

Cybernetica: Chapter 20

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The docking bay was dim when they entered. The ceiling winnowed open, the platform hydraulics raising them to where white stars were fading from a red sky. They stepped off again, walking out of the hangar, seeing from their elevation the dross meridian of Talaat City, its sulfurous glow and the velodrome beyond.

“Never thought you’d live to see this place, I bet,” said Lanik, looking deep into the city’s industrial guts. “It’s suicide rate is among the highest in the world. Of course, not many humans inhabit it, so I guess you could say the numbers lie.” He eyed Jake pensively. “You haven’t been home yet, have you?”

“I’ve seen the vids. I know how bad it is.”

“No, you don’t. You’ll never know until you’ve seen it with your own eyes.” A passing wind shrilled heavily in their ears. When it was gone, Lanik said, “I admire you, Jake. I admire you and others like you. And I apologize for what happened this morning with Annalise. We didn’t mean to push her, and Riona shouldn’t have been so belligerent either. As for what happened at the Omega, she has a right to be angry. I doubt she’ll sleep any better knowing I can’t. You don’t do the things I’ve done without having some kind of hell to pay. I asked for a life sentence, and for my sins they gave me one.”

“But you can’t force others to agree or share your views,” said Jake. “Sublimation does work for people. Maybe not for us, but for others.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Jake. Sublimation doesn’t work for people. *People work for sublimation*. They’re merely rewarded for their subservience while the ones that don’t are punished.” They were standing near the edge of the heliport now. The city reeked of unnatural gases. He peered into the distance and said, “Have you ever heard of a man named Lowell Gromkin?”

“No, but I’ve heard of Elson Primakov.”

Lanik smiled amusedly. “Salem told you.”

“That and a few other things. Is it true?”

“Is *what* true? Elson Primakov doesn’t exist, Jake. He’s dead, remember?”

“Yes, I suppose he is.”

They walked to the edge of the heliport as the sun was beginning to burn over the minarets and mosques. “As for Lowell Gromkin,” said Lanik, “I’m not surprised you never heard the name. He was a scientist who defected to the Free Side about ten years ago. He’d developed blindsight, was dismissed from his post and formally arrested on a false charge. They claimed he was selling technological secrets to the Free Side. I had no knowledge of this, so when I heard about it I decided to find out what was going on. Reality proved a completely different story. Gromkin had no connection to us at all. The police took him away because of what he knew, what they *feared* he might do with his knowledge. Here was a man, completely innocent of the charges brought against him, but guilty as a potential threat to the system. By assuming he was incapable of being the same person after sublimation, they decided his fate for him. There’s no evidence to suggest he would have done something remotely like that, yet he fulfilled their prophecy by escaping to the Free Side on a false identity. He mistakenly thought they would harbor him; extradition completed if only to avoid further trouble. My point here is that blindsight is a sickness for the system, not the individual whose mind is rejecting the encrypted commands. The media serves as an integral part of the social brainwashing because it helps create the impression that the individual is in need of curing, or in some cases, punishment. They tell you that sublimation is ‘good’ for you, and monsters like me are ‘bad’. You, for example, weren’t susceptible, so they broke your will to resist and then offered you a job so you could *pretend* to be like them. People’s eventual acceptance of the social organism is a direct result of sublimation having initially introduced itself as beneficial, an instrument to end war, depression, boredom, violence. What they promised was utopia manufactured in a lab, but harmony by way of complete control is totalitarian, not what *they* describe...”

At the very least, Jake had to admit there was some truth in all of it. His ideas were fascinating, but his warrior’s ethos seemed to ignore the realities of managing the network—the very point raised earlier by Nisha.

“I understand all that,” he said, “but sooner or later you’re going to have to confront the corruption. It isn’t something you’ll be able to avoid.”

“Of course not. Nothing’s assured—and certainly no one ever counted on blindsight. But we’ve studied the network for years. We know exactly where most of the problems are. They’ll be corrected through what we’ve termed our gradual phase analysis of comprehensive solutions. I won’t sit here and pretend that new circumstances won’t arise, but the schemes will grow less complicated as technology incrementally reduces and the population continues to shrink.”

Comprehensive solutions, Jake thought. Using sublimation to terminate its self. How could that possibly work without stirring more violence?