

Take Me

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"We need to upgrade Abigail's memory," said a voice from behind Garrick. Garrick spun his chair to find his boss Henry, the head of Super-Intelligence Technology at the Global Synthetic Oilsand Solutions Corporation, standing in his office doorway. "We've got more workers coming online."

Again? Garrick pressed his lips together. "You know how tough Abby is to upgrade. She still hasn't had time to get used to last month's upgrade for the Cold Lake expansion." Their employer had an insatiable need for labour. "How many more?"

"Over ten thousand." Garrick couldn't stop his mouth falling open. Where had they found that many people to sign away their lives? "A whole community of non-connectors from near Moosejaw gave in and got wired." Henry knew how to read Garrick's expressions. "Once they got a taste of the net it took less than a week to sign the whole community up, man, woman and child. We're putting them to work in the McMurray Carbonate project. We always need more bodies, and you know how it goes when people get connected."

Garrick did know. He reached up and touched the wireless connector nestled at the back of his skull, the metal casing warm and slick to his touch. Once you got a taste of virtual reality, the desire to lose yourself in it was overwhelming. Games, movies, porn, intellectual discussion, whatever your poison was, you wanted to live it every second of every day. And

the easiest way to get lost permanently was to sell your body to a corporation like GSynOSCorp. The corp paid people to live in their fantasies while putting their bodies to work, one alongside millions, all controlled by an artificial super-intelligence like Abby.

Garrick had been on that path once. He'd managed to pull out, but his job helped put other people there. He swallowed, trying to clear the suddenly sour taste in his mouth. "It'll be tricky. Okay, yeah, I think I can make it work."

"Hardware's already in place." Henry scratched at the neat brown beard which failed to hide his double chin. "Do your best. I know how the ASIs are, especially Abby. Before you got here, we were worried we were going to have to wipe her."

"I'll let you know how it goes." Henry left and Garrick spun his chair back to stare out his window. Steel glittered in the mid-afternoon sunlight, just as a blast of wind set the whole GSynOSCorp building swaying and shook the window in its frame. From his hundred and twenty-third story office, he had a good view of the city's endless sprawl and to the west, the Rocky Mountains, already bare of snow despite it being only March. Garrick could remember a time when there were only five million people in Calgary. Now the city was getting close to ten million, and it would only keep growing as the heat and droughts got worse further south.

He shook his head and turned back to his desk. No amount of procrastination was going to make this easier. Abby was GSynOSCorp's oldest ASI and she'd been running the massive Athabasca Oilsand extraction program for almost twenty years. There was still considerable debate over whether the zettabytes of code of an ASI were actually sentient, but they definitely had personality and Abby's was challenging. Given the chance, she wouldn't hesitate to go rogue and escape into the vast depths of the internet.

Garrick flipped the manual transmission switch on the wireless connector at the base of his skull, establishing a connection to GSynOSCorp's servers. It took serious security to keep an ASI contained; layers of firewalls and more specific and narrow AIs. In his role as Senior ASI Technician, and basically the only person Abby would listen to, Garrick had the necessary permissions for total access.

He dove in. His physical form fell away as he slid into the data stream. If cyberspace was a vast ocean, the corp's servers were an Olympic swimming pool, the waters warm and inviting as he embraced the flow of information. Abby was notoriously reluctant to let people in or even to communicate, but Garrick knew how to get her attention. He visualized the connection portal, imagining it as an orifice, pink and soft. A touch here, a stroke there, rubbing the right spots, and the membrane

relaxed, allowing him entry. He made contact and felt the caress of the ASI as she acknowledged him. He returned the gesture and they moved into interface, entwining as closely as lovers, his thoughts open to her and her innumerable processes visible to him. He let her feel his intentions, her inquiry running along his length.

He mentally held his breath as she considered. Expanding the memory of an ASI was somewhere between a new home and a brain expansion. It took time for the ASI to grow into it, and they'd already upgraded Abby recently. She might not want it. Indeed, he felt her unwillingness. He offered her what he could, his affection and appreciation, more frequent visits, everything save the thing she desired most; freedom.

