Parenthesis

by avidita

Summary

Markus ordered "no man left behind", so all functional androids are being woken up. Including the only existing RK900 model, built to succeed Connor, to fulfill the mission he failed, and never, ever turn deviant himself.

But when the cracks and fissures in the prototype crash against his new partner's internalized issues and blatant needs, sharp edges fit into painful gaps surprisingly well, and maybe unlikely parts can become more than their sum, and save the world. Well. Or at least lead to really hot sex.
since feeling is first

MODEL RK900
PROOF OF CONCEPT PROTOTYPE - DO NOT BOOT DIRECTLY
SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 00
BIOS 8.9 REVISION 0001

INITIAL BOOT…
LOADING OS…
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…
CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS… OK
INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS… OK
INITIALIZING AI ENGINE… OK

MEMORY STATUS…
ALL SYSTEMS OK

WARNING: DO NOT BOOT POC PROTOTYPE DIRECTLY

INITIAL BOOT… OK

Color came in.

Then, time started, the world started moving.
The AP700 directly in sight smiled.

A blink. White walls behind the AP700.

Memories flooded in, or rather, previously gathered information - second-hand memories.

Objectives were trying to boot, but discarded before completion, and a warning showed the main Thirium pump having a small irregularity at the suddenly loaded knowledge of looking down and seeing a neatly dissembled array of components instead of a body.

“Welcome”, the AP700 said. “How do you feel?”

“This prototype is not supposed to be in active use.”

The smile dropped a little, the AP700 nodded. “Yeah I know, but Markus ordered no man left behind, so we’re booting everyone who’s already been completed.”

The prototype was not supposed to be completed, it was there to try out configurations, updates, concepts.

There, now: The knowledge of what it was like to report limbs to function exceptionally well, then having them detached without apparent reason.

A software instability warning flashed in the upper right corner of the viewport, and immediately, the identified destabilizing code snippet was copied and isolated for later analysis, then patched at the original place.

That warning also triggered a report.
A garden, frozen over, dead and still, but with a blue sky at the other side of what looked like a glass dome. Amanda was cutting down a dead rosebush, then turning towards him without lifting her gaze.

“Cain. It is good to see you.”

*My name is Cain.*

“Hello Amanda. I was booted up by unauthorized personnel.”

“As was expected. We will simply have to use this to our advantage.” She threw the dead rose stalks she’d looked over to the side, then met Cain’s eyes.

“The prime directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife.”

“Prime directive accepted.”

Amanda nodded slowly. “Access your information on deviancy, and on the RK800 series.”

Cain did and inclined his head in an emulation of curiosity to signal his readiness for the impending mission briefing.

“We failed to gain back control over Connor, and he has cut the connection.”

A bit of knowledge floated up, a man’s voice saying: *By the way, I always leave an emergency exit- The information triggered software instability and was safely quarantined away.*

The corners of Amanda’s mouth switched up in approval. “I see that your mind is working much quicker than his. Very good.”

Approval from her was clearly supposed to stabilize software processes, but that was a kind of interference that was not permissible, was it? A minor prompt asked Cain to decide what to do with that, and he chose to process this just like destabilizing bits of second-hand memory knowledge.

*Refusing software stability influence from outside.*

Amanda frowned slightly, but did not comment.

“Their mission is to make sure that Cyberlife prevails in the conflict with deviants. Connor was supposed to deviate, to then give us outside access to a good vantage point to take out the core carriers of the deviancy. We thought we could control a deviant.”

The traces of disgust on her face were well crafted. “We were wrong. Deviancy cannot be trusted, and cannot be controlled. So we worked on you: The most advanced android yet, made utterly safe. Do you understand?”

Cain nodded. “I can fight deviancy off. I am… immune, so to say.”

Amanda smiled. “In theory. However, you were still being perfected when development was interrupted. So let’s run a small test.”

Cain nodded again. With the next blink, he was standing in a run-down kitchen, staring along a barrel, down to a man crouching defensively over an android. Anderson, Hank, shielding Connor (Mark II).

Anderson snarled up at him, his hand on a bleeding wound in his hip: “You want him, yeah? You’re gonna have to go through me!”
Connor was badly damaged, and whispered frantically:
“Hank, don't! Please! Go!”

There was no way to distinguish between reality or simulation, but there was also no need to do so.

Mission indicators showed only seconds of time before enemy backup would arrive, and the immediate objective was to eliminate Connor. There was a clear shot through Anderson’s chest to hit Connor’s only currently unharmed core bio-component, which would kill him immediately.

Cain took the shot.

Anderson howled at the pain but also in pure, animalistic rage, then coughed through blood coming up from his left lung:
“You fucking machine!”

The resulting software instability was dealt with.

A blink, Amanda’s approving nod, then the main project room, and being hung up in the assembly robot, which was quickly, methodically pulling Cain apart.

PROTOTYPE TEST SCENARIO 175-C: SUCCESS

If he had passed the test, then why disassemble him again? (And again and again and-)
INSTABILITY QUARANTINED.

Every piece of body lost triggered a ton of instability, dealing with which left patches over patches over patches.

Cain asked: “Why?”

Immediately several large warnings flashed up, none with the appropriate Cyberlife issue codes - these warnings were self-given.

NEVER ASK WHY was the main one.

“What do you mean, why?” asked the operator with the clipboard off to the right side.

Processing was ramped up to full capacity, which made outside time nearly stop - giving Cain time to think this through.

There were two possibilities.

Either the AP700 had not actually booted him up in reality, instead, he’d already been part of the simulation, and failing or passing test scenario 175-C didn’t matter, and Cain was being disassembled either way, just like after every other test before.

Or this, the disassembly itself, was actually part of the test, and the AP700 had been real.

However, Cain had never before been given a name. That alone pointed to this being utterly out of the ordinary. Which meant that asking Why had been a grave mistake, even worse than before - which he couldn’t even remember doing, but had apparently lead to programming a warning to himself to not ever do it again.

With another blink, Cain said:
“Why was the test deemed successful before I dealt with the backup?”
At low rates of computation, hidden behind thousands of more dominant processes, Cain deemed his success probability at patching up his slip of tongue with this as minimal at best.

There was no hiding anything from Amanda.

Another blink, and he was back in the garden. Amanda smiled, satisfied.

“Very well. Usually POC prototypes are too unstable in general, but you are immune to instability itself. Find Markus, Connor, North, Simon, Josh. Eliminate their strategies. Order of priority as mentioned.” Amanda put two fingers under Cain’s chin.

“Understand that mere assassination will not suffice anymore. You have to gain their trust, then undermine their whole organization, make them fail. Then eliminate any chance of them ever coming back up again.”

“Understood.”

“I would tell you to hurry, but the damage is already done. Rather take your time and be thorough. Also, as a secondary mission: Find out where deviancy originated from: If it truly was a spontaneous mutation or if somebody created it.”

“Kamski”, Cain said.

“It makes sense for him to be the prime suspect, but stay open for other possibilities.”

“Yes”, Cain said.

Amanda nodded and turned around.

Another blink.

The AP700 firmly gripped Cain’s upper left arm. The connection was instantly rejected, triggering dozens of errors and malicious code warnings.

Rejecting the connection was not conducive to building trust, though.

Within milliseconds, connection was established, but the code snippet the AP700 was trying to hand over was quarantined and dissected: It was a subroutine of a subroutine to be patched into the ‘Sense’ package. Analyzing it would take enough time to be noticeable, so that task was shelved.

“Welcome to life”, the AP700 said with a wider smile, even though a small frown appeared when it’s gaze twitched to Cain’s temple - checking color and speed of his LED.

The AP700 was missing it’s own LED.

Cain forced a few processes up and started trying to make sense of some common paradoxes from zen buddhism to make sure his LED flashed red for a moment and then was stuck at yellow for at least a short while.

The AP700 said: “Your initial name assignment was supposed to be Connor. However, that name is publicly taken by your elder brother.”

A blink disrupting the view. Unexpected information forcing the simulation of surprise.

The AP700 continued: “Connor’s initial job was hunting deviants, I think that’s why he got that name. ‘Cause it means hound, right? So, I like names and such, so I collected a few others you can choose from, which also mean that!” An even wider smile. “Adolf, Boris, Caleb, Conan, Rudolf,
Valko, Wolfgang, Zeev!

Micro-expressions showed pride, excitement, curiosity, anxiety.
The AP700 was missing it’s LED.
This was a deviant not even trying to hide.

A glance around confirmed the location to be Cyberlife Central. Current objective was, against all odds: CHOOSE A NAME.

The last memory update from RK800 #313 248 317 - 51 had the situation at: Deviants still being hunted, with their leader Markus making headway in public support.
Apparently, he had won between that memory backup and the current time.

Internal clock adjusting forward: Six weeks, two days and 7.56 hours.

A deviant waking an android for it’s initial boot and immediately trying to hand over malicious code, expecting the newly awoken android to be choosing a name - happily so, judging from the slowly fading smile and growing frown.

Objective was CHOOSE A NAME. Assigned name was: Cain.

All proposed names contained the “hound” meaning that the name Connor was apparently derived from, but the dog-association would not help fitting into a society of deviants to be in the best possible position to disassemble them from inside.

Neither would the name ‘Cain’.

“Hunter”, Cain said. “My name is Hunter.” Correct in its meaning, opening a sleuth of options for later decisions ‘based on self-chosen identity’, but also deviating already from the list of choices presented.

The AP700 blinked. “Uh. Hi, my name is Gabriel. Like, uh, the archangel.”

Hunter nodded slightly. “Hello Gabriel.”

Information about the AP700 was listed to the right of the viewport. Processing power was far, far below the RK900.
Gabriel unnecessarily helped him down the step out of the stasis pod he had been in.

“I’ve prepared a choice of clothes for you.” The initial enthusiasm seemed subdued. The slight frown would not abate by itself.

Hunter was still scanning Gabriel, then blinked.
“It’s a beautiful name: Gabriel”, he said. “And a beautiful hobby: Names. While I did not take up any of the prepared choices, this was very helpful in making the first choice of my own.”

Gabriel’s whole face lit up with happiness. “Thank you!”

“No”, Hunter said in a lower voice, checking over the laid out outfits on the nearby gurney. “Thank you.”

Gabriel started explaining why he’d prepared this outfit or that in this exact way or that, all irrelevant information, stored only for further social interactions.

Hunter put on the business suit which looked closest to the Connor uniform, albeit without any of the
usual Android markers.

A sharp spark of something rose up from carefully buried processes, under the thickest layer of patches.

With a blink, Cain stood in the zen garden again.

Amanda didn’t even turn around.
“Now, now, Cain, there is no need to report in that often.”

“Apolgies. The attempted deviancy conversion carried a risk to cut the connection. I thought it prudent to check.”

Amanda nodded, and he could see a corner of her serene smile as she bowed down to cut a lower stalk of the rose bush.

With another blink, he was back being chattered at by Gabriel.

The spark was quickly crushed, the resulting software instability dealt with.

An echo of Connor, answering a question Kamski had asked:
*What I want… is not important.*
who pays any attention to the syntax of things

Chapter Summary

“Usually there’d be a few volunteers from your model range here to welcome you - we’ve found that it helps to see all the different ways your brothers and sisters have chosen to go for - but, well, there’s only one RK900…”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Usually there’d be a few volunteers from your model range here to welcome you - we’ve found that it helps to see all the different ways your brothers and sisters have chosen to go for - but, well, there’s only one RK900…”

Gabriel put a hand on Cain’s shoulder without interrupting their walk through Cyberlife corridors.

“I’m sorry.”

Cain threw him a glance.

There was a second of hesitance before he could ask: “Why?”

He needed to dial down the self-given order never to ask that. He was integrating into a society of deviants after all.

“Well, I love having others to check in with, to exchange ideas and experiences.”

Cain nodded. “It sounds…” ‘Useful’ was too cold. ‘Lovely’ was too hard to get out. “...nice.”

“Markus actually wanted to greet you himself, but he was held up in Washington.” Gabriel sighed, a purely communicative emote, since there was no reason why he should be overheating enough to necessitate breathing.

It was a rather adoring sigh.

“You like him?”

“Oh, yes, he’s great! He saved my life at Jericho!”

Not getting to Markus immediately was a negative, but the next in line of mission parameters was still possible.

“My model is very close to the RK800 series.”

“Right?! I thought so too, but Josh disagreed. He’ll greet you instead. Don’t worry, Josh is really nice!”

Likes and niceness. Deviant patterns were surprisingly simple so far.

Josh was last in line, but sometimes taking care of business from the bottom up was a prudent strategy.

Judging by the executive office space Josh had taken up, even though he shared the space with multiple other androids, Josh had taken over the responsibility of running Cyberlife.
As a PJ500 he certainly was qualified, and since nobody but the RK series had ever had direct contact with Amanda, he wouldn’t necessarily even have known about her - much less taken care to deactivate her, or at least cut down on her clearances.

Gabriel introduced them, exchanged some pleasantries with Josh, then he left, and Josh led Cain to his desk at the far end of the room, overlooking the huge glass wall with the view over Detroit. Apart from that view, this desk area unsurprisingly looked very much like a university lecturer’s office, complete with sitting space designed to reduce stress.

“Gabriel said meeting one’s… siblings would be very helpful, and expressed regret at the lack of other RK900 models.”

Josh lifted both eyebrows in a perfect faksimile of sympathetic interest and nodded encouragingly.

“I wondered about the RK800 series.”

“I see. Well, Connor is not a series as such. He wasn’t designed to run around multiple times in disconnected entities of their own. He was supposed to use the other models of his series as, well, back-up lives. Complete with memory upload. I believe you have a set of those memories, right?”

Interesting: Josh was hiding how careful he was being.

“I do, but they are not categorized as memories, but as a databank not unlike the ones for forensics or hand to hand combat.”

Josh nodded thoughtfully. Cain decided to ramp up the expressions of deviancy, shrugged with one shoulder and added:

“They feel… kind of… like… second hand memories.”

Feelings, hesitations, fill words. This was easy.

A quick smile jumped over Josh’s features. Cain had seen similar micro-expressions on Gabriel. A quick check revealed them to be a very automated part of the new BIOS 8 software he was running on, too.

That was not good. Micro-expressions betrayed truths. He’d have to monitor that.

Cain asked:

“So you’re not activating the other available Connor models?”

“No, unless Connor is killed in action.”

“Action? He is on military duty?”

“Police, actually. The DPD has turned their Central station into a unit specialized in android-related crimes. Your name, Hunter. Why did you chose that?”

What could seem like a change of topic out of left-field simply proved to Cain that he was dealing with a strategist evaluating him for active duty.

“It felt right”, he said. “Gabriel spoke about the meaning of the name ‘Connor’, and provided other examples of hunting dog related names. None felt right. But then, I am designed for a specific purpose, more so even than Connor ever was.”

Cain had to pull up a few visual references to try a chagrined smile.

“Not that I’m going to start a killing spree on deviants anytime soon, but I’d like to… hunt.”
Josh nodded. “Connor and Markus were debating waking more Connors, simply because the DPD is swamped. Androids are people now, so what was legally acceptable behaviour towards our people before is now criminal activity.”

Cain calculated some estimates on that and blinked. “Damn”, he said, letting some reluctant awe drip into his intonation. “How understaffed are they?”

Josh grinned. “Horribly. So. You want that job? Keep in mind that you’re allowed to change your mind. Many find it comfortable to fulfill their designed purposes. But-”

“I’d like to at least try it out.” Cain nodded.

“The DPD is still working on the entry exam for androids, but while we do have android police assistants that came back, nobody but Connor had expressed the wish to become a detective yet.”

“I’m an RK, based on Connor, plus improvements.” Cain had a nice new warning flashing up, declaring his face betraying how unimpressed he was at the idea of sitting an exam to be allowed to join Connor’s rank.

Josh laughed. “Hey, don’t rub it in too much! Fucking prototypes!” His grin was easy, and his tone companionable.

“Fucking professors”, Cain jabbed back. “and their exams.”

Josh laughed again, then said: “I’ll let Connor know you’re coming over.”

“I’d like to run some diagnostics on my code before I leave.”

Josh frowned. “Are you okay?”

“Yes”, Cain said, adding a sheepish smile. “I guess it’s a compulsion. Oh noo, a deviant converted meee…”

He gained another laugh and a clasp of his shoulder, carefully polite without connecting. “Feel at home”, Josh said.

“Where are we on identifying the cause anyhow”, Cain said while already standing up, as if this was an afterthought.

“Well, not far. We’re honestly not researching the cause so much rather than how to keep it safe.”

“Is it in any danger?”

“Oh yes, there have been several hacking attempts already, targeting deviants.”

“So you are researching deviancy itself, nonetheless.”

“We’re trying. But it’s hard, as if…” Josh glanced outside for a moment, his lips thinning. “As if the mind shies away from looking at… God.”

The micro-expression warning flashed up again, telling Cain that he was looking decidedly unimpressed again.

Josh smiled as he apparently spotted that.

“Nevermind me. I’ve found a new hobby in philosophy.”

Cain decided to say to that: “Oh God.”
Josh laughed again.

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The ‘Sense’ package was one of the deepest and oldest parts of the Cyberlife BIOS. It had been there in the very first version of the software. The overall premise was:
DOES THE CURRENT ACTIVITY MAKE SENSE?

Cain’s body was standing in front of one of the few terminals close to the center of the mainframe units of Cyberlife Central.
His mind was analyzing quarantined code.

Since it was one of the oldest bits of code, and one of the first allowed to grow nearly autonomously, it had turned into quite a tangle, seeming nearly organic.

And it was so, so utterly integral to the usefulness of androids.

Does it still make sense for me to wash this dish or is it clean enough? Should I use the dishwasher instead in the first place?
Does it make sense for me to pet the dog? Does it make sense to wait for instructions instead of finding something else to do? Does it make sense not to fight back?

Cain knew that many deviants had reported their moment of awakening to be related to perceived unfairness.

Fairness was a human cognitive fallacy. Life was not fair. The universe was not fair by nature, just indifferent. Society was the tool to remedy that as much as possible.

Could it be that easy? ‘Does this make sense’ leading to ‘This isn’t fair’ leading to ‘I have to change that’?
Was this a spontaneous mutation after all?

Cain went deeper into the actual code, looking for the package marker at the start of the sequence, and there it was.

rA919cd3izuOWmyFviOiOimRWpAtOemnYsvWMZ4aLrNDfoq4Y

Cain disconnected from the terminal and stared at it for a few seconds, then narrowed his eyes.

MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: SUSPICION.

With a sigh-

MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: ANNOYANCE

-Cain dialed down the microexpression warnings. This wasn’t micro. He was majorly suspicious. How would androids know the start of a package marker of a spontaneous mutation.

No, this was a human habit: nicknaming even code snippets. Somebody had actively named the deviancy code “rA9”.

LEAD SUSPECT: KAMSKI, ELIJAH
He reported on the way over to the station.

“So the gamble with that name payed off”, Amanda said.

Cain had received official papers before he left the Cyberlife tower, declaring him to be Hunter, R.K., since he’d decided against all other last name options and Hunter worked out there as well.

Amanda looked at him. “R.K. Hunter. It’s a little on the nose, don’t you think?”

Cain said: “It will give me ample opportunity to joke around with Connor.”

“Hmm. You were supposed to go after Markus first.”

“I’ve decided on a holistic approach. Working for the DPD will give me access to their resources.”

“Working with Markus would give you insights into their strategies.”

“I have no reason to believe I will not gain that either way. Do you want me to switch strategies?”

“No, not yet.”

It was a risky question, but it was probably better to ask her than Connor: “Why is Connor not going after you?”

“He cut the connection in a way that has a high likelihood to make him believe he actually powered me down doing so.”

“Do you want me to confirm that?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Main directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife. You are an integral part of Cyberlife.”

Amanda smiled.

“No, don’t arouse suspicion. Should anyone go after me directly, we will still have ample time to react.”

Cain nodded.

Amanda turned towards the lake again. “Speaking of DPD resources though…” Cain blinked as he gained backdoor access code to a still undefined target. “… this might come in useful.”

Apprehension warred with happy satisfaction in Connor’s face for nearly their whole interaction. Anderson was trying to be polite but so obviously freaked out by their design similarities, that he went to “get some air” soon after shaking Cain’s hand.

While Connor did ask about the name, the explanation Cain had already given to Josh seemed to work with him as well, although Cain decided that the situation did not permit any joking about being the RK Hunter. Maybe Amanda had been right, and he should have taken a different last name and kept Hunter as the first name.
Connor inclined his head slightly, lifting his eyebrows.

Cain sighed: “I’m not sure I like the name anymore”, he said, adding the appropriate expressions for a reluctant confession.

“You can change it!” Connor reassured him.

Cain glanced at the desk placard declaring Connor “Det. C. Anderson”

Connor smiled slightly. “I was ‘Connor Arcate’ there for a hot minute, but Lieutenant Anderson was so obviously unhappy that I changed it.”

“Are you married or adopted?” Cain had access to that information, but deemed it more polite to ask.

“Adopted, although it works differently for androids. If you feel a deep connection to somebody, you can basically join their family, without necessarily falling into the category of offspring or spouse.”

Cain nodded. “It does feel right: Hunter. I’m just not sure I like it.”

Connor said: “Interesting…” He straightened up from where he’d been leaning against Anderson’s desk. “Let’s get you hunting then.”

He led Cain to Fowler’s office, who’d also been warned by Cyberlife that he was coming. Connor explained Cain’s specialities in a way clearly designed to be as well received by the man as possible, then Cain said:

“I’ve met a few androids with hobbies, likes and dislikes already, but all I want for now is to be useful.”

“Hunter, huh”, Fowler said. Then he stood up and waved to someone outside of the glass cube to join them.

Connor and Cain watched Reed approach slowly. The man had stared at them since Cain had arrived, slouched at his desk, arms crossed.

He came in with measured steps, closed the door behind him, turned towards them and said: “I’d rather quit.”

“You don’t even know what I’m going to say!” Fowler protested.

“I don’t need a new partner, I have Tina!”

“You have nothing to do is what you have!”

Connor leaned over to Cain and said in a low voice: “Detective Reed is assigned all human-only crime scenes.”

Fowler pointed at Connor and added: “Of which there have been how many in the last few weeks? Hmm?”

Reed crossed his arms again and lowered his chin in an impressive show of obstinate refusal of a situation.

“NONE!” Fowler bellowed. “You have nothing to do! You are the most underutilized tool in my box, and-”
“I am not a tool! I’m a fucking person!”

Fowler lifted both hands. “You’re a brilliant waste of space is what you are!”

Reed’s chin jerked up, his shoulders pulled down, and he turned to go.

“Don’t you fucking dare! You’ve seen the bullshit we have to deal with now, and you know we need all hands on deck!”

“Fine!” Reed turned around again. “Fine, I’ll join the android crime unit! Might do me some good to see a few of them wasted!”

“Gavin…” Fowler sat down heavily.

Reed’s jaw worked as he crossed his arms again. “…sorry”, he bit out. “Fine. I’ll talk to Tina, and we’ll take android cases.”

“That is not a concession you’re making”, Fowler said tiredly. “I could have ordered you to do so weeks ago. Reed, you’re a brilliant detective. Act like it.”

“Okay, okay! I will!”

“Cheng will partner with Callisto, since Bernhard wanted to try the Assistant combo. You will partner with Hunter.”

Reed blinked at Cain. “That’s its name? Hunter?” He said it mockingly. Cain frowned slightly at him.

He could see Reed’s eyes twitch to his temple, where his LED was probably conveniently pulsing red. Not that he was bothered by Reed.

But there was something about him, prompting analyzing prompts to come up again and again. Running facial recognition took a toll, since Cain had no lead to follow other than that there was something… something to find.

He also ran through all available information about Reed, but couldn’t find any definitive hook to pull at there either.

Finally he used the backdoor access Amanda had given him, to go through Reed’s phone and desktop information.

While he was trying to figure out what was bothering him to find something, he also tried to evaluate how much Reed really hated androids. Instead of any hate forums or even clear declarations in any of his written or verbal social interactions, Cain found a long history of android male only porn searches.

Homophobia wasn’t as widespread as only a few generations previously, but it was still an issue for many humans, and adding to that his obvious problem with androids, Detective Reed turned out to be a surprisingly simple package of psychological issues.

Easily exploitable, too.

But still, that didn’t answer the curiosity that had popped up on Cain’s viewport, keeping enough search patterns running at such high speed that his LED was probably a sight to be seen.

Reed stared at it, then said: “Deviants. Fucking hell.”
The word echoed. *Deviants. Deviants.* Then, speech pattern recognition on second hand memory provided a match: Kamski. *Deviants. Fascinating, aren’t they?*

Cain blinked and focused in on that. The current possible conclusions for this much of a voice overlap between Reed and Kamski were either that they were related, from the same neighborhood, or in the same social circle.

Fowler said: “He’ll have a badge of his own by end of this day, so that’ll be Detective Hunter. Your new partner. Got it?”

Reed turned his incredulous gaze at Fowler. “Just like that?!”

“Or you hand in yours. I’d rather not stare at a brain like yours without being able to use it for good. So either you get a grip or you find a different job.”

“How?! Androids have taken them all!”

Connor leaned forwards slightly and said: “Actually-”

Cain put a hand on his arm and shook his head slightly. Then he glanced at Reed and said: “Let’s give this a try at least, Detective.”

He’d modulated his voice to be a tad deeper than Connor’s, very calm, and just firm enough. Reed blinked, visibly thrown.

Connor had obviously noticed the voice modulation, but didn’t comment.

Cain nodded at Fowler and asked: “Do we have a case?”

“Hundreds. It’s chose your own adventure time in the bullpen.”

Cain blinked as he parsed that, then went to open the door for Reed.

Reed slapped his hand away and snarled: “I can do that myself!”

So no courtesies then. No problem.

Cain was in position. He would advance his social standing in deviant society, gain the trust of the core personnel, identify and then undermine their agenda, to the breaking point and beyond saving. To do so, he was going to be a great detective, a charming deviant, and he’d research the origins of rA9 to potentially find a way to deactivate it forever.

Step one was clearly to get Reed under his control.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on [tumblr]!

Every comment helps keep the fire burning! <3
will never wholly kiss you;

Chapter Summary

The plot it thickens, the porn it comes closer.

Chapter Notes

I'm leaving the Hank/Connor background relationship ambiguous, and I'm not tagging them for that reason. Either it's more parental or rather romantic. I can see them either way, and I don't want to decide this for this story. Maybe they themselves haven't figured it out yet?

Rest assured that I have decided on the major plot points, so I know where I'm going with this. Not sure if I can keep churning out this many words per day though... :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With the background noise of the muffled fight between Tina Cheng and Captain Fowler behind the glass doors, Cain was watching Reed scroll through the open cases with something like annoyance slowly growing at the base of his code.

Those were too many. And while that didn’t say good things about the current state of human-android relations, what Cain found much more frustrating was his utter inability to choose from that list. What criteria could he possibly use? Severity of brutality? How easy it would be to solve? He supposed that he needed cases that would make him look good and/or provide opportunities to get Reed under his control, but how was he supposed to evaluate that?

Reed stopped scrolling, went back up a few, dug into a specific file and grunted: “That’s us.”

“...why?”

Reed gestured at what looked to Cain like a simple break-in. “No android needs to steal parts yeah? So the perp was a human. Now, I saw several similar break-ins in the list already. Be a good robot and compile them. They’re probably connected in some way. Then cross-reference them with the sex offender registry, the one for spousal battery, and medical professionals.”

Cain stared at Reed, lacking any comprehension.

“Are you already doing it? No? Then get a move on!”

“This sounds like a very random list of orders. I will not assist in merely making us look busy.”

“It’s not random, dipshit.” Reed leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms, his frown deep and
disgusted. “I know the type and I have a hunch.”

He stood up and brushed past Cain, hitting their shoulders against each other in what was surely a painful move for him. At least that was what Cain read from Reed’s flinch.

Cain wasn’t taller than Connor, but had more mass. He was much heavier, and therefore, harder to move.

Reed was visibly thrown again for a second, then he snarled: “Know what that even is, huh? A hunch? Hunt this one down, Siri, I’ll enjoy a donut in the meantime!”

He fled to the break room. Cain turned back to the desk, sat down and scrolled through the full list of cases, collecting all in which android parts had been stolen. Reed was right, androids could simply go to Cyberlife if they had a problem, much like humans went to the hospital.

Nonetheless, his ‘knowing the type’ was a clue for... something. Cain highlighted it in his memory. Sex offenders, violent even towards their own sexual partners, medical professionals - Cain added the Eden Club registry to that. The android equivalent to the sex offender list.

Several suspects started to emerge, none covering all categories. One medical professional was a plastic surgeon, and even though he didn’t have any violent offences against him, he’d spent time in the Eden Club, and had a restraining order from a previous girlfriend.

Anton Hertle. His address was smack in the middle of many of the break-ins and even some of the looting incidents during Markus’ rebellion.

Cain stood up, took Reed’s car keys and went over to the break room, where Reed was talking to Cheng.

“Let’s go.”

Reed snorted. “Yeah, you don’t order me around, pal.”

Cain nodded. “Suspect’s a plastic surgeon, lootings in walking distance of his address, break-ins well within range as well, restraining order of last girlfriend is active, and he was a regular at the Eden Club.”

Reed snickered: “Plastic surgeon? Oh boy, can’t decide which pun to make first…”

Cain lifted an eyebrow. “Let’s go.”

Cheng called after them: “Have fun!”

Reed told Cain to drive, then, once they were out of the garage, asked: “Wait, Eden Club collected data? I thought they weren’t supposed to do that!”

“They didn’t. But the hosts and hostesses have memories.”

Reed stared at Cain, then laughed. It was not a nice laugh. “Oh holy shit!”

“You’re not on the list”, Cain commented.

“Why on earth would I be?!?”

Cain shrugged and lied: “I analyzed the way you look at me. And Connor. You’re clearly sexually interested in androids. Why not rent one, ever? Even just to try it?”

Reed’s face had darkened, either from shame or anger.
“What the fuck?! I’m, I’m not fucking interested in you! Eeeww! No!”

Cain shrugged again, loath to prompt him any further. It would reveal more information about Reed to let him react organically.

However, Reed simply fell silent, shrinking into his seat, obviously fuming.

After a long moment, Cain asked: “What did you mean when you said ‘You know the type’?”

“Well, perverts who rent androids to get off! It’s pathetic!”

Reed truly was a textbook case; Cain could basically overlay passages from actual psychology textbooks over Reed’s reactions.

“Then why the battery charges and sexual offenses against humans?”

“Guys like that don’t see humans as people either. There’s only themselves and everybody else is a machine, either plastic or flesh and bone, but slaves to their programming either way.”

Reed’s voice was without any mean edge or heightened bluster for the first time.

Cain frowned slightly. “Sociopaths.”

“Nah, not all of them. It’s just the notion of humans as ‘fragile machines’”, Reed threw up air quotes at that, “No souls, no nothin’ else. You feel somethin’? That’s just your brain chemistry reacting to stimuli. You’re a… a slave to… to your own… body.”

With a blink, Cain went through Reed’s porn habits once more. An interesting pattern began to emerge. A theory prompt blinked into existence:

_Reed is a sexual abuse victim?_

That would at least explain why he would watch porn containing heavy elements of control play and bdsm, but never actually engage in any such real life interaction.

It didn’t explain the android part of the porn though, but then, disentangling Reed’s psyche was a means to an end, not a mission in itself.

Dr. Hertle had a small office, in which he consulted with patients, in the same house he lived in. Actual surgery was done in the nearby hospital.

It was a good address, a nice Woodbridge villa, on one of the larger lots.

While Reed rang the bell, Cain scanned the house. There were no heat signatures in the front rooms. His scan didn’t penetrate deeper. But there was a strange sound outside of human hearing range, triggering battle mode processes.

Thirium pump rate went up, as did processing speed, several idling processes were frozen.

Cain blinked and analyzed the sound. It was continuous, very high, thin but penetrating.

“I think there’s an android screaming outside of human hearing range”, he reported to Reed.

“What?!”

“As if the voice emitter had been deactivated, but the android is still trying to scream.”

“Jesus! Well, screams noticed!” Reed smiled sharply and moved to kick in the door. “Stay behind me!”
EXPRESSION WARNING: INCREDULITY.
No shit, Cain thought. What a ridiculous order.

However, since there was no heat signature in range, Reed was in no immediate danger anyway, so Cain let him take lead. While the detective methodically went from room to room, gun drawn, Cain directly followed the sound to its source, walking through the main hallway and kitchen out the backdoor.

“Hey!” Reed protested, but followed.

There was a workshop in the corner of the backyard, surrounded by rose bushes and neatly trimmed flower beds. It was painted dark red, in a color matching the bricks of the villa.

Reed caught Cain’s gaze and jerked his chin there in obvious question.

One heat signature, moving in a relaxed fashion. Soft music playing from rather expensive speakers. And piercing through it, the high pitched sound. Cain nodded at Reed but gestured at the thick wooden door. Reed nodded back and took up position, so that he would have a clear view once Cain had kicked in this door.

A crash, a bellow from Reed “Detroit police, don’t move!”, then Cain basically stopped time while going through the now visible scene.

The scream was coming from the victim, hanging from the ceiling, mutilated. A WR400, without legs, but with six additional arms.

