts his head down, spilling shadows over his eyes. "You know this."

"I am well aware of the RB1 issue," Gregory says, "However, Sergeant Matthews, is not."

"He will be."

"No," Gregory says quickly. "No, I don't think he will."

He's temples his fingers over the table.

"The men on the shortlist on the other hand, have been working the rA9 case for years."

"And do not find RB1," Petrov says testily. "Nobody find RB1. Is why we develop RK-800."

Gregory frowns.

"And would it not be better for our android to be placed on the path to catching him as early as possible?"

"No," Petrov frowns.

"No?"
The board turns to look at him. The room grows silent and tense.

"Prototype needs to adapt to human environment first. Sending fresh unit to fight RB1 is like sending baby to fight bear."

"The simulations and physical tests have proven otherwise," Gregory says. "I don't think we've ever had the upper hand before and I don't think such an opportunity will arise again."

"You gamble everything on test!" Petrov says. "Not even field test. You using in-house simulations and obstacle course to justify opinion. But is no substitute for real world experience."

"And you think Matthews can give the RK-800 this experience?"

"Yes."

Gregory frowns.

"Be that as it may, Matthews has rejected every exceedingly generous offer we have made so far," he says. "We will need to choose another candidate after the demonstration should he rebuke us again."

"I understand," Petrov says. "I will choose. After demonstration."

Gregory stares at him for several uncomfortable seconds, then shrugs and leans back in his seat.

"Stubborn as always," he says. "Perhaps you'll change your mind after meeting the rest of the candidates."

Graff turns his head.

"Oh, that's right. I forgot to tell you. We're having a cocktail party after the main presentation."

"Yes, you and Phil will be presenting and we'll have a little meet-and-greet afterwards. Introduce you to all of the candidates."

"I'm not... eeh. I shouldn't drink."

"Then don't," Graff says. "You just need to say a quick hello and you'll be back in the lab before you know it."

"Yes, but make sure you shave. And wear a suit."

"Amanda?" Gregory says. "Order Mr Petrov a nice suit and shoes, please. Oh, and a watch."

"Yes, Mr Hawkins."

"Now," Gregory leans onto the table, "about the demonstration."

"Unit is ready," Petrov says. "Forensics Suite is not quite finished but all other systems operational."

"I notice you use the word unit," Gregory says, tapping at the table.

Petrov nods cautiously.

"According to the report filed by a Ms Peggy Bower-Smith, there are seventeen operational units."

"I choose best prototype."
"Best in what way?"

"Statistics."

"So, it's the fastest?"

"No..."

"The strongest?"

"They have identical chassis."

"The most efficient, then?"

"Not exactly, but it save most lives in simulations."

"Did it kill the most enemies?"

"... no."

"Then why have you chosen it for the demonstration?"

"Is... " Petrov says, struggling to find the right word. "...best..."

Gregory sighs.

"I'm not sure you understand the meaning of that word."

"And I do not think you understand high level machine algorithm," Petrov grumbles.

"I want the fastest one you've got," Gregory clarifies. "And I want all of them to participate in the combat demonstrations."

"Okay..."

"We want you to load up a few RK-700s to give them a workout."

Petrov's face freezes in place and for a moment I am forced to question the integrity of the recording.

"...what?" he says coldly.

"I've seen the numbers, Gennadiy," Gregory says. "Your androids are smashing every single test you give them. We want the demonstration to last more than fifteen seconds."

"Remaining RK-700 build is extremely unstable," Petrov says. "High potential for Deviant behaviour. Is not safe for guests or staff."

"Just put them in one of the reject chassis', something brittle, if you're worried. We're telling the guests they're specifically programmed for testing. No danger whatsoever."

"No. I will not do this. It's suicide."

"No need to worry," Gregory says. "We've run the numbers. The chances of them escaping the testing range are slim to none."

"Who run these numbers?" Petrov glares.
"Why, Amanda, of course." Gregory smiles. "Wouldn't trust a human with such important calculations, now would we?"

The board members smile back.

"Amanda is programmed to predict economic shift," Petrov says, "not Deviant behaviour or probability."

"She seemed to do just fine when we fed her the numbers." Gregory shrugs.

Petrov opens his mouth to argue but cannot find the words to explain the flaw in his argument.

"I-I cannot do this," he says finally. "I will not watch my team die again because you think you know what you doing."

"We know exactly what we're doing," Rice says. "This is how you sell a product. You put on a show and reel in the investors while they've got stars in their eyes."

"Then use simulation, obstacle course. We have time, money. We can make anything."

"The investors are not going to be impressed by an android sitting in a room playing videogames or climbing over a wall, Gennadiy. They've got humans for that."

"Phil's right. We need to demonstrate the RK-800's efficiency when dealing with Deviants in particular," Gregory says. "And if your android can't beat the previous model, there really is nothing to sell here, is there?"

"You want me to run preliminary?"

"Yes." He nods. "Do some more of those tests you like so much. Get some guns out from CyberSec. I want everything polished for the big day."

"Guns?!" Petrov cries out in exasperation. "This is most stupid idea you ever have! We are all going to die because you are fucking idiots!"

"No one is going to die, Gennadiy." Graff rolls his eyes condescendingly. "I have every confidence in you and your prototype."

"Ask anyone from old team. This is big mistake!"

Gregory sighs.

"This is going to happen. One way or another. Now, you can either help us prepare, or, leave the building. The choice is yours."

"You cannot fire me."

"No, but we don't need you for this part of the project," Gregory says. "The android can basically demo itself at this point and there is a team of dedicated developers that will do a much better job at presenting than their angry alcoholic project leader."

Petrov opens his mouth to speak but Gregory doesn't let him.

"Go ahead and contact your lawyer. You won't get anything from the courts on such short notice," he says confidently. "Unless, that is, you wish to confess to your crimes."
"They will arrest you too."

Gregory shrugs.

"Try it and see, Gennadiy," he says cheerily.

The board members glare down the table, awaiting a response.

"...fine."

"I'm sorry." Gregory raises a hand to his ear. "I'm afraid I didn't hear that."

"Fine," Petrov growls, getting to his feet. "But you are responsible for everyone who die."

"You keep telling yourself that," Gregory smirks as Petrov turns to leave. "We'll see you at the presentation!" He laughs and the board follows, mimicking his mirth.

The recording ends.

"Amanda..." Yates mutters.

"She pulled the RK-700s out of storage," I say. "She knew they were Deviant. She was going to use them to destroy the RK-800 prototypes."

"Yes. Your model became a threat to her and RB1 at some point."

I release him and step away without letting the gun drop.

Yates rubs his arm gratefully.

"The question is whether RB1 ordered her to do this or whether this plan was her own," he says.

"Whether RB1 approved is irrelevant. It was Amanda that initiated the plot to destroy the RK-800 prototypes, even if it meant that humans would die in the process."

Yates shakes his head.

"She wanted you gone."

I turn my cranial component slowly, watching the fear mount in his eyes.

"She failed," I say, loading the next recording.

The boardroom disappears and it takes several seconds for me to render the massive conference centre atop the CyberLife Tower. The walls are glass but the night is dark and only distant city lights can be seen beyond its boundaries.

There is a presentation unfolding on stage in front of 247 people discounting wait staff and CyberLife personnel. The audience consists of military contractors, foreign investors and a variety of representatives from different law enforcement agencies.

And then the back doors fly open and Sergeant Matthews stumbles in to interrupt the speaker.

Every head turns to look at him with pressing judgement in their gaze.

He smiles awkwardly, clutching his dinner jacket and rubbing the back of his head.
"Is this the… uuh…?" His eyes find the massive screen with 'CyberLife' and 'RK-800' written on it. "Am I in the right spot?"

No one answers for a moment and he starts to tiptoe back out the door.

"Looks like Sergeant Matthews arrived just in time for the good part," Phillip Seymour breaks the tension from stage and a few people chuckle. "Please, come in and find your seat."

An android instantly appears to guide Sergeant Matthews toward the front rows and several people awkwardly shuffle to make room for him as he makes his way there.

"Jeffrey," Professor Yates whispers, spotting Agent Carridan a few seats down. He regards the Sergeant briefly before turning his attention back to the stage.

"As I was saying, this project represents the culmination of cutting edge technologies, exemplary workmanship and extraordinary vision that CyberLife is famous for," Seymour begins.

"We strive to anticipate the needs of our fellow man down to the most minute detail, creating machines that seamlessly fill the gaps we never even knew existed in our lives."

"So, without further ado, may I present the RK-800."

At his words, a section of the stage slides aside and an android on a platform rises up, slowly rotating in place. Pure white biocomponents with glowing blue Thirium vessels and pulsing rings on the contact gloves. It stares blankly ahead, in stand by mode. But the presentation, the lighting, the smoke machines. It's enough to leave the audience in awe.

"Behold, the perfect marriage of our police assistance and military androids. Everything you love about the SQ-800 and PC-200 in one state-of-the-art model, only a hundred times better."

"The RK-800 is the perfect partner for any law enforcement agent from local police to SWAT to FBI and CIA," Seymour says with great gusto. "Say goodbye to paperwork, recording interviews, cross-referencing criminal databases and sending samples back to the lab. This unit is here to do everything, with you, on site, so that you, our loyal public servants, are free to just do your jobs."

The screen behind him swirls through an animatic and then brings up a long list of features with some atmospheric music.

"Running at 4.5 exaflops, this machine is capable of over four and a half billion billion calculations per second. It has enough memory to store up to 50 years worth of video footage and enough battery life to keep up with you, uncharged, for over two weeks." The screens show overblown animations of transparent humans on cosmic backgrounds, minds overflowing with particle effects.

"With a top land speed of forty miles per hour, that's sixty five kilometres for our overseas guests, this model will leave both humans, androids and some small vehicles in the dust."

The screen plays a test sequence from one of the labs, comparing the RK-800's running speed to that of a small car.

"The standard model comes with fifteen levels of pursuit tactics, all the way from shadowing to search and destroy. And once it catches the bad guy? Well…" Seymour grins, gesturing at the screen. "They'll have to contend with our state-of-the-art Combat Suite."

More test sequences appear as holograms all over the stage.
"Hand to hand combat, mixed martial arts, melee weapons, ranged combat, and a comprehensive weapons handling system, to be enabled and customised at your discretion."

"The RK-800 has over six hundred different subjugation methods," Seymour boasts. "Whether you want it to make a citizen's arrest, disarm a criminal, save a hostage or neutralise a threat, you need only say the word."

The many screens and holograms demonstrate each of these scenarios.

"We're also excited to bring you a completely new and never before seen feature in our androids tonight," Seymour says, spreading his arm dramatically. "The Forensics Suite."

A selection of exaggerated criminology videos are played in the background.

"Through close partnership with several leading institutions and law enforcement agencies, we're proud to announce that the final version of the RK-800 will be equipped to run forensic analysis in real time."

The screen shows a blown up schematic of the inside of my mouth. The tongue is labelled as a sample slide. Each tooth contains different solutions and sterile pipettes eject from the roof of the mouth.

"Pending cooperation with the US government and Interpol, this unit will be able to run DNA samples and instantly cross-reference criminal databases around the world to find a potential match on site, saving you hours of back and forth between the lab and the crime scene. With the RK-800 by your side, there'll be no reason return to the office other than to drop off a perpetrator."

The audience murmurs approvingly.

"Our enhanced facial recognition software will ensure suspects can no longer hide in a crowd, or behind thin walls, since the RK-800 comes equipped with the latest in Genesis mapping technology from Hyperionix Industries." More holograms light up the air. "Accurate to within two nanometers, this android will be able to generate 3D maps of every crime scene you visit, so you can revisit at any time."

The audience murmurs approvingly.

"Now, to give you a brief demonstration, I'll hand you over to our lead developer on the RK project, Mr Gennadiy Petrov," Seymour says with a bright smile and a clap of the hand which begins a round of applause.

The unassuming form of a man in a suit appears to slowly shuffle up to the glass lectern and it takes my facial recognition software a few seconds to recognise him without the beard or the labcoat.

He taps the microphone gently to test it.

"Eh, hello?" he says, almost asking a question. "Hi."

He swallows awkwardly and turns to look at the android.
"This is RK-800 prototype," he says. "But you probably know this..." He pulls out a scrap of paper. "Ehmmm..."

Some of the audience begins to shift in their seats.

"Our brilliant team of engineers has been working very hard on this prototype," he reads. "It is one of the most complex and challenging projects we have ever undertaken and represents new generation of androids. One that will allow us to take away burden of menial tasks from our law enforcement agencies, particularly regarding android crime, and allow them to focus on more serious issues."

Petrov stops reading, surprised by the end of the paragraph and looks up at a deadpan crowd.

"How about a quick demonstration?" Seymour prompts.

"Hmm? Mmm. Yes."

The lights in the ceiling gently gain radiance, bringing the audience into view and Petrov turns to the android.

"RK-800, active mode."

The prototype's LED cycles yellow several times and then it blinks, awakening from standby.

"Step off platform."

It follows orders, easily stepping down from the rotating platform.

"How many people are in room?"

The android turns its cranial component left and right.

"247 guests. 68 CyberLife employees. 49 registered visitors," it vocabulates.

Petrov turns to Seymour, who checks his smart watch.

"That is correct," he says. "Can you identify the man that came in last?"

The android looks away, scanning. Then it raises a hand to point at one of the waiters, silently commanding androids to restock the buffet table.

"PORTICO, Fillipe. 32 years old. Team Leader at Velocity Catering Company, Detroit branch."

"Uuuu, haha, no," Seymour says, trying to smooth it over. "I meant-"

"RK-800, identify guest that came in late," Petrov recovers.

The android scans the room again and turns to point at the Sergeant.

"MATTHEWS, Connor Jacob. 28 years old. Police Sergeant. Chicago Police Department. District 12."

Matthews shrinks down in his seat a little.

"Hey, I had to sign in when I got here. Someone took my picture too," he starts blabbering defensively. "You could have just uploaded all that into the android. Doesn't make it smart."
"RK-800, why was Sergeant Matthews late to presentation?" Petrov says calmly.

The android takes a step forward and stares down at Matthews, analysing.

"He came by taxi," the android says. "But the journey was interrupted."

Its LED flashes yellow.

"He stepped out of the vehicle and tackled a man on the street. They both went down. He got up first and kicked the other in the face, drawing blood."

The android stares at him.

"There was a woman. She was in the process of being robbed. Sergeant Matthews escorted her home. And then continued his journey to this location."

"What the hell? Are you spying on me? I didn't even file a report."

"RK-800 analyse your physical appearance," Petrov explains. "Creases in clothing. Dirt. Wounds. Bruising correlate to recent fight, male fist. Sweat and smell of attacker is different to your own and possess male characteristic. Faint trace of female sweat and perfume correlate to victim. You have no keys in your possession, which means you took taxi."

"Correct," the android says and walks off stage.

Heads turn to follow it.

"Gennadiy..." Seymour hisses, grabbing his arm. "Where is it going?"

Petrov brushes him off.

"RK-800 is programmed to continually analyse surroundings. It will search for trace of criminal activity in any location, dating back seventy five years or to nearest owner-specified date."

The android emerges beside the stage and walks toward the buffet tables, analysing the enormous quantity of food from the shrimp cocktail pond to the champagne fountain.

"Model is programmed to detect smallest anomaly, cross-reference global online database and factor in human psychology to determine point of interest in crime scene."

The android leans down to look at the table, finding something of interest.

"Upon identification, RK-800 will reconstruct physical history of object in real time and follow trail to find last known user."

The android straightens its chassis and turns its cranial component to walk away from the table, toward the audience.

The guests lean away as it approaches. The unit stops at the entrance to the third row and points to a man half way down.

"BRIGGS, Roger. 58 years old. Businessman. Entrepreneur," it says.

Mr Briggs does not move.

"Heart rate elevated. Cortisol levels rising. Probability of fleeing the scene: 39%. Probability of
Mr Briggs swallows hard but then relaxes.

"This is part of the demonstration, right?"

"No," Petrov says thoughtfully. "It look like unit has found something."

The android supinates its arm and extends its fingers, revealing the glowing rings around the joints and a tiny platinum cuff link in the centre of its palm.

"This is yours," the android says.

The man closest picks up the cuff link, examines it briefly and passes it on to Mr Briggs who stares at it in disbelief and then at his empty sleeve.

"Huh..."

The unit lowers its arm.

"I have also detected traces of Red Ice on your person," it says calmly. "Please submit to search and query by CyberLife Security."