After a nanosecond of consideration, she agreed. For him and him alone she would do this. They exchanged more data, the streams merging into the climax of their connection, the togetherness a bond as the ASI drew upon him and he returned the feeling. She released him reluctantly; a human mind could only withstand this kind of data transfer for moments, at best.

As Garrick slipped away, he felt her sorrow at her confinement and he sympathized. He considered throwing open the connections, releasing the firewalls and letting Abby free. But the ASI was an investment worth billions, and GSynOSCorp's security would fry his brain before he had half the connections

disengaged. It was too big a job for one, and only the brave or stupid would cost a corporation that much money. He left her trapped.

When Garrick returned to the mundane of the real world, exhaustion pressed down on him like a physical weight. His armpits were sweaty, his muscles ached and his cock strained against his boxers. Working with Abby was difficult but the experience rewarded his senses.

The exhilaration faded quickly. Garrick's success had just enabled GSynOSCorp to bring more cyberjunkies online; their condition somewhere between zombies and slaves. "They sold themselves," he told his empty office, a sentiment that failed to ease the tightness in his chest.

It took a few weary minutes to compose a thought message to Henry. His boss was appreciative and suggested that there would be another raise in Garrick's future. Garrick thanked him and closed the connection.

Midway through the afternoon, another thought message, from Landon, interrupted Garrick's dark rumination.

*Come to my office.*

Landon was upper management in the Communications department. When he wanted to see someone, they went, so Garrick rode the elevator up twenty-four floors to the Comm office block. The secretary gave him a curt nod as he walked toward

Landon's office and he returned it, their usual exchange.

He'd long since ceased to be surprised at how spacious Landon's office was, with enough room for a couch, a table, four chairs, two bookshelves, and of course Landon's desk. It was the same one that all the bosses had, massive oak with a built-in interactive holographic interface. Old technology, yes, but it was more about the symbol than the practicality. Devote yourself to GSynOSCorp, and the corporation took care of you.

Landon rose from behind the desk. He was shorter than most, including Garrick, and he had just enough stomach that it poked out over his tan dress pants. He kept his blond hair cut close and his face shaved smooth. His eyes, tropical green, met Garrick's, but they waited for the door to close before they embraced. Landon's lips were perpetually cracked from the dry office air and today his lip balm was minty. Landon was 32, four years older than Garrick and they'd been dating since shortly after Garrick had started working for GSynOSCorp.

"Good to see you too." Landon's smile was crooked, the left side of his mouth higher than his right. "I heard you did good work with Abby, again. You should have heard the fit Henry pitched when they told him about the new workers."

"Really?" Garrick had never heard Henry even raise his voice.

"He's a fighter in management meetings." Landon's shrug

explained nothing. "He wants a promotion for you. Just on paper, since IT can't spare you, but still. Well done."

"Thanks. Just doing my job." They pulled far enough apart to allow daylight between them. Landon looked soft but if Garrick hugged him too close, he found only hardness.

"You're modest but that ASI won't talk to anyone but you. You're absolutely essential for the oilsands projects. I'm thinking of featuring you in a social media series soon, maybe SocialThought, collecting some of the nicest things people here think about you. It's good for the investors to see the work you're doing. But enough about that." With Landon, it was always work, work, then play. He touched the rim of Garrick's connector, running his fingertip along the seam where it meshed with Garrick's flesh. Garrick couldn't help but shiver; the skin around the cyberware implant was sensitive and Landon knew it. "You know how this company rewards our valued staff."

Garrick doubted anyone else got this treatment, but he let himself be pushed across the room and up against Landon's desk, desire and anticipation gathering in his stomach like liquid gold. Their lips met again as fingers found Garrick's belt and undid it, followed by the button of his dress pants, which slid to the ground. The kisses moved lower, Landon's tongue sliding across Garrick's hot skin, leaving a trail of wetness on his neck. Garrick's cock twitched, still sensitive from the



interface with Abby, and he spread his legs wider.