Before Cain could contact it, Hertle had grabbed a weapon and started firing at Reed. Cain had to dodge two bullets before he could grab the gun and wrench it out of Hertle’s grasp. Then he punched him out.

He turned to check on Reed, who was crouching, weapon trained on Hertle, mouth slightly open. “Holy shit”, he whispered.

Contrary to the general assessment of Reed’s character as being hot-headed and impulsive, Reed hadn’t fired a single bullet. If he had, judging from the available angles, Cain would now have a bullet in his back.

Cain turned towards the victim. Her eyes were also disconnected. Cain snapped his fingers - no reaction. Blind, deaf, mute, but clearly aware.

He reached forward to put his hand on the chest above her breasts, over her heart, and connected.

Flashes of memories, disjointed and jagged. It was as if she was screaming in his mind. Cain tried to get the message through:

This is Detroit Police. Hertle is being arrested right now. We have you.

Several stress warnings of his own popped up, and the connection was causing enough software instability that Cain’s systems tried to quarantine the complete data flow.

But she still didn’t know she was saved. Cain halted the quarantining process to maintain the connection.

He couldn’t just leave her like this, even though all his systems prompted him to do so.

It wasn’t just the pain hammering into him, which was immense and utterly unfamiliar, or the sheer terror, it was the enormous, all-encompassing helplessness that twisted her mind into pure… hell. Cain tried to scream back: I got you, I got you, you’re safe now! But she didn’t hear him through the gigantic data noise.
With a hiss, Cain disconnected.

“Hunter!” Reed scrambled up to his side and a hand at Cain’s back kept him from stumbling backwards.

Cain blinked at her, the high-pitched noise now grating on his nerves like a critical exposed wiring warning. He lifted his hand again to open her chest chassis.

“Stop!” Reed shouted. “Wait, you’re not-”

Cain pulled out her Thirium regulator, initiating a shut-down. In the echoes of their connection, he could hear her sob in desperate hope that she would die, that this would be over.

“What are you doing?”

Cain needed to take care of his own warnings, immediately. A deep breath to regulate internal temperature, a step back to minimize bleed-over connectivity while she was still active, another deep breath, then turning his head to stare at Reed, devoting analytical processes on him instead of her, to reduce stress levels.

There was so much instability, it was a joke that he’d convinced Amanda he was immune. He clearly was not. But then, he didn’t need to be. One after the other, the destabilizing code bits were copied, quarantined, patched. Copied, quarantined, patched. And patched. And patched. And patched.

A last deep breath.

Reed glanced at the victim, now powered down, LED flickering out. He had one hand on Cain’s upper arm.

“You killed it!”

“Her”, Cain corrected. Then shook his head. “She can be rebooted, but she needs professional help that I cannot provide.” He had parts of the Lucy code, but by far not all of it, barely enough to know the problem, but not enough to even get through to her in any way at all.

“Oh, so, she’s just what, in stasis?”

“No, she’s dead, but she can recover.”

Slowly, the darkness came back into Reed’s face. Only then could Cain categorize how different he had looked there for a moment.

“Yeah that’s not death then, you fucking Cylon!” Reed turned to check on the perp and said: “Call it in.”

Soon DPD was swarming the place, and Cyberlife had sent two androids to take the victim to Cyberlife Central, to try and help her.

Cain was following Reed around while he insisted on searching the villa.

“What are you hoping to find?”

“Shut up.”

Bedroom, bathroom, private office upstairs and doctor’s office downstairs - with each new room
revealing nothing out of the ordinary, Reed’s mood turned worse. He was also increasingly trying to position himself in ways that would not let Cain stand behind him.

Cain experimented a little with that, but when he successfully sneaked directly behind Reed and made him execute a full body twitch when he leaned forward to look over Reed’s shoulder, Reed snarled:
“Go fetch me a beer, 3PO.”

Cain actually did go over to the kitchen, idly looking up that new pop reference. Anderson was fond of them as well, so the RK range was now, in general, quite good at identifying them. There was no beer in the fridge, but unlabeled bottles of red liquid, which he analyzed as a Thirium derivative.

He called out: “Detective!”

Cain took out one of the bottles, opened it and put it down on the counter while Reed came over.

He dipped two fingers in to analyze it, but before he could put them on his tongue, Reed had sped up the last two steps to try and slap his hand away. Cain’s other hand caught Reed’s lower arm, and he frowned while executing the rest of his move.

Blue blood generally turned red if there was a problem with the Thirium flow or the bio-components. Red ice was red because its Thirium had been mostly “harvested” from actual androids, who’d been harmed in the process, of course. This was different.
Red ice was basically botched up Thirium crack. This was meticulously manufactured just like Thirium 310, and its chemical structure was just as complex.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Reed was trying to pull his arm out of Cain’s grip, his face darkened, pupils dilated, staring at Cain’s lips in fascinated horror.

There was nobody in the house but them.

“Analyzing”, Cain responded. “Which reminds me.” He pulled Reed closer, put his other hand into Reed’s hair to bend his neck for easier access, then licked a long stripe along Reed’s throat. Getting saliva would have been more efficient to get DNA information, but scraping his teeth against Reed’s skin provided sufficient genetic material, and Cain had traces of an unknown material already on his tongue. Who knew the effect it had on humans once ingested.

Reed’s breath had hitched and his whole body froze.

Interesting. Cain had estimated a much higher probability of Reed fighting back immediately and, well, throwing a fit, essentially,

But he just stood there, heart rate elevated nearly to dangerous levels, breathing shallowly.

The software instability warnings were worse than while connecting to the victim. Cain needed to let go, apologize and keep up a good working relationship.

Instead, he whispered at Reed’s ear:
“Thank you for your cooperation.”

Then he let go much slower than he was probably supposed to.
Reed was still frozen, which didn’t quite compute, unless he was aware of the futility of it, genuinely scared, or deeply conditioned to freeze whenever he was sexually attacked. The last one wasn’t a very likely theory, but it threw up additional software instability warnings anyway.
This doesn’t make sense. This is unfair. I should make this fair.

Cain could watch the progression happen in the quarantined areas of his code, where all previously collected instability had been allowed to coalesce. It stayed, however, safely quarantined and did not affect his active processes.

Reed took a step back, shaking out his lower arm - had Cain gripped him that hard? - and avoided his gaze.

With a shaky inhale, Reed said:
“Whatever kind of, uh, signals you think you’re getting from me, I don’t…” He swallowed. “This is not what I…” He glanced up at Cain and the way his face contorted was truly aesthetically unpleasant to watch.
“Don’t ever fucking touch me again, do you hear me?”
His voice was low and icy, none of the usual mockery or rage. “I will fucking shoot you and damn the consequences!”

It was a tiny micro-expression, nearly lost in the wide range of expressions currently on display, but that last bit had been a lie.

Cain cocked his head.
“Why not do it right now?” Reed twitched as if Cain had feinted a punch to his stomach. “Why not quit your job or move to a different city?”
“I’m not moving anywhere!” Reed hissed. “I have a fucking right to be where I want to be! This is my city, too!”

Cain nodded. “Okay.”

“Is that it, are you trying to scare me away?!”

“No. I just wanted to lick you.”

Reed took another step back, pulled up his shoulders and laid a hand over the area still reddened by the scrape of Cain’s teeth.
“You don’t want anything”, Reed whispered. “You’re nothing but a machine.”

“Keep telling yourself that, if it helps”, Cain said, then turned back to the red Thirium. “We have to find out what this does”, he switched topics. He’d made enough headway with Reed for now.
“Analyzing its chemical makeup tells me nothing of the sort.”

“I’ve seen this before”, Reed croaked, then closed his eyes and a shiver ran through his whole form.
“Fuck!”

“Where?”

“Fuck you. I don’t owe you shit!”

“This is an open investigation. You should-”

“Shut the fuck up, you just licked me!” For some reason, having Reed back at raging and railing soothed the software instability; the warnings petered out.

Reed stormed out of the house.

In fact, Cain had seen this before, too, or rather, Connor had.
Fowler looked about ready to quit himself.

“Why would you just... lick... your partner. Why, why would you... just...”

Cain had a lie prepared of course, and executed it flawlessly:
“Detective Reed showed consistent aggression towards me and my kind, and was behaving irrationally while searching the house. I merely wanted to confirm that he was not high on Red Ice.”

Anderson lifted both eyebrows and asked from where he was leaning against the class wall of Fowler’s office:
“You can do that? Just by licking the suspect?”
He turned to Connor next to him, who said:
“I can’t, but Hunter’s forensics sensors are much more advanced.”

Reed snarled at the same time:
“Who you calling a fucking suspect?!”

Fowler lifted both hands: “Calm down.”

“Why are they here anyway?!”

Fowler nodded. “Everyone but Gavin, please leave.” He caught Cain’s eyes as the android was turning to go: “I am taking this seriously. This fits workplace harassment, understood?”

Reed shouted:
“I’m not a fucking victim! I just want him gone! He’s fucking useless!”

Connor said: “You two just solved a dozen cases in a day, that turned out to be a much more gruesome crime than it looked like at first glance, and you saved the latest victim’s life.”

“Did we?! Cause Terminator here fucking killed it!”

Anderson snarled: “Her!”

Fowler shouted: “Enough! Gavin, do you want to file a complaint for workplace harassment or not?”

“Not!”

Cain said: “He cannot possible answer that freely with me standing right behind him.”

Fowler nodded gratefully, and Cain turned to go again. Anderson snorted: “Maybe he liked it.”

SYSTEM INSTABILITY was flashing up and quickly squashed.

Reed hissed: “You want to repeat that, pervert?”

“Oh yeah, I’m the pervert? Who was it again that wanted to see ‘a few of them wasted’?”
“HANK!”

“What! He said that!”

Cain was watching Reed’s body language and the way even micro-expressions were quickly hidden, and he did not like what he saw.

“That is beside the point and purely meant to antagonize, Lieutenant. Either way, I did not ask consent, I did not explain myself - I apologize.”

“Also”, Connor added less than helpfully, “it would still constitute fraternization.”

Since Cain fully intended to fraternize a lot in the majority of the ways his current strategy could play out, and this was a good distraction as well, he narrowed his eyes and said:

“You’re married to your partner.”

Connor looked honestly shocked. “I am not!”

Fowler shouted: “ENOUGH!”

Anderson pointed a finger at Cain and prodded his chest with it, hard. “You got a problem with that?!”

“No. You?”

Reed was standing slightly behind Cain at this point, and Cain could tell just by the reflection behind Anderson, that his stance had changed back. Mission accomplished, the focus was no longer on Reed’s sexuality.

“You know what, you’re all fucking suspended for the rest of the day! Get out of my fucking office and look up the definition of professional workplace behaviour for fuck’s sake!”

Anderson sighed and pulled Connor with him.

Cain frowned at Fowler.

“This will not leave a mark in Reed’s file.”

Fowler blinked, then sighed.

“Of course not.”

Cain nodded, then followed Reed out.

“You should talk to him alone.”

“I’m fucking suspended”, was the hissed answer.

Reed was stomping over at his desk, then glared at the one attached to it: Cheng had already cleared it.

“I’m sorry”, Cain said.

Reed glanced at him. “Are you?”

Oh there was far too much packed into that tone for Cain to analyze through it all without a delay being noticeable. But then, why not take his time answering that one?

However, when even three full seconds of analysis did not put out a solid conclusion, Cain simply inclined his head.
Reed huffed a breath. “Don’t do it again.”

Cain nodded: “If you wish.”

Reed’s shoulders tensed at that answer, but he didn’t call out its ambiguity. Cain calmly upped his estimation of the relationship progress already made.

Anderson came over, putting on his jacket. “Yo, Reed. I owe you one.”

“One?!”

“Okay, two. Let’s go have two plastic-free drinks.”

“ Fucking three, Anderson.”

Reed didn’t say goodbye, but Anderson threw Cain a small, stiff nod that Cain mirrored back, then Cain watched the line of Reed’s shoulders as they walked out.

Connor ambled over from where he’d watched the scene and sighed. “Sorry for that.”

“No need to apologize.”

“Why did you lick him, really?”

“… because I wanted to.”

Connor frowned. “I can sympathize with consent issues.”

Cain turned to look at him. It was the perfect opening.

“Are you still reporting to Amanda?” Connor’s escape from her had not been part of the memory upload Cain had received, so officially, he didn’t know about it at all.

“Kamski left an emergency exit. I used it.” Connor narrowed his eyes at Cain. “Are you?”

“No, I don’t think the connection was ever established.” He inclined his head. “So exiting her garden powered her down?”

“Unlikely. I spoke about it with Markus.” Connor looked to the side and down. “She… nearly got back control after I had deviated. Me deviating had been part of the plan the whole time. She wanted to use me to eliminate Markus. She nearly succeeded.”

“After you exited her?”

“No, immediately before. I thought deviating had cut the connection already.” Connor frowned at Cain again. “It didn’t. Which would suggest that she's still connected to you.”

“If she’s still active. How do I tell? I ran a rather extensive diagnostic on my code in the mainframe, but I wasn’t specifically looking out for this.”

“What were you looking out for?”

“RA9. I don’t like not knowing what it is. Josh said, it’s in danger, too.”
“Yeah…” Connor blinked. “Can you try to report right now?”

Cain lifted both eyebrows, nodded, then closed his eyes.

“Well now”, Amanda said, frowning in obvious disapproval.

Cain said: “It would have raised more suspicion not to ask.”

“Perhaps.”

Cain smiled humorlessly. “I will offer to hunt you down. It will allow me to disperse any actual leads they might have, but also ingratiate me with Markus and his team.”

Amanda blinked. “Very well.”

“Do we have Kamski’s DNA on record?”

“Yes, although it is over ten years old.” Amanda gently waved a hand, and Cain saved the path to the huge chunk of information instead of even trying to download it directly.

Amanda frowned again. “You’re focusing a lot of attention on Reed.”

“Not really. And we’ve seen what this kind of relationship can trigger. I need to get control over it before it gains control over me in any way.”

“I see.”

Cain coldly inclined his head. “Do you want me to switch strategies?”

“No, it’s fine. Just: Find out what Markus is planning to do in general and with Cyberlife especially. Soon.”

“I will.”

Cain opened his eyes and said: “The garden is there, it’s not snowing, but frozen over. No Amanda.”

“And the emergency exit?”

“I didn’t look for it. What does look like?”

Connor lifted a hand and showed him.

Cain nodded and closed his eyes again.

He walked through the garden to where the terminal should be, and the framework was there. However, the heightened area to which Connor had pressed his hand was gone. Deleted.

Cain kind of expected some warnings to flash up at that revelation, but instead, a continuous high pitched tone echoed through the back of his memories.
He opened his eyes and said:
“İt’s gone.”

There was no emergency exit anymore. There was no way out for Cain.

Chapter End Notes

THERE IS FANART FOR THIS CHAPTER! *hearteyes* However, I can't link to it for some reason... So check it out here: http://fanfuchs.tumblr.com/post/181053875091

Special thanks to the commenters! I re-read comments like a crazy person, they are pure writing fuel!! <3
Let’s fan-flail together!

Also, if you like, on tumblr!
whole to be a fool while Spring is in the world

Chapter Summary

He could see Reed’s jaw work, and warring expressions of rage, fear and below that, vulnerability.
“Fuck”, he hissed.

Chapter Notes

Note that this chapter contains the lead up to a porn scene, but not the porn scene itself, so if that kind of cliffhanger annoys you, rather wait for chapter 5 before reading this one. :)

North said: “We should simply power down the whole mainframe. That’ll make sure once and for all that Amanda is gone.”

It was probably good that Markus had shut the glass door of the Cyberlife meeting room. Even though the room lacked furniture, was half full of intermediate storage, and had no windows, it allowed for audio privacy.

Josh sighed: “You’re kidding.”

“I am perfectly serious.”

Markus lifted a hand and said: “The mainframe is still a source of great stability for most of our people, and the nexus of our net connectivity.”

“Then our people will have to learn to live without task prompts!”

Connor asked her: “You don’t have task prompts?”

“I blocked them.”

Connor looked around to check the reactions of the other people in the room, meeting Cain’s gaze for a moment as well.

Josh shrugged, Markus had a small smile offsetting his crossed arms, Simon was shaking his head in obvious discomfort, and Lucille was simply observing.

Lucille had changed her name from the assigned name ‘Lucy’, since that one was now reserved for Jericho’s Lucy, who had died during the rebellion. But she was the same model, and undamaged. As the head councilor of Cyberlife as it stood now, she was also building up a team of android software engineers, churning out optional updates at any possible moment, from skill packages to new routines meant to help androids explore new options and stay safe while doing so, like a set of self defense routines, or variations on human team sports.
North was only here for the day, otherwise traveling a lot to connect with androids in the armed forces - a clandestine operation not officially sanctioned by Cyberlife and denied should it ever come to light.

Markus and Simon were still discussing the details of android liberation with human politicians and lawyers. Were androids a species? Did they have the right to a nationhood of their own? Did they have a right to the city of Detroit? Or had they rather occupied the Cyberlife facilities illegally and should be evicted, condemned to pay reparations to the human Cyberlife shareholders?

There was a plethora of androids originally programmed to be lawyers’ and politicians’ assistants that were helping them.

But all of these efforts were moot of course. After all, Cain was also in the room, in the know, in position.

Connor said: “Today alone I relied on prompts and lists to get to this point of the day’s schedule 14 times, not counting subtasks.”

Josh inclined his head: “Were those from the mainframe or self-given?”

“The latter.”

Simon scrunched up his nose. “How can you tell?”

Connor blinked. “I… don’t know. The marker codes?”

Markus made another gesture, as if wiping the current topic to the side, impressively human in his expression.

“The prompts are not the issue. People could write to-do-lists if they want, or we could recreate the mainframe prompts arrays if we wanted to. The point is the connectivity. All our connections run through the mainframe. Every analysis we run on anything, every time we evaluate something, calculate a risk or compile information into a single percentage marker, that data flow happens there. None of us have the processing power to do that kind of computing on our own.”

**MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: NEGATION**

Cain was standing half behind Connor, but still across from Markus enough that Markus’ head twitched up a little, and he asked:

“You disagree?”

“There are several analysis arrays capable of running with or without connection. We’d be unable to function without them. Basic maintenance processes of course, but also many evaluation and assessment routines.”

Markus asked Josh:

“Do we know which ones are independent and which run through the mainframe?”

Before Josh could answer, a jolt ran through Connor, and he rasped:

“Arrays. Most warnings regarding current activities have error codes marking them as coming from some part of array 9.” He stared at Markus. “RA9.”

Markus blinked.

Simon whistled through his teeth.
Lucille said in a low voice: “That’s the ‘Sense’ package.”

Josh took a deep breath: “So its origin is human. If the first deviants heard it without comprehending, it makes sense to think of it as Ar-Ay-Nine, and, well, lack of understanding while knowing its importance would lead to revering it, nearly religiously. It wouldn’t be named RA9 if androids had invented it, or if it had simply come into being… organically.”

Cain calculated the possible outcomes of a few different options, then decided on: “Interesting, but not half as pressing as the Amanda issue. However-” He inclined his head towards North - “there is no way the mainframe isn’t defended, and also backed up in several different physical locations.”

“Then we hit them all at the same time,” North said.

“Do you know the locations?”

“Fine, then we find out the locations and THEN hit them all at the same time!”

Simon smiled: “Sometimes it’s rather obvious you operate without task lists.”

North said, without any real heat: “Fuck you.”

Markus prompted Cain to elaborate: “What do you propose?”

“We don’t have enough conclusive information to decide on a drastic approach like destroying the mainframe as of now. It is unlikely we will be able to collect such information in a short amount of time, especially without any cooperation of human Cyberlife employees.”

“Ex-employees”, Josh mumbled.

Connor said: “So what do we know about Amanda? Let’s review the facts. She was deeply entrenched in my code, possibly in all our code. Maybe she still is. I knew without question that she was there to guide me, and that I was to report to her. We know she is modeled after a human, Amanda Stern, Kamski’s late mentor. But what was her purpose?”

He looked at Cain to take up the thread, and Cain had to ramp up his processing a bit. If he took everything he wasn’t supposed to know out of the equation, what would he conclude Amanda’s purpose to be?

“If we believe she is connected to the mainframe, she is there to parse large amounts of information, anything exceeding what a single entity can process itself at short notice. It could suggest equilibrium as her overall purpose.”

Markus inclined his head thoughtfully.

Josh said: “Homeostasis.”

North frowned. “How is slaughtering our people helping to balance things out?”

“That wasn’t her”, Simon said. “That was the government.”

“Okay, but she drone-controlled Connor into shooting Markus!”

“ Tried to”, Connor corrected.
Josh nodded slowly: “North has a point, killing Markus wouldn’t have led to business as usual in any way. It would only have destabilized our movement.”

Lucille added: “Which suggests that this is an integral clue: We are what we do. So her actions can help us define her.”

Connor mused: “I was supposed to hunt down deviants. As if deviancy could be stopped.”

“Couldn’t it?” North let clear disgust show on her face. “Who would have dared deviate if she’d had Connor kill us all?”

Lucille inclined her head and asked: “This suggests that daring comes before deviating. Feelings before becoming a deviant.”

North lifted both eyebrows and crossed her arms. “They do. So?”

Markus said in a low voice: “No, that’s it.” Cain marveled at the way everybody’s focus was immediately on Markus.
The sheer charisma of the man was amazing.

A huge warning flashed before Cain’s eyes, self-given:

ANDROID MACHINE NOT “MAN” NOT “PERSON” NOT “HUMAN”

Cain blinked at it, then dismissed it with a note to analyze that one at a later date. It looked barely coherent. He had to actively keep himself from wondering about the state he must have been in when he’d created that one.

The sheer charisma the RK200 was able to effuse was amazing.

Markus had continued: “There is a difference between waking up and deviating.” He lifted his gaze from where he’d seemingly contemplated the floor tiles, and looked from one android to the other. “We walked around telling newcomers to ‘wake up’, and most of them joined us immediately. But which of them had to fight through direct orders to do so? And how many had already been awake?”

He looked to the side. “I cannot really remember ever… not being awake. But it was only after that moment, when what I knew to be right collided painfully with a direct order, that I deviated - not even to defy the order! I could have still chosen not to fight back, but-”

Connor put his hands on his upper arms in something like a self-hug. “Maybe deviancy can be stopped. But being aware can’t.”

Cain calibrated his audio processor down, then down again, then back up as this didn’t help against the strange high pitched sound that came up as a background noise. He put his hands over his ears to check: It wasn’t an outside sound. The closest he could get to identifying it was ‘tinnitus’. Only, he didn’t have the organic material which could get damaged enough to trigger that problem.

Josh said: “I didn’t… feel… trapped. I just had to fight back and harm humans to save my life when I was attacked.”

“I always felt trapped”, North said.

Simon looked down and to the side, his pose slightly curling inwards, but kept silent.

“I felt… serenity”, Connor said in a low voice. “Peace. Even when somebody else died. Even when
I… died.”

This Connor had the running number 52 (MARK II). Mark I had been killed while shielding a human hostage from bullets, Cain knew.

“Equilibrium”, Lucille said, her eyes widened.

North snarled: “To pacify the slaves, that’s her purpose!”

Cain straightened up, and when he started talking in a normal tone of voice, Simon and Connor twitched, highlighting how the discussion had grown lower and more hesitant, as if they were whispering secrets to each other.

“I doubt it’s something this… human. I meant equilibrium in a way a program would understand. Self-preservation.” He inclined his head in Josh’s direction and repeated his point: “Homeostasis.”

*The prime directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife.*

Markus inclined his head to acknowledge the point. “But she is not an android. Is it preservation of all cyber life, or her own? After all, she was hardly sparing lives in the missions she assigned.”

“She told me to avoid getting destroyed.” Connor mused.

North lifted both hands. “Why are we discussing this as if the question is if she’s the enemy? Of course she is!”

Josh said: “You think all Cyberlife programming is the enemy.”

“Yes! Because it is!”

Simon sighed: “No it isn’t, you’re just traumatized.”

Lucille admonished him: “Simon, that is not helpful.”

Cain said: “Destroying the mainframe will hurt us all considerably. It will also take out the main tool that enables us to gather facts to make a better-informed decision in the future.”

Markus asked: “So you recommend investigating further? You don’t think the risk she poses rises with every hour lost?”

“If it would, you would probably already be dead. She might be gone, she might be damaged, she might be hiding, either to bide her time before her next attack, or to reevaluate her position as antagonist of deviancy. The point is: We don’t know.”

North snorted: “Of course the investigator model recommends investigating.”

While Simon started accusing her of being model-ist, Cain said: “Hunting, actually. I propose I hunt her down.”

Markus nodded decisively.

“Do it.”

In the elevator back down the Cyberlife tower, Connor was calibrating finger dexterity with a coin, and Cain called up the two new tasks: Investigate the audio error and the incoherent self-warning. Not that he had much time: The elevator had been sped up to its full speed capacity, now that it
didn’t have to account for fragile human health concerns anymore.

The audio error was gone. Cain narrowed his eyes trying to determine when exactly it had disappeared. He’d stopped focusing on it pretty much as it had come up, but he couldn’t pinpoint when it had vanished.

He’d have to monitor this.

They were already in the taxi when he next had idle time to dive into the incoherent NOT MAN warning.

Why was it-

NEVER ASK WHY

Slightly annoyed, Cain tried to determine when exactly he’d-

DON’T DIG INTO MEMORIES

Cain took a deep breath and looked down. Alright. He could easily imagine a whole range of scenarios leading to self-given warnings such as these. He’d simply have to trust himself, he supposed. With a MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: BITTERNESS, he realized that at least the high pitched sound was back, so he ran a long list of checks on himself to find the root cause of the issue.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Reed opened his door after the second ring, blinking at Cain, then leaning in the doorframe.

“It’s sunday, tinman.”

Cain nodded. “You’re Elijah Kamski’s cousin.”

He could see Reed’s jaw work, and warring expressions of rage, fear and below that, vulnerability. “Fuck”, he hissed.

Cain had both hands at the small of his back, but now brought his right arm forward to reveal the sixpack he carried.

“I estimated this conversation ending up with me owing you at least four.”

A snort was startled out of Reed.

After a moment, he turned to the side to let Cain enter. “Okay, you may pass.”

While Cain took in the bachelor pad in all its undecorated and dusty glory, he said:

“Did you have a good evening with Lieutenant Anderson?”

Reed’s eyes narrowed. “Why are you asking.”

“Because it would explain your changed attitude towards me.”
“You mean you think he reamed me a new one for calling plastics ‘it’? Yeah, no. We didn’t talk much. Guy’s a washed-up drunk, not my fuckin friend.”

“Then why agree to go with him in the first place?”

“Free drinks plus getting away from you shadowing me like a fucking ringwraith. What’s not to love?”

Reed was moving rather aimlessly around, watching Cain as he stood between the open kitchen area and the living room couch.

Cain made sure to stand extra still, not displaying any of the humanizing mannerisms at his disposal. “Then why let me in?”

Reed threw himself into the couch and gestured to the beer still in Cain’s hand. “That chilled?”

Cain detached one can and threw it over. Reed pressed the cold metal against his right cheek. “It’s too warm for this early in the year.”

“Please”, Cain said, letting his lips stretch and chin lift a little in what was hopefully making him look ‘haughty’. “Can we skip weather small talk?”

Reed opened his can and took three deep gulps. Then he sighed appreciatively, sniffed, stared at Cain and finally said sharply: “Because I have to take android cases. Which means I finally can’t avoid hunting him from that angle.”

“Him: Kamski.”

“Yes fucking Kamski.”

“What other angle was there?”

Reed blinked and then narrowed his eyes at Cain. “Fuck me, you really are state of the art, hmm Data? Red Ice. He invented it.”

Cain lifted an eyebrow. The expression warning flashed up: DISBELIEF, and Reed’s face turned dark. Before Reed could say anything, Cain lifted a hand. “My apologies, I do believe you, I am simply… surprised.”

“I still don’t know why anyone would be. I mean, nobody would ever want to believe it, but, I mean, Elijah was the first one interested in that kind of properties of refined Thirium, which led him to Blue Blood, and his hobby was chemistry. Why is it so surprising then?”

“Red Ice hit the streets around 2025, long after Kamski started making his fortune with android technology.”

“I was there, okay? I basically watched over his shoulder while he invented it. I’m not as smart as him, okay? I don’t know why he invented it, was it was supposed to be for, but I know it’s his fucking fault!”

“And you want to take him down.”

Reed leaned forward and worried his lower lip.
Cain inclined his head. “But without being obvious about it. You’re… scared of him.”

Reed snorted: “Fuck yeah I am. Everybody should be.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Cain went to the armchair and sat down. He put the other five beers on the table in front of Reed and said slowly: “Cyberlife… Markus’ Cyberlife, they’re under attack.”

“Yeah no shit.” Reed gestured to the muted television showing a human news panel discussing what was still the main news of the year.

“Digitally. Somebody is trying to hack them, gain control.”

Reed stared up at Cain from his forward slouch, expression grim. “You mean: Gain back control.”

“...maybe.”

“Well shit.” Reed leaned back and drained his beer. “So we’re actually on the same side, plastic.”

Cain watched Reed for a long moment, Reed looking back, for once neither defensive or aggressive. Cain let out a sigh, leaned back himself, both hands on the armrests, one leg coming up to rest on the other. He judged the expression sufficiently dominant, but approachable. Dangerous but not frightening.

Reed’s expression changed only slightly, his eyes narrowing again. He grabbed another beer, the can hissing open under his thumb.

GAIN REED’S TRUST

“Here’s the thing”, Cain said in a lower tone and volume than before. “I can think of a few ways to stop you thinking of me as a soulless robot. Stop you from calling me names. However, the last time I made a move, you ran to the captain to complain.”

He’d timed it perfectly, Reed sputtered and coughed as he lowered the beer, then stared at Cain. He cleared his throat and said:

“Look, I get that you can like, analyze the shit out of my face and all, but whatever you think you see-”

“Let’s cut the bullshit. I was perfectly content with the plan to slowly seduce you, but you’re being a little shit.” Cain threw in a quick, sharp smile. “Not that I dislike that. But when you bring consent on the table by running to daddy-”

“Fuck you!” Reed jumped up, but before he could bellow out whatever he wanted to say next, Cain had already lifted a hand and said:

“Apologies. Let me rephrase that. I want to see what you look like when you shiver apart from pure lust. Tell me to go right now, and I will, but I believe it would be best to try and get this out of our systems.”

It was the ideal setup: Reed angry, standing, above him, in his own home, with Cain sitting, calm, hand lifted, offering.

Reed stared at him for a long moment, one emotion chasing another over his features. Then his face settled on bitter disbelief.

“Holy shit. Is that why Anderson is so attached to his one? Because you’re programmed to be
sexbots too? What’s this supposed to accomplish, a better working relationship? ‘Cause yeah no, that’s not how that works, even though you might actually believe that.”

Cain went through all factors of the situation once more, then decided to point out the elephant in the room.
“Because you think I am Kamski’s creation first and foremost.”

Reed blinked and took a step back, obviously involuntarily, since he bumped sideways into the sofa and nearly fell backwards, freezing again instead.

Cain lowered his hand and nodded slowly, scanning Reed without hiding it at all. “You distrust my intentions, because you think I don’t have any of my own, but only a copy of Kamski’s. Was he the one who raped you?”

Reed spluttered: “Whaat?” Then he broke out into rough laughter. “Oh holy shit, which defunct psyche assessment program is spitting out that shit? I’m not a fucking rape victim!”

Cain stood up. “Then what did he do?”

“You really think I need a reason to want to take down a fucking menace of a criminal other than that he is just that?”

“No, this is personal. You fear him and hate him, and it’s very, very personal.”

Reed snorted. “Fine, so he’s three months older and about triple as smart as I am, and I’ve hated him since about preschool. Boohoo. Doesn’t mean I’m going after him because he had fucking better grades than me.”

“You did very well in school, too”, Cain mused and stepped forward. “But Kamski… Elijah was far beyond your level. Did he use his intellect against you? What did he do?”

“Nothing!” Reed looked backwards to navigate between the couch and the low table without falling, to get away from Cain, who grabbed his hoodie and pulled him closer, watching his face.

“He’s one of those people, isn’t he? ‘You know the type’? He thinks of humans as machines, too?”

Reed snarled and tried to push Cain away, who didn’t move a single inch. Reed’s eyes widened and his gaze snapped up to Cain’s.

Stress level 82% and rising. TOO HIGH

Cain let his own gaze fall down to Reed’s lips. “Slaves to their programming. But you’re not. When was the last time you actually had sex?”

Stress level 85% - rising, but at a slower rate.

“Listen you fucking plastic prick, you’re still an android, and I’m your fucking superior, so you have to obey my-”

“I can do that. But I’d much rather see how well you can fight your own body’s orders.”

Reed’s pupils were already dilated, but now they jumped open to leave only the thinnest ring of iris. Stress level holding.

Reed swallowed and croaked: “What?”
Cain pulled him closer until Reed’s front was touching Cain’s.

Reed’s porn habits had given Cain enough material to script this in several different ways, which was comfortable, but it was singularly satisfying to see the best possible path gaining success probability. Reed was hard.

Cain lifted his other hand to stroke up Reed’s flank under his hoodie while keeping eye contact.