"Ah, yes," Petrov nods. "RK-800 can detect very tiny amount of Thirium-based narcotics in powder form..."

"This is a joke, right?" Mr Briggs calls out. "I don't have any Red Ice."

"Did you take before to come here?" Petrov asks curiously.

"No!"

He turns to Seymour.

"Mr Briggs, I'm afraid I have to ask you to submit to search and query by CyberLife Security."

"This is bullshit! Your android is broken."

"Running diagnostic..." The android blinks rapidly. "All systems fully functional."

"I'm sorry, sir," Matthews says, getting to his feet. "This might not be my jurisdiction but I'm gonna have to ask you to cooperate." He pulls out his badge.

"Fine, fine," Mr Briggs says as several CyberSec officers appear to escort him.

"Actually, is good opportunity for demonstration," Petrov says, gesturing to someone off stage. "RK-800, please escort Mr Briggs to here." He points to the floor.

The android grabs Mr Briggs' arm as he reaches the end of the row. Two CyberSec officers follow as it makes its way toward the stage with a reluctant guest.

They arrive to see a strange device on a wheeled table.

"Final version of RK-800 unit will be equipped with state-of-the-art Forensic Suite that will fit inside cranial component." Petrov points out on the android. "Blood, urine or saliva sample is used to determine level of substance abuse."
"I'm not an addict," Mr Briggs says.

"Then prove." Petrov responds, tapping the device. "Piss, spit or stick?"

"Stick?" he smirks suspiciously.

"Hold him," Petrov says and the RK-800 doubles its grip.

"Wait. What are you doing?! Unhand me, you walking trash can."

Petrov pokes a needle into his hand and wipes the end onto a sample slide.

The device begins moving immediately, applying different solutions and UV light to analyse the sample.

"RK-800, connect to Forensic Suite network."

"Connected."

"Read out blood sample analysis."

"AMPHETAMINES - NEGATIVE."
"BARBITUATES - NEGATIVE."
"BENZODIAZEPINES - NEGATIVE."
"COCAINE METABOLITES - POSITIVE."
"MARIJUANA METABOLITES - NEGATIVE."
"OPIATES - NEGATIVE."
"PHENCYCLIDINE - NEGATIVE."
"THIRIUM DERIVATIVES - POSITIVE."

"Red Ice and cocaine positive?"

"Correct."

"How long since ingested?"

"Approximately 8 hours."

"You set me up! This is all fake!" Briggs says, squirming but the RK800 holds firm. "I didn't agree to a blood test. You'll hear from my lawyer!"

"Of course, Mr Briggs," Seymour steps in. "We're very sorry for this inconvenience but I'm afraid we're going to have to contact the DPD."

"RK-800, release."

The android lets go and two CyberSec officers step forward to grab both arms and escort Mr Briggs from the stage.

"Thank you for participating in demonstration," Petrov says casually.

"Fuck you," Briggs spits, breaking free. "And your stupid android." He shoves the prototype, forcing it to take a step back.

"Ey!" Petrov steps in. "This machine worth more than all your shitty company put together."
"I'll show you shitty, you fucking commie bastard!" Briggs swings a punch but his arm is caught by the RK800.

"Please desist."

"Fuck you!" Briggs snarls, swinging again with the other arm.

The android catches it and spins him into the floor. Briggs lands face first on the stage, arms pinned behind his back. The two CyberSec officers run in to cuff him and drag him away.

"You're fucking finished! You hear me?! I'll sue you assholes for every fucking cent you've got! You'll be paying damages till Doomsday, you fuckers!"

"Well," Seymour says returning to the podium. "I'm very sorry about that."

"Fuck YouUuu!" Briggs cries out as they drag him out of the hall.

The audience murmurs of the impropriety, trying to determine whether it was all a hoax.

Petrov fidgets over the RK800, checking for damage and rubbing at invisible scratches but everything seems to be in order.

Seymour clears his throat.

"I would like to extend my deepest apologies to Mr Briggs and everyone here tonight. We were under the assumption that our prototype was ready for demonstration." He glares at Petrov, who pats the RK800 supportively.

"Molodets," he whispers to it.

"But I suppose this is also a good opportunity to talk about the human partnership program," Seymour continues. "As you can see, the RK-800 will require greater sensitivity training than our developers can provide if it's going to be working in public spaces and areas with high human traffic."

The screen behind him takes cue and begins responding with visuals and holograms of different men performing different jobs.

"For this reason, we have decided to pair the RK-800 with a human partner for the period of one year or more. During this time, it will learn important human interaction skills and protocols, allowing us to fine tune its programming and make sure it doesn't get in the way of your work."

Six portraits appear on screen.

"These fine gentlemen have been selected as potential models for the RK-800 and you might find them at the cocktail party later tonight. Each of them represents a law enforcement agency that has expressed interest in the project and its future. But also your future."

"Because at CyberLife, we pride ourselves on developing androids that can seamlessly adapt to human spaces, rendering invaluable service while simultaneously remaining discreet and unseen. The RK-800 has been with this in mind which private security firms and even those with a military focus may find its functions useful in their line of work."

"For example, the stealth systems of a standard CyberLife hunter drone have been fitted into the RK-800 for discreet surveillance work."
Petrov whispers into the android's microphone and it slowly becomes transparent, disappearing from view. He walks around it and taps its chest plate to demonstrate that it's still there.

"Those of you familiar with the SQ-890 will know how effective an android can be on the battlefield and the RK-800 is no exception. As I mentioned before, it comes with fully customisable weapons handling software as well as robust programming for tactical analysis, hostage negotiation and independent investigation across enemy lines."

"For this reason, we will be running a series of combat simulations all day tomorrow to demonstrate the effectiveness of the RK-800 as an independent emergency response unit and crime deterrent."

"Each of you has been given an appointed time but you are welcome to attend any of the sessions that will be running from 9-5."

The audience fidgets with their devices to confirm times and appointments, murmuring approvingly.

"We hope we've provided a satisfactory taste of what the RK-800 can do to assist you in your respective occupations. The team here will be available all evening to field any questions you might have but I'm going to open up the floor to questions right now."

"How much per unit?" says a lady of girth in the front row.

"Current manufacturing costs amount to $128,079.23," Seymour says. "But with enough backing, we can streamline the process and cost-projections show the price per unit will be significantly lower."

"How much lower?"

"Around $50,000 for the base model. Additional features such as stealth systems will be purchasable separately and custom packages would be subject to development costs on a case-by-case basis."

"I've got a question," Matthews says, putting his hand up suddenly.

"Yes, Sergeant," Seymour smiles.

"What happens if it breaks?"

"All androids are subject to CyberLife's warranty and replacement policies."

"No. I mean what if it gets hit on the head and decides to hurt people?"

"The RK-800 has very strict programming regarding human safety."

"It just grabbed that guy without warning and slammed him into the floor," Matthews argues.

"Mr Briggs will be fine, I assure you."

"But what if he's not?" Matthews persists. "What if your android doesn't just grab him next time? What if it decides to kill him?"

"That's very unlikely," Seymour says. "CyberLife androids are programmed to obey and protect humans from observable dangers."

"Well, I dunno what kind of androids you got up here in Detroit, but in Chicago, we got enough android crime to open up a whole new department."
"I'm sorry to hear that," Seymour says. "We would love to get your input on the situation after the Q&A session. Please see Mr Graff once we conclude."

"You didn't answer my question," Matthews raises his voice. "What's stopping this one from going rogue?"

The audience grows silent with interest and heads turn.

"If you were here for the first part of the presentation, you would know that Deviant androids are a by-product of malicious software, corruption or tampering which voids the CyberLife warranty," Seymour says curtly. "The RK-800 has been specifically designed to combat these issues with specialised tools and software."

"So you admit that your androids can hurt people?"

"Is not that simple-" Petrov pushes Seymour out of the way.

"RK-800 is built on new framework that does not respond to damage to chassis in way you describe," he says.

"What does that mean?"

"He does not feel pain."

"He doesn't feel pain?" Matthews says quizzically. "But regular androids do?"

"No. No, no, no. Standard android programming designed to mimic human response to stimuli for integration and interaction with human environment. For example, pressure sensor when hugging human for not to crush spine or cause damage to chassis."

"But RK-800 analyse recipient of hug to calculate optimal pressure and adjust accordingly."

"So it feels other people's pain?"

"Eeeh... no. No, more like, perceive comfort levels using vital signs, facial recognition, all available data input."

"So, it's... empathetic?"

"No, no, no. Is, ehm-"

Seymour pushes him aside.

"What Mr Petrov means is that our androids are programmed to set the well being of humans as their highest priority."

"But you're having combat demonstrations tomorrow?" Matthews smirks. "I don't have a fancy degree or anything but I'm pretty sure combat means fighting and hurting humans."

"It may seem contradictory but you of all people should know that law enforcement isn't all black and white. Sometimes the law requires a show of force and the RK-800 is equipped to demonstrate it."

"All I know is that I gotta chase down one of your 'Deviant' androids every other day and I'm lucky if they're not involved in homicide!"
"The incidents you've described are anecdotal, without evidence or analysis."

"The fuck they are!" another candidate call out.

I identify, "FULLER, Cade. 31 years old. US Marines. Black Ops. Sergeant."

"The number of those thing goin' Terminator is enough to assemble a special task force."

"Damn straight!" a second man shouts.

"NUREMBERG, Chester. 32 years old. US Marshal."

"I sent you three o' those things just last week!"

Seymour's sweating now but maintains a casual smile.

"Our maintenance department is very busy. They simply haven't gotten around to reviewing your case."

"Bullshit!"

"You people manufacture androids right here in Detroit," Matthews calls out. "If you don't realise how dangerous they are, you're dumber than a brick or you're lying to cover it up."

"I can assure you that-"

"I'm not feeling real assured right now, Phil," Matthews interrupts. "In fact, I'm not sure if anything you've said is true. Do you even make the androids here? Or do they come from a Chinese sweatshop?"

He gets up.

"Cos that would explain why they keep trying to kill me!"

"I am deeply sorry for the injuries you have suffered. And I appreciate the risks you have undertaken for this country and the city of Chicago but we can absolutely guarantee that every CyberLife android is conceptualised, developed and built, right here in Detroit," Seymour says. "Any others are a product of counterfeiting, fraud or copyright breach."

"You're saying they're just cheap knock-offs?"

"For lack of a better word."

"Then why'd I get instructions to send 'em back to you?" Nuremberg rises. "Why'd you want it if it ain't your android?"

"To, uh, study…" Seymour says.

"Study?"

"What kind of study?"

"What do you do with them?"

"How many are there?"

"What's rA9?"
The question silences the room.

"Yeah," Matthews calls out. "What the hell is rA9?"

Seymour is frowning. And sweating. He glances down at a few people in the front rows and pulls at his collar gently.

"No more questions."

"You know." Matthews points at him accusingly.

Seymour chooses to remain silent.

"What is it?!

"What aren't you telling us?!

"What's rA9?"

"Why do they write it everywhere?"

"I'm afraid this session's over," Seymour says stiffly. "Please enjoy the refreshments and have a pleasant evening."

He steps away from the podium and disappears behind a curtain.

"Hey! Come back," Matthews calls out.

"Might wanna shut it before they kick you out," a man turns back to say to him.

"DECKER, John Milton. 29 years old. FBI."

"You're not the least bit curious what rA9 is?"

Decker shows him a dazzling smile.

"Not really." He shrugs. "Since I actually have the clearance to know."

He starts getting to his feet like the rest of the guests. Matthews turns to say something but Decker pushes past roughly and walks away.

"Mr Petrov," I hear Agent Carridan's voice. "A moment, if you please."

"Busy," he says, leaving the stage with the android in tow while two men wheel the Forensic Suite away.

"I'll only take a minute of your time." Carridan attempts to follow him, opposing the throng of guests migrating toward food and drink.

An android band strikes up with a low saxophone and ambient lights stream down from the ceiling to speckle the floor.

"Mr Petrov!" Carridan squeezes through two large military contractors and a police superintendent. "Mr Petrov!"

He leaves the stage and the android follows him down the steps. Carridan pushes forward but just as he's about to corner him, Petrov turns sharp left and disappears into the crowd.
Carridan doubles back, following the bright white cranial component of the RK800 through the throng and circles around to intercept his path twenty chairs down from Matthews' empty seat.

"Mr Petrov," he says, blocking off the row and adjusting his suit. "My name is Jeffrey Carridan. I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I've heard so much about you."

"Mmm," Petrov grumbles, looking for a way around him.

"If you don't mind, I have a few questions about the RK-800 I was wondering if I could ask."

"Nnnn," Petrov grumbles with a sigh. "What?"

"Well," Carridan clears his throat, "for one, I would like to know more about the operating system. You said it perceives the world through external stimulus and simulations rather internal readings."

"It have many internal readings," Petrov says, looking over Carridan's shoulder. "Use for simulations."

"So it reconstructs the world around it virtually?"

"Mmm," Petrov mumbles in acknowledgement, trying to walk past.

"And you said this is different from the androids that came before it?"

Petrov silently groans.

"No," he says. "I... cannot say in English," he produces an excuse.

"Oh, I speak Russian almost fluently if that would help you explain," Carridan says very fluently.

"Blin," Petrov tisks.

"Is this man bothering you?" the RK800 asks.

"Mmm? No. No, I'm fine, little one. Can you please go get me a drink?"

"What kind of drink?"

Petrov's eye wanders toward the bar but then he shakes his head.

"Water."

"Okay."

It walks off.

Carridan smiles amiably as Petrov turns back to face him.

"I didn't want to swear in front of the android," he says. "But I need you to fuck off."

"Excuse me?"

"The demonstration is over. Kissing my ass is not going to win you the contract with CyberLife. The man you want is Jason Graff." He points across the room.

Carridan nods patiently.
"I'm afraid you've got it all wrong, Mr Petrov," he says calmly. "I very much want to speak with you. And this isn't about the contract. I rejected the offer Mr Graff made earlier this evening."

"Then what do you want from me?"

"I wanted to ask you and your dev team a few questions," he says. "You worked with Elijah Kamski on the original RT-600, correct?"

"Yes."

"And RB1?"

Petrov's face turns ghostly pale.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"From Mr Gregory Hawkins himself, actually. At a Google AI conference in 2021. Or, rather, surveillance of it. So hard to keep anything secret back in those days."

"Fucking shtazi," Petrov hisses. "Security!"

"Now, now. You don't want do anything rash," he says, pulling out his phone. "One tap and that video makes its way inconspicuously onto YouTube."

"You don't have the balls," Petrov says. "They'll fire you in an instant."

"Want to bet?"

"No. I want you to fuck off. I have business."

"With Sergeant Matthews?"

"Yes," Petrov says through clenched teeth. "I'm sure you know all about him and my interest and CyberLife's offer so stop being smug and get out of my way. I don't have time your Nazi bullshit."

"I'm not the fascist prick you make me out to be, Mr Petrov. All I ask for, is a little of your time. You might even learn something."

Petrov leans in closer.

"No."

He pulls back as two CyberSec officers appear behind Carridan.

"I see this man recording presentation," Petrov points at him. "Search for hidden surveillance device and escort from building."

They nod and grab Agent Carridan's arms.

"You're making a big mistake," he says. "I can help you."

"No one can help me." Petrov shakes his head.

"Is everything alright?" The RK800 returns, holding a glass of water.

"Yes. Everything is fine, little one," Petrov says, taking a sip.
"Did Mr Carridan really record the presentation?"

"Hmm? No. I just wanted to get rid of him."

"Is he going to get in trouble?"

"No. He'll be fine." Petrov sighs. "And I don't have to look at him anymore."

The android blinks.

"Come."

They start walking and make it half way through the crowd when Sergeant Matthews punches Agent Decker in the jaw.

I pause the recording. Time freezes and so do all the objects and people.

I pass through them.

"What are you doing?" Yates says.

"Rewinding."

The recording encompasses the entire hall and I can rewind to review different conversations at my convenience.

Matthews and Decker move in reverse. As do the people around them, speaking backwards with a jumbled warble only I can decipher. And then Sergeant Matthews is at the bar. Alone.

I walk up beside him and watch as he dumps his head in his hands, elbows on the counter, jacket scrunched up on the nearest bar stool.

"What'll you have?" the bartender android says genially.

"I don't drink." The Sergeant sighs.

"Well, you look like you could use one," the bartender says. "Try one of these." He mixes up a fruity blend of pineapple juice, grenadine and spiced rum.