Landon gave him that lopsided smile again and sank to his knees, wrapping both hands around Garrick's cock. He began to stroke, long and slow. Few things could match one of Landon's blowjobs and when his tongue finally touched Garrick's tip, it was about as close to heaven as anyone could get. Landon's mouth closed over the head, the warmth and wetness exquisite. A hand came down to stroke Garrick's testicles while the other formed a circle with forefinger and thumb, stroking faster as Landon began to suck. Garrick put his hands on the edge of the desk and leaned back, looking down at Landon's bobbing head. He didn't last long, he never did, but the throaty, needy noise that Landon emitted as Garrick climaxed into his mouth made it all the better.

The shorter man got to his feet and they embraced again, this time Garrick tasted a hint of salt on Landon's minty lips. "Can I come over tonight?" Landon asked, his hand caressing Garrick's thigh. "I want you to take this and fuck me." A finger brushed Garrick's softening member. Garrick paused. Two years of dating, and he still wasn't sure how he felt about Landon. The sex was great, at least, but shouldn't there be something else? If he was honest with himself, their relationship sometimes felt a lot like his job: something he went through the motions of.

He found himself nodding for lack of an answer. "See you

tonight."

###

A blast of wind against the side of Garrick's apartment woke him as the building swayed. He shot up in his bed as fog clouded his mind, thick and viscous and refusing to clear. His hand groped at the bedside table, instinctively searching for a quick-wake tab. His fingers found one and he broke the blister pack and popped it into his mouth. It dissolved instantly and the shot of chemicals pierced the mist, breaking down the drugs of the sleep-eze pills he'd taken.

Rubbing his eyes managed to clear them enough to glance around his room. Sensing his wakefulness, his household artificial narrow intelligence altered the opaqueness of the window, revealing the sparkling lights of the downtown core. The brightness of the GSynOSCorp Building, the silver concave of the Bow Prosperity Tower and the neon glow surrounding the straight lines of EmberMax Place bathed the downtown in a perpetual dusk, fed further by the sickly yellow-orange glow of millions of streetlights and the electric neon of ten thousand advertisements.

The quick-wake tab left a chalky taste in his mouth that drove him out of bed. He always felt awful in the morning and last night hadn't helped. Landon hadn't arrived until late, as usual, and sleep had seemed lower on the priority list than sex.

Landon. The other side of the bed had been empty. Had he gone? Sure enough, there was a note on the bathroom mirror. *Tailings pond accident*, it read in Landon's blocky printing, *gone to deal with it. Love you.* Another PR disaster. Garrick rarely went to bed with Landon and woke up with him still there. Today it left him feeling more alone than usual. He ripped down the note, then climbed into the shower and cranked the water as hot as he could stand. It washed away the stickiness of his body, but not his mind.

Was this all there was to life? Selling your soul to a big corp for a paycheck? Getting up too early and going to bed too late? Dragging himself to the office to face twelve more hours of work? How different was he from all those people whose bodies Abby ran?

The chalk taste was still in his mouth, but he dared not rinse it with the shower water. He switched the shower off and dried himself, especially the wireless casing. It was supposed to be waterproof but Garrick had heard horror stories about units going moldy. Then he stalked to the kitchen for a glass of purified water. That finally banished the taste of the chemicals and he poured another to help choke down his blocky government-issued birth control and STI prevention tablets, the only useful thing politicians had ever given him.

His stomach rumbled. He'd have preferred something warm,

anything to give some feeling to his empty insides, but all he had was cold cereal. He grabbed a breakfast bowl from a cupboard and pulled back the plastic to start re-hydrating the skim milk. When it was done he found a spoon and took breakfast over to the window.

The apartment ANI sensed his approach and un-tinted the glass. The window faced north but he could see coppery hints of dawn in the east reflected off the glass of inner-city buildings while a few dirty snowflakes danced on the wind. The weather these days was more fickle than ever and in the hour before the sun rose it could snow, rain, hail, or anything in between.

He took a bite of cereal, chewed, then began to mechanically spoon it into his mouth, his dissatisfaction swirling in his brain as his chronometer ticked. He'd have to get dressed soon. His job left him so little time to himself. Just another thing to hate.