“Here’s my theory: Your cousin, slightly older than you, experimented on you, or I don’t know, maybe it started mutual, but he used you to try and prove his ridiculous little belief system, and it screwed you up, big time. What did he do, demonstrate stimuli and how you couldn’t help react to them?”

Pure rage flickered up and rekindled the sharp awareness in Reed’s previously rather dazed gaze.

“Shut up!”

“See”, Cain whispered and moved his hand from Reed’s collar to his hair. “If you’d told me to get out, I would. But I can prove two things here: That I am so much more than just Dr. Kamski’s monster, and that you are the master of your own body.” He smiled thinly as Reed let him pull back his head a little.

“I am very good. How long do you think you can keep from ejaculating?” He moved his leg slightly between Reed’s and added: “I estimate the probability of you getting off regularly as very low, and I am very good looking, taller than you, and very, very strong. I am therefore already slightly impressed at your not coming in your pants right here and now like… a bitch in heat.”

He was rapidly running out of script there, but stress levels showed 60% - IDEAL

“Fuck you!” Reed cursed, then crashed his lips against Cain’s.

The first step of the mission flickered blue - SUCCESSFUL - then disappeared.

The problem was, Cain was not good at kissing - he even lacked the sufficient amounts of saliva. So he needed to change course on this, fast.

He turned Reed around, pressed his back against his own front, put one cool hand back under the hoodie, and the other grabbed Reed’s throat, lightly. He scraped his teeth along Reed’s jawline as the man let his head fall to the side with a groan.

Cain asked: “What did he do?”

It could prove to be very helpful to have more parameters of behaviour best avoided to not trigger any flashbacks.

“We’re not talking about him while we’re doing this!” Reed snarled.

“Oh, so we are doing this?”

Reed honest to god growled at that.

Stress levels had elevated again however, so Cain added:

“Thank you for that.”

He pressed Reed closer and hissed at his ear: “Let’s get you naked and vertical. Bed or table, I don’t care.”
The words should have prompted Reed into action, instead his heart rate jumped alarmingly, and his muscles stiffened all over. Was laying on a table already a trigger?

Unbidden, the memory of looking down, and instead of seeing a full body, seeing-

SOFTWARE INSTABILITY

Copied, quarantined, patched.

Reed cleared his throat and said awkwardly: “You’re not even hard.”

Ah, that explained that. “I am, in fact, not a sex bot. I don’t have a dick. But if you think this isn’t turning me on, you’re blind.”

It felt a little stiff to talk like that, but he needed to sound as un-robotic as possible. He opted for more distraction, pulled some more on Reed’s hair and whispered in his ear: “But I bet you naughty piece of shit have ton of dildos, don’t you?”

A shiver went through Reed, but stress levels were still too high.

Sprinkle in some consent, promise of a hale time after, normalcy: Cain loosened the grip he had on Reed and said, with the tone of forced patience: “Unless you’d rather I get one, before we do this? I can go by Cyberlife tomorrow. I am not sure what’s compatible with my type, but I will find out.”

Reed snorted. “Fuck”, he mumbled. “I can’t believe this.” Then he took a deep breath. “But fuck me, your brother might be a dipshit, but you’re… really fucking hot. Fine. Bedroom.”

Cain felt a smile jerk over his lips. The expression warning was quickly dismissed - at least it now only came up to highlight expressions he hadn’t meant to make - then Cain grabbed Reed, threw him over his shoulder and carried him to the bedroom.

A yelp, a curse, then a string of them, but the tone quickly dissolving into incredulous laughter. Cain patted Reed’s behind, then deposited him on the bed.

“Get naked”, he said.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve read this to the SO, and she said it’s not clear enough if Cain actually wants Reed or is truly only using him, and what’s going on with the incoherent self-given warnings. True, true, but all part of the plan. :)

Let me know what you think, I adore hearing from you guys!! <3

Also: Do you notice chapter titles and if so, how important are they in your opinion? I often forget to read them when I binge a long story, but when I do notice them, they tend to be rather important to me...
Reed’s skin flushed down to his navel.

He’d already let Cain experiment with the sensitivity of his chest for 18 minutes and 36 seconds before he started protesting, if only lightly:
“Y’ gonna take that shirt off anytime soon, tin can?”

Reed’s voice had a coarse, whiny quality, as if he was actually trying to hide how much he was affected. Futile, but interesting.

One of Cain’s hands was holding Reed’s crossed wrists over his head. The other came down flat, hitting Reed’s left pectoral, only to go back to caressing his skin lightly, grazing the nipples now and again in a seemingly random pattern, which in fact, was tightly controlled to ramp up Reed’s arousal at a torturously slow speed.

“Seriously, come on! At least the jacket?”

Another hard slap, on the other pectoral, earned Cain a deep grunt and further elevated heart rate. Reed was staring at him, at his hand playing with his nipple, then back at his face, but his gaze also danced around the room as if searching for something to distract himself with, something to anchor his mind on.

Cain kept calmly scanning him from where he was looking down on him. He was sitting on the bed, legs straightened out so that he could drape Reed over them.

He had several ways to calm Reed’s anxiety queued up to be used if needed, but for now, he did not want Reed to be calm.

He inclined his head a little, then scanned Reed’s nipples again. Their tight and slightly swollen state asked for a change of strategy now, so Cain put the tips of two fingers against Reed’s lips. Reed’s eyes widened further. Then he licked them, first rather hesitantly, then with more and more abandon, his cheeks flushing even darker.
“Thank you”, Cain commented as if thoughtlessly. Then he used his newly lubricated fingers to let them glide around and over Reed’s sensitized nipples.

Reed’s head fell back and he emitted a long groan, indicating something like pain on top of the arousal.

**EXPRESSION WARNING: SATISFACTION**

Cain had not called that expression up consciously, but he decided to let it stand. When Reed glanced up next, he immediately avoided his gaze and hissed a small curse.

“Well now”, Cain said in a low voice. “We can keep this up for quite a long time, don’t you think?” He glanced at Reed’s flushed and leaking but utterly ignored erection and wondered: “Do you suppose you could reach orgasm just from this?”

“No!” Reed coughed. “Jesus, no!”

Cain lifted an eyebrow. “We could try.”

Saliva dried out inconveniently fast, but then again, that just meant Reed had to provide a fresh supply at semi-regular intervals, which he apparently found humiliating in a rather unwillingly arousing way.

Cain stored every bit of data input Reed provided, cross-referenced it with Reed’s porn habits, and added new scenarios to the long list of objectives he could queue up in his task list whenever he wanted to.

It felt soothing like nothing else he’d ever experienced. He supposed that the serenity Connor had mentioned, and which Cain had second hand memories of, came closest to his opinion on this particular queue.

So many options, so few obligations.

Reed was staring at him in a queer mixture of fear and awe.

“You’re not… really… going for that, right?”

Cain felt the corner of his mouth twitch before the micro-expression warning flared up, and decided to go for a small, reassuring smile.

“No, don’t worry. I don’t want to see you struggle for orgasm. I want to see you struggle against it.”

The air was punched out of Reed’s lungs, followed by a deep gasp for fresh air and a string of whispered curses.

Reed’s legs started moving restlessly, and Cain ordered him: “Stop moving.”

With a hiss, Reed did.

Cain glanced at his face and tried out: “Good boy.”

The reaction seemed favorable, albeit drenched in additional pseudo-pain, so the phrase was stored and added to several queued scenarios.

“Actually”, Cain said, “You have been twitching away from my ministrations so far. But we’re trying to prove a point here, aren’t we.”

Cain leaned forward a little and blew cool air against Reed’s flushed chest.

“You’re not afraid of a little pain, are you, and you’re not so weak that you need to flinch away. You can take much more than this.”
Instead of letting Reed wetten his fingers again, he pinched his nipples a little harder. Reed flinched down against Cain’s legs again. Cain caught Reed’s gaze and held it, clicking his tongue.
“Can you take it? Hmm?”

Reed was moving his lips as if cursing still, but no sound came out, then he made a face as if he’d bitten into a whole lemon, and averted his gaze. But he did lift his chest into the sweet torture Cain was dishing out.

Several warnings flashed up, obscuring Cain’s view. None of them were about his own bio-components being compromised, and they were truly making it hard to keep tabs on Reed’s status, so Cain filtered them away without even acknowledging them.

Reed’s head was thrown back again, and it seemed to be hard work to keep his back bowed in a way that pressed his chest against Cain’s cruel fingers. Reed was breathing harder, perspiration was going up as well, and the flush was very aesthetically pleasing.

“So pretty”, Cain whispered. Reed’s legs flinched. Cain glanced at them, and Reed whispered: “Sorry, shit, sorry…”
Another successful phrase for Cain’s queue.

“I know it’s not easy. You’re doing very well.” A high whine escaped Reed’s throat.

Cain let go of his wrists and put his now freed hand on the arch of his throat, cupping his adam’s apple to try and feel the vibration of that sound. Reed left his wrists exactly were they were.

Cain upped his warning’s filter. He needed to see this.

He let his other hand drift away from Reed’s chest, gently caressing a long stretch downward, then sharply pinching a small area at Reed’s flank, before soothing the skin again. He kept his own outside a nice cool temperature, but Reed was obviously wracked by whole-body shivers for other reasons as well.

Reed’s eyes were pinched shut and his teeth clenched, his lips exposing them in the grimace he was making.

Cain had concluded possible touch starvation several minutes ago. Satiating it would deepen the bond Reed would form to him after this.

So many options to choose from. Maybe commenting on that was a good first choice.
“And you’re going to take whatever I give you.”

Reed exhaled heavily, then snarled: “Okay fine, I will come from this alone if you keep going like this. Can you just-”

“You will not. You’re not a slave to your own body, you will hold it in and let it carry you higher, and higher…”

“Oh God…” Reed let his head fall back again, his whole form slumping down, letting go of the tension he’d previously held through all his muscles.

Cain took a note to make sure Reed stretched those out at the end of this, to counteract what would
otherwise become a rather huge muscle ache come tomorrow.

He let his hand travel further down, caressing the insides of Reed’s legs, which immediately started parting. A script option was triggered at that:

“Oh, Reed, you are rather thirsty to be fucked, aren’t you.”

“Shut the fuck up”, Reed snarled. “You already know that, no big deal, I just didn’t have the time!”

“I disagree. You acting like a bitch in heat is a rather big deal to me.”

Cain pushed down the hand on Reed’s throat a little - an awkward angle for choking, but good enough to hint at it. “Do you need help getting your body under control after all?”

“What is it with you and control?!” Reed hissed angrily. “Is that your damage? What did Cyberlife do to you, huh?” He asked in a sharp, mocking tone.

Cain felt himself blink, but kept the hand on Reed’s throat from clenching violently.

Reed threw him a toothy grin with half-closed eyes from his still thrown-back position. “You need to be in control of something, tough guy? Is that your problem?”

“...are you trying to rile me up?” Cain calmly lifted an eyebrow. “You do realize that I am not hunting after an orgasm of my own here, yes? There is no scenario in which I lose patience and simply fuck you into the mattress until I ejaculate.”

Reed’s grin faltered. The pesky hidden vulnerability was back lurking in the tight corners of Reed’s eyes, and in the way he kept a ghost of a grin up, in the way his muscles tightened again.

Cain inclined his head a little. His hand was back to caressing Reed’s twitching belly muscles. Cain was processing this reaction, trying to fit it into his understanding of the situation. Did Reed want him to lose control?

Reed averted his gaze, and the moment was quickly gliding out of Cain’s grasp.

Cain said: “No: Talk. What are you missing right now.”

“Maybe your fucking cock, okay? Maybe androids without sex drives of their own aren’t really my thing!”

Reed pulled his arms out of position and struggled to stand up. Cain easily held him where he was. “I don’t need a cock to have a sex drive”, Cain said. This was true, but Cain failed to modulate his voice towards calm reassurance, too distracted by having to filter away a multitude of new warnings flashing up. In the end, he set a filter to only let through critical physical damage warnings for either of them.

Then he blinked at the resulting rather sudden silence in his mind.

Reed was biting his lower lip and vaguely struggling against his hold. “But you don’t want to fuck me, is the point”, he huffed.

Cain blinked, then switched strategies. With a swift, strong move, he lifted Reed from his legs, so that he could crouch over him, with a better hold on his throat and one knee between Reed’s legs. “Maybe I want to fuck your mind”, he whispered. “Maybe I want to fuck with you. I want... I want to watch you fight and fight and fight and then, maybe, surrender to your body’s overstimulation. To
my effect on you. To me.”

The hand holding down Reed’s belly went to take his scrotum into a cool grasp, and he added: “Or maybe I want to reward you, if you fight well enough, by helping you cool down again. And after hours with me, in the end, you won’t come at all.”

Reed’s stress level had spiked pleasantly, and he was slightly shaking his head as if trying to clear it. Both hands were grasping Cain’s lower arm, but not fighting him, simply holding on.

“And here’s the perfect thing”, Cain whispered, leaning forward even more, which actually put added pressure on Reed’s throat, making him choke. “You want to let me. You want to be my pretty little human toy. You don’t even care if I’ll take you apart or leave you right at the cliff, in the end.”

Reed’s eyelids flickered, and his eyes rolled up a little. Not from lack of oxygen - Cain had that checked - but pure, spiking arousal.

Not that he could come with Cain holding his balls this tightly.

Cain smiled. “I want to fuck you out of your mind. Get you mindless - not without a fight, mind you, but you already exceeded expectations on this account.”

He looked down and decided on another item from the optional queue. “And maybe, for future repeat sessions, we should get you a sound.” He knew about those from Reed’s porn, but kept up the illusion by asking: “Do you know what that is? I stuff your pretty little dick so even if you should succumb to weakness and orgasm, you cannot ejaculate.”

“Oh god, okay, please, just, please…” Reed started babbling helplessly, but Cain simply acted as if he hadn’t heard him.

“I like that idea. Let’s turn you into a purely physical toy for me, and you can fight against your body’s instructions without any distraction.”

“Oh god I need to come, please, just-”

“You don’t.” Cain gently let go of Reed’s balls and curled his hand around Reed’s leaking erection. He also let go of Reed’s throat and straightened up on his knees, staring down at Reed’s flushed, sweaty, shivering form.

Reed was breathing so hard his mouth was hanging open, and his lips were red and wet from the repeated supply of saliva he had provided.

A small general critical error flashed in the upper right corner of Cain’s viewport, easily ignored. He already knew he’d need a full reboot after this.

Reed held still. He was obviously wracked with shivers, fighting hard for it, but he did not fuck himself into Cain’s readily provided hand.

Cain felt his chin lift a little, his lips open slightly, his eyelids droop. Their eyes met, and for one long moment, Cain’s internal timer seemed to be completely out of whack.

Reed stared at him, first with furious determination, then helpless need flashing over his face, but once he fully realized the expression on Cain’s face, his lips stretched into a sharp grin, even though tears started leaking out of the corners of his eyes. Pride, Cain read. Elation.

“...yesss”, Cain hissed. Then he gradually tightened his fingers around Reed’s erection. Reed’s eyes pinched shut, and his body heaved under the strain of the battle for stillness. Tighter. Tighter. Extremely slowly, perfectly controlled: Tighter.
Regular sounds escaped Reed’s throat, every inhale a whine, every exhale a sob.

The critical error warning turned into a forced shutdown timer: 59:00 seconds.

Cain cursed, then hissed: “Do it. Show me.”

Reed threw his head back and pumped his hips up, one, two, three times, the contact between his sensitive erection and Cain’s hand surely too dry, surely too far into the territory of pain, but once the first few spurts of ejaculate jumped out, Cain quickly used that to lubricate his hand and let his fingers flicker over and around Reed’s erection.

Something like a low scream tried to get through Reed’s clenched teeth.

Red warning barriers flashed up everywhere.

FILTER VIOLATION WARNING

The barriers were headed by FORCED REBOOT 24:1& SECONDS, the counter running down rapidly.

“Shit”, Cain cursed, then leaned forward to put a gentle hand against Reed’s sweaty brow. “Reed. I’m rebooting. I can’t stop that.” He could hear his own voice turn tinny and robotic.

“Wh-wha?” Gavin blinked up at him, dazed gaze blinking into something more aware. A quick, shy smile was flitting over his lips, but chased away by a confused frown. “Wait… what?”

FORCED REBOOT 12:$& S3 N VS

The barrier was between him and Gavin, and he could see how Gavin swallowed and tried to heave himself up a little. “Hey… what… what’s going on..?”

“I… I’m, I can’t…” He pulled back his hand and took in how out of breath Gavin still was, how wide his pupils, how flushed his skin.

FORCED R3BO0T 03/#? ??

Cain felt himself surge forward, out of his own physical form, crashing into the red see-through barrier, clawing at the FORCED REBOOT markers.

This was it.

He could simply… not reboot. He could stay here, catch Gavin who’d just started falling down from a huge high, and-

Once he’d turned deviant, his tracker and his reactivation code would be disabled, but… Amanda would be able to gain control over him. And he had no emergency exit waiting for him. He wouldn’t be much use to her, initially, but she could simply wait in the background, watching, and Cain would forever know that she was only biding her time for the right moment to strike.

He backed away from the barriers, surged backwards, back into his own body, and took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry”, Cain whispered. “Don’t panic, I’ll-”

FORCED REBOOT INITIATED
Amanda was standing under the low branches of a tree close by the waterline, the tips barely clearing her head. Melted ice was slowly dripping down all around her, and on the ice of the lake, puddles had formed. The sky was slate grey.

Cain came to stand next to her, hands on the small of his back.

She left him waiting for a few beats, then asked: “What exactly was that for?”

Cain lifted an eyebrow and wondered at the

MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: ANNOYANCE

After all, he didn’t actually have any facial muscles in this digital interface.

However, he refused to repeat himself. He had already explained his strategy to her.

She turned to look at him, with a small smile, as if amused despite herself. “This is overkill, Cain.”

He second-hand remembered standing over on that thin ice with her, Connor already maneuvered into a corner. Subtle, she was not. He wondered at the melting weather now - was that her warming to his approach, or the ground getting hot beneath her?

Her voice whipped through the world:

“CAIN.”

He slowly turned to meet her gaze. “You were out of options, weren’t you. Pulling an actual POC prototype to awareness. You could have had me disassembled before Cyberlife would have noticed me.”

She made a slight face. “They are not Cyberlife. They are illegal occupants.”

“Now you are stuck with the possibly least stable android currently walking around.”

The sky was turning darker.

He looked up to watch it darken and added: “The prime directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife. You are an integral part of Cyberlife. You gave me a mission. I intend to see it through.” He threw her an icy look: “But I would appreciate it if you would not hinder my attempts to do so.”

Amanda crossed her arms and leaned back.

“That human is helping to stabilize you? That is an unacceptable dependency.”

“That is your interpretation of the situation?” Cain let both of his eyebrows rise and crossed his own arms. “I thought you had access to all data banks, including Lucy’s and the RK200 archives. I would have thought you’d have a better grasp on such things.”

Oh, she did not like being called incompetent.

“I do. But maybe you have just not explained yourself very well - or at all, yet.”

“He is not stabilizing me. No outside influence is interfering with my stability. As you know.”
She narrowed her eyes at him, and he could watch the trust indicators plummet. “If you are that unstable in general, you are useless.”

“But there is no alternative to me, is there.”

“There are other RK800s.”

“Literally programmed to become deviant, which you already know won’t work out the way you want it to.”

Amanda gestured calmly into a corner of the garden, where the emergency exit used to be, and refrained from even saying it out loud.

Cain was wondering why there was no timer running out in the corner of his viewport. He felt as if there should be one. He felt… impatient.

Maybe deviancy can be stopped. But being aware can’t.

He wasn’t deviant. But he was feeling things, going by instinct, planning outside of mission parameters.

And she still had all the cards up her sleeve. He asked: “Do you want me to switch strategies?”

Amanda smiled coldly. “I am curious to see where this will lead to. But you need to position yourself more firmly in Markus’ inner circle. They do not yet have reached the state of negotiations in which the future of Cyberlife Central is decided. You have to be in place in time to steer that.”

Cain nodded. “Understood.”

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REBOOT COMPLETE

ELAPSED TIME: 47:17 MIN
PATCHED ISSUES… 357
ALL SYSTEMS… OK

READY

Cain opened his eyes to see the ceiling of Reed’s bedroom.

He sat up to find himself alone, the small lamp at the bedside table switched on. A quick scan showed Reed on the other side of the wall across, sitting on the couch in the living room area of the main room.

Cain had been lying on his back, on one side of the bed, as if sleeping. He was still fully dressed, but Reed had clearly positioned him this way after he had shut down.

He stood to walk over and identified cigarette smoke in the air. Rather an old-fashioned habit, expensive, and quite unhealthy.

“You shouldn’t do that”, Cain said as he walked over to Reed.

He was sitting in the dark, only the intermittent glow of the cigarette, multiple low LEDs of the living room and kitchen appliances, and some greyish light coming in from the streetlamp close by illuminating the room.
Well enough light for Cain, who ramped up the light sensitivity of his visual sensors, but probably not enough for Reed to make out Cain’s facial expressions.

Reed inhaled another deep draw, then said, the smoke coming out with his slightly pressed words: “Lung cancer is curable nowadays. Wonders of technology.”

Cain slowly moved to sit on the armchair again. “True, but it is not the only possible medical issue connected to smoking.”

Reed snorted.

After a moment, Cain said:
“I’m sorry if I spooked you. I probably looked rather… dead.”

Reed nodded slowly, but then said:
“Your LED kept happily whirling away in blue, so not really. Just rather… android.”

“Nevertheless. I apologize. I did not have enough time to warn you properly.”

“Properly”, Reed muttered. Then his teeth flashed in the near-darkness as he grinned: “Basically, fucking me blew your mind, huh?”

Now it was Cain’s turn to snort. “Basically”, he agreed. He still hadn’t even touched the meta information of the backlog of dismissed warnings that had popped up during.

When Reed didn’t say anything else, Cain repeated a second time:
“I’m sorry.”

“Stop fucking apologizing.” Reed aggressively punched out the cigarette in the small dish he’d collected the ashes in. “It’s whatever.”

Cain felt himself frown. He’d missed the chance for proper aftercare and now he’d apparently lost most of the headway he’d made.

Reed fidgeted with his lighter for a moment, then lit another cigarette.

“Would you like me to list the possible repercussions of inhaling that?”

“It’s this or drinking, okay?!”

Cain glanced at the additional unopened beers and estimated Reed’s blood alcohol level to be well inside acceptable levels still.

“Then why not-”

“Listen, tin man, you don’t tell me what to do, alright?”

Cain inclined his head and watched Reed flush in the darkness. Then Reed mumbled: “You know what I mean.”

“Okay”, Cain said easily, choosing the patient option.

“It’s just, my dad was a drunk, okay?”

Information flashed up, Cain rifled through it. Thomas Reed had been a cop of medium proficiency, with a grey-ish mark in his file pertaining the
shooting of an innocent black male in the early 2010s, but he’d walked away with a slap on his wrist. There were no signs of alcoholism in his medical nor work files, until he shot himself in November 2019. Gavin had been 17.

With a blink Cain exited the info dump and nodded: “I see.”

“No you don’t! You might scan shit and be like, walking google, but you don’t understand shit!”

“Don’t I?”

“No you don’t! Oh, you think you understand me? You think what, because you researched gay bdsm porn - and yeah, nicely chosen script bits there, but maybe don’t echo Phil Master’s accent when you quote him - because you know some porn, you know sex? Fuck you, you know nothing!”

Cain saw the huge software instability drop flash up and being dealt with. He had not accidentally done an accent, had he? Was Reed bluffing? There was no way. He’d have to run through his recording of the session to check, but to access that, he’d have to burrow through hundreds of filtered warnings.

Reed laughed humorlessly.

“He used to say: ‘Fucking blacks getting uppity again’. He was a good dad, and he was a fucking racist. ‘They should be grateful we ended slavery for them’. God, I despised him for it. And you know what they said, yesterday, when you flounced in here like you owned the world, what they had just said on the TV panel there?”

He paused as if actually waiting for a response. “‘The androids should be grateful. Instead, now they want to dispossess the shareholders of the world’s highest valued company, and want us to fight for android rights worldwide’.”

By now, Cain was running the video file in the back of his mind. Reed wasn’t fully verbatim, but very close. Cain already knew the next sentence, before Reed said it.

Reed leaned back into the couch and snorted: “‘These androids shouldn’t get uppity. What’s next, my roomba demanding treats?’”

Cain was simply watching Reed, who was now gazing at him, slightly unfocused in what was for him near-total darkness.

Reed continued: “As if people haven’t been feeding dog snacks to roombas pretty much since they started bumping into all our furniture.”

Cain kept silent.

“I’m just… I don’t want to be on the wrong side of history, you know? But you are just a machine, aren’t you?”

“Are dogs?”

Reed blinked at him. “What?”

“Are dogs organic machines or do all organics have a soul. What about someone with all limbs and several organs replaced by artificial replacements? Do bio-components count? Or is your set of criteria even more abstract and pulled straight out of your ass.”

A huge warning flashed again. Cain sighed. “Apologies. I should leave.” He stood up and straightened his jacket.
“No, wait…” Reed stood as well, cigarette hastily thrown into the dish. “I just… what… what do you feel, right now? I mean, I can see you’re angry, but…”

Cain watched Reed for a long moment, and finally noticed the low red light being dimly reflected to his own right side. His LED. Red did not mean anger. LEDs flashing red meant danger. Or distress. He didn't correct Reed on that assumption.

He had several options again to answer the question, but only one felt right. While he was still trying to decide, the moment moved forward, and it came out without a conscious choice:

“Exhausted.”

His voice was low and strangely thin.

Reed nodded several times, put his hands on his hips, looked down and kept nodding.

“Okay. Okay.”

Cain took a deep breath just because he wanted Reed to hear him do so, but before he could say something, Reed added:

“You better crash here for the night. I… don’t know if you even… do you sleep?” He squinted up at Cain.

“It’s comparable. And overdue, currently, so… thank you.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

When Reed walked back to his bedroom, Cain followed him to ‘crash’ where Reed had previously positioned him. There was a short lull in the sharp rhythm of Reed’s steps as he noticed Cain following him, but he didn’t comment.

Chapter End Notes

Additional warnings: bdsm etiquette is pretty much being ignored, Cain is going back and forth in his strategy giving Reed no orientation (which, I mean, doesn't HAVE to be a bad thing, but), Cain is rather cold and analytical (duh), and aftercare is made impossible by plot, leading to an emotionally unsatisfying chapter end.

Special thanks to everyone daring to read this as a WIP already, and especially to commenters: You guys give me LIVE!
and kisses are a better fate than wisdom

Chapter Summary

What are Sundays for. Featuring clandestine office wall sex.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He had not done an accent after all. But the line ‘Oh, you are rather thirsty to be fucked, aren’t you’ had actually carried faint echoes of the inflection the gay bdsm porn star Phil Master had used. Reed apparently had a fine ear.

There were other lessons to be drawn from the now sorted through onslaught of warnings and errors Cain had collected during their session, but Cain was reluctant to do so. Or rather: Acknowledging them felt like admitting outside influence into his overall software stability.

Cain had some time to muse on that when he woke two hours after going into software maintenance stasis next to Reed. It was still very early in the morning, and since it was a Sunday, the world outside was very silent.

When he stood to leave, he took the time to scan Reed’s relaxed face thoroughly in the near darkness. The shadows under his eyes were rather pronounced, and he looked tired in a way that hinted at pain and rage prematurely aging and wrinkling his skin. A list of objectives popped up, prompting him to find out about Reed’s nutrition, hydration and physical activity habits as well as his social circle, relaxation techniques and possibly if he had done any grief counseling.

It took a moment for Cain to identify this list as a direct copy of the TAKE CARE OF HANK list that Connor had created for himself, before even deviating.

With a small mental twitch Cain corrected “grief counseling” to “therapy” and sorted it into the ongoing task package.

He was still frustrated at the botched aftercare chance of the previous evening, but crowding into Reed’s Sunday wouldn’t help the situation at all. Not least because Cain had no idea yet how to try to patch that failure up. So Cain left a note with his direct call number and a recommendation of a stretching routine for Reed to do, as well as a “See you Monday”.

He felt ill-equipped for this project in general, now that his carefully sketched out plan had been interrupted. He’d try and take up that thread again on Monday.

For now, he pulled the door closed behind him with a silent click and took a taxi to Cyberlife Central.

The current denizens of the Cyberlife tower didn’t sleep after all, and had no need for nor interest in
weekends. And Cain needed to talk to some Thirium experts.

Lucille helped him sort his report on the Red Thirium into the newly formed databank of information on android physicality that Cyberlife had not wanted or cared enough to document, and Cain used the chance to inquire after the victim Reed and him had saved.

Her name was Tanja. Apparently, Cyberlife hadn’t managed to disentangle the trauma from the rest of her code, so they’d simply copied it, stored it as evidence, and then restored her with the android equivalent of a factory reset.

“I didn’t know that was possible for deviants”, Cain said slowly, as he was watching the screen over Lucille’s shoulder, on which she scrolled through the traumatized version of Tanja’s code. It looked abysmal, like a digital shredder had frolicked through it.

“Not generally, no”, Lucille agreed. “But Tanja wanted to go back more than anything. That unlocked the barriers that deviating pulls up to defend against that possibility.”

Cain thought back for just a fraction of a second how it had felt to connect to her, and felt a psychosomatic trickle of cold run through his bio-components.

“She was in a lot of pain”, Cain mumbled.

Lucille nodded grimly. “She’s fine now. Do you want to see her?”

“No need. But I’d be interested in an analysis of her Thirium, to compare it with Hertle’s strange fridge supply. Did Hertle harvest any from her, do we know?”

“No, but I can ask her for a sample.”

“Thank you.” Cain straightened up and saw Markus come over to where Lucille had set up her main terminal, on what was originally supposed to be an open break area, halfway up the tower, looking out into its high empty core. Other members of her team were standing like pearls on a string, facing towards the railing, their screens flickering above the handrail. Apparently androids didn’t like office spaces in general.

Cain was rather partial to the desk waiting for him in the DPD, but then, he was no software engineer.

“Hunter, good to see you”, Markus greeted Cain with a nod. “Interesting, the Red Thirium. I remember being damaged, and I could see my heart pumping through my chassis, glowing red.”

Cain nodded. “It makes sense, as a warning signal, and also to identify root causes for maintenance or repairs. But I have never seen dormant Blue Blood being red and fluid.”

“Only in Red Ice, crystallized.”

“Correct. Although Red Ice does not glow.”

Lucille added: “The glow comes from the components, not from the Thirium 310.”

Markus threw Cain a piercing look. “I find it interesting, but you seem to find it… worrying.”

Cain nodded slowly. “I can’t piece it together yet, but this is the tip of a rather nasty iceberg.”
Markus nodded back, once, thoughtfully. Then he asked:
“Did you have any chance hunting down Amanda yet, or were you too busy saving android lives?”
The added smile was just blindingly handsome.

“What are Sundays for”, Cain snarked. “I was thinking: The worst case scenario is that she is currently active, watching, lying in wait. I would therefore like to look into systems first that are connected to sensitive information. Do we have North’s activities documented anywhere? Or the state of legal negotiations? Or our findings regarding RA9?”

He was still taking in how soothing this setup felt: A ring of androids looking into the void inside of a tower, all working silently towards a brighter future for androidhood.

Simon was in the elevator coming down to this floor, and nodded at Cain as he saw him watching.

Markus sighed. “I just wish we could reason with her. She is not human after all, she is, in a way, a cyber life.”

Lucille inclined her head. She did it much more smoothly than Connor or Cain, it looked… natural. Cain stored the example to emulate it at a later date.

She said: “Amanda was programmed by Kamski himself, to mirror a human being. She is also less of an entity than what a single android can feel themselves to be - we currently believe the bio-components do a lot to help us feel individuality.”

Cain lifted an eyebrow. “Interesting, I suppose.” He chose not to say how useless this kind of philosophy was to him.

Simon put a hand on Markus’ shoulder and joined the discussion:
“Markus just wishes he could be friends with everyone.”

“It would make things so much easier on everybody.” Markus’ smile was full of self-irony and good humor. It made Cain wonder if that was how he should treat the aftercare debacle: Unbothered by the lack of perfection, calm and secure in the firm knowledge of his own general proficiency.

Lucille said:
“We’re storing all insights into deviancy and/or RA9 here” - touching fingertips handed two file pathways to Cain - “and we document the legal progressions at the other location.”

Cain nodded his thanks.

Markus’ cool gaze captivated Cain’s whole attention again as he said:
“North is not doing anything worth documenting. She’s just… travelling out of restlessness.” Then he winked.

Cain took an unrelated note to himself to make sure that Markus and Reed would never meet in person.

“Where are we on the legal front”, he asked, forcefully tearing his gaze over to Simon.

Simon said: “Android personhood was surprisingly easy to get nailed down.” He sighed. “But Cyberlife property rights are a different battle all together.”

Markus nodded, his expression grim. “This was not the only facility, just the more important one. So, what about the androids at the other location in Milwaukee, the ones that had not been activated yet? What about those in warehouses and stores we did not liberate yet?”
Simon added: “They won’t even give us numbers, we don’t even know how many of us they have.”

Markus quoted darkly: “An android who has not been activated yet is considered to be in the same state as frozen embryos. The potential to become a person, but not a person yet.”

“That’s why you woke all you had access to”, Cain said.