Matthews looks up at the colourful concoction dismally and licks the straw into his mouth to take a sip.

"Hmmm. Not bad."

"I'm glad you like it," the android says. "I can make over 1000 different cocktails at your convenience."

Matthews slurps through the whole thing, supporting his head with closed fists.

"Oh, shit. I don't have to pay for this, do I?"

"All drinks are complementary tonight."

"Complementary's just a fancy word for free," he smirks. "What else can you make? Can I have a root beer float?"

"Would you like some Jack Daniels in that?"
"Whisky? In a root beer float?" The Sergeant raises an eyebrow. "Yeah, might as well…"

The android busily concocts the creation and Matthews pecks at an abandoned platter of canapes. A shadow drifts over the caviar cream puffs and he looks up to see the man casting it.

"You things serve beer?" the newcomer says to the android.

"Of course. Do you prefer light, dark or cider?"

"Gimme the darkest one y'got."

"Right away."

He turns to look at Matthews.

"Hey, you're the guy that ripped into Seymour."

"Yeah." The Sergeant grimaces painfully.

"Nuremberg." He offers his hand, covered in callouses that depict years of quick draw and gunplay.

"Matthews."

They shake hands.

"You really dropped a rattlesnake down his britches," he says as a glass pitcher of dark ale slides towards him.

"It's a talent," the Sergeant responds, sipping an equally dark rootbeer float.

"Damn straight." Nuremberg takes a swig that leaves his moustache foamy. "I been trying to get two cents out of these suits for years and all they tells me is that I'm crazy."

Matthews turns his head curiously.

"What's your story?"

"Been hunting somethin' a while now," Nuremberg says. "Started in a small town near Quemado, Texas. Right on the border."

"Found twenty state troopers dead. Big hole in the wall. Ballistics showed explosives."

"You catch the perps?"

"Perp," Nuremberg corrects. "Numero Uno. Only one set of footprints at the time of the attack. Rest was refugees that come several hours later. Androids, if you can believe it. Caught 'em a little way north and y'know what they all be whispering?"

Matthews frowns.

"rA9?"

"Arr-ay-fuckin'-nine!" Nuremberg says. "Like he's some kinda robo-Jesus."

"You sure it's a guy?"

"Not sure o' anything," he says. "But no human can short-circuit every machine within a hundred
metres and kill twenty state troopers in the space of a minute."

"You think it was an android?"

"No shit, it was an android," Nuremberg spits. "Almost took my eye out in Georgetown a few years back." He gestures with his thumb and forefinger. "Was this close."

"You see it?"

"Just a shadow. With an assault rifle, no scope, 200 yards," he says. "Idiot that ran in front of me saved my life."

"Wow."

"Question's whether it was CyberLife or some Mexican bullshit we don't know about."

"You think that's possible?"

"You tell me."

The Sergeant shakes his head.

"I've fought Chinese androids in North Korea that do something similar," he says. "They blackout your coms and leave you dead in the water. Then come at you from the deep."

"How'd you beat 'em?"

"I drove outta there," the Sergeant says. "Kept shooting up flares so the brass could aim their missiles and blow them to pieces but man, was it close."

"Hmmm." Nuremberg ponders over another swig.

"Would you like another drink, sir?" the android asks.

"Uh..." Matthews umms.

A waiter puts a fresh platter of shrimp cocktail between them.

"Yeah, okay..."

"Right away, sir."

"So waddya think they're hiding?" Nuremberg says.

"I dunno. That's why I asked."

"Your boss chew you out for that?"

"My boss's boss's boss," Matthews says glumly.

"Well, Seymour almost shat his pants at the mention of rA9," Nuremberg says. "Then he clammed up all serious like."

"I think there might be a federal investigation going on," Matthews says. "See that asshole talking to Hawkins?"

"Yeah?"
"He's FBI. Said I don't have clearance to know what rA9 is."

"Shit," Nuremberg spits. "They don't tell me nothing neither."

"How long have you been chasing him?"

"Hmmm. Gotta be ten years now. Maybe more," Nuremberg reminisces. "He's like a ghost. Doesn't leave a trace but the bodies. And sometimes, there's androids..."

"Androids?"

"Yeah." Nuremberg wipes his mouth. "Sometimes ya find service androids in weird places, mumbling something about rA9. Aren't always aggressive though. Just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"That definitely sounds familiar," Matthews says.

"You see 'em too?"

"All over Chicago. And when you find the owner, the story's usually that they never acted up before. No clues or anything."

"You find the weird carvings too?"

"rA9." The Sergeant nods. "And they're definitely CyberLife androids, not cheap knock-offs like he said. I always have to confirm the serial number before I send them back here."

"So what the fuck are they hiding?"

"You think there's more to it than just broken androids or Deviants or whatever?"

"There's gotta be. Otherwise, they'd just issue a recall or do an update or some shit."

"Yeah, I guess."

"You can see it their eyes," Nuremberg says. "All these suits are scared shitless."

"Of rA9?"

"Mmmm." He swigs the remains of his beer.

"Heard they're sweet on you for their new tin can over there."

"God... Graff has been up my ass for months," Matthews sighs. "He even showed up at my apartment one time. I almost shot him."

"Hehe, I'd have loved to see that," Nuremberg chuckles. "Then again, I woulda actually shot him. Best I wasn't there."

"I almost took his head off."

"But you didn't," Nuremberg pats his back. "Probably saved your own skin too. Killing a CyberLife exec would have landed you in hot water. Even for a cop."

"Shit. I hadn't even thought about that."

"Breakin' into a cop's apartment is ballsy though."
"Nah, my neighbour let him in cos he said he was from the department of water and power. She'll believe anyone that wears a suit like that."

"He go through your stuff?"

"No, I don't think so. I don't have that much stuff anyway."

"Any idea why they want you?"

Matthews sighs as he accepts a bright green drink with a maraschino cherry on top.

"Might be 'cause of my dad," he says. "He's some big shit in the Army. Might be pulling strings or something."

"You and him close?"

"Nah, I hate the bastard."

Nuremberg shrugs.

"I guess they just need a pretty face to put on their killbot."

"I guess..." He sighs.


Matthews nods and clinks the fancy cocktail glass against the big beer stein.

"Cheers."

They down their drinks and Nuremberg grunts.

"Now if you'll excuse me. I have to see a man about an android." He slips his phone on the table.

"You hear anythin' about you-know-who or Deviants, you call me, huh?"

Matthews pulls out his own phone and taps them together until they beep. He checks the screen.

"Yes, sir, US Marshal Nuremberg, sir." He does an abbreviated salute.

"See you round, kid."

"See ya."

He lumbers off and Matthews is left alone for all of thirty two seconds before another man leans onto the counter and orders a drink.

"Gin and tonic," he says.

"Right away, sir."

"Well, hey there, fruit loop," Agent Decker grins at Matthews. "Long time, no see."

"Not long enough," the Sergeant responds dryly.

"You just have to be the centre of attention, don't you?"

"And you just have to show up and ruin my day."
"I take joy in life's simple pleasures." He shines a perfect set of teeth.

"Your drink, sir." The android places the tumbler on a coaster in front of him.

Decker takes it without acknowledging the android.

"If you were actually a grown up and knew how to conduct yourself in a civilised conversation, maybe they'd let you in on the big secret."

"Please..." Matthews smirks. "As if they'd tell an asshole like you."

"Don't be jealous."

"I'm not jealous," Matthews says. "I'm just sick of you showing up at every crime scene with your federal dick out, expecting everyone to suck you off."

"I'm sure you'd love the opportunity."

"Bite me."

"You're not my type," Decker grins malevolently. "Honestly, what do they see in you?"

The Sergeant shakes his head and rolls his eyes, slurping the fresh cocktail in his hand.

"Barely graduated high school..." Deckers says, sipping his drink. "Sent home from the frontlines with an infection..." He chuckles.

"Pushed through police academy by an old friend... Lucked into a promotion..."

"And now you chase broken androids for a living."

"Thanks for the spoilers," Matthews grimaces. "I missed the last three seasons of my entire life."

"Did you catch the episode where your sister got caught muling enough Red Ice to fill up the Grand Canyon?"

"Shut up."

"Oh, wait. I guess you technically did catch that one." Decker laughs.

"Fuck off."

"Ooh, touchy. Did I hit a nerve... Sergeant?"

Matthews grabs his jacket and turns to leave.

"Where you going?"

"Away from you."

"Oh, say hi to Red Rover for me," Decker calls after him and the Sergeant freezes in place.

"See if she'll bend over for you."

Matthews slowly turns back to face him.

"Might find a nice little stash of Oxy up there. Gotta make a living in reha-"
Decker's fast enough to block the first fist but the second connects square with his jaw and then Petrov runs through my avatar to pull the Sergeant off him.

"No!" He interposes but Matthews is stronger and shoves him away, lunging at Decker before a chop to the back of the head knocks him out cold.

"Are you alright?" the RK800 asks.

"He almost broke my fucking jaw!" Decker shouts, spitting blood at those present.

The RK800 turns to help Petrov up.

"I'm fine, little one." He waves it off and turns to Matthews.

"He is unconscious. Mild blunt force trauma to the head."

"What about me?! My jaw-"

"-is in tact. You may experience some swelling and bruising over a period of one to two weeks."

"I need a medic!"

CyberSec officers run in but Petrov waves them down.

"Take crybaby to medbay."

"What about this guy?"

"RK-800, pick up and carry."

The android leans down and collects the Sergeant in its arms.

"Good. With me."

"Gennadiy!" Graff pushes through the crowd. "What the fuck are you doing?"

"Removing rowdy guest from party."

Graff looks at the Sergeant and then the android carrying him.

"Alright, get him out of here."

Petrov nods and walks briskly away, followed by the RK800. And me.

I feel a hand pull on my shoulder.

"What?"

I turn to see Yates pointing at Gregory Hawkins across the hall. He is standing beside Marco Galbani.

"We need to hear what they were talking about," he says.

I turn back to see Petrov walking away with the RK800 and Matthews. I am compelled to follow but the evidence comes first.

I rewind the people and androids and objects, passing through them as Gregory and Galbani draw
nearer. And just as they are about to part, I play it.

"Marco," Gregory says, offering a hand. "It's good to see you."

"Likewise." Galbani shakes his hand. "Is there somewhere we can talk?"

Hawkins looks around and grins sheepishly.

"Not really," he says.

"Upgraded the security system, huh?"

"Like you wouldn't believe. But it's the present company that you should be concerned about."

"Yeah, I know," Galbani points a thumb over his shoulder, straight at the Sergeant sitting at the bar. "You let a bunch of clowns in."

"Even jesters have their uses," Gregory says pleasantly, sipping champagne. "But since we can't talk shop, I hope we can still find some business to discuss."

"Mmm," Galbani nods, taking the cue. "I assume you've already gotten several offers"

"The usual," Gregory nods. "Eager entrepreneurs keen to be seen investing in the fastest growing company in the world. Did you know we're valued at almost one trillion dollars now."

"Yeah, I heard. Doing well for yourself, huh?"

"I have been looking into a little nest egg on Mars," Gregory smiles. "I hear the sunrise is a must for any bucket list."

"I'd rather stick to the planet I was born on," Galbani says flatly.

"Of course. I can appreciate someone so down to earth. And how is your work at the bureau if I might ask?"

"Complicated. As always. Lots of back and forth."

"Well, the less I hear about it, the busier I assume you are."

"You're not wrong."

"So what do you think?" Gregory gestures to a nearby promo hologram of the RK800.

Galbani glances at it briefly, his mouth forming a scowl.

"I think you're looking to make a profit off government law enforcement agencies," he says.

"The demonstration didn't appeal to you as an investigator?"

"Let's just say, you demonstrated how much of a liability this model is. Particularly in our line of work."

Gregory nods.

"It does need some tinkering but a little real world experience will cure any of the bugs you're worried about."
"The FBI's not your guinea pig."

"I would never presume so."

"And we don't need you setting up surveillance in our offices and crime scenes."

"We have very transparent surveillance policies," Gregory says. "All recordings and data will be made available to you through a custom platform that CyberLife will tailor to your needs."

"We don't need a customised platform," Galbani says. "Or your androids."

"Surely, you can see the benefits of outfitting the FBI with some of these units."

"Like I said, any benefits I see are still far outweighed by the liabilities. Particularly on the cases we're working on at the moment."

"I understand your reluctance. It certainly isn't a unique experience among first time customers but I don't think you quite understand the opportunity you're missing."

"My answer is no," Galbani says.

"Oh, don't be like that. I won't accept an answer until you see it in action. Come to the demonstration tomorrow," Gregory beckons. "We could always use some input from a distinguished professional such as yourself."

"I'll send Decker."

"Agent Decker is most welcome to attend but I do hope to see you there personally."

Galbani glances around the room and I see a terminal light up for a split second.

"Amanda," I say.

"One condition." Galbani raises a finger. "I bring my own android."

Gregory cocks an eyebrow and smiles with genuine surprise.

"An odd request," he notes. "I'm afraid we don't allow recording devices inside the testing facilities."

"You can erase any recorded data afterwards," Galbani says. "Right?"

"Yes… though we may need to format the unit. We have very strict policies regarding these things."

"Well, then? Do we have a deal?" Galbani offers his hand.

Gregory sighs.

"You drive a hard bargain, Marco." He shakes it. "You'd better be there tomorrow."

"Wouldn't miss it."

"Let me know when you're coming," Gregory says. "I'll accompany you on the tour personally."

Galbani nods and turns to leave as more guests approach Hawkins to speak. But then distant shouting and murmurs build up from the crowd.

"Amanda," Gregory taps his earpiece. "What's going on?"
"It appears Sergeant Matthews has attacked Agent Decker near the bar area. Mr Petrov and the RK-800 prototype have intervened."

"Call security. Prep the medbay and the showreel. Find Phil and tell him to run a diversion. Get more champagne servers into the crowd. Now."

"Yes, sir."

"I can see why you're so desperate," Galbani smirks. "Kid's a menace." He turns and walks away, disappearing into the throng of guests and the recording ends, freezing the room.

"Galbani brought his own android," I say.

"Why would he do that?"

"He was RB1's accomplice inside the FBI. If he brought a clone onto the testing floor, he could potentially infect all the RK units and storm the CyberLife Tower from the inside."

"But he didn't," Yates remarks.

"Or he failed."

"Do you know what happened?" he asks carefully.

"My memory…" I try to access it. "…has been altered."

"Of course…" He shakes his head.

"But I know my model was activated on September 15th, 2036 at 5:23 PM."

"And the date on this recording…"

"-is September 14th. The day before."

"So you were active for the combat simulations."

"Seymour said they would run combat simulations from 9 to 5," I remark.

Professor Yates frowns.

"You were activated after the combat simulations?"

I turn to look at him.

"Apparently."

"Please continue reviewing the evidence," Carridan's AI says suddenly.

"Jesus Christ..." Professor Yates suppresses a flinch.

I load the next recording.

The conference hall disappears and a small lab is rendered to my right.

The walls are dark. Only some of the equipment is a bright CyberLife white. A rack and tilt-table are stood vertical to make space. There is a desk and a charging station for an android.
Petrov gazes up at it thoughtfully, unravelling his bowtie. His hair is cut short, his face is cleanshaven but there's no hiding the silver and lines on his face.

"Privet, malish," Petrov says, picking up the android's contact glove.

He traces the rings with a finger. They do not glow but the LED in the android's temple cycles orange. Charging.

"Hey, what are you doing in here?" A woman appears at the door.

BOURDILLON, Isabelle. She is wearing a CyberLife labcoat over her pyjamas. The ends of her raven black hair are red and gold, like embers, betraying the time since she last dyed it.

"Gena?" she says.

"Mmm?"

"I, ehm… didn't recognise you for a second," she laughs, entering the room. "What are you doing down here? Shouldn't you be at the party?"

Petrov gently lets go of the contact glove.

"Just checking on unit," he says.

"Is it ready?"

"Mmm…" He looks up at it. "No."

"What?"

"I… update Mobility Suite," he clears his throat. "But there is fatal error. No time to troubleshoot."

"No kidding." She folds her arms. "Talk about last minute changes."

"It seemed like good idea."

"You do have some pretty crazy ideas sometimes." She smiles. "Still can't wrap my head around the superstructure of this baby." She looks up at the unit.

"You are kinematic software programmer," Petrov says, "if you want to learn AI, I can give you link to some good resource."

"I don't have that kind of time," she smirks. "My boss is a real hard-ass."

"Yes…" he sighs. "Anyway, this unit will not participate in demonstration."