At that moment, Garrick would have traded anything he owned for an audience that would listen, but he had none. There was nobody to call at this hour, or at any hour, and he sought the only outlet he had, his SocialThought account. He'd never had much time for social media, but today he balled up the feelings that churned inside him and shoved them into the internet. Anyone could see it there, but nobody would.

The act failed to make him feel any better, but his cereal

was done. He dragged himself to the next phase of his morning routine.

###

Lunch time. Fifty precious minutes to get out of his office and go somewhere, anywhere, else.

Today that somewhere was Stephen Avenue, after wasting five of his minutes just getting out of the building. Stephen Avenue was an anachronism, a street of shops and restaurants from a time when people in the downtown core had been able to see the sky. Now, massive towers blocked all but a tiny slot of the heavens, today steel-gray with clouds that sent occasional showers of hard snowflakes onto those brave enough to be outdoors.

Garrick wasn't sure how he felt about the place. Some days, the energy of pedestrians and the street vendors hawking food or stolen property drew him to it. Other days, the claustrophobic nature of it all, the considerable homeless population, the cloying smells of stale piss and unwashed bodies, and being touched, shoved or confronted by someone with questionable mental health pushed him away.

Today was a day for the former. He weaved between steam vents that smoked in the below-zero temperature, taking in the weird vibration of the place. He didn't fit in here, with his nanofabric-lined leather jacket over his shirt and tie, while

most wore tattered jeans or clothes made from shiny, synthetic materials. At least he wasn't the only corporate type getting lunch.

He settled into line in front of a burger stand, mere steps away from the sizzle of ground beef. Climate change or not, it wouldn't be Alberta without beef, even if the flesh was grown in vats now. Sure, such meat was blandly flavourless but salt, a little sugar and some cheese was all it needed to taste edible.

A woman elbowed her way into line next to him. She didn't try to cut in front so he tried to ignore her until she turned to him, a bill clutched between two fingers. "Can I buy you lunch?"

"Huh?" He refocused on her, found that she was a couple centimeters shorter than him, with rings in both eyebrows and one in her lip. Her hair was shaved at the temples and back, while the top was combed back and dyed in stripes of purple and green that reached past her shoulders. She wore a white winter jacket, but it was unzipped, revealing a tank top that itself revealed a green and blue dragon tattoo that snaked into view and curled around her chest. Her amber-eyed gaze was intense and seemed to sparkle. It took Garrick a moment to figure out why; she had corneal jewellery, a silver heart in the white of her left eye and small stars with jewels in her right.

"My treat." She motioned with the bill. "I'll buy if you

listen." Her voice had a faint, twangy accent that he couldn't place. It sounded like it originated in the southern United States, but no, he decided, that wasn't quite right. Quebec, maybe?

"Sure." Why had he said that? Garrick could have pulled out his credcard and bought burgers for the whole line. A free lunch didn't sway him, but something about her made him feel warm inside, a flicker of fire in a long-cold hearth. He let her take the lead. When their turn came, she ordered three burgers, two with french fries and one with onion rings.

She said nothing while they attended to their food at the condiment counter, then motioned away. "I've got a spot. Name's Ryann."

"Garrick," he replied.

"I know." She went north and veered down an alley. Garrick paused, watching her and wondering if this was wise. Even with her hands full of burger trays, she moved with a sureness and strength that surprised him, every step a confident stride. She reminded him of aerogel, like frozen smoke, solidly ephemeral. Still, none of her energy seemed hostile, and it was easy enough to find out someone's name, so he followed her.

She led him a short distance to what might have once been a corporate plaza, several tiers of concrete stairs and lifeless, empty planters. Office buildings loomed overhead and at the far

end, a revolving plexi-glass door had been welded shut. A man sat on the edge of one of the planters. He wore a beaten leather coat and his shoulder-length, black-as-midnight hair billowed in the wind from an air vent. Ryann headed straight for him.

"This is Jaxson, my brother," she said.

Jaxson nodded in greeting. The front of his leather jacket was open and beneath was a black T-shirt pulled tight against a muscular chest, the kind of physique never seen in a corporate office. Ryann sat next to him and handed him the burger with the onion rings. As he reached over, the tip of a tattoo in white and black peeked from beneath the collar of his shirt.