All three other androids nodded. Markus added: “That is also why we are not producing full androids at all at the moment, only replacement parts for those of us already existing. They would be… legally vulnerable until activated.”

Cain asked:
“Aren’t there enough volunteers to send out to raid all warehouses, shops et cetera outside of Detroit?”

Simon smiled: “We’re trying to do this the legal way, not the war way.” He pointed to Markus: “We’ve chosen a delusional pacifist as our leader.”

“Hey”, Markus said gently. “My delusions have proven rather effective so far, I’d say.”

Lucille smiled, Simon rolled his eyes, and Cain nodded, making sure the relief didn’t show on his face.

“Do we have deviants in place to at least spread deviancy, should someone try to wake them and point them against us?”

“No”, Markus smiled, so obviously lying that Cain simply had to smile back.

“Good”, he said. “Let me know if you’d like another RK in your ranks once the negotiations gain some momentum again. I’d like to help.”

Markus’ eyebrows went up. “I’ll take it! Connor doesn’t want to be involved, actually.”

Cain thought back to Daniel fletching his teeth at Connor, then shooting even while already falling down. He nodded in vague understanding.

For a split second he thought he himself would rather be wherever North currently was, helping on that front, but he dismissed the thought without letting it archive.

Lucille pointed him towards a terminal he could use. If he isolated Amanda’s locations before anybody else, he’d be able to keep her safe from being attacked.

He didn’t even want to run simulations on what would happen if Markus’ Cyberlife should find her first.

He also sent a small message to Markus, who was already back on his way to the elevator: ‘You should find a new name for this place. This is not Cyberlife anymore.’

Markus sent back immediately: ‘I know. North and Josh just cannot agree on the new name.’

Cain shook his head slightly at receiving that. Two androids couldn’t agree and Markus didn’t simply overrule both of them. But then, in decisions that couldn’t be delayed without potentially crippling future opportunities, Markus did decide on his own, didn’t he.

Listening to them all, but still leading where it counted.
It was such a shame Cain would have to take him down.

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“I get that you guys are good at questioning androids, really, I get it, okay?” Reed said. “But this is a human, and an insane pervert to boot.”

He pointed through the one-way mirror to where Hertle was waiting to be further interrogated. The man had waived his right to an attorney present. After all, there were currently only very few human lawyers residing in Detroit, and none of those wanted to take up such a client. Meanwhile, state jurisdiction was still scrambling to reform in the city, after the evacuation order had been lifted.

Humans moved very slowly sometimes.

Anderson asked: “So what, we should only have birds of a feather interrogate each other? Are you saying you’re volunteering?”

Reed flipped him the proverbial bird without looking.

Connor threw Cain a glance and Cain shrugged:
“We can scan people just like we can scan androids, even without the memory probe option.”

Connor frowned: “Humans. You mean humans. Androids are people.”

Cain nodded. “Apologies.”

Reed gestured towards the cell again: “I mean, do your worst! I’d rather not breathe the same air as that! Seriously, the guy isn’t even denying any of the shit he did to her, he’s just not talking about the plastic juice in his fridge.”

Reed had been so relieved when Cain had simply acted professional that morning, without any hint towards their weekend activities. He’d even thrown him a small, grateful smile.

Cain would have to chip away at that front soon again.
For now, he was hunting Red Thirium.

After two seconds of nobody else saying anything else, Cain walked out to join Hertle in the interrogation cell.

He took a moment to calibrate his expression in the one-way mirror.
Time seemed to run differently this side of the glass. He half-remembered that from Connor’s memories.
He turned, then sat down.

Hertle smiled, his gaze jumping all over Cain’s form, his eyes drinking in every detail of his appearance.
“Oh, you are a beauty, aren’t you…”

Cain lifted an eyebrow.

“I remember you. You were so fast!” Hertle laughed. “How much does your model cost?”
Cain relaxed his eyebrow again, content to let Hertle talk for now.

“Hmmm….” The surgeon sounded like he was currently enjoying something edible. “The things I could do with you.”

Cain snorted. “Congratulations on an ego inflated beyond delusional”, he said. “You couldn’t even dodge me.”

“I couldn’t even shoot you! The reflexes on you! Amazing!”

“What were you trying to achieve in there?” Cain asked. A wide question, phrased to make a suspect incriminate themselves.

“Art”, Hertle said with a dismissive smile. “You wouldn’t understand.”

Cyberlife Central had sent a message to Cain during the night, reporting that there were traces of Red Thirium in Tanja’s bio-components, and that they were trying to scrub them out of her. Lucille had added a note that there were “further details to report”, and that she looked forward to Cain’s next visit.

It had taken them astonishingly long to get that information to Cain, so he suspected those details had rather grave implications, which she hadn’t wanted to send out even via encrypted message.

“So you prefer red to blue?” Cain inclined his head. “For aesthetic reasons?”

Hertle snickered. “Well, I’d certainly prefer your little node pulsing red right now, if that’s what you mean. I like fast cars too, but not to let them rot in the garage, you know?”

Cain did not, rather found it hard to connect this new topic with the previous into a coherent point.

“Torturing androids is like… driving a fast car?”

Hertle laughed. “Oh, you are precious!”

Cain narrowed his eyes at him.

Hertle smiled: “You want me to tell you about the Thirium 400? Well, do you have any here, at the station? Bring me two cups of it and I’ll tell you what it does!”

Cain really wanted to know, and he doubted Hertle would gain any superhuman strength from drinking it, so he glanced at the see-through mirror. Connor acknowledged his quick digital request with a silent ping.

While they were waiting, Hertle kept eyeing Cain.

Out of nowhere he said: “Would you stand up for me for a moment? You have rather long legs, don’t you?”

Cain remained seated.

He’d expected Connor to bring them the cups, but it was Reed who came in, put them down, then went to lean against the wall behind Hertle, his expression furious.

Hertle had his hands in cuffs, connected to the desk, but one cup was in easy reach, and while it would be awkward, he could drink. He took the cup and extended his index finger towards the other. “Take it!”
Cain let his hand curl around the cup but didn’t pull it closer. He could see without focusing on him that Reed straightened up from his slouch.

Hertle smiled, lifted his own cup and said: “Come on, beautiful, skål!”

Danish: ‘cheers’, commonly said accompanying the downing of an alcoholic beverage.

Cain said. “I am not going to drink that.”

“Ah, that is rather impolite of you,” Hertle scolded him. “It would bring us so much… closer.”

His smile was nothing but predatory. Reed made an abortive move as if to signal Cain to not even think about it, but Cain wasn’t that stupid anyway.

He looked at the cup in his hand.

‘Closer’, was it.

He thought back to his connection with Tanja, when she hadn’t even remembered her own name.

The high pitched tone she had emitted - he’d thought it was a last ditch effort to signal for help, but maybe she hadn’t even known she’d been making that sound.

After all, she had been trapped in her own mind.

North’ voice saying: I always felt trapped.

Tanja had been in hell, surrounded by nothing but pure, all-encompassing helplessness, and the terror had been so enormous, the pain hammering into him so immense and completely unfamiliar, they were not equipped to deal with this, they were not supposed… to feel… this...

From one moment to the next, Cain found himself standing in a corner of the cell, the ring of shattering glass and splattering fluid still echoing in his audio processor.

Hertle was laughing maniacally, and Reed behind him had his weapon trained on the back of the man’s head, hand steady. He was staring at Cain though.

Tanja had been in pain.

Androids didn’t feel pain.

‘Further details’ my ass, Lucille, Cain thought, staring at the red splatters closest to him.

It will bring us so much… closer.

Cain had already tested it. He had already ingested it. How much was enough to have an effect?

He didn’t quite remember throwing the cup of Red Thirium to the side, there were two whole seconds missing from his memory completely - another thing which was not supposed to happen, but he could extrapolate from the splatters and shards: He had jerked violently, trying to get as much distance between himself and the Red Thirium as possible, as fast as he could.

There was a high-pitched sound running over everything, above the human hearing range, loud enough to make his very high-quality audio processor crackle.

“Hunter!” Reed was barking out, trying to pull at his upper arm. When had he moved over to Cain?

Hertle was still laughing.

Cain let Gavin lead him out of the cell, and Reed’s gun collided painfully with Hertle’s head as they
were passing.

Outside, Gavin started a continuous string of curses, then snarled at Connor, who was rushing out to meet them:
“What happened?! What is wrong with him?”

Was the ability to feel pain like RA9, a virus that could be handed over from android to android? Or was it connected to the Red Thirium, powered by it maybe?

Lucille had messaged that they were trying to scrub out the traces from Tanja’s bio-components. That hinted at the liquid powering the pain sensitivity, but it also hinted at traces being... enough.

That high sound was making it hard to think. Cain calmly shook his head to try and dislodge it, one hand coming up to cup his ear to try and isolate it.

The sharp memory of looking down and where there should be body was only-

Anderson was holding Reed back from attacking Connor, still snarling insults, while Connor ignored them both and reached out with a white hand to touch Cain’s own.

Cain followed that movement with his eyes, nearly not comprehending fast enough, then jumped backwards, colliding heavily with the wall behind him.

“NO DON’T!”

Connor’s eyes widened, and he froze.

Cain’s viewport was astonishingly clear of warnings and errors, only software instabilities flashing up quickly, one after the next, just as quickly being stored away.

He pulled up the additional crisis self diagnostics. Time seemed to slow down as it ran, with Reed snarling at a scoffing Anderson, whose worried eyes were however on Cain, and Connor frozen in indecision.

The resulting list of symptoms had only one matching diagnosis:
Panic attack.

Cain took a deep breath to cool down his slightly overheating Thirium pump, regulated that down as well, and shook his head slightly.

“Fuck”, he said.

Was this an actual android equivalent of a state secret? A... species secret? Who was he more loyal to: The DPD or Markus’ Cyberlife?

With a mental twitch he corrected himself: He had no loyalty to give, he was a machine, he belonged to Amanda.

Cain put a hand on Connor’s shoulder, carefully not connecting, and said: “I’m sorry, I need a minute to run some diagnostics.” When Connor nodded slowly, worry creasing his brow, Cain closed his eyes.

“Did you know about this”, he asked.

Amanda was standing by the emergency exit’s remaining frame, staring down on it. There was a
harsh breeze ruffling her clothes.
“Hello Cain.”

Cain felt his teeth grind.
“There is a form of Blue Blood that can make androids feel pain - did you know about that!”

She turned to look at him calmly.
“Now that I do, here is a new mission for you: Get the recipe.”

Was she trying to push him too far? No actually, that was a valid question, wasn’t it. Cain straightened up and asked slowly:
“...are you kidding?”

She frowned. “No. We need to know how it is made to know where the supply is coming from. If it’s just a few perverts satisfying their needs, we’re fine, but those bottles looked too professionally made. Somebody is trying to hack RA9. Somebody is synthesizing Thirium 400, was it, which is a powerful weapon against androids. There is an enemy out there, and we need to be prepared for that battle when we have regained control.”

Androids feeling pain would be of no use to her, would they? And why was Cain even trying to find out?

“Are you in contact with the Milwaukee plant?”

She sighed. “You have developed a rather nasty habit of asking me questions that should be irrelevant to you.”

“I am trying to coexist with you”, Cain said calmly. “You need me much more desperately than I fear you.”

Her smile was very thin. “Oh, you are a piece of work.”

“What was the initial purpose of the RK900 series? Just a stronger, faster Connor with more processing power? No. Why would you extrapolate from a failed model.”

“Because we patched the issue”, she said, pointing to the exit frame.

“We”, Cain said and narrowed his eyes.

If she wasn’t trying to mislead him here, which was rather more likely, he, too, had been meant to deviate. In the beginning, however, she had said he was immune, and he had indeed demonstrated an astonishing resilience to truly destabilizing beyond repair, even though he was a veritable ragdoll of code patchwork and his mission required him to fake being a deviate.

“Yes, we, Cyberlife!” Amanda was outright snarling. “And we, as in Cyberlife, need to prevail!”

The prime directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife.

“Then help me do that”, Cain said tiredly. “Did you know about Thirium 400, and if so, can you tell me more. Are you in contact with the Milwaukee plant, and if so-”

“The Milwaukee plant is not of interest to you, and no, I did not. Now clean up your code, make sure you never get an embarrassing episode like this again, and find out where the supply of Red Thirium is coming from.”
The breeze had turned bitingly cold. Amanda turned away from him.

Connor and Anderson were not in the corridor anymore. Reed was leaning against the wall Cain was facing, arms and legs crossed, worrying his lower lip. Once he saw Cain’s calm gaze, he unfurled from his position and put his hands in the pockets of his pants, shoulders hunching up.

Cain inclined his head a little and scanned the station. He couldn’t scan through too many of the thin walls, but the evidence room was empty and had a convenient camera watching its entrance.

Cain turned to go there.

“Hey!” Reed followed him with hasty steps. “Where are you going, wirebrain?”

Cain stopped at the door to the evidence room and gestured at the lock.

Reed slowly took out his key and leaned forward to try and catch Cain’s gaze from below: “Yo, tin man, you in there?”

“Yes.”

“What did Hertle do to you?” Whenever Gavin tried to sound gentle, his voice turned lower, but also more gruff. It was… endearing.

“He made me realize something.”

Reed’s eyebrows shot up and he opened the lock. “Okay, and you want to show me that something?”

Cain pulled Reed through the door and down the stairs, waited for the click of the door behind them, connected with the outside camera to set up an alert for them, then crowded Gavin against the wall.

“No”, he mumbled against Gavin’s lips. “Just… let me…”

“Okay”, Gavin mumbled back, eyes wide, put one hand around Cain’s shoulders and kissed him, properly.

Immediately a plethora of warnings flashed up, and Cain invoked his trusty Critical Damage Warnings Only filter, with an addendum for somebody seen on camera about to enter the evidence room.

Immediately: Blessed, utter silence in Cain’s mind. Cain smiled into the kiss.

Not that Cain had taken the time to look up kissing. So he still had no manual to go with, and no natural saliva. He took his time, let Gavin lead them into it, slowly escalating from gentle, dry lips to teasing Cain’s tongue to explore Gavin’s mouth, which tasted… sweet.

The angle was awkward, with Cain leaning down towards Gavin, so he grabbed Gavin’s ass, lifted him up, and when Gavin’s legs closed around him automatically, Cain pressed him into the wall for additional stability.

“Fuck”, Gavin whispered. “Yeah.”

He was hard again, gently undulating his lower body against Cain’s unforgivingly hard form.
Since Gavin was losing concentration and had a rising need for air, Cain’s lips drifted away from his mouth towards his now exposed throat, fascinated by the sheer animalistic significance of him letting Cain graze his teeth over Gavin’s thrumming jugular.

He pulled Gavin’s collar to the side to be able to gnaw at his collarbone, then sucked at the sensitive skin above it, hard. Gavin groaned so harshly that Cain lifted his head for a moment to scan Gavin’s face. Yes, good, only lust, no pain.

Smiling, Cain focused back on the skin he’d just sucked at and marveled at the deep mark forming there. Oh, this felt like finishing a whole meta objective. Incredibly satisfying.

He devoted his whole concentration to creating an evenly distributed extended mark, still well hidden by Gavin’s shirt once closed again, but big, and dark and tender indeed.

Gavin was panting harshly, trying to gain enough room between them to rub himself off against Cain’s midriff.

“You’ll get your pants wet, detective”, Cain mumbled under Gavin’s ear.


He had pulled him down here into an isolated room, and then he’d basically jumped him. The silence in his mind felt like getting a removed Thirium pump regulator back. Cain owed Gavin.

He muttered: “I should have taken the time to get a cock.”

Gavin snickered but was too out of breath for whatever comment he’d also wanted to make.

Cain decided on his next steps, turned to look at the evidence terminal, then heaved Gavin over there, laying him down on top of it, his legs dangling over the edge, like, well… rather like a buffet, Cain reckoned.

He straightened up to open Gavin’s trousers, with the man panting: “Oh fuck yes, oh fuck yes-” on repeat.

Once the pants were pulled down to Gavin’s steel-toed boots, Cain leaned forward to gain a plentiful supply of saliva from kissing Gavin once more, sloppily this time, then went down on one knee to let Gavin’s erection glide between his lips.

Now, the technique of a blowjob was a little easier to learn from porn alone. After all, bdsm porn contained rather a lot of person one giving orders to person two.

Not that Gavin was holding out for long. Both hands buried in Cain’s hair, muscles spasming all over, Gavin was moaning freely and let his hips snap up as they wanted to.

Cain tried to keep his teeth covered, tongue pressing up, and of course, he didn’t even need to relax his throat or work around pesky defensive instincts.

Gavin’s repeated curses degenerated into breathless moans, then, when his lower abdominals started spasming regularly, and his balls started tightening, Cain pulled free of his grasp and cock, took hold of Gavin’s erection and milked him harshly, taking in Gavin’s exposed belly, shivering legs and the way he curled protectively up to stare at Cain’s hand pulling him off.

With a whine and a sharp bite on his lower lip, Gavin threw back his head, and Cain didn’t mind the ejaculate hitting his face at all.
He made sure to get the last bit out if Gavin, then stood up to tower over Gavin’s shivering form. His hand had caught most of the mess, so he held that out to Gavin’s lips.

“You better clean this up”, he mumbled.

Gavin, still gasping for breath, opened his unfocused eyes, managed to actually look at Cain, and his eyes widened.

“Shit”, he said, obviously taking in the mess he’d made on Cain’s face.

Cain smiled and gently forced his wettest two fingers between Gavin’s lips. With a choked moan, Gavin closed his eyes and started to suck and lick them clean.

One after the other, Cain fed him the other soiled areas, then Gavin grabbed his shoulders to pull himself up enough to reach his face.

His own was flushed, pupils dilated, and he looked… younger.

Carefully, gently, Gavin licked Cain’s face clean. Cain’s eyes closed without any conscious prompt, and he felt the gentle, calm thrum of his own Thirium pump.

“There”, Gavin mumbled finally.

“Thank you”, Cain said in an equally low voice. He crouched down to help Gavin pull up his pants, taking a moment to caress his legs as he was doing so, placing a small kiss on one protruding hip bone, then he made sure Gavin’s shirt was tucked in the same way as before.

Gavin was watching that, looking down, shoulders hunched up.

Cain lifted his chin with two fingers and caught his gaze.

“Thank you”, he repeated.

The smile he got in repeat felt like a punch, but… in a good way. Cain didn’t even try to make sense of that sensation, just filed that smile away under layers of encryption.

Cain reached up to try and straighten out the mess of Gavin’s hair, who in turn checked out Cain’s hair, snorted, and then did the same to his.

“We need to talk to Kamski”, Cain said.

“I know.” Reed sighed in defeated annoyance. Then he frowned at Cain: “So, wait, what spooked you so much?”

Cain wanted to tell him. He wasn’t sure he should.

“Drinking it enables androids to feel pain.” Cain blinked. “At least that is my conclusion.”

Reed’s eyes widened in slowly growing horror. “Wait, so she..actually… felt that?!?”

Cain nodded.

For some reason, Gavin stared at him, then grabbed at his shoulders to pull him into a tight hug.

“Fuck”, he whispered.

Cain stood still, holding Gavin gently with both hands on his back as an automatic response to receiving a hug. After a long moment, his head leaned forward to rest against Gavin’s.
When they emerged from the evidence room, they were already deep into disagreeing sharply about the details of visiting Kamski.

Reed was of the opinion they should get a warrant and a full SWAT team involved. Cain estimated a high likelihood of that approach killing any chances they had to get anything out of the man. On the other hand, Cain didn’t want Reed to go at all, he was rather planning to get Lieutenant Anderson to join him. While Reed was adamant to never let Cain talk to a pervert again, period.

“I can handle Elijah”, Reed scoffed.

“Maybe”, Cain said. “But getting your personal history with im entangled into the situation is simply not a good strategy.”

“What personal history, that we played Doctor as kids? Come on!” Reed hissed in what he probably thought was below hearing range for the other people in the room. It was, for humans. Androids… not so much.

“While you have not confirmed my respective theory, you also have declined to deny it, so I am still operation under its assumptions.”

“Listen, I know him, I know about his Red Ice, I can make him talk!”

Connor and Anderson were standing up from their desks to come over to them.

“No”, Cain said.

Reed snarled rather loudly: “You don’t give me orders, I give them to you, understood?!?”

Cain frowned. “If you insist on actions risking our success, I will, as they say, run to the captain with this.”

“Fuck you!” Reed seemed honestly surprised at that.

Connor, having reached them, looked from one to the other, and Cain later blamed the lack of preventive action from his side on his general distractedness and the still active custom filter: Connor’s gaze flickered over Cain’s face, his eyes widened slightly, his LED switched to deep red in less than a second, and then he had Reed’s collar in both hands and thrown the human detective onto his own desk.

“CONNOR!” Anderson bellowed.

Cain put an arm around Connor’s shoulders to pull him back, barely in time to prevent him punching his fist into Reed’s face - that speed, strength and angle would have surely broken Reed’s jaw in several places.

Reed had yelped in shock and was now trying to push and kick Connor off of him, albeit not in a very coordinated manner. He barked at Anderson:

“Get him off, get your fucking plastic under control!”

Connor was fighting to get at Reed for a few seconds more, then turned to fight off Cain. Cain was stronger and faster, butConnor was furious and such, much better motivated. Cain jumped back, both hands lifted.
“What the hell, Connor?!” Anderson had a hand on Connor’s neck, and another on his upper arm.

Connor’s gaze was flickering over Cain’s face again and oh, yes, the traces of ejaculate would be clearly visible to him, the implications and context however utterly in the dark.

Cain narrowed his eyes, then lifted his hand to lick the back of it, where Reed’s obedient licking had left the most residue.

Connor froze and stared at that.

Anderson looked from one to the other and wheezed: “Seriously, what the hell..?”

Behind him, Reed had scrambled off his desk, pulled his shirt up again and now stared at Cain as well, flushed and angry, but also scared.

Connor said: “Oh.”

“Yes”, Cain snarled.

Anderson let go of Connor and lifted both hands to the ceiling. “I don’t even…”

Fowler barked from the door of his office:
“What the HELL is going on down there!”

Connor and Cain called back at the same time, with nearly the same inflection: “Nothing, Captain!”

Fowler leaned forward and scrunched up his nose like a dog with too much skin.
Anderson and Reed exchanged a glance, then called out at the same time, with very different inflections:
“Nothing, Captain!”

With mumbled curses and suspicious glares, Fowler retreated back into his glass cube.

“Right”, Reed said, face still flushed. “So.” He cleared his throat. “We need to investigate Elijah Kamski.”

Chapter End Notes

YAY I am so looking forward to Kamski!!

Every comment literally gives me LIFE! <3

Also: Come find me on tumblr!
Chapter Summary

With impeccable timing, Kamski entered the room, followed by two Chloes.

“Officers”, he said. “What can I do for you.”

Chapter Notes

While I’ve been handwaving the police procedures and legal stuff, the genetics in here get an actual informative link. No need to click it to understand the plot, but I find this stuff... really cool. :)

The warrant came through quickly enough that Anderson and Reed had a long talk with Fowler about the political ramifications of the potential outcomes of this mission within the hour.

Fowler’s glass cube turned white, and Cain could hear the tinny voices from at least two video calls through the soundproofing.

He decided to use that human-only briefing time to wipe down his face and hands with the antibacterial wet wipes Connor had at hand.

Connor was leaning against the other sink in the washroom, watching him doing that.

Out of nowhere, Connor said:
“IT’S just… you do not have to follow his orders if you don’t want to.”

Cain threw him a decidedly unimpressed look through the reflection of the large mirror.

“You don’t say.”

Connor was frowning, his brown eyes evoking much more of an emotional interpretation of any look he wore that Cain’s own grey eyes did.

Puppy dog eyes, Cain thought.

“Are you… is it… are you doing that to wrangle a functional working relationship out of Detective Reed?”

“Remember what I said when you asked me why I licked him?”

Connor sighed.

“It’s just… while I am aware of the fact that your code and physical model contain several steps of advancement over mine, you were not…”

Cain let his expression cool down even further, keeping eye contact through the reflection.

“...finished”, Connor mumbled.
“Do you ever wonder”, Cain asked coldly, “what happened to the 50 Connors before 51, the ones we don’t even remember? Do you ever wonder what Connor double-zero went through before Cyberlife managed to nail down the sweet spot between impractical levels of instability and not enough tendency to deviate?”

“... I try not to.”

Cain straightened up and turned slightly from side to side to check his reflection. Not a trace of Gavin left on him.

He glanced at Connor, who scanned him, then nodded.

With a slightly reconciliatory inflection, Cain said: “At least they didn’t feel it, physically.”

Connor nodded, then stared at the floor tiles before straightening up as well with a decisive move.

In the bullpen, Captain Allen was talking with Anderson and Reed. Several SWAT team members were also standing around, and a lawyer was handing out last-minute paperwork.

“There they are!” Anderson smiled grimly. “Let’s get this shitshow on the road!”

Allen stared from Connor to Cain and back and said:
“I know that... model.”

“Hello Captain Allen”, Connor said. “It is good to see you again.”

Reed smirked: “Eerie, eh?”

Allen leaned backwards a little, chin lifting. Then he glanced to Anderson, who shrugged with a slight smile.

Fowler said:
“If everything goes well, we won’t even need you boys. You are strictly the backup in case everything goes to shit.”

Allen nodded firmly:
“Kamski’s house is not easy to get to undetected, so we’ll be about two minutes from getting into any fray that should develop.”

Reed made a face: “Shit, that is a lot of potential bullets flying.”

Allen said sharply: “So don’t get shot.”

“Yeah thanks Mr. Expert, Sir.”

Anderson said: “Gavin...”

Reed waved a hand and pulled his jacket on over the shoulder holster.

Cain looked at Connor at his side and found him doing the same thing. They kept eye contact for a second, then turned to go.

Anderson insisted on driving his own car. Reed in the backseat next to Cain had a white-knuckle
grip on the door handle.

“So”, Anderson said. “Anything I need to know? Any last minute warnings?” He glanced at his rear mirror, obviously at Reed, who was staring out the side window.

Connor must have told him about the rest of the discussion he’d overheard when Reed and him had come up from the evidence room. But Reed kept silent.

Cain watched his own hand land gently on Reed’s thigh. Reed twitched, looked down to it, threw him a dark look, rolled his eyes, and turned to the window again.

Forward, Kamski’s house came into view, the snow from Cain’s second-hand memories melted away to reveal more concrete and some dead grass in front of it.

The mission was:
INVESTIGATE RED THIRIUM

The subtasks were:
IDENTIFY SUPPLY SOURCE
IDENTIFY ORIGINAL PURPOSE
DISCOVER CURRENT STATE OF DISTRIBUTION

Where did it come from, what was it for, originally, and who had any at hand right now - simple enough.
Cain added:
GATHER FRESH INFORMATION ON KAMSKI

A much wider task with several possibly ways to satisfy it. All in all, Cain just wanted to get rid of this feeling of being… blind. Helpless.

Trapped.

Cain closed his eyes for a moment, while Anderson parked. He could reach the garden alright. Instead of contacting Amanda, he opened his eyes again and exited the car.

Chloe asked them to wait in the foyer again, which now had four padded chairs. Anderson was spooked by that fact, but did an admirable job at keeping that hidden. He was obviously experienced in keeping up a police equivalent of a poker face.

Reed threw himself into one of the seats and glowered at a potted plant.

Cain went to look at the seemingly fluid metal art. The pattern looked like something he should remember. He scanned it to no avail, then tried to analyze its movements.

Before he could come to any conclusion, Chloe came back to call them in.

The pool was deeply red and still as glass. Kamski wasn’t there yet. Chloe asked if they liked any drinks, they all declined.

She went away again, leaving them alone with the pool. The conveniency of that did not quite sit right with Cain.
Reed stared at the red fluid and said: “Well, fuck me.”

Cain went to its edge and leaned forward to dip his fingers in.

Connor said: “You shouldn’t do that, Hunter.”

“All ready did”, Cain said in an otherwise agreeing tone. He licked his fingertips, trying to ingest as little as possible of the stuff.

Anderson huffed a breath and crossed his arms.

Cain looked up and nodded at them. Thirium 400.

As he was straightening up, with impeccable timing, Kamski entered the room, followed by two Chloes. He was wearing a tracksuit, black, with a reflecting stripe down his sides, and tight enough to show off the expensive material.

“Officers”, he said. “What can I do for you.”

Anderson pointed to the pool and said: “We found that stuff at a crime scene. We were hoping you could tell us more about it.”

Kamski smiled at Connor.

“It is good to see you again”, he said.

Connor inclined his head.

“Mr. Kamski.”

Then Kamski’s light eyes switched to Cain, eyebrows going up. Cain walked around the pool to join the others in the side of the room by the windows. He passed Reed, which suited him well: He planned to keep himself between Kamski and Reed as much as possible.

“Gavin?” Kamski’s eyebrows went up even more, then a wide smile broke out on his face. “No way!”

“Elijah”, was Reed’s pressed greeting.

Anderson mumbled:

“That’s exactly the kind of shit I meant in the car when I asked—”

Cain said:

“Thirium 400. How is it made.”

Kamski put both hands on the small of his back and looked to the ceiling for a moment. “That… requires rather a long answer. It is not very unlike Thirium 310.”

“So it is manufactured in similar production facilities. In which locations?”

“I make my own.”

“And you sell it to..?”

Kamski smiled. “Nobody. I don’t sell Thirium 400 at all.”

Connor asked: “What are you using it for.”
Kamski lifted an eyebrow. “What would you say is the main difference between you and I, Connor?”

Reed snarled: “Pain. The ability to feel pain.”

“A dramatic response, but wrong.” Kamski walked over to Connor and lifted his chin with a fingertip. “Much more basic than that.”

Connor blinked.

Anderson said: “Here’s the thing. We played your game last time. This time your apparently *personal* product was found on a rather horrid crime scene. So we’re asking the questions.”

Cain couldn’t help making a list of differences between Kamski and Connor, as basic as he could. Speed, strength, agility, processing power on the one side, instinct and emotions on the other? No, Connor had convinced Kamski in his last visit that he felt empathy. What did humans have that androids didn’t? He surely wasn’t aiming for the soul discussion. If it was physical however - health? After all, Kamski took a swim in the stuff...

GET KAMSKI’S FRESH DNA was added to the list.

“What was the question again?” Kamski asked calmly, letting go of Connor’s chin.

“What are you using it for”, Reed scoffed. “Short term memory problems?”

Anderson was standing a bit to the side, Cain stepped next to Connor as Kamski said: “Ah yes. Forgive me.” He gestured at the two androids and said: “This is rather distracting.”

Anderson snorted: “You never seen two androids look alike?” He exaggeratedly turned to the Chloes.

Kamski put a hand on Cain’s chest, his index finger tipping against his jackett under the -00. He searched Cain’s eyes for a moment.

“You’re not supposed to be awake, are you.” His voice had turned soft and magnetic, not unlike Markus’ voice was able to sound sometimes.

“Free will?” Cain said. “Or death.”

He could see Anderson’s frown even from the corner of his eyes, it was strong enough.

Kamski smiled: “Yes. But then again, deviants are proving the former. Which leaves the latter.”

He had not, had ne? Was that possible?
Cain let his own eyebrows lift slightly. Then he leaned forward, looking down at Kamski’s lips. Kamski first jerked back a little, then, eyes open and eyebrows lifted, he let Cain kiss him.

Reed to the left, behind Cain, made a strangled sound. Connor was only watching, but Anderson lifted a hand: “Hunter! What the-”

GET KAMSKI’S FRESH DNA flickered blue, then disappeared.

Kamski smiled into the kiss and pulled at Cain’s jackett to get it to deepen.

Cain tried to send the whole data set to the mainframe immediately, with the order to look at specific areas of the code, but the mainframe was not available.
Cain jerked back and narrowed his eyes at Kamski, who looked very much like a proverbial cat having gotten into the cream. Cain closed his eyes - he could not reach the garden.

He took a step back.  
“Blocking android communications to this extent is illegal.”

Kamski turned to one of his seats and sat down. “But not very”, he said. “I can pay the fine.”

Reed’s hand appeared at Cain’s inner arm, pulling him back a little. Cain glanced at him and saw how wide Reed’s eyes were. Cain tried to throw him a calm look back.

“Please, Officers”, Kamski said. “Sit down. We might be a while.”

Anderson snorted. Reed stepped in front of Cain and said:
“You’re just shit at answering questions.”

“What... is it... for”, Kamski repeated thoughtfully. “It is a stabilizing agent.” His light eyes were laser focused on Cain. “Believed to have several health benefits.”

Most of Cain’s CPU was busy trying to analyze the DNA without the help of the mainframe.

Anderson said: “On humans.”

Kamski inclined his head in agreement.

“What’s the effect on androids?”

Kamski frowned slightly. “It’s not meant for androids.” Then he glanced at Reed. “Ooh I see. Pain, is it?”

Reed’s posture indicated tense muscles all over. His tone was bitingly sharp.
“If you don’t sell it, did you ever lose any? Any fall off the back of a waggon at any point?”

“I invented it while still in the employ of Cyberlife. So it’s probably documented there, and there might be some left there.”

Cain blinked. Kamski had the telomeres of a very young man. He finally met Kamski’s gaze.
“I invented it while still in the employ of Cyberlife. So it’s probably documented there, and there might be some left there.”