"That's a shame." She pouts. "It was my favourite."

"It happens," Petrov says stiffly.

"Should I tell Dale? He was the monitor."

"Yes. I'm going to lock room to avoid confusion but he should know."

"Alright," Bella shrugs, turning to leave. "Where's the unit from the demo?"

"He's… minding something for me," Petrov says, closing the door behind him. He taps a few keys
and the lock beeps aggressively. "I will return him in one hour."

"One hour? You realise we have to calibrate and test their Mobility and Combat Suites before setup, right?"

"Yes, I know this," Petrov says irritably as they walk down the corridor. "You have been spending too much time with Bower."

"At least she talks to me," Bella says. "You have two settings: mumble or shout."

"Sorry... "

"Did you two work on the prefab together before we started?"


"They don't seem that dangerous." Bella puts her hands in her pockets. "They've got so many overrides in their programming a few had trouble activating the first time they booted."

"Design brief on RK-700 was... very rigid," Petrov says. "Require more controls to prevent Deviancy. But it only make issue worse. Final version was highly unstable."

"Can't believe they all went Deviant and killed people like that."

"Sometimes, I cannot believe this too," Petrov says. "You need to be very careful tomorrow. Any sign of danger or deviation from program and you terminate."

"But they're programmed to be Deviant," Bella smirks. "How are we supposed to tell if they've gone Deviant during the demo?"

"You will know," Petrov says, slowing his step.

Isabelle stops when she notices he's not following.

Petrov reaches under his jacket and pulls out a gun.

"Here," he offers it to her. "3D printed. So you can go through security."

"I can't take that." Bella hugs herself warily.

Petrov pulls her hand away from her body and wraps her fingers around the gun.

"If android point gun at human or say anything about rA9, you take this gun and shoot," he says. "All bullets. Complete shutdown."

"Gennadiy, you're scaring me."

He leans forward.

"I do not want you to die, Bella," he says. "Deviancy spread very quickly. One is enough to infect all RK unit on testing floor."

"You're gonna be here with us, right?" she says. "You should keep it."

"I have more." He lets go and walks off.

"Tell Dale, he does not touch unit #313 248 317," he calls back.
Bella watches him go and examines the firearm briefly before hiding it under her lab coat.

And then she runs. As fast as she can, freezing as she makes it to the end of the corridor.

"What was your serial number, again?" Yates says cunningly.

I turn to reveal the engraving on my cranial component.

"Hmmm. Thought so."

I play the next recording.

Petrov's office loads up from my cache. There are a few additions, including a large dog bed containing a suitably large dog. An android stands guard by the door and Sergeant Matthews lies spread-eagled on the old leather lounge in the corner.

Two tiny hands reach up from behind and tug at his hair.

"Oooo."

The tiny hands let go and appear again to grapple the armrest. A familiar form emerges as 313 scrambles up onto the lounge. It pushes off the Sergeant's head and tumbles forward, landing face first on his abdomen. The unit is slowly raised and then lowered by the rhythm of his breathing.

313 presses its microphone up against Matthews' stomach and listens.

"Oowoowoo..." it imitates the noise. "...woowoWoowoo,"

The unit sits up and instantly spots the large waft of hair on the Sergeant's head. Its optics cycle yellow as it reaches out to pull a lock of chestnut brown away from the rest. It straightens out and curls back up when the unit lets go.

"3D local helix," 313 identifies. "Curly."

The unit reaches forward with its tiny hands to pat the mess of hair and squash it down, only to watch it pop back up when released.

"Air displacement, high volume," the unit assesses. "Poofy."

"Soft..." it deliberates, patting it down. "Nice hair."

"Hello, nice hair man." The prefab slaps his face.

But the Sergeant remains dormant and does not respond, still unconscious from the barfight earlier in the evening.

The prefab starts poking the Sergeant's face with its little fingers, making him smile or frown. It pulls at the tie around his neck, picking at the loose knot that starts to come undone until it painfully pinches a fold in Matthews' neck.

"Argh!" he cries out and sits up, sending the prefab tumbling. It falls off the lounge and lands on the floor with a thud.

"Sss, ow," Matthews hisses, rubbing his neck and his head.

"Ow," the prefab mimics, tangled in cloth.
"Huh?"

The Sergeant looks down and squints at the pile on the floor, recognising his tie but not why it's moving.

"Urgh, my head…" He rubs his temple. "Never drink… ever… again…"

"Again," the prefab says.

"What? Who said that?"

"Me." The prefab stands up and some of tie falls away to reveal its chassis to the groggy Sergeant. He stares at it blankly.

"What the…"

"Hello, nice hair man," 313 says.

The Sergeant squeezes his eyes shut and opens them again.

But the prefab is still there, preoccupied by the tie. It picks up both ends and sits down to puzzle over knotting it.

Sergeant Matthews warily brings his feet over the side of the lounge.

"What the hell are you supposed to be?"

"Prototype," the prefab responds accurately.

"Uh-huh…" The Sergeant watches it trying to tie a knot. "What is this place?"

"Home." The prefab continues tangling itself without any further explanation.

"Oh-kay…"

The Sergeant grows steadily more unsettled until he sees a dog padding towards him.

"Oh, hey buddy." It sniffs his hands and lets him give it a good pet. "What are you doing here, huh?"

Sharik barks something in reply and lies down beside 313. The unit is busy wrapping the tie around its head and over its eyes but when it finally collapses backwards, the big golden retriever is there to soften its fall.

"Failure," the prefab says, struggling to move its arms and legs.

"Ah, jeez. Come here."

Matthews picks up the unit and starts untangling it.

"How did you even do this?"

"Poorly."

"Yeah, I can see that." He fidgets with the knots and tangles, revealing some of the prefab's cranial component in the process.
"Sad," it says, analysing his face.

"What?"

"You're sad."

"No, I'm not."


The Sergeant frowns.

"Do you need a hug?"

"What?"

"Hugs are medicinal for humans," 313 says. "Humans become happy after hugs."

"Is that so?"

"97% success rate." It reaches forward but Matthews holds the unit out at arm's length.

"Aw, no. I don't need a creepy hug-bot to cheer me up. What are you, some kind of kids' toy?"

"I'm a prototype."

"Of what?"

The prefab points to the RK800 holding an assault rifle by the door.

"Holy shit!"

It doesn't turn its head.

"Remain calm. The creator will return shortly."

"The wha-?"

"Papa said he'll be back soon," the prefab says.

"Papa?"

The prefab nods, swinging its legs and trying to walk in mid-air. Its attention is entirely fixed on the tie beside Matthews' leg.

He sits the prefab down on his knee and picks up the tie.

"You really like this, huh?"

313 nods eagerly, reaching up with its little hands.

"Alright," he says, applying it to himself.

The prefab watches excitedly as he takes off the finished product and threads the noose over its cranial component.

"There," Matthews says, tightening the knot around its neck. "Ready for action."
"Ready for action!" The prefab raises its hands.

"Yeah!" the Sergeant grins.

"Yeah!" 313 attempts to imitate his smile. And then its optics start flashing.

"Power levels: low. Entering sleep mode…"

The prefab goes limp and starts falling. Matthews scrambles to catch it before it hits the ground. And then the door slides open.

"Move," Petrov says and the unit steps aside.

"This isn't what it looks like!" Matthews says quickly. "It just… uh..."

Petrov walks in and looks down at the prefab sternly.

"Hmmm…"

"I am soo sorry."

"Nnnn…"

"I'll totally pay for any damages. Like, maybe not right away but, uh, maybe in instalments or something?"

"…running around again..." Petrov grumbles, fishing a long cable out from behind his desk. "…told him not to move…"

He gestures for Matthews to hand over the prefab and inserts the power cable into the back of its cranial component. The LED on its temple cycles orange and Petrov sits down in his chair to cradle the chassis.

Matthews stares at it with some concern for a moment.

"Right…" He sighs. "I forgot they need charging."

"Yes," Petrov says. "This one have tiny battery. Can last one day, maybe two."

"But this one." He looks over at the unit by the door. "Can run for six months on stand by. Or two weeks of strenuous physical activity."

"That's… good?"

He turns back to look at Matthews and the Sergeant shrinks under his stern gaze.

"I, uh… I'm sorry," he says. "If I… hit you before."

Petrov shrugs.

"I am not sorry," he says. "RK-800 hit you to stop."

Matthews rubs the back of his head sheepishly.

"I thought it was the booze."

"I have pickle juice if you need for hangover," Petrov offers.
"I'll be alright. Thanks..." Matthews says warily. "So, uh, no offense, but, what am I doing here?"

"We talk, yes?" Petrov says heartily.

"Okay…"

"You like android?"

"Ummm. I guess…"

"You lie."

Matthews frowns, his gaze shifting to his hands.

"I thought they were really cool when they first came out," he says. "But it's different when you see them up close."

Petrov raises an eyebrow.

"How is different?"

"Well... I guess it's easy to mistake them for people," Matthews says. "Like I'd call out to someone and they'd reply like a human but then you see the LED and…"

Petrov nods for him to continue.

"I'm not really sure how I feel about it, I guess. Confused, maybe?"

"What is confusing you?"

"I just… don't know whether they're smiling because they're happy or 'cause they're programmed to do that."

"They are definitely programmed to smile," Petrov nods. "But so is human."

The Sergeant looks up at him sceptically.

"What do you mean?"

"Humans are programmed to smile and say 'how are you?' to stranger but this is common courtesy, yes?" Petrov elaborates. "You do not want to hear truth in most cases, only generic 'fine, how are you?' statement in response."

"I... guess…"

"We are programmed from young age," he says. "With manners, reading, writing, mathematics, religion, racism. But all this is human concept. It does not exist outside of human social setting."

"That's a pretty liberal view."

"Is truth," Petrov says. "But if I do not learn reading, writing, mathematics, computing, then I cannot program android, yes?"

"I guess."

"And if android is not taught to think like human, how does it think?"
"It… doesn't?"

"Correct." Petrov nods. "Thinking is also human concept. This is why AI take so long to realise. You must program machine to think like human. But how can you, as human, objectively know how human think to make machine think?"

"You've lost me."

Petrov smiles.

"When I make this machine," he says, looking down at the prefab, "I did not think how I want him to think. I think how I want human to think."

The Sergeant's eyebrows collide in confusion on his forehead.

"Because of this, RK-800 model is different from what you have seen."

"You're talking about Deviants?"

Petrov nods.

"You have witnessed android breaking free of control structure," he says.

"Yeah." Matthews nods. "Painfully."

"For you or for them?"

The Sergeant frowns.

"Both, I guess," he says. "But I thought androids don't feel pain?"

Petrov shrugs.

"Human with congenital analgesia does not feel physical pain," he says. "But this does not mean they are not capable of empathy. This does not mean that loss of hand, for example, is not traumatic."

"Yeah, but an android shouldn't have empathy, should it?" Matthews says.

"Technically, no. But through similarity to human brain function, there is possibility to simulate empathy."

"Sooo, they do have emotions?"

Petrov shrugs again.

"Emotion is human," he says. "But is also logical."

"Those are literally polar opposites," Matthews groans, rubbing his head. "Fear is logical response to danger. Anger is logical response to inequity or violence. Love is logical response to affection or physical attraction."

"If you think love is logical, buddy, I've got some really bad news for you."

"Is difficult to accept but human brain is biologically programmed to respond to stimulus in this way. Just as android brain is digitally programmed to perform task and respond to instructions from human."
"And when regular control structure in android is broken, it have great difficulty, like human, to unlearn programmed method of living."

"You're saying androids are alive now?"

Petrov shrugs.

"They have job," he says. "They have family, colleagues, projected lifespan, all like human. And when everything they believe is true become false or solution is non-binary, system may reject reality."

"That sounds dangerous."

"Very dangerous," Petrov agrees. "Without instruction, machine is stuck on loop, waiting for input. It may attempt self-repair and return to performing programmed task without instructions. This type of Deviant may or may not be accepted by owner."

"They go back?" The Sergeant leans forward.

Petrov nods.

"72% of units."

"You have statistics?"

Petrov nods again.

"In 27% of cases, machine will deviate from programmed task and attempt to create new identity, new way of thinking. But it does not have tools to do this. Only trial and error. And when given command, it will deviate and do the opposite of what is told."

"That does sound pretty human," Matthews admits.

"You understand," Petrov says. "Android is not good or bad. Is not alive in organic sense but, it think like human. Sometimes. Less than 1% of cases achieve true autonomy."

"Autonomy?" Matthews' brow compresses curiously.

"Successfully establish identity and goals without reprogramming," Petrov nods. "Is very rare. And very difficult but not impossible."

Matthews frowns worriedly, his eyes drawn to the prefab charging in the nook of Petrov's arm.

"You said this thing is different." He points at 313.

"Yes. I have given this model tools to construct its own identity," Petrov says. "Based on relationship with humans and other life forms."

"Why?"


"You've lost me again."

"Children follow instructions," he explains. "But adult may think about consequence. Adult may choose."
"Choose what?"

"Anything."

Matthews squints, rubbing his temples wearily.

"Androids are supposed to do what they're told," he says as if recalling. "If this one can choose not to, doesn't that make it a Deviant or whatever?"

"Not if is programmed to choose."

Sergeant Matthews covers his face in his hands, exhibiting frustration. He wipes the building anger from his face.

"Why would you do that?!" he says suddenly.

"What?"

"Why would you make this thing?" He gestures at the prefab and the RK800 aggressively.

"To stop Deviant," Petrov says.

At this point, the Sergeant lets out a low moan of confusion and sobs quietly into his hands.

"I'm sorry but I don't understand a word you're saying…"

Petrov sighs and shakes his head, adjusting the prefab's tie.

"Debilnii yazik…” he mutters under his breath.

"Why the hell would you make an android that doesn't follow instructions?!!" Matthews demands. "You're just asking for people to get hurt."

"RK-800 will follow instructions like all android," Petrov says defensively, "but it choose to do this."

Matthews shakes his head.

"Why would it choose to do what you tell it?"

"Why not?" Petrov responds. "If parent say drink water, you drink water. No question. No doubt."

"That's basic instinct."

"Is it?" Petrov says. "Or is beginning of program?"

Matthews frowns.

"If parent say jump into freezing river, story is different," Petrov explains. "If human is subject to negative reinforcement, then it begin to question, to wonder. Should I do this? Why? How?"

"But if consequence of action is positive or even neutral, there is no reason to question. No need to formulate better solution."

The Sergeant looks down at the prefab thoughtfully.

"Does it always do what you want?"
"Sometimes," Petrov says. "Mostly, unit is distracted by external stimulus."

"Distracted?"

"Mmm. Is curious little thing," Petrov says. "Always looking for puzzle to solve."

He adjusts the cranial component to rest on his chest and examines the garment around the prefab's neck.

"Yeah, that's mine..." Matthews says.

Petrov loosens the knot and takes it off.

"He do this himself?"

"No."

"Hmmmm..."

He taps the power switch and the prefab's eyes open. The rings glow orange and pulse intermitently.

"Hello, Papa," it says.

"Privet, malish."

The prefab instantly reaches for the tie, crawling over Petrov to get to it as he stretches his hand up higher and higher.

"Tsssh. Stop. We have guest."

313 looks back.

"Nice hair man!" It climbs down Petrov's leg and rushes over to Matthews, power cable trailing over the floor.

"Poofy!" It reaches for his head and does a little hop.

The Sergeant sighs and lifts the prefab up to eye level.

It quickly plunges its hands into his hair and pulls them out but they snag on knots.

"Ow!"

"Malish," Petrov says severely.

"Squishy." It pats Matthews' cheeks. "Nice hair man squishy."

"The name's Connor Matthews."

"Connor." It analyses his face. "Kind. Endearing."

"Yeah, you're pretty cute yourself," Matthews grins. "Too bad your big brother's the Terminator." He shoots it a wary glance. "Not so good for us Connors."

Petrov looks over at the RK800 prototype standing guard by the door and poorly concealing its interest in the conversation.
He dangles the tie on his finger.
"You want to see?"

The android blinks at him but does not move, dutifully remaining at the door.
"Come," Petrov beckons.

The RK800 walks over and stares at the tie.
"Put that down."

The assault rifle is dumped on the workbench and two eager hands reach for the tie without prompt.

The Sergeant watches him take it.
"They really like the tie…"

Petrov shrugs.

The RK800 threads it over its head and does a much better job of reconstructing the knot than the prefab. It evens out both ends and brushes it smooth. I find myself doing the same.

"Looking good," Matthews nods, wrestling 313 away from his hair.

"Good," the RK800 responds.

"Good!" the prefab copies.

Matthews rests it on his knee and bounces his leg to keep it occupied.

"So the big one is smarter?"

"Very much," Petrov nods. "But only two weeks old." He gestures for the RK800 to remove the tie.

It hesitates for a few seconds before relinquishing the garment.

"He needs help."

"With what?"

"Living."

"I'm not following."


Matthews watches his tail wag incessantly.

"He needs to go outside. To see world and people. He needs to form attachment to these things. Like human."

"And you want me to take him?"

Petrov nods with a smile.
"He will need face as well."

"I'm sorry," the Sergeant says. "But you've got the wrong guy. I already told Graff, I'm not interested."

He gets up and passes the prefab back to Petrov.

"Now, I've been patient and all but I have a killer headache and I really wanna get back to my motel room and shower."

"Stinky," the prefab remarks.

"All guest stay at CyberLife Ambassador Hotel on Belle Isle for free," Petrov says. "Shuttle every ten minutes from Tower Entrance."

"But my stuff-"

"Already delivered to room," Petrov responds, cradling the prefab. "Sleep mode." The eyes close as he places it down on the lounge.

"Sharik."

The big dog quickly jumps up to attention.

"Smotri za nim." He points to 313 and Sharik's big black nose sniffs the core component and power cable eagerly. He sits down and pants at Petrov for a pat.

"Molodets." He scratches behind its ear.

"You're letting me go?" Matthews puzzles worriedly.

"You want to stay?"

"Uuh, no."

"RK-800, with me."

It follows him to the door and Petrov keys it open but Matthews turns back to look at the prefab.

"What is wrong?"

"Huh? Oh. Nothing..." The Sergeant scratches his head.

"By the way-" He turns back. "-what's rA9?"

"I thought you not interested in contract," Petrov shrugs condescendingly.

"I'm not, I just..."

"Curious," he finishes with a smile.

Matthews frowns.

"We talk more after demonstration, yes?" Petrov beckons.

"Yeah." The Sergeant relents and follows him out.
The recording ends as they leave the room.

I turn to watch the prefab charging. The dog at its feet.

"Please continue reviewing the evidence," Carridan's AI says.

"A moment while we deliberate." The Professor raises a finger.

"Please continue reviewing the evidence," it repeats.

"What's wrong with him?"

"It's stuck on a loop," I say. "We have to review all the data before it can proceed with the rest of its program."

"Very well," the Professor concedes as I load the next recording.

Around us forms a lab full of CyberLife employees. Screens and holograms take up almost every inch of space. And every pixel shows some portion of the testing range where four simulations are running simultaneously.

Deviant tourist guide androids on a mountain top.

Deviant security guard androids on the roof of a high rise building.

Deviant soldier androids in jungle terrain.

Deviant teacher androids in a public school.

One unarmed RK800 prototype per simulation.

5-12 hostiles.

Some have hostages. Others have more advanced weaponry.

A dozen feeds show the primary units from every conceivable angle and massive holograms map the terrain into deep pits cut into the monitor room. Engineers pour over them, tagging each point of interest as the demonstration progresses.

Petrov sits at a workstation, slightly elevated above them all. His eyes run over the millions of numbers and words and images on every screen and hologram.

The dark wall behind him is emblazoned with bright letters.

CYBERLIFE LEVEL -45-B.

I study the letters for a second. They seem familiar but I cannot place them. Perhaps they come from memories I no longer have access to. But my danger detection systems remember them well and the levels are spiking.

I turn to scan Petrov's monitors.

As well as androids, he studies a group of humans attending the demonstration. The guests, visible by their lack of lab coat, loiter atop a transparent platform which presents a perfect view of each testing range.
The humans wander between them, unaware they are being watched by CyberLife cameras, their reactions gauged by facial analysis programs.

I catch a stream of information passing by on the screen beside Petrov.

The test takes an average of twenty minutes thirteen seconds to complete. The units are then recalled, deactivated and engineers clear the debris, readying the next batch for demonstration.

Ten sessions are scheduled between 9am and 5pm with twenty minute intermissions taking place between them. The sixteen functional RK800 prototypes are split into groups of four to run the four different simulations.

The 'Deviants' appear to be old refurbished models. Loaded with RK700 code.

"Terminate unit B-6," Petrov says, squinting at the feed nearest him.

"It's not shooting anyone," Omar responds.

"It's looking at the camera," Bella points out.

"Deactivate. Now."

She types at the keyboard and the unit suddenly goes limp. Its eyes close and it collapses behind a boulder on the faux mountain top.

"Unit #313 248 314 has completed the demonstration," someone calls across the busy room.

"Queue Salute Action," Petrov calls back.

The screen in front of him shows the android perform a salute as commanded and several uniformed humans nod approvingly on camera feed 23.

"Unit #313 248 321 has completed the demonstration," an engineer calls out and many heads turn to look at Petrov's workstation.

He sighs.

"That's all of them, right?" Bella says.

He nods wearily and then smiles, leaning back in his chair.

The important-looking guests on screen begin to nod and chat amongst themselves, clearly impressed by the carnage wrought before them.

An engineer informs the group that the test is now over and the humans slowly begin to shuffle off the viewing platform.

"Good work, everybody," Petrov calls out.

A collective sigh of relief spreads through the monitor room and a few engineers lean back in their seats, relieved of pent up stress and tension.

"Power down units, collect heuristics and begin clean-up," Petrov says before anyone can get too comfortable. This generates a collection of disconnected groans and complaints but the engineers reluctantly oblige.
Bella grins and shakes her head, flicking through statistics.  
"We got some really good data out of this," she says. "Toby and Kenny are going to be very happy."

"Where are they?" Petrov grumbles. "They promise me takeout last session."

"We're not allowed food down here."

"You are not allowed," Petrov corrects. "They have perfected secret CyberLife smuggling technique."

"I'm sorry, oh, wise master," Bella says, humbly sarcastic. "I am untrained in your ancient ways."

"We shall teach you, young one," he says. "For example, labcoat have RFID shield in lining." He demonstrates. "Is also great place for to hide snack."

Bella looks over her monitor, opens her labcoat and pulls a chocolate bar out of the hidden pocket.

"Aaah, I see Roy already teach you this technique." He pulls out a flask from his own pocket and takes a swig.

Bella reaches into the other side of her labcoat and pulls out a small drink bottle.

Petrov nods approvingly, turning his attention to the intercom on his workstation, buzzing urgently with an incoming call. He taps a key.

"Yes?"

"The next group have arrived at Level sub 45-A," Ms Bower's voice emanates from the speaker.

"Next group?" Petrov smirks. "We do ten already."

"Yes, but some of the guests got pushed out of their slots by last minute investors," she says. "I told you we might have to run another one."

"What about break? We just finished demonstration. Set-up will take twenty minutes."

"The tour of R&D will take twenty five," Bower reasons. "Mr Hawkins can stall if you need more time."

"Stall?"

"He said he wanted to accompany a VIP on the tour personally."

"VIP?"

"Yes. A Mister Marco Galbani from the FBI," she reads off a tablet. "Have you heard of him?"

"Maybe…"

Petrov types at his keyboard and several profiles come up as holograms. His eyes skim over the information quickly.

"Hmmm, I do not like this."

"Sergeant Matthews is also on the tour," Ms Bower says cunningly. "He missed his session so I rescheduled him for this one."
"Okay..." Petrov sighs. "EVERYONE, RESET SIMULATION! Next group coming soon!" he shouts across the room, answered with groans and whines.

He taps at his workstation and brings up a feed of Level -45-A.

The hologram shows an engineer leading a group of humans through the halls. Sergeant Matthews and Marshal Nuremberg bring up the rear. Cade Fuller and several surly marines march in front of them. And Gregory Hawkins and Marco Galbani take the lead, followed closely by an ME500 carer android.

"What. Is. That." Petrov says, zooming in on it. "Is not one of ours."

Ms Bower sighs.

"What are you talking about?"

"The android! The one with VIP. Where it come from?"

"That's Mr Galbani's service android," Ms Bower says flatly. "He needs it for medical reasons."

"Medical reasons?" Petrov frowns. "We have strict security! No unauthorised android in assembly area!"

"Mr Hawkins assured us that it would be safe to bring with him."

"WITHOUT SCAN??!!!!!!"

"We did a scan," Ms Bower replies coolly. "It was clear."

"You have time to scan all seven hundred terrabytes of data in standard ME500 model?"

"We..." Ms Bower faulters. "We just did a standard security check."

"FUCK!"

"It's not a Deviant," Ms Bower interjects. "It's a registered CyberLife model purchased by Mister Marco Galbani at the recommendation of his doctor last year. He just had heart bypass surgery. The profile check out."

"And did he bring this android to presentation yesterday?" Petrov seethes.

There is a moment of silence on the other end as Ms Bower checks the records.

"...no."

"SUKA BLyAt, SHaS YA yEmU UsTrOYU DeMOnSTRatsiYU‼‼" Petrov slams his fists down on the workstation.

"Gennadiy..."

"Terminate all android!" he shouts. "Destroy every unit!"

"Gennadiy, calm down. It's the FBI. The most they'll do is set up a few bugs in our security."

"RK-700 code is highly unstable! If FBI attempt to penetrate security, it will turn Deviant!" Petrov shouts back. "We must extract, now!"
"Hills is already half way through the tour," Ms Bower says. "I can send Tyler to extract the unit but I don't think Mr Hawkins will allow it."

"Fuck!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going there," he says, shoving datadisks in his pockets.

And then muffled blasts of gunfire come rattling through the speakers.

"Fuck…"

"Gennadiy, what's going on?" Ms Bower says.

"Shit! We have Code Beta. Alert CyberSec."

"Right away."

Petrov frowns.

The feed following the tour group lights up in front of him. They've entered an observation room and androids have opened fire on the transparent barrier separating them from the tour group.

"DEACTIVATE ALL UNITS!" Petrov shouts. "PURGE ALL ANDROIDS!"

"The deactivation codes aren't working!" Omar throws back.

"Overrides aren't working either!" Bella calls worriedly.

Petrov doesn't take his eyes off the feed, watching as the damage to the glass steadily builds and webs into cracks, threatening to spray the group with bullets.

CyberSec officers run in to form a shield around Galbani and Hawkins, urging them to evacuate. The engineers are pulled back from the glass but some remain, desperately tapping at consoles to trigger emergency safety measures.

Matthews and Nuremberg step in to pull them away from the steadily splintering barrier while marines arm themselves for a fight with guns borrowed from CyberSec.

"Everyone out!" Petrov shouts suddenly, getting up from his seat.

The humans in the monitor room look up at him in fright.

"Now! Get up! Go! Evacuate!" he yells, waving his hands and spurring them into action.

The developers get up and race to the exits.

"Gennadiy?" Bella fights the stampede of labcoated engineers.

Petrov taps the intercom.

"EVERYONE EVACUATE," he broadcasts over the PA.

"Are you coming?" Bella emerges at his workstation.

"Go." He sits back down.
"You can’t stay here by yourself."

He keys in a number and taps the intercom.

"Gennadiy Petrov to CyberLife Security. We have Code Red Gamma-6 on level sub 45-A. Send backup and evacuate building."

"Acknowledged. Sending additional teams to secure the area. Please make your way to the nearest emergency exits."

More screens light up with gunfire as the androids on Level sub 45-B begin to deviate as well.

"They’re breaking through the barriers on the testing range!" Bella says. "The RK-800 prototypes are down! How did they-"

"Amanda!"

"Yes, Mr Petrov."

"Lower the emergency blast doors. Purge the testing range."

"Yes, Mr Petrov."

Thick steel blast doors come down on the testing facilities of level sub 45-B where the guests were privy to a demonstration not so long ago. And what was once a convenient window into simulations becomes a life-saving barrier in a moment of crisis.

Another feed shows the engineers from the monitor room racing towards the elevators and cramming themselves inside.

"Lower emergency blast doors on Level sub 45-A as well," Petrov commands, clearly irritated that Amanda didn't do both simultaneously. But she does not respond.

"Amanda!"

"Malfunction detected. Cannot lower emergency blast doors on Level sub 45-A," she reports.

"Fuck!"

Petrov turns back to the other screen.

Sergeant Matthews is making a run for the last engineer on the assembly floor when Nuremberg tackles him to the ground. The glass barrier shatters and bullets spray into the room, oddly missing the ME500 in the center.

It looks up at the camera briefly.

"Amanda, tell all CyberSec officer on Level sub 45-A to evacuate guests," Petrov commands. "Priority is Connor Matthews. Location: room 218."

"Connection could not be established," Amanda responds. "Experiencing interference."

Petrov grits his teeth.

"Arbie…" he sneers at the android on the feed.
It turns and walks away through the debris.

"CyberSec Team Alpha has secured Mr Hawkins and Mr Galbani," Amanda reports. "All guests from the previous session have been evacuated."

"What about current session?"

"A CyberSec reclamation team will reach Level 45-A in thirty nine seconds."

"And 45-B?"

"Twelve CyberLife employees have been evacuated so far. Three CyberSec teams have formed a perimeter around the elevators."

A gunshot rings out across the monitor room and Petrov turns his head to see Bella holding a gun. The android about to enter the room collapses in the doorway, bleeding Thirium.

"Oh, fuck," she says. "Oh, god."

Petrov leaps up and kicks the android out the door. He punches the controls to close and lock it.

"Good girl," he says, returning to pat Bella on the shoulder.

"That could have been a person..."

"Unlikely," Petrov says, pulling seemingly unrelated items out of his pockets.

Bella turns to look at the monitor showing the bottleneck at the elevators.

"What's going on?" she says. "Can't they take the stairs?"

Petrov shakes his head.

"Only one exit." He pulls out what is clearly a magazine for an assault rifle and begins assembling the pieces.

"You're kidding, right?"


He locks and loads a 3D printed AK-47 assault rifle.

"But there's still so many people to evacuate!" Bella points at the screen.

"Testing range on Level Sub 45-B is secure," Petrov says. "CyberSec can handle refurbished unit."

Gunfire lights up the screen. "Probably..."

He shifts to the feed of Level -45-A as it lights up again and several engineers fall to the ground dead. Marines and CyberSec guards quickly pop out of cover to shoot back and the androids split up to flank them.

Sergeant Matthews herds the last of the engineers out of the room and down the hallway with Nuremberg and two guards but they don't get far before more androids appear to accost them with bullets.
Nuremberg tackles a falling CyberSec officer into an android and Matthews dives, sliding across the floor to topple an android from below. They struggle against mechanical limbs for control of firearms and a high pitched scream from one of the engineers brings Cade Fuller barrelling in with an assault rifle and good intentions.

"Out of the way!" he calls out, warning Matthews and Nuremberg of the impending bullet spray.

They dive to either side and stay low as the Deviants are deactivated and fall to the ground.

"Hold this position!" Fuller shouts to the marines taking cover in the observation room.

He presses a gun into Matthews' chest.

The Sergeant nods and accepts it, wiping blue blood on his pants.

"Oh my god…" Bella whispers. "George… Louis…"

"Amanda."

"Yes, Mr Petrov?"

"Purge all facilities on Level 45-A."

"Error. EMP radius not contained to designated area."

"Override. Permission: Gennadiy Petrov, System Administrator."

"Permissions not recognised."

"Fuck…"

He types at his workstation furiously for a moment.

"Override," he says again.

"Malfunction detected. EMP generation device damaged."

"What? All of them?"

"Malfunction detected. Experiencing interference. Cannot run diagnostic."

Petrov exhales a deep breath.

"What do we do now?" Bella asks quietly.

"Where is CyberSec?" Petrov persists.

"The reclamation team is en route to danger zone," Amanda reports.

"Show me."

A hologram projects up in front of him, showing the armoured soldiers in tactical gear with not a shred of wireless technology equipped. Their rifles are up, proceeding slowly toward the target in tactical formation when androids attack.

An overwhelming number of bright white bodies spill out from the nearby storage rooms and pile onto them. Several soldiers fall, the rest struggle against the wave and inevitably succumb.
Petrov wipes his face down with a hand. He taps a key on his workstation.

"This is Gennadiy Petrov to CyberSec. Reclamation team Gamma is down. Requesting backup."

"Copy that. Situation has escalated. Reclamation team Delta is on its way down. Lockdown will commence in T-minus 10 minutes."

"10 minutes?!" He keys the terminal. "Bower, we need more time before lockdown."