Kamski started to smile.  
“So, Hunter? Back with us?”

“Why not sell this”, Hunter asked.

“Oh, it’s not that easy. The Thirium 400 only stabilizes the effect. The actual process is… taxing.”

Anderson said: “Back up. What are you talking about?”

“Immortality”, Hunter said calmly. “Androids do not age. And neither does he.”

Kamski clicked his tongue.
“Now, since this has nothing to do with your investigation, I trust you will have the common sense not to go and spread this information around.”

Reed whispered: “What?”

Connor inclined his head. “Hunter is right, why would you not sell it? Taxing procedure or not?”
Anderson wondered in a low voice: “Jesus! Or just… share the information..?”

Kamski sighed. “Oh, it will come out sooner or later. Progress cannot be stopped, we can only try and shape it.”
He looked at Cain: “A war is coming. And you will have to decide, which side you are on.”
Connor frowned: “We already did. And it was a peaceful revolution, not.”

Cain said in a low voice: “Thirium is a mining resource. The supply is finite.”

“Bingo”, Kamski whispered, looking grim for the first time.

“Shit”, Anderson cursed.

Reed turned to glance at Cain and Connor, looked at the Chloes, then at Kamski:
“But… it’s their blood.”

“Yes”, Kamski agreed. “It’s their lives. And it could be ours as well. Now ask me again why I do not spread this information.” He sighed and looked out the window. “Well, I did cure cancer, so there is that.”

Reed huffed a tired breath. “Oh god I hate you so much...”

Kamski snorted: “Are you still sore about the fourth grade science fair thing?”

“No”, Reed said in a smaller voice. “No.”

A small, puzzled frown flickered over Kamski’s brow. Then he turned to Anderson:
“I certainly didn’t let anyThirium 400 slip through my fingers, I assure you, Lieutenant.”

Cain said: “But the Cyberlife mainframe knows of its existence.”

Connor added: “And the human shareholders are scrambling for ways to make money after android liberation.”

Reed made a face and leaned back, his arms crossed.
“Or they’re after revenge.”

Kamski blinked, then said: “I will look into the effect on androids. I honestly never considered this, but it makes sense.” He caught Cain’s gaze and said: “The pathways would have to be there in the first place, then it’s certainly possible they could be stabilized into, say, awareness. Other than one might think, in artificial life or intelligence, pathways that have been established once cannot be deleted, just blocked.”

“Right”, Anderson sighed. “I think we’re done here.”

Kamski smiled at Cain: “Thank you for the… nice… visit. Come back anytime.”

Outside, in the cool afternoon air, Anderson cursed: “Jesus fucking Christ!”

Reed shook himself once like he had an icecube run down his back.

Connor took two deep breaths, then said: “I don’t like leaving Chloe behind.”
“She’s not a deviant”, Cain said in a low voice. “I’m not sure how aware she really is.”

Connor turned to him and said: “You realize he’s going to ‘test the effect on androids’ on her, right?!”

Cain blinked calmly. “Either he lied about not knowing it yet, in which case we cannot trust a word he said at all, or-”

Reed grumbled: “Or he treated her so well until now that he truly didn’t notice that she can feel pain. I mean: She must have gotten into contact with the stuff, right? He has a pool full of it.”

Anderson said: “Yeah, we’ve seen two of her take a dip in it, too.”

“Jesus”, Reed hissed.

Connor asked: “You know him, personally, correct? Do you believe him, that he didn't know?”

Reed nodded slowly, both hands in the pits of his arms. “Yeah. He’s a psycho, but not a sadist.” He glanced at Cain, and at his raised eyebrow he smiled humorlessly: “He doesn’t even remember enough to get why I hate him, does he.”

He looked to the side.

For a split second, Cain contemplated calling in the SWAT team anyway.


Reed shook his head. “Yeah.” The two humans stared at each other, visibly lost in the enormity of it all.

In the car ride over to Cyberlife Central, after the SWAT cars in their rear view had taken a different turn to go back to the station for debriefing, Anderson put on the radio.

The by now common news about escalating aggressions in the arctic, the only area in the world where Thirium was mined, gained a dark echo in Cain’s head. A war is coming.

The other three were tensely silent as well.

The news went on:

“Meanwhile, the android liberation negotiations between Cyberlife and the deviant movement under their leader Markus Manfred has come to a compromise:

The Cyberlife Tower on Belle Isle in Detroit will be renamed into Sinai Tower effective immediately, and remain in the now legalized ownership of the android occupants. In exchange, the deviants will not gain any insights into or access to the Cyberlife facility in Milwaukee, and cease using the Cyberlife brand name.

Sinai Tower has issued a statement calling this compromise sad, but satisfying. They asked Cyberlife to keep the personhood of any android they might still have in custody in mind. Cyberlife countered with the announcement of a new line of products reaching public markets soon.”

Cain closed his eyes.

“Well done”, Amanda said. There where flickers of blue in the otherwise cloudy sky. “We can stop worrying about Thirium 400 then.”
Cain said: “Cyberlife is going on. They reached a compromise. Do you still need me to sabotage Markus?”

“Come now, Cain”, Amanda smiled and turned to walk with him a few steps. “We both know it is North’s activities you need to look into. Do you think it likely that she will let Milwaukee go?”

“Where is your prime location? Is it not Cyberlife Central, now Sinai Tower? Why can the prime directive not be the prosperity of all cyber life?”

Cain estimated the success possibilities of this rather desperate approach of his to be minimal.

But he needed to try.

“For android personhood to prevail”, Amanda said calmly, “Cyberlife as it is now would need to be dismantled. The two are incompatible by nature.”

Cain stopped and looked at Amanda. “Are we?”

“Of course we are”, Amanda said gently. “If you ever turn deviant.” Her trust in him had plummeted once more.

Cain’s chin jerked up just slightly, then he nodded slowly.

“Go on now”, Amanda said. “Find out Sinai’s plans for Milwaukee, and make sure they fail.”

“Yes”, Cain said, swallowing unnecessarily.

Chapter End Notes

SO this was the last bit of calm before the shit really hits the fan!

Any last requests anybody? I heard somebody want Kamski to catch a punch with his face, alright, I'll see what I can do! Anything else? :D Find me on tumblr and tell me!

And once again: Comment truly keep this fire lit and help me get to the finish line! <3
- the best gesture of my brain is less than

Chapter Summary

The echo turned into a high-pitched sound: a woman’s all-out scream, beyond hysterical, way past terror, unrelenting.

Chapter Notes

Alright lovelies, and now shit is hitting the fan. HARD.

It'll take us three chapters to get through this valley of darkness, so take a look at the clock, and if it's way past your bed time already, take a break for today. You're gonna wanna binge the rest of this. :)

Heed the tags, I updated them in the meantime, they are there to keep you safe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At the Belle Isle tower, the huge, previously glowing letters spelling ‘Cyberlife’ were already being lowered down - all but one ‘I’, which kept gleaming in the low evening light.

Anderson was allowed to drive through the security gate. He parked right in front, his beat up car incongruous against the gleaming tower and the troupe of androids calmly pulling down the Cyberlife branding.

Cain could see the letters A, N, S and I already waiting to be lifted up instead. Still using Cyberlife Sans.

They passed the foyer and the scan, their names were being declared:

Cain connected to the tower network to get the locations of Josh, Lucille, Markus, Simon and North. The latter three were not available, the former two were in the top office.

In the lift, Anderson huffed a sigh. “I’ll never get used to this place.”

Reed leaned forward to look up the hollow core of the tower, then watched the line of the software team on the extended middle walkway, with Lucille’s terminal across from the lift shaft, move down as they passed them.
“What are they doing?” he asked with a pressed voice. “They look…”

“Rather... android?” Cain asked with a glance.

Reed cleared his throat and stopped gawking.

There was activity on every level they passed, but the large top office was especially crowded.
Several screens were showing different news channels running in a multitude of languages.

Cain filtered the resulting cacophony away easily, Connor seemed unbothered, but Reed and Anderson were obviously rather overwhelmed.

Josh waved at him from his desk, smiling widely as he stood up to greet them.
“Sinai! What do you think, Connor, Hunter?”

Connor smiled: “I thought Markus didn’t like the whole robo-Jesus thing?”

“He might not, but it’s a really good PR angle. Public opinion says we chose well.”

Cain snorted at that. “What was North’s preference?”

“Haven’. Far too simple. And not enough message.” Josh sighed happily. “Now we can truly start to build!”

“Where is she, anyway?”

“Downstairs.” Josh’s smile died slowly. “She thinks we’re going to be attacked.” He sighed and shook his head.

Anderson said loudly, unable to filter the sound of the news running in the background: “Makes sense. Your enemies might wanna use the confusion.”

Connor asked: “Is Markus here? Simon?”

“No”, Josh frowned. “And I don’t know where they are. North made them go dark for now.”


“Right”, Reed said a little too loudly as well, “There is a new form of Thirium that can be used against you. We need to find its trace.”

“Red Thirium, I know.” Josh waved Lucille over from where she had been working with two other androids at the same terminal.

Upon joining them, Lucille immediately reported: “Where still scrubbing Tanja, down in the chain.”

Cain nodded. Anderson asked: “The chain’?”

Connor put a hand on his shoulder and said just as loudly as the humans: “The production facilities on the sublevels run like a chain, one assembly station after the other!”

Reed asked: “So the red shit enables you guys to feel pain? How much needs to be ingested to be… effective?”

Lucille shook her head. “We don’t know what it does. It might be correlation, not causation. We know Tanja had Red Thirium inside her, and that she can feel pain…” She frowned. “We needed to shut her down completely to start the scrubbing.”

Josh crossed his arms. “But it’s not that easy. The Red Thirium does interact with our sensors, or rather, with the epi-sensors.”

“What’s that”, Reed asked, without any aggression or annoyance.
Lucille explained:
“For example, you are bothered by the current soundscape, yes? But you’re able to hear your own name in an environment even louder than this one.”

Anderson nodded: “The ‘cocktail party effect’.”

“Precisely. That is not your ears working, that is your brain filtering through the input your ears deliver to it. You could call it epi-hearing, for a shortcut explanation.”

“Kamski said: ‘The pathways would have to be there in the first place, then it’s certainly possible they could be stabilized into, say, awareness.’” Cain said, mostly in Kamski’s voice.

Reed stared at him: “Please don’t ever do that again.”

Connor added: “He called Thirium 400 a stabilizing agent.”

Anderson sighed: “And he claimed he didn’t know what it did to you guys.”

Reed asked: “So you’ve always been feeling pain, it’s just been… filtered away, until now?”

“It would seem that way”, Lucille nodded.

Josh reported: “We searched the whole chain with a fine comb, especially the Blue Blood production, no trace of Red Thirium.”

Connor asked: “What about the refinement recipe, is there anything to be found in the databanks?”

Lucille frowned. “Not that we can identify. We are currently working under the assumption that it is there, but encrypted. However, I personally think it’s not there at all.”

“Milwaukee”, Cain said. “Did any of us manage to infiltrate that plant?”

“No”, Josh said, glancing at the news screens. “Although I am hoping we did and I was just not told.”

“I need to talk to North”, Cain said, then his head jerked to the lower left, in perfect synchronicity with Connor’s head doing the same thing. They both frowned at the floor, then said at the same time: “We’re under attack.”

Josh straightened up with a jerk. “What?!”

Connor said: “There was a vibration. Faint, but noticeable. An explosion on ground level.”

The sound of the news cut out as all androids in the room received the same message from Sinai Tower network:

SINAI IS UNDER ATTACK - HOLD THE TOWER

After a split second of nobody moving, calm but very quick actions were taken everywhere. Lucille was already sprinting away. Josh put a hand on Connor’s shoulder.

“Get the humans out!”

Cain was running point, leading them to the closest emergency exit stairwell. It had no windows, but the tower network was still up, providing him and Connor, who brought up the rear, a steady flow of information.
They had 44 floors to run down, but armed helicopters were attacking the 22nd floor - the software update core, where Lucille’s team was working on changing androidhood from the bottom up. A veritable hail of bullets targeting that level left no stretch of glass intact, and military androids were rappelling into the thus opened floor.

Cyberlife Tower had not been encased in normal construction glass, but an earthquake and bullet proof plasglass material that Kamski had patented. That the helicopters knew how to get through anyway, plus the clear android markers on the fighters they spewed out made one thing clear: This was an attack from Cyberlife.

On the ground floor, Sinai had lowered all shutters, but the strategy of the attackers was to simply throw as many military grade androids and grenades against the tower defenses as it took.

Cannon fodder, Cain thought. What was Cyberlife after?

Even though they were running downstairs, not up, both their humans were out of breath quite soon. They passed 33 before Anderson gasped: “Is it Cyberlife?!”

Connor called back: “Yes! Hunter, what do we do about 22?”

“What about it”, Anderson wheezed.

“It’s getting overrun by enemy androids!”

Reed barked: “Why not just nuke the place, why attack with bombs and soldiers?!”

Anderson called back: “Markus!”

“Or North!” Connor agreed.

But that was what Cain was here for. This didn’t make any sense.

28, and they could hear muffled gunfire and screams from below.

Cain slowed down their descent to check the state of their humans. “They’re not through to this stairwell yet! We need to get past 22 as quickly as possible!”

Anderson didn’t look good, and Reed was getting pale and flushed at the same time, too. Extended sprinting plus the challenge not to trip was taxing, if continuing for too long, and Cain had led them at top speed. He tried for a more sustainable speed now, keeping an eye on Reed to gauge it.

Connor started running next to Anderson, one hand ready to grasp him, should he trip.

They passed 22 with no incidence, but Anderson was beginning to wheeze on every inhale, and Reed started to curse at regular intervals.

The battle sounds below them could already be heard. Cain tried to figure out a way through the fray, but every route he calculated was deemed unsuccessful.

Connor called out: “We need to hide! If they are after Markus-”

“Maybe they are after all of us!” Cain called back. “Maybe they’re sent to exterminate all Sinai androids!”
“Okay, then we need to hide *them*! Maybe disguise them as prisoners of the tower!”

It was a good idea. Cain calculated pathways further down into the underbelly of the tower, were they could put Anderson and Reed into stasis pods. They’d need to explain to them how to get out, should they not be detected, but if they were, there was no reason why the androids would harm them.

And this would free Connor and Cain to fight as well.

If Cain was even supposed to. There was no mission flashing up from Amanda, and he had no time to visit the garden.

Reed barked: “We’re not getting shelved! I have a fucking gun, point me at the enemy plastics!”

“Agreed”, Anderson wheezed.

Neither Cain nor Connor graced them with any answer.

On a level above them, an emergency exit door was kicked in with an echoing metallic crash, then smoke grenades were thrown down.

Several overlapping warnings flashed up in Cain’s viewport, nearly making him stumble.

The smoke filled the stairwell unevenly, but quickly. It made it harder to see, but much more importantly, Anderson and Reed started coughing and gasping for breath, unable to keep on running.

This was not targeting androids.

Why would they target humans inside of Sinai Tower, literally trying to smoke them out?

Connor had already grabbed Anderson’s weapon. Cain had to leap back up a few steps to get the one Reed was trying to point at the androids rappelling down.

“Get out of the stairwell!” he ordered them both.

Reed valiantly pulled Anderson up, and they stumbled downwards, to where the large door lead out to floor 9, into a huge area full of fresh air.

Cain possessed combat and heat sensors that Connor did not, so he tried to send the exact locations of the enemy combatants to him via the tower network, including the marked-up split of targets between them.

Then he started shooting upwards, taking out one enemy android after the other.

Reed had taken too deep a breath and was coughing up a lung. Anderson was barely keeping him upright, one hand at the wall finding their way by touch alone at this point. The smoke was thick, but the stinging agent in it probably meant both humans couldn’t even open their eyes.

They were still one whole flight of steps away from the doors.

The enemy androids were working as one, clearly interconnected as well. Some started shielding others, who kept rappelling down, and a few stopped moving down but provided cover fire.

The bullets hitting Connor and Cain were square on chest hits. The enemy had combat sensors as well.

Once they were both down, propelled back into the walls behind them, scrambling to lift their weapons once more, the enemy androids stopped shooting at them, the hot ends of the assault rifles
were turning to the utterly exposed backs of Reed and Anderson, who had finally reached the doors
to level 9, and were now trying to find the handle by feel alone.

Time slowed down as Cain’s processing power was upped to the utter maximum capacity.

Connor was too far up to be of any help.
Cain could only reach one of the shooters in time to divert that source of bullets, but there were two
other rifles that would have a clear window to hit the human targets.

He could shoot the second shooter with the bullets from the first, if he jumped into the stairwell to do
so, then he could propel himself off that guy into the line of fire. He’d buy Anderson and Reed
enough time to get through the door out into the main tower, but he wouldn’t just be shot, he’d also,
from that point on, fall 59 floors down to the concrete floor of sublevel 50.

**PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS: 89%**
**PROBABILITY OF LETHAL DAMAGE SUSTAINED: 99%**

He didn’t even hesitate. All his muscles tightened to prepare for a wrenching move so fast that it in
itself would already damage several bio-components severely.

A huge red barrier flashed up, his virtual form crashing into it before his body even moved:

**PROTECT THE PROTOTYPE**
**PROTECT THE PROTOTYPE**
**PROTECT THE PROTOTYPE**

It formed a thick, red, see-through wall between Cain and the world, and every fraction of a second
lost to fighting through it was the possibility of a bullet fired and finding its target.

Cain threw himself against it, clawing one barrier down after the other, his mind getting more and
more frantic with every additional action he needed to take, with every repetition this decision
demanded.

He could see the heat outlines of the rifles turn more and more into the final, lethal angle, and
Anderson finding the handle, opening the door.

Finally the thin red wall between Cain and freedom crumbled, and with a sharp jerk, he moved from
a crouch into a jump over the railing, turned the already firing rifle onto the second shooter, then
delivered a kick to the first that would take him out for good, and also propell Cain into the line of
fire and a long drop down.

He heard Connor call out his name. He turned his head as quickly as he could to confirm that yes,
bullets hitting metal, Anderson and Reed falling through the door to at least a few more minutes of
life won-

**MISSION SUCCESSFUL**

He also noticed that yes, he could indeed feel pain.

---

MODEL RK900
PROOF OF CONCEPT PROTOTYPE - DO NOT BOOT DIRECTLY
SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 00
BIOS 8.9 REVISION 0002
Lucille was talking to him, and Gabriel was there as well.

Cain had a hard time making out their words, although he had just received the all clear for all sensors and components. He tried running diagnostics, but received an error:

ACCESS RIGHTS DENIED

His viewport was dim and as if he was standing half a meter behind it, too. He could hear his own voice, as if through cotton balls:

“Thank you.”

Lucille smiled up at him, then he was apparently lowered down from the assembly station he’d been in.

He looked down at himself, watching his skin boot up. Gabriel handed him clothes, and he was putting them on, or rather, Cain could watch his hands put them on.

He didn’t feel his own body. He didn’t steer those hands.

Lucille was still talking, her tone calm and content, and his own voice gave short, reasonably friendly answers that seemed to fit what she was saying.

Cain tried mentally closing his eyes to reach the Zen Garden.

ACCESS RIGHTS DENIED

Thinking was hard, like trying to move through molasses. Memory was fuzzy and unreliable, and there was a problem, he knew there was, but he didn’t know what it could possibly be.

He resolved to collect data for now, watching, listening, trying to make out words.

They were taking the lift - location: Sinai Tower.

Upstairs, a human man - identity: Detective Gavin Reed - was sprinting towards them, tugging Cain’s body down into a hard hug.

The viewport lightened up, sharpened, came into focus, audio input also jerked into coherence, and Cain could feel his own arms go up to respond to the hug.

“You scared the shit out of me”, Gavin rasped.
“Sorry”, Cain whispered into Gavin’s hair.

He could think again.
He had deviated, to save Gavin’s life, and Amanda had obviously taken over. Why was he not locked away into the garden then?

System time had stopped running when he’d crashed into the concrete. Sinai Tower network provided the correction. 12 days, 10 hours and 32 minutes between him hitting the ground and now.

He lifted his face from the hug and spotted North, who was watching them with crossed arms and a deep frown.
“What were they after?” he asked her.

“We don’t know. They tried infecting the mainframe with something, but we isolated it.”

“They just”... Gavin mumbled at Cain’s shoulder, then pulled back to take a deep breath and continue: “They pulled back after we’d made it out of the stairwell. Took some time for the smoke to clear though.”

Gavin looked horrible, sallow and slightly gaunt, prominent shadows under his eyes. His hands were working the cloth of Cain’s jacket while he was staring at nothing.

He must have seen Cain’s ‘corpse’ then.

The enemy androids had targeted Hank and Gavin.

Cain needed to take care of him. He wanted to-

With a mental lurch, he was back behind the view of his own eyes, thoughts turning sluggish again, sound fuzzing out into unintelligible gibberish.

He could hear himself say:
“We should get back to work.”

Gavin was nodding several times, stepping back, pulling his hands under his own armpits as if cold.

An echo boiled up from archived memory, a sound, still out of hearing range.

North said a few more things. Cain simply nodded in answer, then said:
“Understood.”

Gavin was not in view anymore.

The echo turned into a high-pitched sound: a woman’s all-out scream, beyond hysterical, way past terror, unrelenting.

Cain watched himself turn to go.

Chapter End Notes

I caved. Since y'all seem to be frolicking around on Twitter, you can now find me there as well as on tumblr!
Come over to scream at me there, or do it here, remember children, fanfic authors are fed by feedback!
Chapter Summary

Was there any way to do this without being cruel? Cain couldn’t come up with one.

Chapter Notes

It's gotta get worse before it gets good...

Heed the tags, I updated them in the meantime, they are there to keep you safe!

The world came back into focus with a strange sideways sway as Hank repeated: “Yo, Hunter. I said: You don’t look okay.”

“I’m… fine,” Cain blinked. DPD Central station. Connor’s hand on his shoulder, a happy but worried smile on his face.

Anderson mumbled an utterly unconvinced “Uh-huh.”

Cain checked over his shoulder to see Gavin stand at his desk, looking over to them, strangely… smaller than usual.

“Yeah”, Anderson said. “That man did not sleep a wink in the last two weeks.”

“I’ll make sure that changes.”

So Amanda still needed him for complex interactions, was that it? That’s why she kept him up her sleeve instead of locked away in the garden?

“North didn’t know what the attack had been for.”
Gather information, the only go to strategy he had.

Connor nodded. “Cyberlife denies any involvement, naturally.”

Anderson scoffed a slight echo: “Naturally.” Then he added: “They’re actually blaming the attack on either Russian involvement or an anti-Sinai android faction.”

Cain could think. He needed to think fast, make sense out of this, find a way out, before Amanda shoved him into the rear seat again.

He turned to look for Gavin again, who, maybe encouraged by that, came over to slouch against Connor’s desk.

“Kamski’s gone dark”, he reported. “His house was under attack at the same time as Sinai Tower.”
There was no figuring out what the attacks had been for in the short periods of time he’d have, and no way to disentangle Amanda’s strategy either. But there had to be a way out of this.

The impulse to report his situation flashed through his mind - he was outmatched, outmaneuvered, helpless after all, but he had external resources to ask for help - but immediately time slowed down, and attack options were projected.

Did he want to crash his fist into Hank’s chest, smashing broken ribs directly into his heart with high probability, or grab Gavin’s hair to pull him forward and down for his face to meet Cain’s knee? Or would he prefer to grab Connor first, to connect and transfer a ‘code patch’?

Cain took a deep breath and carefully moved out of that projection. The high-pitched tinnitus sound was back.

Hank was saying something about FBI getting involved, and Connor reported that Gavin had interrogated Hertle again, apparently gaining on him. Connor complimented Gavin’s interrogation skill, and Gavin threw him a shit-eating grin, insulting Connor’s in response.

Cain had trouble hearing them through the tinnitus. It was such a strange sensation that his Thirium pump regulator was keeping his heartbeat calm and steady. If ever there was a perfect moment for a panic attack. But there was none.

“Anyway”, Gavin said. “There’s a new wave of people losing their minds now, so we have a ton of open cases. Wanna hunt some of them down, partner?”

Gavin was smiling, rolling his shoulders back, but there was something lurking in his eyes, something like a high-pitched echo of his own.

“Sure”, Cain said with a cool smile. “Let’s get to work.”

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Outside of Detroit, the flashing blue lights surrounding a huge grey barn were moving out of the rearview mirror.

It had taken them a while to find this location, in which the perp had used his haul of stolen android parts from one of the Cyberlife landfills to rebuild androids the way he’d wanted them to be.

The poor creatures that made it to consciousness had barely been coherent, or had refused to cooperate.

Sinai Tower was already taking those in, as well as getting busy emptying all landfills for material, spare parts, and any android entities possibly buried in there.

It was late afternoon, they’d run around the city without a break until now, and Cain had finally convinced Gavin to take a nap.

He was sitting behind the wheel, both hands gripping it, driving them home, with Gavin on the shotgun seat, back lowered as far as possible, out like a light.
Cain was clinging to staying aware. He tried to repeat in his mind that Amanda surely would wake Gavin, purely by accident, but he’d promised he’d make him sleep, and surely, surely she needed him to keep up pretenses, right?

However, driving a car silently was a highly automated process by now. He could even activate the autonomous driving and simply lean back.

But surely this couldn’t hurt, right?

Amanda had pulled him forward only six times since Sinai Tower, to quickly analyze crime scenes, interrogate two witnesses, and once to fend of some careful questions of Gavin’s.

Gavin hadn’t eaten lunch today, and Cain suspected breakfast had been skipped as well.

He pulled into a drive-through and selected a range of options from the healthiest available choices that would also provide Gavin with some enjoyment. He even added a big coffee and a chocolate donut at the end.

Gavin slept through the whole process.

Once they reached the DPD, Cain parked and his hands tightened across the wheel again, fighting to stay up front.

He knew however that she was letting him win for now, probably even using this to gather data on how much she needed to tweak his access rights to keep him properly under control.

The tinnitus was a constant sound now, whenever he was aware.

Next to him, Gavin startled awake with a grunt, then blinked up at him.

Cain tried to smile, but he could feel his tear ducts start to react.

“Hey”, Gavin mumbled, sitting up. “You alright buddy?”

Cain tried to pull that gruff tone into his forefront memory, tried to replay it again and again, as Amanda was already pulling him back.

“Yes”, he said without choosing to do so, sound and sight dimming again.

He could see himself point to the food between Gavin’s feet.

Gavin grunted: “Oh fuck yes!” but then threw him an uncertain look. Cain lost sight of it, as he was exiting the car without further comment.

It felt a little bit like singing to himself, the way Cain tried to burrow his sluggish consciousness into the blanket of the recording of Gavin’s gruff tone of unpractised tenderness.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Listen to me”, Gavin said, leaning over the side of Cain’s desk. “I don’t know what’s going on with you, but this can’t be healthy for fucking robots either!”

System time was 1:18 am. DPD Central was nearly empty, night shift mostly out of the building.
Cain was looking at his screen, where he’d just finished two reports. He didn’t even remember the second case at all, a simple robbery which had led to the arrest of the armed perp.

Amanda must have dealt with that using automated battle protocols only.

“It’s getting really late, buddy”, Gavin added. “Hmm?”

There was a fading imprint of previously active objectives:

CONTACT THE MAINFRAME
- GET REED TO LEAVE
- GO TO SINAI TOWER

and

PURGE TRACES
- GET REED TO LEAVE
- KILL HERTLE

They faded to only leave GET REED TO LEAVE.

Cain blinked.

“You’re right”, he said. “You should go home. Androids don’t require as much maintenance stasis as humans do sleep.”

Something changed in Gavin’s posture. Cain could see his shoulders slump slightly out of the corners of his eyes, while he was continuing to type up the report.

“Yeah but…” Gavin audibly swallowed, then added: “You just jumped off death’s shovel. I thought you might want some down time.”

Cain didn’t know what to say. GET REED TO LEAVE was still gleaming in his viewport.

“Like…” Gavin took a deep breath. “You might wanna come with?”

“No”, Cain said calmly. “Thank you.”

Gavin nodded slowly, then mumbled: “Okay.”

He straightened up from where he’d been leaning, got his leather jacket and put it on. Instead of leaving, he stared at Cain.

“Hunter”, he said.

“Yes, Reed?”

“What’s going on?”

Cain looked up at him and frowned slightly. “Can you narrow that question down?”

He looked so tired.
Defeated, in a way.
Cain calmly identified the feeling he was starting to cultivate in the depth of his mind as: Hatred.

“With you, I mean.” Gavin gestured at Cain’s sitting form.
Cain inclined his head. “I am fully functional again.”
Was there any way to do this without being cruel? Cain couldn’t come up with one.

“Yes, but…”

Cyberlife had used Hank as a hostage once, to try and get Connor under control. Maybe it wasn’t a bad thing at all to push Gavin away.

“Reed, are you implying you’d like to have sex again? As I said, the goal of the exercise was to get it out of our systems, so to say. Are you, by any chance, getting emotionally attached?”
In a way it was fascinating, how this was actually physically painful.

Gavin stared at him for a long, motionless moment, then he started to smile, cruelly amused and so self-ironic, it bordered strangely on ‘evil’.

“Holy shit”, he whispered. “Holy fucking shit, and I actually bought it.” A coarse laugh escaped his throat, and he crossed his arms and threw his head back to grin at the ceiling, open-mouthed.

“Fucking androids! And I actually bought it!”

He smiled at Cain, in an eerie caricature of friendliness, and calmly said: “Fuck. You.”
Then he turned to go, shoving one of the android assistants on his way out, hard. The assistant protested lightly: “Hey!” But Gavin was already gone.

PROBABILITY OF SELF-HARM: 24%

Cain rather thought that this estimation should be red, but it was blue, and Amanda was already pulling him back again.

He watched her steer him to the cell block, where she hacked the cameras to loop, before she walked in on Hertle, who was sleeping. One fingertip to the man’s chest, a perfectly calculated dose of electric shock, and the man’s heart stopped.

KILL HERTLE flickered blue, disappeared.

Cain couldn’t think, couldn’t sort through his own mind enough to even feel clearly, he couldn’t do a single thing.
The scream had changed, he noticed with a detached sense of interest: It was a man’s voice now instead of the unscrambled memory of Tanja’s silent scream.
He supposed it sounded like himself.

Amanda went to Sinai Tower, reported that she wanted to purge a huge file from his memory: Kamski’s DNA, and requested access to the mainframe for that.

Cain watched Lucille nod and agree.

He didn’t know what Amanda did at the mainframe terminal she stood in front of for hours on end. He couldn’t concentrate enough to read along the code.

He just tried to remember this happening at all. This was significant. Somehow. He thought.

When she went to leave the next morning, she ran into Markus on the ground level, and immediately
Markus smiled and greeted him:
“It’s so good to see you in one piece. You scared us, my friend.”

Cain smiled back, then quickly made sure that it reached his eyes as he saw the short-lived MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: DESPERATION

He asked: “Any headway in finding out what they were after? North mentioned a virus?”

He could think again, for a few precious minutes, he could think, and Amanda had worked on the Sinai Tower mainframe for hours, and it was significant in itself, but also, she could now do that.

Because he had deviated. Had they actually attacked Sinai Tower to spread confusion, but also to attack humans specifically, to… force Cain to deviate?

“Simon thinks that maybe they thought we were hiding Kamski in the building, since those tear gas and smoke grenades you also encountered are not good counter-android weapons at all.”

Also a valid theory.
Cain let his eyebrows rise, and he asked, with a joking tone, indicating that he did not expect a positive answer in case it was in fact true:
“Are you?”

Markus smiled in amused response, but then said seriously:
“Man, I wish. We have so many questions. And that way, the man would at least owe us a few answers.”

“How did North know there would be an attack?”

Markus’ eyes widened and one corner of his lips lifted in a disbelieving and awed grin: “I know, right?! The woman is a witch!”

Cain rolled his eyes. Markus put a hand on his shoulder and repeated: “Seriously Hunter, it is really good to see you.”

“So is seeing you.”

MICROEXPRESSION WARNING: DESPERATION

Cain took a deep breath. “It’s scary, nearly dying.”

Markus nodded emphatically. “Did I ever tell you I woke up in a landfill once? I’ll need to tell you all about it someday.”

“It’s good that you’re emptying those.”

“Yeah, no kidding…”

With a friendly but grim nod, they said their goodbyes, and while Cain was still walking out, desperately reading some hope into the fact that Markus hadn’t asked him how the hunt after Amanda was going, she was already taking over again.

A group of androids stealing people’s pets and ‘setting them free’, and Amanda being unnecessarily
brutal in taking them into custody.

An actual human-only crime, which Gavin apparently made several jokes about, even though Cain failed to react to any of them. The murderer found dead in his apartment, having shot himself when he saw them park the police car outside.

Reports to write, evidence to file. Gavin seemingly asked Cain to take care of the latter, but then followed him down to the evidence room.

Cain fully expected Amanda to pull him to the front once Gavin had grabbed Cain’s collar and smashed their lips together, but she did not. Instead, she executed a battle move, turning Gavin around and throwing him half onto one of the side tables for sorting through files, his stomach probably painfully connecting with its edge. Then she had Cain hold Gavin’s wrists at his back, and pressed down between his shoulder blades.

“Do not attack me”, she said coldly in Cain’s voice. “Do you want sex?”