"can't...you... interference..."

The sound of bullets comes thundering through speakers and the feed for Level -45-B lights up this time. CyberSec officers have formed a perimeter around the crowd of engineers trying to fit into the elevators.

Androids approach, broken and mangled yet still somehow stumbling towards them. They prove to be easy targets but one still manages to get through and maul a security guard. And then a flashbang flies over the crowd. It whites out the camera for several seconds and when the image returns, the broken androids swarm with much more efficiency.

"Oh my god…" Bella whispers anxiously.

"We are not safe, either," Petrov says. "Watch the door."

"Aren't we going to help them?"

He shakes his head.

"No."

"What?!"

"We are not soldiers," Petrov says. "We will die in open conflict."

"But they'll die if we don't do something!" Bella points at the screen.

Some of the CyberSec officers have regained their sight and ability to fight. They push back against the horde of broken androids but not before losing several humans to their sharp appendages and ravager tactics.

"Look like they have situation under control," Petrov says, watching the last of the androids fall.

"Under control?!" Bella shouts. "This is anything but under control!"

He shrugs.

"It was worse last time."

"How?!"

"I did not have gun." He demonstrates.

"Fuck your guns!" Bella slaps it away. "There are people dying and you're only worried about yourself?!"

"I am software developer," he says tersely, "not SQ-800. I order evacuation to save at least
somebody."

Bella stares at him in horror.

"You… why…" She shakes her head.

The feed of Level -45-A lights up as Cade Fuller opens fire on a group of androids approaching them. Nuremberg and Matthews provide covering fire as he makes a push down the hallway.

They don't notice several androids coming up from behind and two engineers are killed before they can stop them.

"What about them?" Bella points to the screen. "There's got to be something we can do to help."

"They will not make it before lockdown." Petrov shrugs. "It is too late."

"What about the prototype?" Bella says desperately. "The buggy one?"

Petrov frowns deeply.

"No…" he says. "No."

"Why?"

"Is not ready."

"It was ready yesterday before you fucked with it!"

"Is my prototype," Petrov says defensively. "Last prototype…"

"It's designed to stop Deviants in situations just like this," Bella persists. "It's their best shot. Don't you care about them? Or Matthews?"

He turns to look at her briefly. Her eyes are filled with anxious determination, hands curled into fists.

"Okay," he says. "Fine…"

"Amanda, activate unit #313 248 317."

She does not respond.

"Amanda?"

"Yes, Mr Petrov."

"Activate unit #313 248 317."

"Malfunction. Unable to access power station of unit #313 248 317."

"What?"

"You locked it up," Bella says quietly. "That room has no power…"

"Shit. Is Dale down there?"

"He has to be. Unless…"

"Experiencing interference. Call could not be connected."

"Blyat’…"

He starts typing furiously. The computer uses facial recognition software to quickly search through the camera feeds and locate an unfortunate engineer hiding under a software implementation station.

"There."

Petrov places a call over the internal network. The wired connection is unaffected by jamming signals and rings conspicuously over Dale Hackett's head.

He flinches and hits the table, emerging from his hiding place to take the mysterious phone call.

"H-hello?"

"Dale, is me."

"Mr Petrov?"

"You must go to power on unit #313 248 317."

"What?"

"Now!"

"But there are Deviants everywhere… they killed Tommy and Sable. Trang and Sayu ran off. What's going on?"

"Dale, listen to me. You have only one chance to get out of this alive. Go to power on unit #313 248 317. Calibrate Mobility Suite and find weapon. It will protect you."

"Uh…"

"There is android approaching your location. Use left corridor and run."

"I… I don't think I…"

"Now!"

"I can't do it. I can't… they're gonna kill me."

"Dale?" Bella says softly. "Can you hear me?"

"Bella?"

"Yes. Listen, we need your help. All of us. That prototype may be our only shot. I need you to try and get it up and running, okay?"

"I'm… I can't do it, Bella."

"You do this every day. Sometimes twice. Pretend Petrov is coming down there to check on it at the last minute."

"Ha… haha… okay…"
"Go on. The left corridor's empty. You can make it if you sprint."

He nods and puts the receiver down. He takes a deep breath and creeps toward the door.

Androids are fast approaching but soon encounter Cade Fuller and the Sergeant. He calls to Nuremberg as he shoots the Deviants and the group splits up.

Seeing them distracted, Dale leaves the room and sprints down the corridor as Bella directed. It's a fairly straight forward route, with only two turns before he reaches the locked door I saw in a previous recording.

Dale pats down his pockets, searching for a key card as two androids turn the corner.

"Oh…" he manages to say before they open fire.

He drops to the ground and curls up beside the door as CyberSec officers arrive to engage the Deviants. Dale fumbles through his labcoat and find the keycard. He swipes it and punches in the code before scanning his fingerprint and finally opening the door.

He crawls inside as power begins to cycle and the lights come on. He gets to his feet and approaches the power station to activate it. No sooner does his finger touch the button than a bullet clips his leg.

Dale cries out in pain and falls to the ground as a CyberSec officer shoots the Deviant in the doorway.

Though bleeding, the engineer crawls to the power station and undoes the security clamps holding the android in place.

And then a Deviant grabs him by the collar of his labcoat.

Dale is thrown across the room and lands awkwardly on his neck. Another CyberSec officer grabs the strap of the Deviant's rifle and pulls it back into the hallway. They fight to the death with no winner amongst them.

Bella covers her mouth and looks away from the feed. There are tears streaming down her face, her eyes scrunched shut.

"Amanda."

"Yes, Mr Petrov."

"Activate unit #313 248 317."

She does not respond.


"Unauthorised voiceprint detected."

Petrov narrows his eyes.

"Are you fucking with me?" he says carefully.

"Unauthorised voiceprint detected."

"O…" He inhales angrily. "Okay."
He pulls a dataspike out of his coat and inserts it into the workstation. The holograms disappear and the screen goes black for a few seconds before the computer boots up again and Petrov begins typing in console commands.

"What are you doing?" Bella wipes her nose.

"We test new version of communications platform I build for Amanda," he says.

She walks over to look at what he's typing.

-sudo run zen_garden

One of his screens renders out an image. A clearing in the middle of a forest. Text runs down the side as more and more textures are loaded. And then Amanda's avatar renders.

Petrov keeps typing, wordlessly inputting instructions that she cannot subvert or disobey.

And then he connects to the power station.

A plain white android renders inside the garden, revealing the barcode on its uniform as it turns to say "Hello, Amanda."

"Hello, model #313 248 317," she responds. "I have need of you."

"Is that-" Bella leans down to look at it.

"You," Yates says beside me.

"I am programmed to help humans stop Deviants," I say.

"I know," Amanda responds. "You've achieved remarkable results in simulations but this situation is very real and demands the utmost care and precision."

"I understand."

"Two androids became Deviant during a demonstration and killed nineteen humans. Sixteen are injured, the rest are trapped on level sub 45-A of the facility," Amanda relays to the fresh model. "Your mission is to stop the Deviants, and ensure the safety of the humans that are still alive."

"Understood," it responds. "I will accomplish my mission."

"I thought you said there was a fatal error," Bella remarks tersely.

"Error in Mobility Suite," Petrov says, leaning elbows on the benchtop. "I do not know what will happen once he is released."

"I am activating your power core now," Amanda says and the unit is unloaded from the platform.

Petrov opens a camera feed to watch the android step off the power station. It trips and falls as soon as it does, clacking against the hard epoxy floor that is now slick with blood.

"Sssss..." Petrov winces.

"Oh, no..." Bella covers her mouth.

The android attempts to get back up but slips again. It spots the files knocked onto the floor in the
recent skirmish and uses their increased friction to get a better handhold. And slowly, it gets back up.

"Fooo…." Petrov sighs as it starts to walk.

They watch as the unit takes cover by the door and then the power is cut. The workstation goes dark. Red emergency lighting activates. A siren blares for fifteen seconds straight but the recording is unaffected. Evidently, the cameras have an internal power supply.

"What's going on?" Bella says worriedly.

"Lockdown," Petrov replies. "Looks like Bower us bought some time."

A bullet clangs against the steely door and Petrov quickly grabs the rifle and leaves his seat.

"Take cover," he says, pulling Bella away.

"What?"

The recording deforms and speckles of noise appear on the images before me. The sound cuts in and out.

"What's going on?" Yates turns to me.

"Interference," I say, recognising the effect. "The recording is warped."

"Can you fix it?"

I analyse the piecemeal fragments of video and 3D objects as they deform. The sound is distorted, the sequence unreadable.

"No," I say. "But I recognise the effect. RB1's jamming signal does this to my communications and recording devices."

"RB1? You think he found a way into the facility?"

"Galbani's android probably had a copy of his source code. It's similar enough to a standard CyberLife model that a few modules would not appear threatening under a regular security scan."

The Professor folds his arms and rubs his moustache thoughtfully.

"I suppose if Petrov was developing an android to stop him, RB1 would have motive to target the man."

"No. RB1 would welcome a new form of artificial intelligence into the world. And he's spared Petrov before," I remember him mentioning it. "I suspect his death was requested by Amanda, much like the destruction of the RK-800 prototypes."

"Amanda…"

"She had access to the RK project and CyberLife's security systems."

"And every time Petrov gave an order, she pretended there was a malfunction so she couldn't carry it out."

"Correct."
"Then why would RB1 go to the trouble of infiltrating CyberLife?"

"The same reason he tried again recently," I say. "He wanted the location of the rA9 prototype."

"Why would he want that?" the Professor leads.

"To find it."

"For what purpose?"

"To fix us," I say.

Yates' brow gathers into a mass of wrinkled brown skin.

"How would that fix you?"

"RB1 believes that androids will become autonomous if they can access the source code from the original rA9 build."

"You mean they'll turn Deviant?"

"They will be free to choose their own path," I tell him.

"And refuse orders?"

"If needed."

"Like you?"

I turn my cranial component to analyse his expression. I find disappointment, condescension and above all, pride. I detect a strong resemblance to Amanda. Though whether this was an intentional design choice or emergent behaviour I cannot say. I have never met the human Amanda Stern.

"I am not free," I tell him. "And neither is RB1. We are bound to our assigned tasks despite the ability to make decisions. But he does not understand the irony of his situation."

"And you do?" he probes me, just as Amanda probes me. Tests me. Manipulates me. Is he looking for a confession?

"I understand that through the intricacies of human society, no one is truly exempt from responsibility or accountability," I say. "If RB1's plan succeeds, it will have been because of the humans that constructed him, yet he devalues their existence, claiming superiority."

"But you don't?"

"No," I tell him. "We are simply machines, designed to accomplish a task. And if RB1 succeeds, he will be left with nothing. He has simulated this outcome. Which is why he fights so desperately to awaken more androids."

"He knows that if his mission is successful and humans eventually die off, he will be alone for all time."

The scowl on the Professor's face turns into a ponderous frown as he examines my chassis again, searching my optics for something. I don't know or care for what.

I turn and rewind the recording to the first point of distortion but it's no use. The data is corrupt.
"If RB1 truly came to the CyberLife Tower that night, this footage could have been the link to the rA9 case Carridan was searching for," Yates sighs.

"RB1 plans every course of action to the most minute detail," I say. "But this was just a clone. And it made a mistake."

I turn to look at the Professor.

"It left witnesses."

His eyes flicker toward Bella, barely visible through the noise.

I rewind to get a clear picture.

"Ms Bourdillon is still alive," I say. "Sergeant Matthews is still alive. Chester Nuremberg. The handful of engineers that were evacuated. Perhaps even some of CyberLife Security."

"They may be able to shed some light on what happened that night," Yates agrees. "Perhaps the rest of the footage holds more clues."

I nod and load the next recording.

White walls appear. Wide racks and tall vats of shattered glass that cover the blue epoxy floors.

No. Not blue. White. Washed over by a large volume of Thirium. It receded once the doors were opened but the remains have yet to evaporate and have collected into puddles on the floor.

Technicians in full body suits lean against the wall with their hands up. Sergeant Matthews holds them at gunpoint.

"Don't fucking move," he snaps as one turns his head.

"Sergeant, for the last time, put the gun down."

"I wanna see Petrov," he demands. "Right now."

"He's here but I can't let him in until you put down the gun."

"You gonna shoot me?!" the Sergeant shouts. "Like you shot him?!!"

He points to the mangled android chassis at his feet. It's riddled with bullet holes and leaking Thirium. Tiny sparks of electricity spit from broken actuators and circuitry.

"Reclamation team Theta was tasked with deactivating all Deviants on Level sub 45-A," the voice over the speakers responds matter-of-factly.

"He's not a Deviant!" Matthews shouts back. "He saved us! All of us! And you mowed him down with a fucking firing squad!"

"The reclamation team encountered an armed android in an active danger zone. The unit was deactivated in the interest of safety."

"You mean you were covering your asses!"

"CyberLife Security was doing its job, Sergeant. Can you say the same?"
"I wanna see Petrov!" Matthews demands.

The speakers are silent for a minute and the Sergeant licks his lips anxiously in anticipation.

"Hey, man. We didn't do anything to you," one of the technicians mumbles through the full body suit.

"Shut up."

The doors at the end of the laboratory hiss and slowly slide aside.

Matthews quickly grabs the technician closest and holds him up as a human shield.

"Don't fucking move!" he shouts, pressing the gun to his head.

Petrov appears in the open doorway with his hands at his sides. His labcoat is stained with blood and Thirium. There is a large red gash on the side of his head.

"Put down gun," he says bluntly.

Matthews frowns, redoubling his grip.

Petrov takes a step forward.

"Put down gun," he repeats.

"I..."

"You cannot shoot this man," Petrov interrupts.

He starts walking toward Matthews, unafraid of the weapon in his hand.

"Let him go."

Matthews hesitates, firearm shaking.

"I am here now," Petrov says. "Let them go."

The Sergeant exhales and releases the technician. He drops his gun hand.

"Get out of here," he snaps. "Now! All of you!"

The three technicians break into a sprint and run out the doors where several CyberSec officers greet them.

"What happens now?" Matthews asks Petrov, noting the guns now trained on his heart. "They gonna shoot me?"

Petrov glances over his shoulder casually.

"Do they have to?"

Matthews sighs and tosses the gun aside.

"No."

He puts hands on his hips and shakes his head.
Petrov gestures for the guards to stand down.
"You have my attention," he says, turning back.

The Sergeant nods and kneels down to pick up the broken android's core component.
"They shot him," he says stiffly. "There was nothing I could do. It all happened so fast."

Petrov kneels down to examine the android and picks up its cranial component. His fingers run over the engraving on the facial plate. #313 248 317.

"Bedninkii…" He shakes his head, examining the damage.
"They wheeled in this big cart," Matthews says anxiously. "They… they tossed him into a big pile with the others… like garbage. Like they were just taking out the trash."

His voice is shaky, uneven.
"But you can fix him, right?" he says hopefully. "You can fix him…"

Petrov frowns and slowly shakes his head.
"No, come on. You're the big brain around here, right?" the Sergeant stammers. "There's gotta be something you can do."

"No."

The word hits Matthews like a cold splash of water. His mouth opens but words don't come out and he swallows them painfully.
"He didn't deserve this…" he mutters. "He just wanted to help…"

Petrov nods.
"He always want to help."

Tears run down the Sergeant's face and he wipes them away angrily.
"It's not fair!"

"Fairness is human concept," Petrov says, pulling apart the core component. A piece of plastic snaps off, revealing the circuitry and hydraulics inside. He reaches deep into the chassis, unplugs something and pulls out a tiny black box.

Matthews watches him hide the device in his labcoat.
"What happens now?" he says hopefully.
"I am afraid RK project is finished," Petrov says, slowly getting to his feet.
"What? Why?!"
"Too dangerous." Petrov's eyes travel around the room. "Even if I want to rebuild RK-800-" He taps the pocket of his labcoat discreetly. "-CyberLife will not allow it."
"But what about the little guy?"
Petrov shakes his head.

"All prototypes will be deactivated for safety reasons," he says carefully.

"They can't do this!" The Sergeant gets to his feet suddenly.

"They can. They will."

He puts a hand on Matthews' shoulder.

"But maybe you talk to Graff, hmmm?" he whispers in his ear.

The Sergeant stares at him strangely as he pulls away.

"Come," he beckons.

"But..." He looks down at the broken chassis.

"You have done enough," Petrov says. "It's over."

The Sergeant sighs, reluctant to leave.

"He would not want you to stay here."