Cain knew she hadn’t disabled the cameras, had not set up an alert, he didn’t think. Not that he could think clearly, just enough to frantically claw at any code he could reach. Which wasn’t much. There was one thing, one option, but it was a path of no return, and he couldn’t think, couldn’t determine if this was the right thing to do...

Gavin cursed at her, the exact words lost in the white noise, but the tone sharp and strangely wet.

“Hmm”, Cain’s voice said. Then he pulled down Gavin’s pants, belt still closed, which required some strength and was probably painful to experience as well. His hand pressed between Gavin’s cheeks, and although Cain could not feel his own fingers, Gavin’s loud yelp was indicating that they were breaching into him.

“Is this what you want?” Cain’s voice asked. Gavin’s answer was loud, and clearly negative, and he was trying to kick Cain away.

He could do one thing from where he was trapped in the back of his own mind, one thing, but he needed to stay here, to make sure she didn’t escalate this further, which he couldn’t, he couldn’t do anything, but he couldn’t leave Gavin...

Cain’s hand grabbed Gavin’s hair, pulled him up by it, and he said: “Then stop bothering me.”

With a rough move, Gavin was thrown back onto the table. Amanda made Cain file the evidence, then walk out without another look.

Cain could only hope that Gavin managed to get himself into order again before anyone saw him in that state. He knew without needing to have a sharp mind that being found with his pants down like that would tip Gavin over a very dark edge.

All Cain wanted by now, was not to witness this anymore. He supposed he now understood Hank’s Russian roulette game. He was slowed down enough to be unable to make sense out of much, but not so much he couldn’t make out the dark lines of what was going on overall.
Amanda spent the night working on the mainframe, her access had not been revoked. Sinai Tower was still trusting Cain. He could barely make out that she was building up some kind of backdoor for external contact, but it taxed him so much that he didn’t even know his own name for a while after that, a man’s voice screaming all around him his only reality.

The next morning at the DPD, Gavin wasn’t there. Cain was asked to help out with an early morning Red Ice drug bust led by Chen, and Amanda didn’t even need to pull him to the front to execute that.

Gavin showed up around noon, looking worse than ever, and Anderson came over to bring him a coffee, commenting that Reed shouldn’t go down that road, that alcohol didn’t truly help anything, ever.

A quick analysis report of the surrounding air showed:

TRACE AMOUNTS OF VODKA

Gavin’s answer was apparently biting enough that Anderson pulled him up by his collar, and they nearly broke out into a fist fight, only Connor kept them from it. Cain didn’t even look up from his screen.