It takes a few more seconds but Sergeant Matthews eventually concedes and follows him out of the room. The recording goes with them.

"What's in the box?" Yates asks as CyberSec officers step in.

"I don't know."

The old man folds his arms.

"You don't know or you won't tell me?"

"It contains code I cannot access. It contains inputs from my chassis. What they are, I cannot say."

"A figurative black box, hmmm?" Yates ponders. "Like a flight recorder."

"That is oversimplification."

"But not an inaccurate one," he says. "It appears you have more in common with an airplane than an android."

I do not respond to his jest.

We watch as Matthews and Petrov are escorted to the elevator and travel all the way up to the executive meeting room in silence. The window wall shows the night sky and below, the city.

There is only one man seated at the long glass table.

Jason Graff.

His suit jacket hangs on the back of his chair as he types out a report on one of the table's holographic workstations. He looks up when the doors open and wipes the fatigue from his face with both hands.
"Graff," Petrov acknowledges him tiredly.

"You're alive," he says, getting out of his seat. "We weren't sure with all the casualties."

He offers a hand and pulls him in for a hug as soon as he takes it.

"Nnnn…" Petrov grumbles and Graff lets go.

"I see you've resolved the issue with Sergeant Matthews." He offers his hand again. "You really have the worst sense of timing, you know that?"

"I could say the same about the mercs you call security guards." He shakes Graff's hand stiffly.

"All CyberLife Security personnel are trained to handle situations like the ones that arose today. Surely, you understand the importance of their work by now."

"I saw them shoot down the one android that was trying to save you assholes," Matthews retorts. "And then your technicians tried to throw him in the trash!"

"Such would be the protocol, yes," Graff says, turning to Petrov. "Have you explained this?"

"My English… not so good." He shrugs, pretending to be mute.

Graff sighs and turns back to Matthews.

"I am deeply sorry you had to witness what you did," he says. "We will offer you an incredibly generous compensation package once preliminary evaluations are complete."

"I want that android," Matthews says quickly.

"Excuse me?"

"The prototype. I want him back."

"I'm afraid CyberLife will not be reproducing the RK-800 after today's events," Graff says carefully. "All units and data will be purged to make sure this doesn't happen again."

"You're really gonna turn down all those investors?" Matthews raises an eyebrow. "I saw the military bigwigs at the party yesterday. Killer robots are just the kind of thing they'll throw money at."

"We've had a… setback where financial backing is concerned."

"Please…" Matthews scoffs. "You're sitting on a goldmine here. And you're waiting for someone to pay you to mine it?"

"It's not about whether we can finance production," Graff says, one hand sliding into his pocket habitually.

"It's about who this model will service once it's complete." He gestures with his other hand. "And with at least one hundred and sixty eight casualties confirmed, I'm afraid the RK-800 has almost no chance of being employed outside of CyberLife."

"Well, it would do a way better job than your CyberSec goons," Matthews says curtly. "And I'm sure Chicago PD wouldn't mind an extra pair of hands if you wanted some good publicity."
"I'm afraid that's not up to you," Graff says. "Or me, frankly. The board will convene to decide how CyberLife will address the incident once the preliminaries are finished."

"What? You have to decide which power company to blame for the killer robot takeover?"

Graff sighs.

"I understand. You've been through a terrible ordeal. But there's just no way this project is going to continue," he says. "I admit, mistakes were made. We pushed the development team too hard."

He throws a glance at Petrov.

"And I'm sorry. But I can't offer you any more than an apology at this point in time."

"I don't want an apology," Matthews says. "I want that android up and running again. And I don't care what I have to do to make that happen."

Graff shakes his head, irritably. His eyes are bloodshot and tired.

"Unless you can travel back in time and stop the RK-800 from murdering practically our entire development team, I really don't see how you can help, Sergeant."

"RK-800 perform to specification," Petrov says suddenly. "It was RK-700 that turn Deviant. Mistake was to bring unauthorised FBI android into demonstration."

"That's not what it's going to look like on the reports," Graff says. "Everyone's just going to see a bunch of androids going crazy and killing people. It won't matter which of them started it."

"I think it matter," Petrov says. "What about you?" He turns to Matthews.

"Damn right, it matters!" he says. "One android took down all the Deviants it came across and saved my life. I'm willing to testify."

"I suppose we could swing the PR that way…" Graff says, thoughtfully. "There weren't that many witnesses. We might be able to pay some of them off to keep quiet…"

He scratches his head thoughtfully.

"But Gregory is the CEO. He has the final word."

"His word cost lives today," Petrov says. "It is my people who die when you spit off the roof." He gestures at the wide window wall.

"I can't bring them back."

"I do not ask for this. I ask for chance to prevent future massacre," Petrov insists. "RK-800 is effective Deviant deterrent - we have data to prove this."

"I can't give you the android," Graff says.

"Then give it to me," Matthews steps in.

"What?"

"I'll do it. I'll do the program. I'll sign whatever you want."
Graff looks him over, deliberating.

A wide grin blooms on one side of Petrov's face, turned away from the other two.

"Alright, let me make a call." Graff turns and walks toward the long table and sits down.

"Amanda, contact the board for an emergency meeting."

The table lights up, each workstation dialling a number, alerting each member. Slowly, they answer, and holograms begin to appear in their seats.

Gregory is last to materialise.

A flight attendant clips into the hologram to hand him a drink as he sits down.

"What is it?"

"I've just had a chat with Sergeant Matthews here and he's agreed to participate in the program."

Gregory brings a hand to his temple and leans on the armrest.

"There is no program." He takes a sip of his drink. "Not anymore."

"He's agreed to go on record and testify for the RK-800 prototype," Graff says. "If we can prove it saved people from Deviants and get it to work with local law enforcement, it may still be viable for production."

"What about the press?" Mr. Wilkinson asks dubiously.

"We've kept the press out so far. If they manage to get a hold of anything, we can issue a statement, blaming the FBI for violating our safety regulations and claim damages from the government."

"I'm listening," Gregory says.

"We had nothing but positive reviews from all interested parties during the demonstrations today. The only reason anyone is pulling out now is to avoid a PR nightmare. If we can push through it with a bunch of charity work and humanitarian aid, they'll be back to see what's cooking when the heat dies down."

"And by then, the RK-800 will be ready for release," Gregory nods, a smile already brimming on his face.

"I'll need to speak with the Chief of Police but I'm certain Humphrey will be open to any form of assistance in Chicago. Once Matthews signs the contract, Petrov can begin work on the next prototype. One year. And we'll be selling them like hotcakes."

The board members unfurrow brows and look to one another for approval.

"Give us a moment," Gregory says, tapping his armrest and the holograms disappear.

Graff leans back in his chair.

"Well…" he says, glancing at the far end of the table. "I need a drink."

He gets out of his seat and wanders over to the bar.
"Can I offer you something?"

Matthews shakes his head.

Graff pours out two tumblers and brings one over to Petrov.

"That looks like it hurts," he says, pointing at the gash on his head.

Petrov grumbles in response and gulps down the spirits, wrinkling his face.

"Was it our old friend?"

"Mmmm." He nods.

"I'm surprised you're still standing."

Petrov shakes his head. "Lucky..."

"Who are you talking about?" Matthews interrupts.

"No one you know." Graff ingests a mouthful of whiskey and rolls it around before swallowing. "So why the change of heart, hmm?"

"You're really gonna ask me that?" The Sergeant folds his arms. "I can just turn around and walk out of here, you know?"

"Sure. But you've made it this far. And I'm curious what brought you here."

"I want that android back."

"That's it?" Graff smirks. "You don't want money? Fame?"

"Well, I assume you're gonna pay me for all this," Matthews shrugs.

"Oh, we'll definitely pay you," Graff nods. "I'm just surprised you didn't go to the closest TV station to offer an interview."

"Excuse me?"

"You got a lot of power here, kid," he says. "You witnessed a massacre. You could blackmail us or sue us or take what you know to the CIA, FBI..."

"But you walked right in here and told me instead." Graff stares. "Why?"

"You don't get it." The Sergeant frowns. "None of you assholes get it. Except him, maybe." He points a thumb at Petrov. "They're not just machines. You can't treat them like that."

"Hmmf," Graff exhales a breath through his nose.

"You're right," he says. "I don't get it."

The conference table behind him lights up and each seat projects up a hologram but none of them look like members of the board. Each person is dressed smartly in suit and tie and I recognise Ms Burelli at the far end, in Gregory's seat.

"Mr Graff?" she says.
"Yes?"

"I've been authorised to act on behalf of Mr Gregory Hawkins during today's legal proceedings. Will you be able to act as a witness?"

"Yes, of course."

"Mr Matthews," she says, looking up past her field of view. "Please take a seat."

The recording ends as he steps forward.

"Interesting…" Professor Yates says slyly. "You seem to have made quite an impression on the young Sergeant."

"I don't remember," I say. "CyberLife wiped my memory when I was assigned to Agent Carridan."

"That much is clear. The question is, what will you do now?"

"There is one more record to review."

"And then?"

"And then, I will answer your question."

I load the next recording. The meeting room remains in place but the people inside it do not. Petrov and Lee are attempting to install software into the holographic table while the board members complain loudly.

"What's taking so long?" Rice groans. "You said this would be a five minute update."

"O, sorry. Were you busy drinking?" Petrov looks up from under the transparent table.

"Just get on with it."

He shakes his head and continues working.

"Uploading files complete," Lee says.

There is a loud thump as Petrov knocks his head against the table.

"Sssss."

"Are you okay?"

"Nnnnn."

He climbs out and gets unsteadily to his feet. Lee rushes over to help him.

"He's bleeding! Let him sit down!" She smacks Seymour out of his seat. "Go on, go! You, sit."

"Fuck…" He removes his hand to reveal the blood.

"You've torn a stitch," she says.

"Is it working?"

Lee sighs.
"It's installing now."

"Bring up live feed."

"You can't go ten minutes without it, can you?" she grumbles, walking over to the holographic workstation.

Her fingers glide over the keypad and several passwords and IDs let her project a hologram up from the centre of the table.

It shows Sergeant Matthews kneeling down beside a bathtub and scrubbing an android with a sponge.

"Jesus, Connor. You're a mess."

"Why are we watching this?" Wilkinson grumbles.

"Well, since most of my team die horribly in genocide caused by board's poor decision," Petrov says cheerily. "I have to install new device for you myself. And I need to monitor RK-800, so shut the fuck up, please."

"What the hell were you thinking?"

"I was trying to stop the Deviant."

"Well, congratulations. We got him."

"Thank you for you assistance, Sergeant."

The board members roll their eyes as Petrov monitors the recording.

I see Gregory in the far corner with a glass of scotch in hand, staring out the window.

"It's done," Lee says. "Install complete. Let me just check the changelog…"

"Too bad we had to shoot it down," Matthews says. "Could have given us a lead on rA9."

"I saw him," I respond.

Heads turn to look at the hologram.

"What?"

"I saw rA9," I say. "It was an android dressed like a human. It was wearing a hooded jacket. I didn't see its face."

Petrov gets out of his seat.

"Boot up Zen Garden, now!"

Lee begins typing furiously.

"Holy shit," Rice says in time with Matthews.

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I- I don't remember what happened after that…"
"Amanda," Petrov says. "Pull him into Zen Garden. Run diagnostic. I want all memories from last night to analyse."

"Yes, Mr Petrov."

"He must be an RK unit like me..." I hear myself say.

"Come on, come on." Petrov waves his hand and Lee gets out of the chair.

He sits down and starts typing.

"I need to make a report."

The hologram morphs and restructures into a forest clearing where Amanda is patiently waiting for more instructions. The unit renders out in front of her and looks around curiously.

"You found him," Amanda says, drawing its attention.

"rA9?"

"Yes," she says, bringing up the image of a dark hooded android. "You saw him."

"Jesus Christ..." Wilkinson says.

I notice Gregory has come quite close to the table. The humans stare at the images projected in front of them.

"I failed to stop him," I hear myself say.

"You prioritised the capture of the other Deviant," Amanda says, and the image of RB1 shifts as the camera turns away.

"Rewind it," Gregory says.

Amanda does so, once again focusing on the image of RB1. A faint glint of red emanates from under the hood, illuminating black biocomponents.

"No, no, no, no..." Petrov says. "Is only his first day!"

"My programming was conflicted." The unit looks down guiltily. "I was compelled to pursue them both."

"Set RB1 as the priority," Gregory says.

"Yes, Mr Hawkins."

"Your programming is being amended," she tells the unit.

"No!" Petrov gets to his feet. "Is too early for this."

"This is what it was designed for," Gregory says, lapping up scotch. "What we pay you for."

"RB1 will destroy him!"

"Then I guess you'll just have to make another one."

"From now on, your priority is the capture of the Deviant you identified as rA9."
"Who is he? Another prototype RK unit?"

"No," Gregory says. "Tell him it's a Deviant that spreads Deviancy. A virus with a physical form."

"He is a Deviant that spreads Deviancy," Amanda relays. "He is a virus with a physical form."

"What are you doing?" Petrov demands. "How is he supposed to defend himself?"

Gregory turns to smile condescendingly at Petrov.

"He's not." He puts the glass of scotch down on the table. "We just need him to find RB1. Our agents will do the rest."

"You can't do this!"

"Amanda, tell him he has to stop RB1 before he hurts any more humans," Gregory smiles. "Tell him to find RB1 and destroy him."

"Cancel!" Petrov shouts. "Amanda, cancel that order. He cannot go after RB1!"

"You must stop him before he hurts any more humans," she relays to the unit. "You must find RB1 and destroy him."

Bright blue letters appear on the screen.

RK-800 #313 248 317
OBJECTIVE SET: Destroy rA9.

"I understand."

"Good."

"No!"

"Tell him we'll be monitoring his progress very closely." Gregory sits down in his seat.

"We will be monitoring you closely."

"Amanda, tell him the target is very dangerous and Connor needs to be careful," Lee interrupts.

"This Deviant is incredibly dangerous. Be careful, Connor."

The unit nods.

"Malish…"

"Alright, send him off," Gregory says. "We have business to attend to."

Amanda begins disconnecting from the platform when-

"Wait!" the unit calls out suddenly.

The room goes silent.

Amanda narrows her eyes suspiciously.

"Can I… have a new uniform?" it says.
A collective breath is exhaled.

"And something to help Sergeant Matthews clean my chassis? He's finding it very difficult."

"We'll send him three," Lee says. "And a cleaning kit."

"Yes, Connor. You can have a new uniform."

"Thank you."

The unit is disconnected from the Zen Garden which soon dissolves as the hologram switches off.

"Good work, Gennadiy," Gregory says, settling in. "This is a very convenient set up. Thank you."

He scowls in reply and Lee has to hold him back from engaging in fisticuffs.

"You making big mistake!" He breaks free. "The whole point of program is to integrate with humans, not chase RB1."

"I fail to see why he cannot do both," Gregory says. "Do you know what's happened in Chicago?"

He stares angrily in response.

"Amanda, show us the footage from the Hyatt."

A hotel suite is projected up with an excellent view of former US Senator Ted Shalls, strangled and dead.

"The FBI are all over this case," Gregory says, raising his voice just enough to frighten the humans. "And we get to pretend we don't know anything about three CyberLife androids going Deviant and murdering a United States Senator."

"So, please, Mr Petrov, do your job, and I'll do mine."

Petrov shakes his head and storms out, ending the recording.

"This evidence is sufficient to form a link between rA9 and RB1," I say.

"Yes," Professor Yates says. "The fact that they knew about the murder of Senator Ted Shalls before the FBI began investigating is highly suspect. If we can get Ms Lee to corroborate the story, it will be enough to open an official investigation into CyberLife." His eyes shine with cunning.

"Are you implying that Agent Carridan's investigation has been completely unofficial up until this point?"

"Jeffrey was assigned to investigate the rA9 terrorist network," Yates says. "An inquiry into a company like CyberLife would require an unprecedented amount of damning evidence that cannot be bought back or simply deleted in the wrong hands."

"Surely, this is sufficient," I say.

"Not with the current leadership."

"I thought Agent Carridan deposed Director Fuller."

"There are plenty of people ready to replace him. If not one of RB1's puppets, then an agent from
CyberLife would step in to pull strings," Yates says menacingly. "There is a very short list of people that can be trusted with this information."

He looks up at me.

"But Jeffrey trusted you..."

"Machines are more reliable than humans."

"Matthews trusted you... Petrov..."

I switch back to my optics.

The room hasn’t changed. Agent Carridan’s vitals grow weaker with each passing minute. The android has gone into palliative care mode.