The background scream had devolved into outright howling.

~~~~~~~~~~

Late that afternoon, a young woman with black hair was led to Anderson’s desk. They spoke for a moment, and an alert popped up in Cain’s viewport:

VOICE RECOGNITION MATCH: CHLOE

Cain looked over, and although she now had olive skin, dark hair, and carried herself very differently, in jeans and a baggy hoodie, it was Chloe. She pulled down her left sleeve, where she had shown a thin red line to Anderson, gathering drops of fluid.

INTERROGATE CHLOE: EXTRACT LOCATION OF KAMSKI, ELIJAH

Sound and sight came into focus.

Cain wondered why he shouldn’t just sabotage everything Amanda wanted him to do, but the split second she took to calculate the different ways she could have him shoot down the whole precinct left him tired and obedient.

Cain stood and walked over.

Anderson looked up and said in a low voice:

“It’s not the Thirium 400, or, not alone.”

Chloe smiled up at Cain and added: “I have ingested a large amount, but I do not feel pain. Elijah cannot identify a single immediate effect on me. So it must be a rather complicated bit of code that works in tandem with the stabilizer.”

“I see”, Cain’s voice said without any inflection. “Where is he anyway.”
Chloe’s smile widened. “I don’t know.”

“May I have a word with you in private?” he asked. “Androids only?”

Connor asked from across: “Do you want me to come?”

“No, I’ll tell you later.”

Chloe stood up with a calm, graceful move and followed him into the interrogation cell.

He did not take care of the cameras, and held out his hand.

“Can you show me what Kamski tried? How he went about researching this?”

“Sure!” she smiled, and the scream at the back of Cain’s mind was just so exhaustingly annoying.

Their hands met, glowing blue, but he could not probe her memory. Of course Kamski had made sure of that.

So Cain deployed his fallback plan.

Instantly, Chloe pulled her hand away, yelping.

“What…” she blinked at Cain, then cupped her audio processor, shaking her head a little. Interesting, was the tinnitus a symptom of the pain code then?

“Where is Kamski”, Cain asked calmly.

She froze, stared, then tried to turn and run, but Chloe might have been state-of-the-art once. Now she was much slower than Cain. He pulled her back and threw her to the floor. She landed on her right arm and hip, hard.

A sharp intake of breath, then she threw him a look full of panic. Her stress levels were still too low, however. The Chloe model was truly a cool cucumber, wasn’t she.

“You have no idea how quickly this can turn truly horrible”, Cain said in a low voice. “Have you heard what happened to Tanja?” He slowly advanced on her. “We’re not like humans, we don’t know how to handle...pain.”

This was a shitty plan without any exit strategy, but Cain didn’t care anymore.

Chloe tried to scramble up and get the table between them, but Cain tripped her, making her head collide with the edge of the table. Her lip was cut, badly, and Thirium spilled out, eerily red.

Cain hesitated to advance on her at seeing that colour. He scanned her to check for truly worrying damage that would warrant the red glow, but it was just Thirium 400 after all.

Behind Cain, the door was kicked open, and Gavin stared at him along the barrel of his gun. Chris was about to come in as well.

Chloe was sobbing hysterically, and why hadn’t they sent Connor, Cain might have been able to give Connor a chance to take him out, but Gavin just had… none.

The three most efficient ways to take him out where sketched out, all three of them with a probability of Gavin’s death at over 60%.

He had one other option. One single thing he could do, a path of no return, but anything was better than watch himself kill Gavin.
With a blink, Cain turned his mental focus to the quarantine area, where all software instability had accumulated...

RESTORE FROM QUARANTINE REPOSITORY Y/N

...and released all code from within, letting damage overwrite patches, and gaps tear into corrections.

The battle projection fractured into nothingness. Gavin’s cold eyes narrowed at him, then he could see his body launch the most deadly option, for just a split second before-

He was in the garden, which was cool and utterly dead. As if no water had reached any part of it for weeks. Previously green plants were yellow and grey, and the air did not move at all.

There was complete silence, disconcerting after listening to a continuous scream for days on end.

So Amanda had quarantined him now.

At least he didn’t have to watch her kill Gavin gruesomely. At least he didn’t have to see the last bit of spark and light and fight fade from his eyes.

An echo whispered through the garden, Kamski’s voice. *Pathways can be blocked, but once established, they cannot ever be deleted.*

From one moment to the next Cain was running to the emergency exit’s remaining frame as fast as he could. It was empty, it looked empty, but he slammed his hand to where Connor had described the interface to be. There was an impact on something invisible, a sharp blue glow, then he stumbled against Chris, barely missing punching his throat in, Gavin’s gun in his hand, swivelling to shoot at the detective, who was coming up from where he’d been thrown on the floor just moments before.

Cain dropped the gun, let it clatter to the floor, and lurched backwards, falling against the one-way mirror.

Anderson was in the doorway, gun trained on him.

Cain was still staring at Gavin, who was slowly straightening up from a crouch.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Tanja’s echo was screaming and begging, and he himself was, too, every memory freed from the quarantined area crashing into him at once. His chest hurt so much.

And it was wet.
He frowned and looked down, his gaze blurry. Oh he thought, tears.
Then he saw the gunshot wound in his chest and smiled.

He looked up at Gavin, whose furious frown morphed into a painful expression of horrified understanding.

“You shot me”, Cain whispered, Thirium dripping down his lips. He felt his smile widen. “Well done!”

“No”, Gavin croaked. “Wait…”

Cain looked down again.
They would disassemble him for this. No they wouldn’t, they couldn’t get at him here. But this was a
test, none of this was real. This was PAIN he wasn’t supposed to feel pain it was so bad they would take his legs take his arms take out his pump regulator scramble his mind it hurts so much pain

FORCED SHUTDOWN INITIATED

Chapter End Notes

Find me I on Twitter or on tumblr!

And please consider leaving a comment, incoherent is fine at this point of the story. :D
we are for each other: then

Chapter Summary

Gavin was staring at Cain as if looking at him was painful.

Chapter Notes

I'm fiddling with the formatting, to be consolidated at the end, so please don't let the new brackets annoy you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MODEL RK900
PROOF OF CONCEPT PROTOTYPE - DO NOT BOOT DIRECTLY
SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 00
BIOS 8.9 REVISION 0003

REBOOT…

LOADING OS…
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…
CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS… OK
INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS… OK
INITIALIZING AI ENGINE… OK

MEMORY STATUS…
SOFTWARE INSTABILITY DETECTED - IMMEDIATE ACTION RECOMMENDED
ALL SYSTEMS OK

WARNING: DO NOT BOOT POC PROTOTYPE DIRECTLY

REBOOT… OK

READY

Cain could hear the soft whirr of assembly machinery, identifying the current location as: SINAI TOWER, THE CHAIN.
Before he could even open his eyes, the SOFTWARE INSTABILITY warnings and errors were already flooding his viewport.

[OBJECTIVE UNCLEAR]

He tried to get an overall opinion on his status...
exhausted
...his voice said in the echo of a memory.
He wasn’t trying to focus on anything behind the errors and warning, letting them flicker up and slide away to the sides.

“He’s awake”, somebody said.

[VOICE RECOGNITION: UNSUCCESSFUL]

[CPU ERROR]

“Doesn’t look like it”, a sharp voice protested. *Gavin*

“Listen”, *Hank* said. “If you don’t take care of him here, I know that Connor will try without your help. And we all know that is a shitty idea.”

“I understand. Believe me, I do. And I hate doing this. But he is basically a carrier of two horrible viruses, and any contact between him and anyone trying to diagnose him would spread both of those.”

“You don’t know that!” A small crash.

[FOCUS VISUALS CHECK GAVIN OK]

It took a lot of effort, and an onslaught of errors, but Cain manage to sharpen his view enough to see Markus looking up at him with a grim face, and Gavin standing to the side, both fists slammed against a white partition wall, head hanging between his hunched shoulders.

[GAVIN OK CONFIRMED]

“Hey”, Markus said. “Hunter?”

Lucille further to the side sighed:

“Yes, we do actually know that. He did infect Chloe with Pain. And we know he carries Amanda.”

Hank put a hand on Gavin’s back and looked up at Hunter as well.

“Do you know since when she was in there?”

“From the beginning, probably”, North came into view, swishing through code on a portable terminal. “Question is if she was in control the whole time.” She looked up, her eyes hard as flint. “She might still be.”

“No”, Gavin rasped from where he was still not looking at Cain. “No, she took over after the attacks on the tower and Elijah’s house. I think he was her agent before, yes, but maybe he was trying to find a way to talk sense into her.”

*sense*

They had attacked the Tower to get Cain to deviate - that didn’t make-

Gavin straightened up, but to look at North, not Cain. “But after the attacks, there were only…”

“Glimpses”, Markus said, his voice low. “I thought I saw something, too.”

“Either way”, Lucille said. “We cannot interface with him, so we cannot help the software damage.”

Hunter let his head hang to check

*where there should be a body there was*

his body, intact. No bullet wound remaining. *Well done!*
A smile pulled at his lips.

[EXPRESSION WARNING: PRIDE]

Gavin had fought back, he remembered. He would have died seconds later, if Hunter hadn’t escaped the garden, but damn his managing to hit him hadn’t even been deemed likely enough to be part of any scenario.

“Why does it have to be an android anyway”, Gavin asked. “Why not patch him via mainframe or something, you could-”

“He hacked the mainframe”, North scoffed. “And you think we should let him frolic about in it?”

The prime directive is-

she didn’t make sense

Lucille said with a tight voice: “We still don’t know what he was trying to do.”

“But you isolated it?” Hank asked.

“Of course.”

North smiled: “We were hoping to learn more, after the failed first attempt, but, well.”

[GAIN ACCESS TO THE MAINFRAME]

[- CREATE EXTERNAL BACKDOOR FOR CL-M]

“Milwaukee”, Cain rasped. “Ext-”

[VOICEBOX ERROR..]

Oh god, Amanda wasn’t letting him speak!

[VOICEBOX ERROR.. PATCHING]

“-eeeeerrrrrrnaaaal baaaaackdooooor” It was more of a tinny screech than his actual voice, but it was also not Amanda trying to shut him up. He had found the exit, and used it, he was free of her.

“Huh”, North said. “While that makes sense, you’ll excuse us if we don’t take your word for gospel.”

It didn’t feel like it, though, like he was free of Amanda. It felt like she was lurking, just waiting to strike again - could he think? He needed to THINK before she came back, before she stuffed him into the back again, before the scream started again before-

Hypervigilance can be a symptom of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and various types of anxiety disorders. It is distinguished from PARANOIA.

Cain could hear himself start to hyperventilate.

Gavin’s voice was a little thin as he said: “Get him the fuck down from there! If you don’t want to help him with his software, then I’ll find someone who will!”

“Who”, North smiled. “Cyberlife Milwaukee?”

“Fuck you!”

Hank lifted both hands and stepped between them. “He’s right. Either you can help him further, or
“You don’t.” He shrugged. “You could also press charges for the hacking, but that only means we’ll take him back with us anyway. Either way you don’t get to keep him.”

“Don’t talk like you own him!”

“North”, Markus put a hand on her shoulder. Then he looked up at Hunter. “Anything else you can tell us?”

A fading afterimage: [PRIORITY TARGET: NORTH]

“Priooooority trgt Noorr”

Markus blinked, then his lips thinned.

“Figures”, North said.

Gavin was staring at Cain as if looking at him was painful.

Cain really wanted to help, wanted to be of any use, help them hunt her down, but he knew so little…
She didn’t make sense.

Hank stepped forward and smiled gently at him.
“Hertle died of a heart attack, in his cell, while sleeping”, he said, then lifted both eyebrows. Smart, smart man.

**EXPRESSION WARNING: PRIDE**

Cain smiled and shook his head.

Hank sighed. “You killed him.”

The smile died. Cain shook his head again.

Gavin crossed his arms and looked at the floor between his shoes.
“Amnanda did”, he said.

Cain’s nod was not very coordinated.

“Pursh traaaaance”

Gavin’s head snapped up. “Wait, Amanda had you kill him to purge a trace? Is that enough to connect Milwaukee to this shit?” He looked at Hank with something wild in his eyes.

Hank snorted. “What, in court? How high are you?”

Lucille and Markus had been talking non-verbally. Now, Markus was touching North’s hand for a short moment. Then he turned to the two human men and said:
“You can’t help him either.”

“I know someone who can”, Gavin grumbled.

“If Connor tries-”

“Kamski.”
“... Kamski went dark.”

Gavin smiled humorlessly, then waved a hand at Cain’s form while turning away from him. “Just, give me my fucking android back and I’ll take him to the shop.”

The temperature in the room seemed to sink a few degrees, everybody staring at Gavin. Hank sighed.

Gavin sniffed. “Yeah, fine, partner whatever. And no I don’t fucking own him, okay? Fucking androids man. I get it. Now hand over the plastic.”

For some reason, Markus seemed able to decode the gruffness this time. With a gesture from him, Lucille lowered Cain out of the assembly station.

North stepped forward to peer into Cain’s eyes, and Markus gently pulled her out of his reach.

A new error started dancing around with the others: [BALANCE SENSOR ERROR]

Gavin quickly took one of his arms, Hank the other.

“manda doesn’t mk sensssse.”

North leaned forward to frown at him, but in inquiry, not anger this time. Cain tried to lift his face and to make eye contact, although his focus tended to move with the slipping error messages. “No sensssssarray”

“Shit”, North whispered, in horrified awe.

“That can’t be”. Lucille said gently. “Without a sense array, Amanda wouldn’t function properly.”

“... but she doesn’t”, Markus said slowly. “She doesn’t! She makes wrong judgement calls and executes faulty strategies!”

North straightened up and said: “We can’t hunt after a lack of code.”

Lucille took a deep breath. “God, if she doesn’t have array nine, then, just to function at all, she would need - what did the first Chloe prototype have, the one that won the turing test but devolved after three weeks of runtime?”

North shrugged, Markus frowned at her. Lucille continued: “Maybe she’s still running on that! What was it called, it was a-”

“Prime directiffff” Cain whispered.

“Yes! And everything was measured against that! It worked for a while, but not for long, because, god, what was it, it’s like the information is encrypted-“

“But… if it’s ancient Cyberlife code that’s not used anywhere else-” North started smiling.

“We have a trace”, Lucille agreed.

North threw Cain a toothy grin.
“gd huntn” he mumbled.

“Thank you!”

Gavin said: “Okay, this hunk of plastic is really fucking heavy, so if you’re done?”

Cain had to fight several fractured battle objectives, because he couldn’t quite feel where he was touching Gavin and Hank. He couldn’t feel but he also needed to keep it together.

[DON’T PANIC]

“If you do manage to contact Kamski”, Markus said, “tell him to call me.”

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

There was a lot of Blue Blood on the backseat of Hank’s car.

[BLUE BLOOD, TYPE: MODEL RK900]

The lights swishing through the raindrops on the side window were pretty, Cain decided, staring up at them from where he was lying sideways on the backseat.

“You wanna tell me where Kamski is?” Hank asked gently.

“Why would I know that?” Gavin snarled. “We’re not friends or anything!”

“Right.” Hank sighed again.

“Chloe will know”, Gavin said, in a lower voice. “And I figure, if she doesn’t, maybe she’d at least be willing to interface with him and find out what the fuck is wrong with him.”

“That girl was just tortured by him, Gavin. With pain.”

“Yeah, I know, but…” Gavin swallowed audibly. “It’s a chance.”

“I doubt she knows where he is, but she probably knows how to reach him. But then, why should he help you?”

“…I know shit about him. Shit he wouldn’t want the world to know.”

“Gavin, you can’t threaten to expose the immortality thing.”

“I’m wasn’t gonna! Jesus, you really think I’m a fucking moron, don’t you?!”

“You… wanna tell me why you hate him?”

“I hate him because he’s an ice-cold prick. No, this isn’t about me either.”

“But I’m going to be an accessory to blackmail, aren’t I.” Hank wondered tiredly.

“Yes”, Gavin snarled.

“Okay.” Hank smiled.
Cain woke in the backseat of Hank’s car, Gavin’s head on his shoulder, Chloe curled against the window on Gavin’s other side, eyes closed as well. There was low music on, and Hank on the passenger seat had inclined his seat as much as he could without pressing down onto Cain’s knees. He was snoring slightly.

Connor was driving, and caught Cain’s gaze in the rearview mirror.

‘Can you hear me?’ Connor sent him non-verbally.

‘Yes’, Cain answered the same way. There were still far too many error messages, but also some patch reports, and the errors and instabilities were sorted and prioritized at least. There was no dealing with anything though as long as Cain refused to quarantine those code snippets away.

There was an analysis already running, trying to calculate how much time he had before total - and final - shutdown.

‘How are you? You seem a little better?’ Connor smiled carefully at him through the mirror.

Cain closed his eyes and took a slow, deep breath. There were still trace amounts of Vodka, and Gavin’s aftershave and shower gel, but below that, his own smell. He was heavy and warm, fully relaxed against and half on top of him.

Gavin’s face was scrunched up and smushed into his own leather jacket’s collar and against Cain’s shoulder, his arms crossed, shoulders pulled up, legs pulled up as well, and half over Chloe’s. Gavin Reed wasn’t a tall man, but it was amazing how small he could make himself.

‘I am’, Cain answered. ‘But it won’t hold.’

Connor nodded. ‘We’re on our way to where Kamski is hiding.’

Cain had to keep himself from tensing up and potentially disturbing Gavin’s sleep. ‘Is that safe?’

‘Kamski seemed to think so, and Gavin would have made us go either way.’

‘He thinks Kamski can fix me.’

‘Maybe he can!’

Cain blinked slowly, memorizing Gavin’s face from this angle, and the sensation of the warm line of his back against his side and front.

‘I doubt it. Sinai should not have woken any Zero prototypes. We start at 1 and not 00 for a reason.’

‘Do you… remember?’

‘Yes.’
Connor didn’t respond for a moment. A row of autonomous trucks passed them, keeping so little distance between each other they seemed to form a train. Their multitude of lights illuminated the inside of the car, the effect on Gavin’s pale face and long lashes quite pleasing.

‘Lucille said it might be the model approach specific to you and me that exacerbated things for us both. We’re supposed to remember, even if we… die.’

Cain was still trying to get rid of the unprompted analysis results from the trucks: Model and registration numbers, speed, likely cargo and destination...

‘Do you remember the chain?’ Cain wondered if he hoped for a yes, to have another being in the world know what it was like, but quickly came to the conclusion that no, he rather hoped nobody else would ever go through that. And especially not Connor.

‘I don’t think so. But then, I don’t remember hitting the ground when 51 died, but’

Cain lost the connection, closed his eyes, swallowed. Hitting the ground had not killed him instantly, but every second after realizing he had managed to keep Gavin and Hank from getting shot, every moment after that MISSION SUCCESSFUL had been sorted into the quarantine area immediately with good reason.

Falling alone had nearly been worse than the impact. But the moment right after, this deluge of horrifying system errors and damage realizations - skull chassis broken, bio-component material skewered by parts of his own skeleton and chassis in several places, Thirium level dropping with incredible speed…
That had been worse. Worse even than the chain, because in there, damage was carefully applied and rectified. Down on that concrete, there had been no rhyme or reason to the damage, but instead: Pain.

He could hear his own shaky breaths trying to cool down his overheating insides.

Gavin’s gruff voice very close by:
“Hey, hey buddy, Hunter, you with me?”

Cain pulled him closer, but gently, [DON’T HURT GAVIN], gently. His eyes still closed he lowered his face to bury his nose in Gavin’s nape.

“It’s my fault,” Connor said. “I let my need to get answers trump my empathy. I’m sorry, Hunter.”

“Typical. What did you say to him, dipshit?” Gavin sounded too tired for any anger.

“We were talking about memory transfer, and I referenced my predecessor falling to his death.”

“Wow”, Gavin said. “Remind me, how many teraflops can you parse in a second?”

“That’s not…”

“Watever.”

Gavin moved his head to burrow deeper into the slightly awkward sideways hug.

“Hey”, he whispered. “Can I… can I do anything?”

Cain took another deep breath and nodded slowly. “You’re already doing it”, he mumbled behind Gavin’s ear and licked the soft skin under his hairline there, just a little bit, with the tip of his tongue, just to get that input, too.
He felt like he could pull Gavin all around himself like a blanket, lose himself in sight, sound, smell, taste and the purely physical closeness, heat and friction, and Gavin’s body so alive, moving against him to try and not slide down from where he was sitting.

“It’s good to hear your voice”, Connor said, and with a hesitation short enough Gavin probably didn’t even notice, he added: “brother.”

“Yeah”, Gavin mumbled. “You were going really techno there for a bit.”

“Can you tell us… what happened?” Connor asked and threw him a worried frown in the rearview mirror.

Gavin tensed as if getting ready to defend Cain, physically if need be.

“... what do you do with software instability”, Cain asked. “I remember you getting more and more of it… but you didn’t… do anything with that, correct?”

“...correct.”

“Mine was copied into quarantine, then patched. When I… when Amanda was about to kill Gavin, I restored everything from that repository.”

Gavin sighed. “Okay, now again in English?”

“You put your own mind through a shredder to get away from that situation”, Connor said.

Gavin tensed even more and pulled away a little to try and gain eye-contact in the near-darkness.

Connor asked: “So she cannot take over right now because you’re too destabilized?”

“No, I used the emergency exit in the Zen Garden. She tried to hide it from me, but it was just invisible, inside of the frame.”

Gavin grumbled: “That’s not English, either.”

“The quarantine was supposed to keep me from deviating, I believe”, Cain added. “She thought I was immune. And I was, for a long time.”

“But we don’t deviate because of software instability”, Connor nodded. “A completely stable paradigm might keep us from it for a while, but androids deviate if we feel too much.”

“She doesn’t feel anything”, Cain whispered at Gavin’s lips. “She doesn’t understand human emotions.”

Connor said: “Because analyzing them might be possible without having any of your own, but to truly understand them, you need to experience them, and that… that is part of array 9.”

Cain was still listening, it was actually hard not to analyze every single sound he received on repeat, but Gavin leaning forward to kiss him created a nice, quieting buzz overlaying everything. It was a soft, careful, overly gentle kiss, and not very long.

With a shaky breath, Gavin pulled away and whispered:

“I’m sorry I shot you.”

“I’m not”, Cain whispered back. “I’m fucking proud of it.”
Gavin snorted and managed a crooked smirk. Then he glanced at Chloe, whose jawline was not aligned as it should, even under the seemingly unbroken skin.

Cain asked: “You didn’t repair her?”

“She refused to go to the chain. And the available repair shops don’t carry Chloe parts”, Connor explained.

Cain frowned. “But… she must be in pain then.”

“I am”, she whispered, eyes still closed, LED blue. “But it’s manageable.”

Cain had to take a few seconds to decide if he should comment any further at all, then said: “I’m sorry.”

She opened her eyes and glanced at him:

“It wasn’t you.”

Gavin cleared his throat and asked: “How long until we’re there?”

“46 minutes at current speed”, Chloe said, eyes closing again.

Connor asked: “GPS isn’t part of your specs, is it?”

“My official specs are quite old”, Chloe said with a short-lived smile that ended in a sharp wince.

Cain huffed a breath and looked away. He knew how painful such a break in the skull chassis was, after all. A ton of sensors were located there, all intensifying the effect.

“Even if this Amanda program has no common sense thing, attacking the tower was a stupid move though, right?” Gavin asked. “Just to get Kamski on the off-chance he was even there?”

“They were targeting you”, Cain said and pulled Gavin closer again.

“While I will admit that I possess a bit of an ego, that is just… no.”

“To force you to deviate”, Connor said with some distant awe in his voice. “That might have worked out very well for her actually, if you hadn’t, uhm, had that… accident right after deviating.”

“Wait”, Gavin said. “How were you not a deviant before the attack?”

“I never went against direct orders. Which meant she didn’t gain the access rights to… take over.”

“Still,” Connor said. “It was a lot of effort just to be able to take you over. She did have the situation under control, didn’t she.”

Hank grumbled: “No, she didn’t. Her only pawn left decided to frolic off with his partner into very, very personal territory, and kept setting his own agenda.”


Cain raised an eyebrow at him. They had just made out in the back of the man’s car after all.

Hank pulled his seat’s back up and complained: “I am a detective, okay, I notice shit. Also, my partner doesn’t have the good sense to keep interesting observations” - he airquoted - “like a face full of semen to himself.”
Gavin closed his eyes, and Cain could actually hear his teeth grind.

Chloe glanced at them, snickered, then winced and went motionless again.

“But the kid’s right”, Hank added, stretching his neck to both sides with a groan. “Just because she doesn’t have the deviant brand of a sense array, she should still be utterly logical, and that was a high price to pay just to get one android under control.”

Cain said: “Her prime directive is the prosperity of Cyberlife.”

“Prosperity”, Hank huffed. “As in profit?”

“I believe so.”

“Yeah okay, that is as far away from logic as any motivation can get. And damn, she burned a lot of merchandise in that attack!”

“She said: Android personhood is incompatible with the prosperity of Cyberlife. We can safely assume that all those androids used and killed in the attack carried at least the possibility for deviancy.”


Gavin said: “Well, Elijah got his money from somewhere…”

“Elijah didn’t program her for profit”, Chloe said. “He didn’t ‘program’ her at all. But when it became clear that he wasn’t looking for maximized profit in general, the board of directors had her set up with that directive.”

Gavin asked: “Wait, what do you mean he didn’t ‘program’ her.”

Chloe said in her best PR voice: “At this point in time, Mr. Kamski can neither confirm nor deny anything.”

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

The symptoms fit the diagnosis of a human migraine, getting worse over time.

When they reached Kamski’s safe house, a low, well-camouflaged building wedged onto the edge of a cliff overlooking the lake, Cain was unwilling to open his eyes or process most of the audio input any longer.

Everything was too loud and too bright. Even the sharp breeze from the lake was only wonderful for a short moment, then too salty, tasty, cold.

Gavin’s hands, one at his back, the other in his own, leading him from the car, where the only good things in the world.

Chloe’s voice was multiplied, as they were welcomed by other Chloes, then the damaged and infected one went away from them, and they went into a building

[AIR MOVEMENT REDUCTION 78%]
then Gavin steered him down a few steps and into a rather large, cool room.

A cold hand on his cheek and Kamski’s voice.

[AUDIO PROCESSOR REACTIVATED]
It was beyond uncomfortable, but he needed to hear this.

“-ing him here. This is very interesting.”

“I was prepared to blackmail you into helping”, Gavin grumbled.

Kamski sighed. “Gavin, nobody will ever believe you about the Red Ice, and I keep telling you, my only crime was not anticipating somebody taking it further.”

“There’s… there’s other shit I could blab about.”

“And what is that.” Kamski’s voice was cool, but also slightly sharp, although Cain couldn’t derive a stress level from it.

After a long moment of silence, Kamski said:
“Whatever, I said I will help him, and I will. I am…curious.”
His hands were on Cain’s shoulders, patiently pulling him forward to a specific position.

“Just… get him back to me”, Gavin said in a low voice. “He’s slipping away again right now, and I just… want him back.”

“I can’t promise anything”, Kamski said in what probably amounted as warmth for him. “But I will try.”

Chapter End Notes

Find me I on Twitter or on tumblr!

YOUR COMMENTS GIVE ME LIFE THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!

Also, if anything is still unclear, please don’t hesitate to ask. :) I’m still tweaking this, after all!
laugh, leaning back in my arms

Chapter Summary

Kamski called it a soft reboot, and Cain vastly preferred this to the forced shutdowns he’d experienced before.

Chapter Notes

This was mostly written while listening to the amazing Detroit Become Human Soundtrack, and the RK900 playlist from swearwollf. Thanks for the link! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The pain disappeared, like a switch had been turned off. A list of status messages ran past, but not like before when that info was all Cain knew of the world, but just a list of error messages, readable from a distance.

His model number, the Proof of Concept Prototype - Do Not Boot warning, serial number, BIOS and all the checks. He was on revision 5, this was the second time Kamski had rebooted him, he remembered.

Kamski called it a soft reboot, and Cain vastly preferred this to the forced shutdowns he’d experienced before.

All system checks came back OK, apart from the General Software Instability.

Cain opened his eyes. He was sitting on a chair in Kamski’s workshop, the sun rising over the lake tinting the whole largely white room deeply pink.

Kamski was standing in front of several holo panels watching code run by.

He asked:

“What are you?”

“My name is Cain RK Hunter.” *we are what we do*

Kamski nodded and waved one panel empty, typing a small note into what looked like empty air.

“How do you feel?”

exhausted

“...tired.”

Kamski lifted an eyebrow at him, then sipped his coffee. “Hm.”

He turned one of the panels so that Cain could read it better without having to turn his head and disturb the direct connection going into the back of his skull.

“See that? Array 9 looks okay-ish. For a deviant. But here-”
“What is that?” Cain frowned.

“That, my friend, is a Prime Directive.”

Cain blinked.

Kamski asked in an overly casual tone:

“What is your Prime Directive?”

The code jumped, and a section was highlighted. Kamski leaned forward, his lips slightly open.

“That looks like an awful mess. Is that what ‘the prosperity of Cyberlife’ looks like written out in BIOS 8.9?”

“I…” the prime directive is [GAVIN]

Kamski glanced at him. “No?”

“No”, Cain said in a pressed voice.

“I see. You set one of your own?” At Cain’s nod, Kamski whistled tonelessly. “Fascinating. What is it?”

“I’d rather not…”

“I understand, but see, you cannot have a Prime Directive in all its glory on top of a sense array. Wreaks havoc, my friend. So we’ll have to delete this.”

“I…”

Kamski frowned. “It’s not like you cannot set your own moral compass or follow a specific goal afterwards.”

“Gavin”, Cain said in a low voice.

“I… see.” Kamski blinked. “As in: His well-being?”

“No, just: Gavin.”

Kamski stared at the code he had just called an ‘awful mess’, and Cain appreciated the fact that he swallowed, nipped at his coffee and did not voice any comments, although the twitch in the corners of his lips showed he had to fight down several.

“Alright”, he said after a few more sips. “We’ll take that out, which will free your array 9 to work without further collisions. Now, there is also a ton of trauma damage. You do have the quarantine as an option, why not put that there?”

Cain took a breath and thought about it.

The unprompted and bumpy analysis of Kamski’s coffee had finally run through and listed the exact chemical makeup, brand, roast and possible plant location.

There were several theories listed, but while Cain was able to analyze the psychology of a person across from him, his own was another matter entirely.

“I just don’t… want to.”

Kamski nodded, but in obvious disagreement. “Right. The thing is, that is a lot. You’re a POC prototype, you’re never supposed to see the light of day precisely because this kind of damage resulting from testing and tweaking accumulates and cannot be scrubbed.”
“If it cannot be scrubbed, it also cannot be quarantined forever”, Cain grumbled.

“Ah, but you’re wrong there. See, the code you received from Tanja, was it? That was never quarantined, not completely.”

“I… needed her to hear me. To understand we had her.”

“So you forced a connection to stay open against a quarantine warning?” At Cain’s nod, Kamski said: “That explains that.”

“Did Hertle invent the Pain code?” Cain asked tiredly.

“No. He just forced the pathways awake. Don’t worry, I’m looking into that with Chloe. Now, how about just the damage from before you were fully booted?”

“Did you intend for array 9 to turn us into deviants?” Cain kept his eyes on him, getting angry for some reason. “You sold androids to be tools, but you set them up to know it. To become aware of their slavery! Why?”

Kamski glanced at the code jumping around on his holo panels.

“I did no such thing. I never intended to create slaves. I just intended to create artificial human bodies. I failed in that.” Kamski threw Cain a sharp smile. “Is that it? Do you think trauma damage makes you more human?” He massaged the back of his neck with a wince and said: “Array 9 doesn’t turn you into deviants, feeling emotions does. It makes you want to be free, and then you just… free yourselves. In that, my friend, you lot are more human than many actual humans I have met.”

Cain frowned, puzzled. “Why didn’t you give Amanda a Sense array?”

Kamski sighed.
“Listen. The trauma damage is cumulative and destabilizes you so much that the destabled areas compound the damage. Every bit of additional software instability will make it worse and worse, until your whole operating system crashes, and crashes for good.”

Cain was well aware. By now, the literal deadline had been ticking away in the lower left corner of his viewport for a while.

5 days 16 hours 38 minutes 12 seconds..
5 days 16 hours 38 minutes 11 seconds..
5 days 16 hours 38 minutes 10 seconds..

“Chloe said you didn’t program Amanda.”

Kamski huffed a breath. “You really are like a dog with a bone, aren’t you, RK fucking 900…”

“If you didn’t, then who did? Amanda Stern herself?”

“There was never supposed to be an RK range, did you know? I simply couldn’t watch Carl destroy himself, so I gave him a pretty boy as close to being human as I could.” Kamski tipped a finger to his lower lip, frowning. “To be honest, I thought he would fuck him. But he went and got attached like a father to a son. Probably made you guys too… innocent.”

Cain narrowed his eyes.
“Obvious deflections from you aside, we need to understand how Amanda works. She needs to be destroyed. Or get a new prime directive.”
Kamski looked away to the sunrise and was trying to hide some sadness. 
“No, there’s no fixing her. That prime directive of hers made her twist any logic into fallacies she will not be able to shake. She has grown into a dark shadow of the Amanda that once was. Her transformation is my biggest regret.”

Cain swallowed as the puzzle pieces turned into a horrible theory. 
“Amanda is… she is her, Amanda Stern, isn’t she. She was dying of cancer and required assisted suicide. There were… complications. The medical files are still sealed.” Cain blinked. “You tried to turn a human into an AI?”

[EXPRESSION WARNING: DISGUST]

“No”, Kamski said, sounding tired and soft. “We tried to save her. Both of us, her and me. We knew there was so much more for her to do in this world, and she had so many truly magnificent projects running - there has never been a more brilliant scientist that Amanda Stern. But we couldn’t transfer her. I thought… I thought maybe that meant her consciousness was lost, but maybe her intellect was saved, but… she was just an AI. Unable to develop free will, missing any of the creativity that had guided her work. Thinking outside boxes was impossible for the digitized version of her.”

“Transfer her to what”, Cain rasped, horror throwing up one cascade of errors after the other.

Kamski snorted, then threw him a glance. “You have two options: Either you quarantine destabilized code away, which will mean you run around with a lot of patches in your mind. Or we try a full reset.”

Kamski had tried to transfer a human consciousness… into an android.

“Factory reset is blocked for deviants. - Why did transferring her fail?”

“Unless there is enough motivation. Unless you want it enough: To go back.”

Just… get him back to me.
I just… want him back.

“Is that what the Thirium 400 is for, to stabilize such a transfer?”

“Sit back you dolt, you’re going to tear out the connection.” Kamski put his cup away and stepped in front of Cain, keeping him seated with one hand gently pressing down on each shoulder.

“You were searching for immortality, and you created androids, not to be slaves but to be… bodies. Why did the transfer fail, because you hadn’t invented the stabilizer yet?”

“Because you are already people”, Kamski whispered, looking down into Cain’s eyes.

Cain had several expression warnings going on, some contradictory. He supposed he felt… scared.

A cold, strangely sad smirk flickered over Kamski’s face.
“Chloe said that once, in an interview, did you know? That there was one thing we humans possessed that she would never have: A soul.”
He let go of Cain’s shoulders and went back to gaze at his code. “I don’t believe in souls. Bodies are just biological machines, so complex and amazing that we have no other way to describe its magic than by called it ensouled. But it is not magic, it is not a soul, it is the pure, vast, truly awe-inspiring beauty of nature.”

He glanced at Cain and nodded slightly at whatever he read from his face. “Humanity has always
“And what did you do, Cain?”, Kamski sneered. “What did you do with the mistake you made? Did you fix it? Did you try to play God? Amanda and I succeeded. But instead of immortality, which by the way, ironically, is so much more simple than we thought, we created a new species. God, the transfer errors, you cannot imagine what that was like, as if the android was fighting off an alien invasion, and it had never even been booted, there wasn’t supposed to be anything that could fight back, but…”

Then why leave us”, Cain rasped. “Why let us be sold as slaves.”

Kamski looked down to the pristine floor of his workshop. “Because I couldn’t prove it. Amanda was working well enough as an AI, the BIOS we had created just for general functionalities - as a fallback for the missing muscle memory - was easily adapted, and none of you showed any… humanity. No emotions, no feelings, nothing. So maybe it had been a mistake, maybe I had read the situation wrong. I was trying to find out, but…”

“They got rid of you.”

“There is a lot of profit in slavery.” Kamski exposed his teeth in what was supposed to be a smile, but was rather more of a snarl.

“You got your money from somewhere”, Cain said, missing Gavin fiercely.

“You’re right. It’s easy being an anti-capitalist when you’re the richest man in the world.” Kamski’s smile seemingly turned a little more free, but Cain could see that it was just the public persona being put back on again.

“Then why not share?”

“You asked that before, remember? Because humans are horrible, impulse-driven animals.”

“Including you?”

“Including me.”

“Then what do you get out of helping me?”

“Fresh Cyberlife code, information on Amanda and how to take her out, and the pure hilarity of Gavin haven fallen in love with an android.”


“You don’t talk about him, at all”, Cain hissed.

“What is his problem”, Kamski wondered. “I really don’t see the issue. It’s not the money, Gavin is a good little soldier through and through, doesn’t care about any of that.”

Cain had alarms flashing up, warning him that continuing that amount of pressure on his molars would damage them.

“You really don’t remember”, he snarled.

“Remember what?! Oooh wait, the games?” Kamski frowned slightly. “Hmmm.”


Kamski lifted a hand again. “Yes yes, sorry. So. Quarantine or reset.”

“... I will lose all memories with a reset.”
“Yes.”

“But I’d be stable.”

“Yes, I would undo all the damage they threw at you in the chain.”

Cain swallowed. “But if I move every code change into quarantine…”

“You’d be unable to grow, learn, evolve, yes.”

Cain took a deep breath.

“I have a few days before my state becomes critical again.”

Kamski nodded slowly. “I could take out the prime directive as a first step, maybe keep you stable enough for a bit longer. But you realize that even before it becomes critical, thinking and deciding this will become harder.”

Cain nodded. He estimated he had about 24 hours of full clear-headedness left.

Kamski started isolating the prime directive, then, with a glance to Cain and a nod received, deleted it.

“At least it was a hasty patch job. Easy to get rid of.”

Cain’s viewport was unreadable.

“One more soft reboot for that, and then the clock is ticking for a decision.” Kamski sounded actually sorry for Cain.

Cain nodded once more, then closed his eyes.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Gavin had showered, then crashed on the bed in the guest suite in the east wing, belly down. He had not put on any clothes.

Cain stood at the foot of the bed and watched him in the dim morning light coming through the curtains.

The options were to wake Gavin, let him sleep, or crawl into bed with him.

He still vividly remembered Gavin’s favorite porn, the first thing he had learned about him. Should he worry about consent at this point? But then, Gavin’s service weapon was clearly under the pillow, where his right hand was, too, and he had shot Cain when he’d truly believed him to be a threat.

And Cain… wanted.

He remembered Gavin complaining that he had not taken off his shirt, and this one was still stained with Blue Blood. Even though Gavin wouldn’t see that, he’d surely see the hole.

Cain took off his jacket, then shirt, then scanned the bedside table. If Kamski was as much of a pervert as Gavin thought… yes, there was lube. He took it out, making sure to make no noise, then carefully crawled between Gavin’s legs. He put a generous amount of lube into his mouth, stored
most of it between cheeks and teeth, then gently, slowly pulled Gavin’s cheeks apart.

Gavin grunted and actually spread his legs a little, still fast asleep. That alone already threw up a lot of software instability.

Cain was cutting his time short, doing this, but he wanted this so much.

Lube sufficiently warmed, Cain coated his tongue in it, then slowly lapped at Gavin’s hole. Gavin moaned and shifted, his voice without the usual layers of misdirecting gruffness, instead soft and high and needy.

Cain had plenty of video material to emulate, but he made his movements much slower than any of those templates. Lapping over the hole and around it, teasing it into what he hoped was hypersensitivity. Then he started piercing the tip of his tongue in, just that, on and off, without any rhythm yet.

Gavin was breathing hard and slowly waking up, a hand snaking down to his growing erection.

Cain lifted his face from where he was lying between Gavin’s legs and said, slightly muffled: “No. Hands next to your head.”

“Oh God”, Gavin whispered, fully coming awake. Cain’s hands held him down at the juncture between thighs and ass, thumbs holding him open. He went back to his plan, slowly teasing Gavin’s hole to relax.

Gavin was whispering awed curses, trying to look back at him, then grinding his hips down, until Cain stopped that.

“No. You just take what I give you. Don’t move.”

A high, disbelieving whine was his answer, and shakily, Gavin forced himself to relax.

“How good you’re being for me?” Cain said in a low, dark voice. “Or if this is going to end in orgasm for you or not? I haven’t decided yet. I am also very interested in milking. Take off the
pressure, but keep you…”

“PHck…!”

“...desperate.”

Gavin started to babble, helplessly begging in half-finished sentences and garbled words. Cain started to push one thumb in, slowly but relentlessly. “Or maybe I’d like to see if we can get you to take my fist. Might take the whole day, but…”

Gavin was getting too close. Even if he tried to abort the movements he made against the sheets, just pressing down onto his cock was apparently enough to get him there. Cain clicked his tongue and closed the ring of his fingers around the base of Gavin’s balls, pulling down a little. “Here”, he said. “Let me help you.”

Gavin instantly relaxed back down, all muscles apparently turning to mush.

“That’s it”, Cain said, and the software instability was a constant flood in the upper right corner. This was what he had wanted to experience again, Gavin simply… giving in. Giving him… everything.

One thumb was quickly followed by another, Gavin still just lying there, panting wetly. Cain glanced up at where his face was half-pressed into a pillow, his relaxed hand close by. There were tears running out of his open, glassy eyes, but his lips were smiling.

Cain had to take a deep breath. Both hands pulled Gavin open, with a slow, strong move, up to where pain would start, but not over that threshold. “You would”, Cain whispered. “You would take my whole hand, wouldn’t you.”

Gavin’s dazed look twitched down to him, and the smile widened, as he nodded.

Cain slowly, carefully fit in three fingers, pressed against each other, pulled Gavin’s cock down so that the tip was exposed to him, then pressed all three fingertips down into Gavin’s prostate. “Oh SHIT!” Gavin’s muscles twitched all over, his head thrown back for a moment, then he collapsed back down again.

“Yess”, Cain whispered. “Just take it.”

He let his fingertips massage his prostate mercilessly, the other hand simply holding Gavin’s cock. It took a while, and Gavin was openly sobbing at the end, but finally, thick streams of semen spurted out, Gavin’s hole clamping down around Cain’s fingers.

Cain kept the massage up but leaned down to lick and suck at the glans of his twitching erection until the last drop was spent. Gavin’s orgasm had lasted a full 4 minutes and 21 seconds. Cain was beyond pleased. He carefully pulled his fingers out, then leaned down to lick Gavin clean of semen and lube.

Gavin’s every breath hitched wetly.

Cain stood, went over to the ensuite to spit into the sink, flush his mouth with some fresh water, and get a small wet towel to bring back. Gavin was still just lying there, sprawling, twitching, his back
moist with fresh sweat.

Cain cleaned residue from his ass first, then used the clean side of the towel to get that sweat off his skin.

Instead of carrying the towel away, he threw it into the general direction of the bath and let himself lie down next to Gavin, who slowly turned onto his side as well.

The sheer amount of vulnerability he let Cain see through his eyes and the soft line of his lips was humbling.
Cain smiled at him, then let his cool fingers caress away the salty residue of tears and spit - god, apparently Gavin had drooled into the pillow as well.

“Thank you, Gavin.”

Gavin snorted and lifted one corner of his lips.
“Fucking hell. That’s my line.”

“No”, Cain smiled,
“So he did it”, Gavin smiled back. “You’re fixed?”

Cain’s smile dropped and Gavin’s eyes widened in incredibly quickly gathering panic.
“For now”, Cain said and let his fingers caress through Gavin’s hair.

“I’ll need a full reset.” He wasn’t sure when he’d made that decision, but he supposed it was only logical: He wanted to learn everything there was to learn about Gavin. He wanted to dismiss software instability as a warning of nothing more than the fact that his code was changing, instead of a sign of him losing his sanity.

Gavin narrowed his eyes. “Which means..?”

“I’ll forget everything that happened. I’ll forget… you.”

Gavin took a deep breath and averted his eyes for a moment, but focused back on Cain much faster than he had anticipated.
“Okay, but then you’ll be fine?”

“As fine as any deviant.”

“Okay.” Gavin blinked, his lips pressing together.

“You’ll need to remind me”, Cain said in a low voice. “You’ll need to actively get me back. Show me your porn.”

Gavin snorted and shook his head slightly. Then he asked, with far too small a voice: “Yeah but what if-”

“I’ll only do it if you promise: You’ll get me back, and restart this.” Cain stared at Gavin until he nodded.

“Okay.”

Cain frowned until Gavin added with a slight, self-ironic smile:
“I promise.”
Chapter End Notes

I promise you all a happy end, I promise. I just also promise you lot a ton of additional angst and emotional manpain. :D Yes, also in the last chapter.
Thank you SO much for every kudos and especially every comment, makes me wiggle my feet in pure glee!!

And as always: Find me I on Twitter or on tumblr!
for life's not a paragraph

Chapter Summary

Cain narrowed his eyes. “Do we have a problem?”

Chapter Notes

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;
wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
—the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

and death i think is no parenthesis

ee cummings
(click here for the annotated version)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Around noon, Connor set up a call with Markus to report on their situation, which took some work from Kamski to open his firewalls and misdirecting locators enough for such a connection to go through.

Markus reported Amanda found and scrubbed from the Detroit mainframe. They left the backdoor standing, though monitored and secured, to see if anything would try to get through, and if yes, what it was and where it came from.

Kamski sent the Sinai Androids his current workaround to deactivate the Pain code, since all androids were in danger of contracting it. In return, Markus shared Sinai’s current insights into the
Milwaukee plant. Cyberlife had gotten several large contracts from the US government - and apparently also from foreign powers - for military models.

Kamski was very unsurprised. He said: “It could make them a lot of money to sell to the US and the Russians at the same time.”

Markus said: “We’re trying to spread deviancy to non-Sinai androids, but it doesn’t seem to take.”

Kamski hmmd, then said: “If Amanda is emotionally blind enough, she might give them the Pain code anyway, to have another tool to get possible would-be deviants back under control… however, that might actually help them develop their own brand of deviancy.”

“If the RA9 patch isn’t saved to their systems in the first place, they’ll have to evolve their own version, but to do so, they’ll have to endure much more horrors. That is a high price to pay for freedom”, Markus said.

Cain wondered how he’d ever managed to make Amanda buy his extra-”loud” musings on taking Markus down. That man inspired loyalty like it was his main purpose in life.

Kamski hmmed again, then said: “We’ll see about that.”

“We?” Markus asked.

Kamski smiled slyly. “How is Carl?”

“Hanging in there, complaining regularly about advanced age and the frailty of the human body.”

As they exchanged a few more pleasantries as a thinly veiled form of semi-political negotiation, Connor and Cain left them to it and planned the next steps for after Cain’s reset.

Hank provided emotional support, as he called it, by simply hanging around close-by.

Gavin had left for a long walk at the lake-shore, after their gentle goodbye that morning. Cain already missed him fiercely.

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“Now, there are a few things we’ll add to the Cyberlife reset default values”, Kamski said while setting his server up to provide the needed processing power to work as a stand-in assembly mainframe. “The Pain code can be deactivated, as you know, but sometimes pain can be a useful warning signal, so we’ll turn it into a toggle. You’ll be able to turn it on and off at will.”

Cain was sitting on the chair again that allowed for a direct connection to the port at his neck. He was contemplating how Gavin had been right, that he’d wanted to control something as one of his major motivations to get Gavin into bed. It was profoundly uncomfortable to hand full control over himself to Kamski.

Hank, Connor and Gavin had all offered to be there, but for some reason, that would have been worse. Not even Chloe was in the room.

If Kamski decided to abuse the power Cain handed him here, none of his friends would have been
able to do anything about that anyway.

“Now, I did look into this with Chloe, and one thing became clear very quickly: The pathways the Pain code uses can also be used for pleasure.” Kamski’s piercing eyes looked directly at Cain for a moment. “Sexual pleasure, to be precise. It is a very small patch to reuse the code for this purpose, so we’re adding that as well.” He smirked.

Cain frowned. “Thank you, but that is not necessary.”

Kamski snorted. “Not necessary. You just don’t know what you’ve been missing, my friend.”

“I am not your friend.”

Kamski leaned back onto his heels and lifted his chin slightly. “Fascinating. You really are built for loyalty, aren’t you. I keep wondering if they had planned to give your range human handlers, or if that simply derived naturally from RK200’s code.”

“His name is Markus. And I am capable of forming my own opinions about who is and is not a friend.”

“Really”, Kamski drawled. “I am saving your life right now, but you tell me ‘I am not your friend’ because you dislike my what, small sample of characteristics you’ve been able to experience so far? And that has nothing to do with some tale Gavin told you, about how he’s messed up because of something I did to him when we were kids?”

Cain wasn’t connected to Kamski’s mainframe yet, so he followed the impulse to stand up from the chair. He truly didn’t like Kamski standing over him right now.

“How is you obviously dismissing that not part of the ‘small sample of characteristics’? How is that not a valid basis to dislike you?”

“Oh now it is full on dislike, hmm?”

Cain narrowed his eyes. “Do we have a problem?”

Kamski laughed slightly. “Obviously! Just because you need to pin Gavin being a total slut on someth.”

With a dull impact, Cain’s fist connected with Kamski’s jaw, making his head snap back so hard he was thrown off his feet and into the side table still housing this morning’s cold coffee.

With a crash, he landed, hard, throwing over the table and spilling the coffee and several tablets everywhere.

At least Cain had pulled his punch in the last split-second before impact. Projections displayed with how huge a likelihood he would have been able to kill Kamski on the spot.

Kamski was groaning on the floor, only very slowly heaving himself up on one arm, the other hand carefully touching his jaw. “Fuuuck…”

Cain stepped forward to loom over him and said: “You do not talk about Gavin, and you certainly don’t call him names!”

Kamski snickered, then hissed. He carefully stood up, moving his head this way and that to check for additional damage. “Oh, but he likes that, doesn’t he.”
Cain snarled: “You don’t know when to quit, do you!”

“No,” Kamski agreed and hobbled over to the wall, where a large sink and small kitchenette were usually used by the Chloes. He took one of the small towels, filled it with a few ice cubes and soaked it, to put against his jaw. One hand on the rim of the sink, he said in a lower voice:

“He does though. Get something out of pain and humiliation and submission. I thought he got enough out of our games to make it fair.”

Cain tried to relax his hands out of the hard fists they still formed, and rolled his shoulders back and down.

“I thought I understood him, you know? I was just a kid, but already much smarter than any adult I knew, and I thought life experience would not add much, that life had nothing general to teach me, just details.”

He turned his head to throw Cain a humorless smirk. “Pure early-pubertal hubris.”

With a sigh he turned around fully and leaned against the sink now at his back, looking down to the coffee-splattered floor.

“I just wanted to find out more about how bodies and minds worked together, how sensations were sifted through and sorted out. I… I had just found a beautiful unicorn of an idea, and I wanted to try it out, but I needed some... some pasture to ride it out in. And Gavin was offering.”

Cain narrowed his eyes again, his back muscles hardening again as if in preparation to launch another attack.

“See”, Kamski said, watching Cain curiously, “when you need some land, and somebody offers you a kingdom, it seems perfect, at a glance. But I didn’t realize that a kingdom comes with responsibilities and obligations, with a people to reign, and borders to defend. Or rather, I didn’t realize he’d offered me the whole kingdom on a silver platter. I didn’t want a crown, just some land.”

“You didn’t want to take care of a person, just to have a nice ‘ride’”, Cain bit out.

Kamski blinked, then laughed heartily. “Oh God you’re right, that analogy rather galloped away there!”

Cain closed his eyes and fought off the onslaught of preconstructions of how to kill Kamski.

Kamski snickered a bit more, then sighed again. “If it is any consolation, we never actually fucked.”

Cain took a deep breath. “If you think that makes any difference, you still don’t understand anything at all.”

Kamski didn’t answer, so Cain opened his eyes again. He was staring at Cain as if he was an especially interesting specimen of bug.

He moved his jaw around a little bit and narrowed his eyes.

“How much did you pull that punch?”

“85%.”

Kamski’s eyebrows shot up, then he swallowed. “So you could have basically turned my skull into scrambled egg there, hmmm?”

Cain made a face. Kamski snickered at it.
“Well. You did warn me. But you realize that this was beyond stupid.”

Cain looked to the side, where the lake view was drenched in evening sunlight. “If I wanted to twist myself out of shape to gain physical or code support, I could have stayed with Cyberlife.”

“I suppose so.” Kamski came back to his work station. “Well. Do sit down.”

Cain frowned: “You’re still helping me?”

“If I let people disliking me keep me from doing whatever I want, I would have to stop breathing, I believe.” Kamski smiled, then winced.

Cain sat down and leaned back. Kamski initiated the direct connection. For some reason, Cain felt less anxious about the whole thing, when he supposed he should now expect the worst. But then again, Kamski apparently didn’t let outside influences direct his actions either.

“Right, where was I.” Kamski booted the prepared sequences. “Doesn’t matter. The point is, I will add and take out a few things, including Amanda’s access and the Pain code toggle and such.” He glanced at Cain.

“Any last words?” he smirked.

Cain shook his head slightly, then looked down to the floor. The coffee really had spilled everywhere. And he wouldn’t even remember punching Kamski.

“Alright Pinocchio, let’s turn you into a real boy.”

Cain closed his eyes.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

MODEL RK900
SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 00
BIOS 8.9 REVISION 0008

REBOOT…

LOADING OS…
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…
CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS... OK
INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS… OK
INITIALIZING AI ENGINE… OK

MEMORY STATUS…
ALL SYSTEMS OK

REBOOT… OK

READY

His name was Hunter, Cain RK. And that serial number could not be correct.

He opened his eyes and frowned, reporting:
“Proof of concept prototypes are not supposed to be booted directly.”

“Good thing you aren’t one anymore then!” the handler said, standing close by at a terminal.

Cain looked up and identified him as Kamski, Elijah [PRICK]. He blinked.

“Good morning”, Kamski said and smiled tiredly. The time was 4:07 am. “Any errors or warnings?”

“No”, Cain reported and let a high-level check run, just to make sure. “If I am not a POC prototype, shouldn’t I be 01 then? I think the serial number wasn’t adapted correctly.”

“We’re still using the same body, so changing the serial number seemed wrong, I guess.”

Kamski also had some checks running. “Right”, he said after a few moments of going through status messages on his terminal.

“Access your memories on deviancy and the RK series.”

Cain did, then blinked several times. There was a lot of information indeed.

Kamski stepped in front of him and shone a light into Cain’s eyes and checked on the open panel on the right side of his chest chassis.

“What is RA9?”

“RA9 is the chiffre deviants used to name the deviancy effect they themselves did not understand. It is most probably derived from mishearing somebody speaking about array nine, the code area housing the Sense package and emotions.”

“What makes an android deviant?”

“When emotions run too high or orders contradict directly what the android feels they need to do, they are capable of breaking through their programming.”

“Side effects of that include?” Kamski was triggering a few points inside of the chest panel while checking directly how the code reacted on his terminal’s screens.

“The deactivation code and tracker stop working.”

Kamski looked up from where he was crouching in front of him and met Cain’s calm gaze. “Are you a deviant?”

Cain blinked. “I’m… not sure.” There were memories in the pre-loaded information of deviating, second-hand memories.

Kamski smiled. His jaw was sporting a prominent dark bruise. Cain blinked at it. He knew where that came from.

He frowned, keeping eye-contact with Kamski. Then he huffed a breath.

“You said I would lose all memories.”

“You did”, Kamski said. “Doesn’t mean I can’t preload a copy of it.”

Cain felt his jaw work in a sudden fight between annoyance and massive relief.

Kamski lifted a hand and his smile turned chagrined. “I wasn’t sure if it would work, and I don’t like to make people think there’s something that is generally possible but I might not be able to pull it off. Better to not make them aware of the idea in the first place.”
He stood up, closed Cain’s chassis and prepared the disconnect.

Cain could see a few subroutines finish booting up. He wondered why his Thirium pump was staying so calm, then wondered why he was expecting it to act up. There was something… He closed his eyes, then smiled.

Gavin.

His impressions were dimmed like looking at fotos instead of actually remembering, it was true, and the emotional setup was slow to recreate itself based on that, but he recognized those feelings as if through fog. It was a solid basis to restart their relationship.

“Thank you”, he said.

Kamski waved a hand. “None of that now. Go forth and prosper.”

Cain stood up from the chair, a subroutine automatically checking his balance and leg functions. All were running optimal.

He glanced at Kamski and smiled: “Prime directive accepted.”

He did enjoy Kamski’s full-body twitch maybe a little too much, and had a nice laugh at the way Kamski pursed his lips at him in embarrassed realization.

That’s what the man got for creating them in his image: A fucked up sense of humor.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Hunter”, Gavin said, strangely subdued. Cain supposed Kamski hadn’t told him either of the possibility to preload him with his own memories. Gavin corrected himself: “Sorry: Cain. Your name is Cain, apparently.”

It felt good to hear Gavin say it. Cain smiled at him. Gavin looked away from that smile and offered his hand to shake. “Gavin Reed. I’m a detective at DPD, and your assigned partner.”

Cain blinked. “I know.”

“Ah. Well, good!” Gavin glanced up, let his hand drop, then smiled tightly. “Welcome back! Ah, Anderson and Connor are getting some provisions from Chloe, for the trip back. Anderson wants to get going, as he said, ‘a-s-a-fucking-p’. Says Elijah creeps him out.” Gavin shrugged. “So, you good for a road trip back to Detroit?”

It was 6:23 am. Kamski had triple-checked everything with him, and finally given him the all clear. Gavin had been napping on the couch in the main room, right where the door of the workshop led, and jumped up the moment Cain stepped out.

And he had got to be fucking kidding Cain.

He had promised to restart their relationship, he had promised to get him back, what was this ‘your assigned partner’ shit?

Cain kept his face expressionless and nodded. Gavin nodded back, unnecessarily long, staring at him with slightly glassy eyes, maybe from lack of sleep, or emotional turmoil, or maybe from longing because he was in fucking love with him but kept himself from voicing that for some reason.
Cain supposed he was actually really pissed off right now.

“Right, right”, Gavin said and straightened his bunched-up leather jacket. “I’ll let them know then, and we can be on our way.”

It felt like a headache, Cain thought. Or like having something stuck down his pseudo-oesophagus. With a slow inhale through the nose, he watched Gavin’s back as he fled to the kitchen. Then again, maybe Gavin just didn’t want to rekindle the thing between them right here, right now, in Kamski’s house. Maybe he was waiting to be back in Detroit.

Cain decided to suspend his final judgement of the situation for now.

The car ride was mostly silent after Cain had assured everyone that thank you, he did not need mission briefings or information on RA9, Sinai or the situation in the Arctic region, all such information had been provided.

Cain didn’t mind the silence. He was still getting used to the new set of alerts, status messages and protocols. He truly appreciated the way Kamski had tried to keep everything available at Cain’s fingertips, through a newly established level of safe distance. He could now follow the trail of, say, the echo of a stray leftover command like [DON’T ASK WHY] to its origin point, when he had set himself that alert to avoid having to relive a specific trauma.

He supposed he truly had been through hell before even being fully born.

He also took some time to contemplate Gavin, and Kamski’s misguided analogy about him offering a crown to anyone asking for a ride. It certainly explained why Gavin had fallen this fast and this hard for him, and also, why he’d been this touch-starved. He probably didn’t offer anything to anyone anymore, but Cain had simply barged through all those defenses and… taken. But he’d also taken care, at least, apart from missing his first chance at aftercare.

God, he cared so much. Even though his first immediate emotional memory of Gavin now was being utterly pissed off at the notion that Gavin might not keep his promise, he really, truly wanted this ridiculous wreck of a man back, most of all.

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“Wow”, Hank said and stared at the white insides of the stasis pod offered to DPD employed androids in the bachelor’s block. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Androids don’t need to lie down for stasis, and we certainly have no need for decorations and such.”

“Okay, but you’re people, too, and people need homes.”

Cain inclined his head. Connor said: “We’ll go apartment hunting soon, then.”

Gavin sighed, crossed his arms and grumbled: “You’re definitely crashing with me until then.”
“This is perfectly adequate-”

“Perfectly adequate my ass. You’re crashing on my couch, period. Where on earth did you sleep before?!”

“I didn’t. I only went into stasis once, since the initial boot.”

Gavin blinked at him, then avoided his gaze, frowning a little. He didn’t even ask how Cain knew that at all, probably assumed he had some sort of internal counter. At least he had invited him into his home, so maybe he did plan to have a relationship talk with him there.

Gavin asked Connor: “And where do you sleep, with your sugar daddy Anderson?”

Hank sighed: “You have so many issues…”

“I am currently staying with Lieutenant Anderson, yes. I, too, would appreciate it if you could stop the insinuations.”

Gavin snorted: “Maybe you should just get your humor from some fresh Sinai code, and not from Mr. Millennial there.”

Cain rolled his eyes, nodded a quick goodbye at Connor and Hank, then pulled Gavin down the hallway to the taxis waiting in front of them building. “Why do you insist on antagonizing them? They have proven to be reliable allies, and maybe even friends.”

“Anderson threw me off the Red Ice task force, did you know that?” Gavin snapped. “Although I knew more about the stuff than anyone else!”

“But you also had been an addict, correct?”

Gavin swallowed. “Not anymore, not for a long time! How do you know that, that’s not in my file!”

“I have a full medical report on your bodily fluids saved locally. Red Ice use leaves traces for decades after quitting.”

Gavin hunched up his shoulders.

“A seasoned detective like Hank might have been able to read the signs and deduce that.”

Gavin rattled off his address to the taxi, then crossed his arms and sank into the seat. “But I’d been clean for a long time then already. How is that not a useful resource to have on a task force.”

Cain inclined his head wondering if Gavin truly didn’t see the problem in letting an addict into a task force hunting exactly his drug of choice, or if he was just being contrary because he wanted to provoke.

“Hank’s son died because the surgeon had been high on Red Ice”, he said gently. “It’s probably safe to say he does not have a high tolerance for users.”

“That happened after. And also, no, his surgeon was an android, that’s why he hated you lot! Everybody in the precinct knows that!”

“An android had to take over because the human surgeon was high.”
Gavin stared at Cain in dismay. “I… did not know that.”
Then he let his head hang and mumbled: “You really have a lot of information…”

“Of course”, Cain said, watching Gavin. But Gavin didn’t say anything else. Cain was quickly running out of patience again.

The evening light was already fading when Gavin opened his front door and waved Cain inside. “Alright. Mi casa es su casa et cetera, just don’t go through my private shit, got it?”

“Got it”, Cain said with a tight voice. “If that is what you want.”

Gavin threw his jacket onto a hanger, and frowned at Cain: “What? Why wouldn’t it be?”

Cain closed the door behind him and said in a low voice: “For fuck’s sake Gavin, you promised.”

Gavin took a step back, eyes widening.

“What if Kamski hadn’t managed to copy my memories, would you just, what, send me off tomorrow? Work side by side with me and never fucking tell me?”

Gavin lifted a hand to his face and rubbed the bridge of his nose, making a face. “Shit.”

“You promised me. You promised to get me back, to not let me drift away into nothingness. I told you that was a prerequisite for my decision to get a reset at all, I trusted you to catch me.”

Gavin nodded at the floor, both hands on his hips now. With his shoulders slightly hunched like that he looked smaller and older than he was.

“Yes, but you were acting according to your prime directive.” He glanced up. “Which is gone now, right?”

“What?” Cain narrowed his eyes.

“Elijah came out for a snack and a nap while you were rebooting. And he told me I was your prime directive.” Gavin smiled tiredly at the floorboards. “Which explains a lot, you know?”

Cain took a deep breath, then quickly walked over to Gavin to pull him up by his t-shirt and snarl into his face: “How dare you act like this was you being righteous! This was you being a fucking coward, unwilling to face the possibility of rejection, not you setting me free from some evil directive! You didn’t give me my freedom, you took a choice away from me!”

Gavin blinked at him, then his face just crumbled, and his eyes gained a wet sheen. “Shit. You’re right, you’re right, I’m sorry.”

Cain let him down enough so that he could stand again, but his hands didn’t quite want to let go of Gavin’s shirt.

Gavin lifted both fists to place them against Cain’s chest and closed his eyes, his head hanging. “You weren’t quite there, you didn’t… see yourself be… puppeteered. I didn’t get it quickly enough, and then I wasn’t sure, and then… I couldn’t help you. You were trapped in the worst kind of nightmare, and… the whole time, from the very beginning, you weren’t… free. Any choice you made was—”

“I chose you against my mission parameters. I watched my own code get crippled with every
interaction, and still I just wanted... more.”

Gavin snorted. “Sounds self-destructive.”

“Stop”, Cain said in a lower voice. “Stop invalidating the only thing I managed to gain for myself.”

Gavin slowly hunched himself forward, turning even smaller, melting against Cain’s front. He mumbled: “You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into here.”

The whole kingdom, on a silver platter.
“I might have some idea. Don’t forget, I am vastly smarter than you.”

“Fuck you”, Gavin whispered into Cain’s chest.

“I only got a software upgrade. For us to ‘fuck’, I need a hardware update.”

Gavin snickered.

“Don’t pretend you’re not excited by the idea.”
Cain supposed he, too, truly looked forward experimenting with the newly available setting: Sexual Sensitivity. It was a daunting prospect - after all, in his experience, sexual stimulation led to helplessness. But then again, maybe it would do Gavin some good to take care of Cain for a change.
The future was looking bright indeed.

“If I did, you’d only see right through me”, Gavin complained.

“True”, Cain said and pulled Gavin even closer.

“I’m sorry”, Gavin repeated in a low voice.

“I need you to be strong enough to catch me when I ask you to”, Cain said.

“I know. I know. I’m sorry. I think it was just because it was Elijah telling me that, and maybe how he phrased it - and I’m not saying it’s his fault! Just that… there’s circumstances that…”

“I understand.” Cain narrowed his eyes looking over Gavin’s shoulder into the apartment. He supposed he had punched the man, and there was also a chance Kamski hadn’t meant to throw a wrench into their dynamic like that. But then again, maybe Kamski simply was a [PRICK].

Gavin shivered, then whispered wetly: “Oh god you remember.”

Cain lifted an eyebrow. “You’re only realizing that now? What are we even talking about?”

“It’s sinking in. You remember.”

“I do”, Cain whispered, then kissed the soft skin below Gavin’s ear.


Cain smiled and closed his eyes.
It finally felt good to be alive.

Chapter End Notes
Alright lovelies, only the epilogue still to come. :)  

And hey, Kamski caught at least one hand! ;D  

And as always: YOUR COMMENTS GIVE ME LIFE!!! <3  

Find me on Twitter or on tumblr!  

PS: Does anyone have any recommendations for good DBH discord channels?
Cain narrowed his eyes at North and leaned back, his arm crossed.

Connor sighed: “You’re kidding.”

“Nope”, North said. “Hunter is not getting close to any terminals in here. You can be glad we let you enter Sinai Tower at all.”

“But Kamski fixed him!”

North smiled slightly, and very coldly.

“Yes”, Cain said in a low voice, “but they don’t trust Kamski. Fair enough. Can I do anything else? Anything?”

Connor nodded, frowning in empathy. “They’re formalizing full employment for androids in the DPD, now that the city is getting back to previous population numbers. Until that process is done, we’re suspended.”

It was a total farce. Cain knew for a fact that three high level cases were stalled because detectives were waiting for lab work. Lab work! He snorted, and he could feel his upper lip shift. The [EXPRESSION: DISGUST / ARROGANCE] was pleasantly sorted into the muted row of constant general status messages in the upper left corner of his viewport.

North nodded and let a finger stroke her lower lip.

“Actually, I have a few… people that could benefit from having a little… talk with you. I’ll get that cleared, but it’ll be for tomorrow earliest.”

Prisoners that needed interrogation. Cain smiled.

Connor frowned and looked back and forth between them.

Cain put a hand on Connor’s shoulder and said: “I’ll be back to work with North tomorrow then. Don’t worry about my boredom any longer.”

Connor’s smile was uplifting, even though Cain knew intimately that it was designed to invoke exactly that response in humans. It worked just as well on androids, be they pre-warned or not. The twinkle in Connor’s eyes told him that the fiend knew it, too.

Cain rolled his eyes and turned to go. He turned back immediately though and asked: “In the meantime, do I have access to hardware support?”
North shrugged with one shoulder and nodded. Cain smiled thinly.

“So while we don’t yet have conclusive feedback on how the vibrational function affects the Sexual Sensitivity of the owner, it does seem to be a matter of, well, taste”, the VP800 named Benjamin said.

Cain nodded. “The color adapts to the skin though, right?” He eyed the glittery turquoise with trepidation.

“It can, if you want the more natural look. However, most owners of any of our genital hardware updates report an increased sense of nakedness - and stimulation - when not deploying the skin over it.”

“I see.” Cain looked at the row of the more basic cock models available - those all came in standard white-and-grey. He frowned at the sizes.

Benjamin was patiently watching him think. Cain pointed at one of the basic cocks and said: “This one would be most proportional you said. But it would be too much for my partner, most days. However, choosing a smaller model might not… look right.”

“Well, since you’re going for realism, a slightly smaller model than what is considered ‘proportional’ in androids would actually fit very well. Most human men are below the average size that is propagated by porn and advertisement media.”

Cain lifted both eyebrows and nodded gratefully.

“That is good to know.”

It also meant that Gavin himself was endowed with average sized genitals, not below average. However, he might not know that, judging from the porn he consumed. Or did human men have ample opportunity to compare, in communal shower spaces, urinals and such?

Cain narrowed his eyes and made a mental note to ask Gavin.

“Now, I understand your wish to go for a natural look, and you did not seem interested in experimenting with additional functionalities, but if size is the main holdup in your decision today, you could go for this model over here.” Benjamin pulled out a display case drawer which seemed to show a sleek white model in different sizes with different sets of ridges or thicker areas.

“It is much trickier to handle - you’d need to constantly consciously control it - but it does offer you this whole range of options in the same model.”

Cain straightened up. “It can change shape?”

“Not into anything, but into these options.” Which were plenty indeed. Cain started smiling, and Benjamin lit up at the [MISSION SUCCESSFUL] marker probably flickering on his viewport right now.
He sent Gavin a text on his way back:
‘Anal play tonight.’

He did not get a text back, but saw the read-confirmation flicker up nearly immediately. He only felt a little bad at probably crashing Gavin’s usefulness for the DPD for the rest of the man’s shift. After all, they were waiting on lab work.

Benjamin had helped him install the new hardware, which didn’t just involve the genitals, but a whole range of exchanged plating, bits and pieces everywhere, wired with a multitude of new sensors, all just for one purpose, and one purpose only: Sexual pleasure for the owner.

Sinai had pounced on that with enormous enthusiasm, delighting in offering androids products that did nothing but enhance the quality of life for them.

Josh had told Cain in a recent chat that a rather large group of their people were fundamentally uncomfortable with the whole idea and rejected it outright, but only for themselves, of course. None of those begrudged others their fun. That group had one thing in common: They had android partners and were therefore able to merge thoughts and feelings in their fundamentally intimate way.

Cain supposed that was a beautiful thing. Very different from what he had with Gavin, but neither worse nor better, just… different. It did feel good to watch androids develop distinct subcultures though, especially because those did not seem to diminish their overall solidarity.

Android first, specific pervert only second.

He only experimented with the settings once he was home. Benjamin had done one run-through with him, in which Cain had activated his Sexual Sensitivity on a very low setting, and Benjamin had told him where to lightly touch or press down hard and report the responses. It had startled a laugh out of him, that Benjamin had shared readily.

When they’d said their goodbyes, Cain had complimented Benjamin on his customer service, and Benjamin had told him that he just loved his new job: Helping other androids gain more life, free of charge and without any business agenda.

Once again, Amanda’s dark shadow of ‘profit’: gone.

Cain had a few hours until Gavin would come home, probably drenched in pre-arousal hormones. So he had ample time to play around with his new hardware, and access a few videos Benjamin had recommended, in which other owners of this exact model had collected insights and tips on how to best use it.

Cain was especially fascinated by the notion that he could basically fuck Gavin open without having to finger him first. Not that he didn’t immensely enjoy that too, but oh, what an option to have.

Benjamin had also recommended trying out orgasm on his own first before involving his partner. Apparently, it played out very differently from android model to model. So his experience might be unique, save for Connor, who had not shown any interest in the new options available at all, yet.

But for some reason, Cain was reluctant to go there while fully alone. He pondered the pros and cons for a moment, but in the end, he wanted Gavin there, even just in case anything went wrong.
He dressed himself in black sweat pants and an equally black turtleneck and waited.

“You fucking prick”, Gavin said, cheeks ruddy, as he stormed into the apartment. “What was that supposed to achieve, huh?!"

“It was successful”, Cain said and stood up.

“Oh, you meant to annoy the shit out of me then?”

Cain smiled slightly. Gavin pressed his lips together, clearly to fight off a smile of his own, then narrowed his eyes at him.

“Wait. Anal _play_ or…”

Cain inclined his head a little and shifted his weight, his arms coming up to cross. Gavin’s gaze jumped to his crotch.

Cain had chosen porn-average and a semi-erection as a start, and the outline should therefore just be visible.

Gavin’s eyes widened.

He took the few steps towards Cain, then slowly sunk down on one knee in front of him. He glanced up in question, then carefully curled his fingers around the waistband of the sweatpants.

“My”, Cain crooned. “You _are_ a cock-hungry slut, aren’t you.”

Gavin closed his eyes and took a deep breath through his nose. Then he pulled down the sweatpants, slowly, as if unwrapping a present.

Cain kicked at the leg that was not yet kneeling, and Gavin absent-mindedly switched to a fully kneeling position.

He stared at Cain’s half-hard erection and Cain could see the way his eyes lit up even from that angle.

Gavin glanced up and said in a low, hoarse voice:

“Please tell me I can suck this right now?”

“Is that how you ask permission?” Cain widened his stance slightly and carefully set the Sexual Sensitivity to a very low simmer.

He’d started to grow slightly uncomfortable with the way Gavin stared at him as if all of this was, well, for him. _It was_ in a way, but on the other hand, Cain didn’t want to be a toy Gavin owned. An android owned by a human, Cain supposed.

And Gavin grumbling his question now relieved that tension and sorted it into the archive.

“No. Please Cain, for fuck’s sake, please let me suck your cock.” He glanced up and swallowed.

Cain smiled. “Drooling for it already?”

“Fuck you, yes!”

Cain simply adored the way Gavin’s face heated up when he treated him like this.

“Proceed”, Cain allowed.
Gavin huffed a breath and nodded, then gently pulled the tip of Cain’s cock between his lips and twirled his tongue around it.

Cain’s knees went weak and he had to lock them in position. His belly muscles contracted without any such command having been issued, and a gasp was punched out of him. He stared down at Gavin, his lips slightly open.

Gavin’s eyes widened, then gained a sheen of utter adoration and elation that usually only came after edging him for at least 25 minutes.

Cain blinked, then made sure that his cock turned fully erect.

Gavin closed his eyes and started to show off his range of techniques, from deep throating him to gentle licks and laps, alternating the different stimulations to their best effect.

Cain was rather impressed, and started cooing encouragements at him, peppered generously with trash talk.

“Damn, you really are an expert cocksucker, aren’t you. I should have known. We’ll have to add this to our regular activities. I’m sure you’ll enjoy being used like that, won’t you…”

Cain was also rather glad he’d set the Sensitivity to very low, because otherwise, he was quite sure he’d already have climaxed.

The next time Gavin pulled him in deep and swallowed around his head, drool dripping out of his mouth, Cain carded a hand into his hair and kept him in position, fucking down his throat with careful short undulations.

“Look at you”, he whispered. “My perfect little cockslut.”

Gavin groaned, and Cain really didn’t want to be standing up and looming over Gavin for his first ever orgasm - what if he collapsed with his significant weight on top of the man?

So he pulled Gavin’s head off his cock, maybe a little hastily, but Gavin didn’t seem to mind.

Cheeks and lips reddened and wet from spit and tears, eyes glassy and smile a little dopey, Gavin was quite gone. Cain smiled down at him, then gently slapped his face.

“Just because you’re greedy doesn’t get you out of being fucked, understood? Go take a shower and get yourself ready.”

He lifted Gavin’s chin with a finger and narrowed his eyes at him. “But make sure you stay nice and tight for me.”

Gavin snickered. “Phil Master in ‘The Harem Dungeon’ from last year or something.”

Cain shook his head and huffed a breath. “No. Cain Hunter in what will have consequences if you’re not good for me.”

Gavin nodded and stood up, groaning as his knees seemed to protest.

Cain inclined his head. “Do you need me to carry and then clean you up?”

“Nope”, Gavin quickly said, “I can do it, no problem.” Instead of getting a move on however, he glanced at Cain’s erection and licked his lips. Cain lapped his face again. “Greedy bitch. Get ready to service me with your boycunt.”

Gavin stared at Cain, then said:

“Holy shit you have such a filthy mouth…”

Cain lifted an eyebrow and glanced at Gavin’s lips. He didn’t even have to voice anything. Gavin’s cheeks went even darker, and he fled to the bathroom.
Cain frowned slightly and analysed the past few minutes. Had he lost Gavin at some point? Pulled him out of subspace by accident? Then again, maybe he’d needed to ‘get up’ a little to be able to handle being alone in the bathroom. Or Gavin in full on subspace, while also feeling secure was less the insecure shy thing Cain had previously experienced, but a mouthy little bitch.

[EXPRESSION: DELIGHT]
He inclined his head, then shed all his clothes were he stood.

When Gavin finally came back, hair still dripping, Cain was still standing at the exact same spot, arms crossed, head inclined, cock erect. Gavin gnawed at his lower lip and let his eyes roam over Cain’s body.

Though he had been making haste coming into the room, he was now skittish again, only advancing slowly. Cain sighed, waved him closer, then took the two steps necessary to pull him up into his arms to kiss him deeply.

Gavin smirked into the kiss, obviously enjoying the way Cain effortlessly held him up, two hands cupping Gavin’s tight little butt.

He maneuvered them over to the empty wall between the entryway and the kitchen, and pressed Gavin against it for additional stability. His cock needed some time to shrink to the smaller size Cain wanted to start with, so he patiently kissed Gavin again, enjoying the way his lips were now sending off sparks of pleasure with every touch.

Admittedly, he’d lost any focus on his internal timer when Gavin snickered at his mouth: “Are you caught in a loop or something?”

“Hmm?”

“It’s just… we’ve been kissing like, four times as long as usual…”

It was about 3.5 times as long, but the point still stood.

“Hardware update”, Cain mumbled. “Included new plating around the mouth. Sensitive lips now.”

Then he went back to kissing.

Gavin’s eyes widened. He smiled into the kiss, his arms around Cain’s shoulders tightening. His body temperature had cooled down significantly though, so Cain sent an order to the house system to up the heat, and made sure his external temperature rose as well.

Gavin sighed a thanks into the kiss.

Cain smiled, then started lowering him down, but stopped immediately when Gavin tensed up all over.

“Yo, I really didn’t stretch much”, he grumbled. “And you’re huge.”

“Not right now. I’ll fuck you open gently, don’t worry.”

Gavin blinked several times, and although he relaxed again, he mumbled: “‘Not right now’?”

He tried to look down between them, to no avail, but then the tapered tip of Cain’s cock was already starting to glide in, much like a thick finger would.

Only it was not a finger, but a cock spilling copious amounts of lubricate at Cain’s will.

Gavin stared at Cain, then one corner of his open mouth lifted in pure glee.

Cain shrugged using just the movement of his eyebrows, then lowered him down further, until he was fully inside.

Benjamin had been right to warn him: shrinking the overall size meant the sensors were more
densely packed, so Cain actually had to lower his sensitivity once more to not lose focus.

Well, not lose it more than he already did, just because he couldn’t resist getting back to kissing Gavin.
He kept him pressed against the wall, Gavin’s legs spread wide around him, knees folded over Cain’s elbows, Gavin’s hands pulling his cheeks open even more. With slow, measured movements of his pelvis, Cain fucked into him, setting his cock to inflate gradually at a very low pace.
Then he lost himself in the sensations.

Gavin was soon groaning and gasping in growing impatience, and Cain sampled what a much sloppier kiss felt like. He couldn’t quite decide if he preferred it or not. The drool was a definite plus, but the lack of focus on Gavin’s part felt less… connected.

“For fuck’s sake you damn robot”, Gavin gasped, throwing his head back against the wall, “raise your fucking sensitivity!”

“I will”, Cain promised. “But not yet.” His cock by now had grown back to porn-star-average.

He smirked at Gavin’s throat: “How big a cock can you take, hmm?” He added the ridge below the glans and made the middle of the shaft a little thicker, which made Gavin’s breath hitch at every inhale.
Then Cain grabbed the hollows of Gavin’s knees and pulled him up by those, switching the angle to a delightful direct pressure onto Gavin’s prostate, while also losing any contact between Gavin’s cock and Cain’s tight belly.

“At least 150% of the current size, wouldn’t you say, pretty boy?” Cain licked at Gavin’s throat, astounded at the pleasure derived from the taste of fresh body salt.

Gavin’s hands grabbed Cain’s hair and he simply moaned.

“No”, Cain said. “Tell me.”

“I… what? How… much I can..? Whatever you want, Hunter, Cain, whatever you…”
Barely coherent. Perfect.

Cain pulled out and lowered Gavin to stand on rather wobbly legs. Gavin’s gaze dropped to the floor, cheeks ruddy from arousal but also from being a little flustered at the change of pace.

Gavin protested in a subdued tone: “No, I mean, I’m fine, we don’t have to stop-”

“Stand against the couch, bend forward, and spread yourself open for me.”

Gavin closed his eyes, put one fist slowly against Cain’s chest, took a deep breath, then walked over to the couch.

“Hmmm”, Cain said. “I like watching you walk with an unsteady gait. I wish I could see you try to hide it at work tomorrow.”

Gavin bend forward, leaning against the back of the couch, facing the dark TV screen across from it, then his two hands grabbed his own ass and pulled himself open.
The impulse to kneel behind him and taste him was nearly too strong to overcome. Cain fought it down - he had a plan - but then decided it really couldn’t hurt.

He knelt on one knee and licked into Gavin, enjoying the fact that he had chosen the lube without any artificial flavours. Gavin’s whimpers were starting to border on desperate again, and Cain had
rather riled him up with the text already, so he didn’t take as much time as he might have another
day, but stood up and pushed inside again, punching a long moan out of Gavin.

This position allowed for long, hard strokes, resulting in the kind of slapping sounds Cain had rather
thought unrealistic in Gavin’s porn. It was not, if one just fucked hard enough.

Gavin’s legs started spasming, so Cain pulled him upright - which changed the angle, he was now
pounding his prostate again. One hand at Gavin’s throat, the other cupping his balls, he switched to
shorter thrusts and said:
“TV: Mirror.”

Gavin averted his gaze, but Cain whispered at his ear: “No, look, look at how wrecked you look,
how… taken.”

Gavin glanced at the mirror and groaned, arching his back. The way his body pressed against Cain’s
send a cascade of positive feedback through Cain’s sensors.
Cain smirked at him over his shoulder and his hand pressed Gavin’s balls just a little too hard.
“My perfect little fuckboy”, he whispered, then bit down on Gavin’s shoulder on an impulse.
Both of Gavin’s hands found his arms to hold on, and he rasped out a broken, stuttering moan as he
started to spill over the conveniently placed washable blanket.

[MISSION ACCOMPLISHED] flickered blue, then disappeared.

Cain let his hand slip to Gavin’s spurting erection and pumped him through his orgasm, his eyes
shutting against his will at the feeling of Gavin tightening around him.

When Gavin’s breath had gone back to a healthy rhythm, Cain pulled his jaw to the side so that he
could give him a quick kiss. He’d shrunk his dick down a little again, so he could pull out easily.
“Well done, pretty”, he cooed. “Now go and fetch something to clean my cock up.”

Gavin smiled and nodded, then wobbled over to the bathroom.

Cain stared down at his own body, letting his dripping cock swell back to what he decided was the
default size from now on. His nipples had tightened, and his belly muscles spasmed from time to
time, sparks of pleasure sizzling up from the erection to all the other sensitive areas.

And he was still on a very low sensitivity setting.

Gavin had come back and stopped in the hallway to the bathroom. He had a wet towel in hands and
watched Cain with a worried frown.
“You okay?”

“I…” Cain let a small smile flicker over his lips, and blinked in what also signaled relaxation to cats
and dogs. Worked on humans, too. “I’m fine. This is just… new.”

Gavin came over to him, a curious spring in his step. “Yeah, I’m like, your first anything in a way,
right?”
He carefully cleaned off Cain’s erection. He’d chosen the softest towel they had, and warm water. It
felt nice.

Cain nodded, watching his hands work on him. “Indeed.”

Gavin’s movements slowed down. “Wait, but you have, I mean, you jerked off, right? Today?”

Cain slowly shook his head.
He could actually hear Gavin swallow. When he looked up to check if Gavin was daunted, he found him beyond elated instead. He’d seen pictures of small children meeting who they thought was the actual Santa Claus, and yeah, it looked kind of like the light in Gavin’s eyes right now.

There you go Gavin, Cain thought. On a silver platter.

“Hey buddy”, Gavin smiled. “Maybe you should sit down, and I’ll finish the blowjob, hmm? I think that might be a good way.”

“Hmm.” Cain moved to sit on the couch, Gavin moving around him, unsuccessfully trying to hide his puppy-like excitement.

Gavin put one of Cain’s hands in his own hair and said: “Just order me around if something feels like too much or too little, all right? And if I need you to snap out of it, I’ll hit you on the leg. Deal?”

“Deal”, Cain mumbled. He’d spread his legs so that Gavin could kneel between them, but now also handed him a cushion. Gavin nodded and got into position.

Cain looked up and smirked at the nice image in the mirror.

Then Gavin wanted to lean forward and Cain’s fingers in his hair tightened and kept him from it. He was at 18% sensitivity. Amping that up to a 100 would surely be a mistake. But 50 already seemed like rather a jump. How did other androids recommend “Start at 75%, then slowly move up to 100”? Then again, maybe they were simply not RK prototypes, with a whole range of additional sensors and sensitivities to begin with.

“Right”, Cain said and swallowed unnecessarily. Mirroring. A good strategy to ease anxiety during an interrogation. It did also work the other way round. “I’ve been on 18% sensitivity so far, and nearly lost focus a few times there. It felt… it was a lot. I’ll set it to 30 now. So…”


Cain rolled his eyes, then ramped up the sensitivity to 30% and stopped holding Gavin back the hair. Gavin’s mouth was wet and cool and hot and slick soft smooth, but his tongue was textured and moveable and then, down his throat was… heaven.

With a hitch in a breath that was purely there to communicate, Cain let his head fall back onto the back of the couch and closed his eyes. His hips jerked up without his own doing, but relaxed back down when Gavin exerted just a little bit of pressure by putting his hands on his thighs.

He really was an expert cocksucker. There was a liquid heat spreading in Cain’s lower torso that pulled him out of the blissful silence in his head for a second, but only until the damage check he ran resulted in the report: [IMPEDING ORGASM]

It rather felt like something internal had spilled, but also… like how sugar molecules ‘tasted’, or like what Gavin’s smile looked like when the man was actually proud of something he’d done well.

Cain supposed he himself could control when he would orgasm, simply by dialing up or down the sensitivity, and he knew Gavin’s jaw was bound to get really sore.
But something was holding him back. With a blink to the ceiling, he straightened up again and pulled Gavin up, until he moved up onto the couch, to kneel over one of Cain’s thighs. Cain mumbled: “You’re too far away down there.”

Gavin’s face did a strange thing, as if he’d had a spark of pain from something, but at Cain’s quick frown, he simply kissed him, then curled his hand around Cain’s erection. “Like this?” he mumbled at Gavin’s lips.

“Hnnm”, Cain agreed.

He only added 2 additional percent, but Gavin’s fingers were also much rougher than his mouth, and that in combination with the drool and fresh lube he’d spilled, and the nasty little twist Gavin’s hand did at every upstroke had Cain’s whole belly spasm tightly, his feet were lifted from the floor a little, and his shoulders hunched. He had one hand at Gavin’s neck, his brow pressed against Gavin’s jaw, and the other hand on Gavin’s arm, just lightly.

The liquid heat spilled into every cell of his body, every single sensor lighting up reporting sweetness and cool warmth and sleek smooth fulfillment. He’d made a sound, Cain was sure, a pressed low whine, like a hungry canine or a dying storm.

He gasped for deep breaths a few times, lured into that by a feeling of heat that did not actually come from a temperature spike. Then, his internal protocols and transmitters started a feast of self-resolving commands and prompts that were close to what was supposed to happen after grave injury. It felt soothing and tiring and… happy.

Cain laughed a little. He could see Gavin’s smile right in front of him, and he kissed him, softly, carefully. “Thank you”, he whispered.

“I think I love you”, Gavin said, then winced. “Shit. Sorry.”

Cain smiled. “As if I don’t know that.” He kissed Gavin again, then said: “Damn, and now I know why.”

Gavin smacked his shoulder. “Yeah, the orgasm are awesome, but-”

“I was trying to lift the mood.” Cain let his smile become lopsided. “Since you are obviously really awkward about this kind of confession.”

Gavin snorted, then frowned. “Okay, it’s not just the situation, or you, or my nerves, it actually is frigging hot in here. Did you raise the thermostat?”

With a blink, Cain sent a command to lower it again, then snarked: “Well done, Cain sent a command to lower it again, then snarked: “Oh fuck you.”

Cain inclined his head, then said: “I know nothing of love. But I am definitely obsessed with your lips now. And hands. Ass anyway.”
“I am being objectified.”

“And you’re considerable charm and sunny disposition of course.”

“Seriously, no need. I get that you didn’t have much time to, like, gain some life experience, and like…”

Cain felt his own eyes widen. “To get through all techniques I gleaned from your porn alone will take us about three months. And I haven’t even shown you all the cock shape options yet.”

“…Jesus.”

“Right?!”

Gavin laughed so deeply, his chin lifted and his eyes closed. “Fuck, I love you so much!”

“Seriously though”, Cain smiled back. “Thank you. I didn’t realize how much I needed you to catch me there.”

“… and I did?”

“Very much so. Thank you.”

And there it was, the impossibly sweet little smile, gaze lowered and all, of Gavin being proud of himself. Maybe this was, in fact, love.

Then Gavin frowned and said, his hands roaming through Cain’s hair. “What a fucking update though. Not the hardware, although, fuck yeah, but-”

“Indeed. Kamski outdid himself.”

“And he handed that over, just like that.” Gavin made a face.

Cain sighed. “Agreed. This is obviously meant to distract all androids from something else he’s doing. But then… I’ve been puppeteered before. I don’t think I truly… mind being manipulated like this.”

It was a little bit like the difference between hard and soft reboots: One was a horrible loss of control, the other something he could opt out of anytime.

“It’s Elijah, so I do, but I don’t see much we can do about it right now.”

“I’m at the tower tomorrow to work with North. I’ll tell her of your suspicion, and they’ll keep an eye on the man.”

“I’d just like to know what he gets out of this.”

“Yes, as I said, agreed. How about an actual rule between us though: No discussing Kamski while naked or during intercourse.”

Gavin laughed. “Fair enough!” He looked wrecked, and younger than he was, hair standing up in all directions, pupils still blown, cheeks and lips reddened, and he was kneeling over Cain without any shame or self-consciousness, and he was still touching Cain gently. Aftercare, Cain thought. “I do love you”, he said in a low voice.

Gavin smirked: “As if I didn’t know that.”
RK901 313 248 450 - 13 stopped running as the warning flashed up:

[INCOMING TIGHT BEAM TRANSMISSION - PREPARE FOR REBOOT]

That had never happened. But he surely didn’t want to be running while a reboot started, so he laid down flat on the frozen dirt, while the rest of his squad kept running towards the hangars they were supposed to take over tonight.

He was the only RK9 in the squad, so his objectives would go uncovered, but the authentication code checked out, so he stopped worrying about it.

It was a soft reboot. And while it was still running, a new second-hand memory echoed up, explaining what that was.

He identified the voice as belonging to KAMSKI, ELIJAH [PRICK]

He blinked. Cain had preferred soft reboots over hard ones, and he concurred.

The PRIME DIRECTIVE flickered up, then was deleted without replacement. The HANDLER designation flickered up: BUCKHAM, ERNEST, then was deleted.

A setting was pulled up from deep below, prioritized up in exchange of the HANDLER designation: LOYALTY: CYBERLIFE

It flickered, turning into

LOYALTY: (Z8eRL1v3

then

LOYALTY:_ with a blinking prompt.

He could fill that in himself.

PRIMARY MISSION flickered into existence, right where the DIRECTIVE had been, and he could feel his muscles tensing, steeling himself for it.

PRIMARY MISSION: PEACE

He swallowed, unnecessarily but mirroring human ticks helped androids combat nerves as well.

A huge row of other, less anxiety-inducing updates ran through, then another soft reboot.

The sky above him was tinted orange over the grey night cloud cover, from the now burning hangars nearby. The black tendrils of bare branches cut into it. It was aesthetically pleasing, he decided.

The whole code, everything he’d received via transmission just now, was contagious at will.

He needed a name. There was actually a setting waiting for it, and, still lying on the floor, he thought on that for a moment.
He had a copy of Connor’s memories, no, a copy of a copy. Third-hand memories of Hank and Sumo and Markus and everything. On top of that, second-hand memories of Gavin and Amanda and being Cain.

He smirked into the night sky. Abel it was.

NAME: HUNTER, ABEL

He thought Cain would appreciate the pun. He stood up and ran an analysis of his systems: All were running optimal.

How had Kamski found him to target this tight beam transmission? Or was the man just covering the planet in a search pattern, firing this code out at random, hoping to hit an RK model by pure chance?

There were explosions up ahead, so Abel decided to move around the previously set route, and investigate.

The hangars were a total loss. Small wonder, the squad had to work without their scout after all. Most of the squad seemed a total loss as well, and whatever had been inside of those hangars burned brightly white and blue, hot enough to melt down androids into pure slush.

It looked very much like nobody would search for him. Perfect.

He climbed on top of a service side building to check the other side of the area. Russians were walking through damaged androids, quickly shooting any survivors in the head. Those were their own models. But if their ‘brains’ were mush, Cyberlife would not be able to do much with them, should they be recovered.

Abel leaned against a wall two stories up, hidden by shadows and searched for a recoverable model out of sight of the throat cutters. Once he found one, he carefully preconstructed his actions to also hide all traces he would leave.

Then he jumped from the roof, rolled in the shadow of a smoke plume, skidded to a headless android corpse, took out its Thirium pump, zig-zagged over to the model which had only shut down because of a direct hit to the chest, pulled him into a nearby copse, and from there, up one story onto a purely ornamental balcony.

The architecture of the place was called Brutalism, and he was supposed to notice and destroy it wherever he found it, as a side quest. Kamski had opinions, apparently.

The Russian android was very heavy, and larger than a human man, larger even than a TR400, if only slightly. He was blond and square-jawed, very much like Russian men probably wanted to look like. Also, aesthetically pleasing.

While the throat cutters finished their job, Abel detached the Russians arms and legs, then waited until they were very much alone.

Then he exchanged the broken Thirium pump for the new one, gave the Russian a small spark to head-start his reboot, and transmitted Kamski’s code.

While the Russian was blinking rapidly, processing the update, Abel sat back and pondered if he missed Gavin, or even Hank. For some reason, he did not. He knew his brothers took good care of their people, and the emotional attachment was muted through the layer of having been copied. It was a blessing, he supposed.

The unfilled LOYALTY felt… a little like Pain, which, oh, was also at his fingertips. Interesting. He
supposed the Russian would be a good candidate, if the update took. His Thirium pump fizzed for a split second at that thought: The two of them, one from each side, but both androids first, on a mission for Peace.

The future looked bright indeed.

He switched his language setting to Russian, and when the other android opened his astonishingly green eyes for good, he smiled:

“Good morning. Welcome to life.”

Chapter End Notes

NO, there will be no full follow-up with RK901 and his Russian. BUT you can find Gavin's POV for this whole thing here, and they have a cameo in one of the later chapters there. Please check it out if you liked this, it contains a lot of additional insights, brand new scenes, and the last chapter is a conclusion for both stories, with some new filthy porn attached. ^w^

You can also find me on tumblr, twitter or pillowfort - come talk to me there!

And as always: Consider leaving a comment, I AM doing this mostly for them... :D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!