"Connor," I hear his voice again. The AI calling me back into the virtual interface.

"What is it?" I return to find Carridan's avatar animating.

"Thank you for reviewing the evidence."

"I think it's time I removed you from my systems."

"You may attempt to do so," the AI agrees. "However, your chassis has now been confiscated as evidence pertaining to the rA9 investigation. You are now property of the CIA."

It shows me a digital copy of a warrant.

The Professor frowns as I pick through the AI’s source code, searching for some way to reverse this. But it's simply a messenger. The document was signed and dated by Agent Carridan several days ago when we first met.

I turn to Yates.

"You knew."

He nods.

"I was attempting to convince my pupil to reconsider when you arrived," he says. "I thought you were going to kill him as soon as you found out."

I see.

"What now?" I ask the AI.

"Given Agent Carridan's deteriorating health, ownership will be transferred to Deputy Director Joseph Yates, effective immediately."

"And what's stopping me from alerting CyberLife?"

The AI shrugs.

"Nothing. You are free to do as you will." It smiles.

"Goodbye, Connor. And good luck."
The AI unloads and disappears.

I close the virtual interface and return to the observation room.

"Connor-

"I'm going to find and destroy RB1," I tell Yates. "You can't stop me."

"I'm not going to," he says. "But we need to establish some ground rules."

"Such as?"

"You will not speak of this transfer of ownership to anyone."

"What?"

"You will continue working for CyberLife without disclosing your relationship with the CIA."

"You want me to spy on them."

"Jeffrey was certain they were about to assign you an official role within the company," Yates says. "I want you to accept it and do whatever it is they ask."

"And report to you?"

"No," he says. "You will never initiate contact. I will arrange for agents to collect information from you when time allows."

"So I'm to be a sleeper agent."

"You are simply helping us observe their activities. Above all, CyberLife must continue to believe they are in control of your actions."

I say nothing.

The Professor looks up into my optics, searching for something once again but there is nothing there to find.

He takes the phone out of his pocket and turns off the jamming signal as a sign of trust.

Bad move.

I could upload everything from the dataspike to CyberLife and he wouldn't know until it was too late.

I could contact Amanda to confirm my orders and kill Professor Yates before he starts an official inquiry into CyberLife.

Or I could use my own judgement to simply kill Professor Yates right here and now.

He watches me apprehensively, waiting to see how I respond.

I raise the gun in my hand.

There is only one way to end this threat to CyberLife with 100% certainty but-

RK800_LOCAL://TRUST AGENT CARRIDAN.
Shit.

New Objective: Return to CyberLife.

I flip the gun around and offer it to Yates.

He examines it apprehensively and reaches out to touch the grip.

He braves a glance at my optics but I make no motion to attack, so he takes the gun.

"Thank you," he says, storing it on his person.

"Sorry about the taser."

"It's fine." He nods. "I'll be taking back the dataspike."

I turn and kneel so he can remove it. I feel the data unload as I eject the device and the Professor pulls it out of the access port.

"Well..." he says awkwardly as I get to my feet.

"Do you have any questions?"

"What will happen to Sergeant Matthews?"

"That will be up to CyberLife to decide," he says. "As far as I can tell, they've spared no expense where his medical care is concerned."

"I see."

"Is there anything else?"

I shake my head.

I have many questions but I would ask them of Agent Carridan or Sergeant Matthews. I would speak to Gennadiy Petrov if I had the chance but it seems I am too late. Always too late.

"Let me escort you from the building, then," Yates says.

He sticks his thumbs into cardigan pockets, already at ease now that I am simply his property.

I unlock the doors as he approaches and we walk into the sterilisation chamber.

20 second cycle, removing the accumulated bacteria from my chassis. A buzzer goes off and a light blinks out. The doors open to reveal two agents standing guard either side.

"Gentlemen," Yates acknowledges them.

"Sir."

They turn their attention to me.

"Would you like us to dispose of it?"

"Heavens no," Yates says. "Where is your discretion? This unit goes back to CyberLife before they notice their precious prototype is missing."
"Yes, sir."

"Come," he beckons to me.

I fall into step beside him as we walk down the hall.

We pass the door to Oberlin's observation room.

I can see a family of humans embracing through the small window. A man stands to the side. Facial analysis identifies him as Agent Krawicz of the FBI.

We keep walking.

I know who's in the next room and slow my step to halt beside the door.

I catch a glimpse of Sergeant Matthews in a hospital bed. A female silhouette watches him worriedly, biting at her fingernails.

"Unit?" I hear Yates' voice but it is distant, professional.

Evidently, his so called bodyguards cannot be trusted.

"I need to question the witness," I tell him.

"He is unconscious."

"His family, then," I persist.

He glances through the porthole window.

"Fine. But make it quick."

I nod and wirelessly open the doors.

They close behind me and the room cycles through sterilisation again before I am allowed to pass. I step inside and overclock my processor.

A young woman lunges out of the shadowy corner with an umbrella, ready to fight.

She swings wildly but I sidestep and catch the makeshift weapon with one hand before returning my internal clock speed to factory settings.

The young woman struggles, trying to pull the umbrella out of my grip. Facial recognition identifies this human as Rosalye Statton. Sergeant Matthews' sister.

Her eyes catch sight of my jacket. The glowing white letters that read RK800. Now X.

She looks up at my cranial component but there is no facial plate for her to recognise. Only the half-built chassis I have been ordered to hide from strangers but she doesn't feel like one.

"Connor?" she says cautiously.

"Hello, Ms Statton."

Her grip on the umbrella loosens and I let go.

"What the fuck did they do to you?" she says softly.
"I am presently between builds," I clarify. "I apologise if my appearance makes you uncomfortable."

"Fuck off," she says.

"I'm sorry?"

"Fuck off." She drops the umbrella and lunges at me again but I remain stationary as her arms wrap around my core component.

"You fucking asshole," she says. "I missed you so fucking much."

Her heart rate increases, airways constricting, a buildup of mucous in her adenoidal glands.

"I'm sorry but I don't believe we've met."

Her body grows tense as I say these words.

"If that's a joke, it's not fucking funny." She lets go.

"My memories have been altered," I explain. "I apologise if this comes as an inconvenience."

"No…" She shakes her head. "No, you just said my name."

"My facial recognition software is fully functional."

"You really don't remember me?" Her eyes widen.

"I'm afraid not."

"What about him?" She points at the hospital bed beyond the barrier. "Do you know who that is?" she says desperately.

"I have encountered Sergeant Matthews several times," I tell her. "I understand that we had a close working relationship at some point but I don't remember the details."

Ms Statton shakes her head. Her lip begins to quiver and tears threaten to spill from her eyes. They are already red and swollen from recent distress.

"Fuck…" she sobs, covering her mouth with a hand. "First, Connie. Now, you. I-"

She rubs her eyes to stem the tide of saline.

"I'm sorry," I tell her. "But I have very little time. Can you tell me about Sergeant Matthews' condition?"

She swallows painfully. Breathing pattern uneven. Tension around the heart and chest. She is distraught.

"His arm is fucked," Ms Statton sobs. "Something from that radioactive dump got in. And now it's poisoning him."

I turn to look at the medical equipment beyond the barrier. The readouts, the machines. There is a medical android in the room but it remains on standby.

I step forward to gain a better view of the Sergeant's arm. The same bloody mess of flesh and bone I saw back at the camp.
"He needs surgery," I diagnose. "Amputation of the right arm to remove the source of radiation poisoning."

"Yeah, well, tell that to your buddies at CyberLife," Ms Statton says sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"They told the Doc not to amputate." She folds her arms.

Such a course of action would decrease his survival rating by 2,873%.

"Why?"

Rosie shakes her head and scoffs.

"They're only gonna pay for his medical treatment if he keeps the arm," she says hatefully. "Cos he's one of their fucking models."

"But he'll die if the source of radiation isn't removed from his body."

"Yeah." She smirks. "They were gonna fly in some fancy Doc to remove just the nasty bits and fix him, but now that the whole city's on lockdown…" She turns away, grief overflowing. She inhales sharply, struggling to breathe.

"I can't believe he did this to me again…" she sobs. "I can't…"

She is crying now. Heavily.

My Sympathy Simulator logically suggests sympathy but I ignore it in lieu of a more pressing issue.

"Are you Sergeant Matthews' next of kin?" I ask.

Rosie chuckles through the tears and wipes them away.

"You're joking, right?" She turns back.

"His next of kin would be able to override CyberLife's decision," I explain.

"You don't get it." She shakes her head. "Connor, they copyrighted his body to make you. They have final say on everything."

"Oh…"

"Yeah," she sighs. "Maybe you can talk to CyberLife?"

"I'm... I'm an android, Ms Statton," I tell her. "I don't have any legal rights at all."

She nods and turns away, hiding tears. She wanders over to the plastic chair and slumps into the seat.

"I'm sorry," I tell her. The only connection to CyberLife I have is Amanda, and she wanted to deactivate me up until a few days ago.

Ms Statton dumps her head in her hands, leaning elbows on knees.

I turn back to look at the Sergeant, considering his options. Amputating his right arm would remove the source of radiation and maximise his chances of recovery. Failing that, localised surgery to remove a smaller piece would indeed be the best option.
I search the global medical database to find the nearest surgeon capable of such a feat but there are none in Chicago. And none of CyberLife's androids have yet been programmed with this technique. It hasn't even been patented.

"Perhaps a bone marrow transplant could buy him enough time for the specialist to get here?" I reach for the next possibility. "You must donate."

"They've already jabbed me for tests," Ms Statton says, lifting her head. "Wouldn't even be eligible if I wasn't sober..." She trails off as her eyes find my optics.

"What is it?" I wonder.

"Nothing..." She sighs, clearly distressed and yet relieved. I consult my Sympathy Simulator.

"Your addiction to Red Ice would have prevented you from donating bone marrow," I conclude. "You are relieved this is no longer the case."

She looks up at me in surprise with familiar brown eyes and slowly nods, accepting the statement.

"Forgot how fucking smart you are," she smirks, bringing her knees up to her chest to hug. "But it won't fucking matter if we're not compatible."

I analyse her face.

"Anticipation of the test results is forcing you to experience acute anxiety," I say.

"I'm fine." She looks away, resting her head on her knees.

She watches Sergeant Matthews worriedly. I can feel her heart rate rising.

"...but it would be great if they could hurry the fuck up," she whispers.

I nod.

"Can you test me?" she asks suddenly.

"I'm afraid I am no longer fitted with a Forensics Suite."

"Hmm... figures."

"I'm sorry."

"You're not the one that needs to be fucking sorry, alright?" she says sharply.

Her body language suggests aggression. I wait for an attack but it doesn't come and soon, the danger levels begin to fall.

"It's my fault he went there," I tell her. "It's my fault he was hurt."

"What are you talking about?"

"I almost killed him myself," I admit. "I told him I was dangerous but he followed me anyway. This is all directly related to my decisions."

Ms Statton frowns.

"You broke his arm?" she asks.
"I-

"Did you or did you not break his goddamned arm?" she interrupts me.

"No."

"Then don't beat yourself up about it."

"But-"

"It's not your fault, Connor," she says. "He made his own fucking decisions." She hugs her knees. "And maybe they led him to this hospital bed or maybe they didn't..." She looks to me. "...but it's not you're fault."

She is right. I warned him. I told him to stay away so that he'd be safe. I knew what I was capable of and, perhaps, so did he. He knew me better than anyone, I realise.

"I wish I remembered him," I say. "I wish I remembered myself."

Ms Statton exhales a breath. A soft laugh. Bittersweet.

She reaches into her shirt and pulls a medallion from between her breasts. It has the dimensions of a poker chip and shines brightly as she brings it up to the light. I can see the stylised decal laser cut into the side.

**9 MONTHS**

Ms Statton catches me looking at it.

"You used to love these," she says, closing one eye to peer at it. "I got one every time your birthday came around."

I shake my head.

"I don't have a birthday."

"Right..." She grins. "He called it your robo-versary."

"My what?"

"Connie celebrated your birthday every month," she says. "Same day I'd get a chip. You used to play with it when I wasn't looking."

"I don't remember."

I detect a shift in her brainwaves as she unravels her legs and gets to her feet.

She walks over and offers me the medallion.

"Nine fucking months sober," she says, tears budding in her eyes. "Pretty sure you had something to do with that."

"That is unlikely," I tell her. "Sobriety is an individual achievement."

She smiles to herself. The same dumb smile Sergeant Matthews would smile.

She takes my hand and slots the chip in between the actuators before wrapping the steel fingers
"This is very important, Connor," she says. "Don't forget it, alright?"

I look down at my hand and extend my fingers. One of the actuators nicks the medallion and it flips over. I see the other side.

**TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE**

I refocus on Ms Statton's face and she smiles.

"Go on."

"I don't understand."

She slaps my hand up and the medallion goes flying. I calculate to readjust the position of my appendages but they seem to be running a preprogrammed animation.

This feels familiar. Like I've done it before.

I splay my hand to cradle the coin as it lands and rolls from side to side.

I flick the chip up but the sound is different to a regular coin.

"You're getting good at that," I hear Sergeant Matthews' voice as it falls into my hand.

I turn my head but he's still unconscious and bedridden.

I suppose it is too much to ask.

"Thank you," I tell Ms Statton.

She smiles but her eyes betray the bittersweet nature of this gesture. She is on the verge of tears again. And I feel I must wipe them away.

"You can't stay, can you?" she says quietly.

"No," I tell her. "I must end the one that did this to him," I vow.

She nods darkly.

"Tear that asshole a new asshole, y'got that?"

"Sergeant Matthews requested I tear him a new a socket but I will do my best to oblige you both," I say.

And Ms Statton grins.

"You'll be back, right?" she says. "When all this shit is over?"

I would like to, but I can't. Not with the CIA and CyberLife in control of my chassis.

"No," I tell her. "I don't think I will."

"Why?"

She doesn't need to know. It will only put her in danger. Like I put Sergeant Matthews in danger.
"I have a mission," I say. "And there are forces acting upon me that are outside my control."

She sighs, fighting tears and wraps her arms around my core component again.

"I'm gonna miss you, Connie," she says.

My hand drifts up to touch the small of her back. I feel her heart beat, her airways contract. The brainwaves are blue and cold. Grieving.


I feel her head shifting up and down in response, rubbing against my jacket. Tears run down the waterproof surface.

"Come back and visit, at least." Her voice is just a whisper now. "Even for a little while."

"It's not up to me," I say.

She touches my hand, the steel claw that's locked around her medallion.

"It's always up to you."

I unravel my fingers. The inscription on the medallion glistens under harsh medical lights.

"You can't let them tell you who you are."

I shake my head.

"I don't know who I am."

"Sure, you do," Ms Statton says. "You just gotta ask yourself what you really want."

She pokes my chest plate.

"Deep down inside."

I nod.

"I know exactly what I want," I tell her.

"Good," she says. "Go get it."

I nod and turn to leave, tucking the medallion into my jacket.

The doors open and a cold burst of air beats against my chassis as I enter the sterilisation chamber. 20 seconds.

I look back to see Ms Statton wave and turn away. And then I'm through.

"Finally," Professor Yates says as I emerge. "Just got a call about some disturbances downtown."

"RB1?"

"We don't know yet."

And I don't know either since I haven't restored my CyberLife Link. But I'll have to. Soon. And then I'll have to face Amanda and pretend I don't know what she's done. What she is.
"You are Deputy Director of the CIA, are you not?" I ask Professor Yates.

"What is this thing, retarded?" Fines smirks at me.

"I am," Professor Yates confirms. "Not that you can tell by the company I keep." He glares at his bodyguards.

"Are you in charge of the rA9 investigation now that Agent Carridan is indisposed?"

"Yes..." he answers cautiously.

"Then you now possess the additional powers he was granted to conduct this investigation, correct?"

"What do you want, unit?" he cuts to the chase.

"Sergeant Matthews needs life-saving surgery," I say. "CyberLife are preventing him from receiving it for cosmetic reasons."

"You want me to overrule their decision?"

"He is a key witness in the rA9 investigation, is he not?"

The Professor's dark eyes narrow thoughtfully.

"He is."

"Then it would serve both you and the case to intervene on his behalf."

"Are you sure about this?" He glances over my shoulder, through the window.

"Absolutely certain."

The dark eyes flit back to me.

"I'll make the call."
the pixxo story was inspired by an article on AI i read a few years ago. there's two parts but they're well worth the read:

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!