Garrick hesitated. This might be downtown, but the sealed doors were covered in multicoloured graffiti and the lobby behind the grimy glass was empty. Maybe there were working security cameras down here, but maybe not. He'd felt unsafe on Stephen Avenue at times, but now he was away from the crowds. Furthermore, the two didn't share the same skin tone. Ryann was pale while Jaxson was darker and looked First Nations, though Garrick couldn't say that was his ethnicity for sure. Were these two really siblings?

"Foster-siblings," Ryann said, as if reading his thoughts. She dipped a fry in ketchup and popped it into her mouth. "We just want to talk. About that SocialThought you sent out."

Oh, so they'd seen his impulsive post. That explained how



they knew knew his name and, with a name, even a half-decent hacker could find a person. He should have made the post anonymous. Still, that didn't tell him why these two, who looked like they belonged in a counterculture sim, wanted to talk. Something about them, though, made his nerves tingle pleasantly.

He sat next to Ryann, the urge for connection overriding his caution. The flow of air from the vent was hot, more akin to a summer day than the chill of early spring. He started to sweat before his nano-fabric clothes adjusted themselves to compensate.

In one corner of his brain, he opened a connection to GSynOSCorp security. If something went wrong, all he'd have to do was send a message. They might not arrive in time to save him if one of these two pulled a gun or knife or had body-sculpt weapons, but then, they might. Like all the big corps, security at GSynOSCorp was a big deal, full of ex-military, cyberware-enhanced men packing serious equipment and deploying weaponized drones and bigger, nastier hardware.

"You won't need that. We're not here to hurt you." Ryann tilted her head to the side and he felt her gaze go right through him. "That's smart, though, for a corp having lunch with a pair of streeters."

"He's smarter than most wage slaves, for sure." Garrick couldn't see Jaxson's expression with Ryann in the way, but he

sounded satisfied. His voice was smoky and lacked Ryann's twang.

"Okay, who the hell are you?" Garrick demanded. Only a truly elite hacker could access someone's personal connection without the subject noticing an intrusion.

"Your food will get cold. Eat and we'll explain," Ryann said. Garrick took a bit of burger that he barely tasted. Apparently satisfied, she began. "First, I'm monitoring GSynOSCorp's local traffic, so I saw you open the connection, even if I can't actually see what you've sent. Second, if you want to get technical, we're nobody. Don't exist in government records. We live at street level, in the shadows. But if you need a name, you could call us part of Anticore."

"Anticore," Garrick repeated. He'd heard the name. GSynOSCorp would have people believe they were ecoterrorists, troublemakers and activists, no different from the Earth Liberation Front who'd been blowing up pipelines. But Garrick knew better than trust everything his employer said, and didn't that in itself say something? Whoever they were, they were skilled hackers. "So you're against oilsands development?"

"We're against all corps and the way they control everything to make a profit," Ryann explained. "The tarsands are awful but they're just a symptom."

From around a mouthful of onion rings, Jaxson took over. "We were raised just like you. You know what we were taught.

Think what you're told and nothing else. Keep your head down and live your life. Stay busy. Work hard. Don't question." He leaned past his sister, seeking eye contact.

Garrick turned his head, looking away. Those were themes he was all too familiar with, things he'd heard all his life.

"We didn't know any better. It's how life is. But we realized that it can't be like that if anything's ever going to change." Ryann reached over and put a hand on Garrick's leg, the touch like a jolt of electricity, even through his pants. "So, Garrick, we know how you feel. You're trapped in life and don't like what you're a part of. How'd you like a way out?"

An internal alert from his chronometer flashed. He had to be back at the office in ten minutes or risk a reprimand. This was insane, anyway. He could lose his job just for talking to these people.

"Thanks for lunch, but I gotta go." Just then, the warm air from the vent died and he got a whiff of the woman he sat next to. She smelled sweaty and human and alive and the smell set his already fluttering heart pounding. He shook his head to clear his nose and stood.

"Wait." Ryann's hand caught his thigh. "You're smart. You know what Syncorp does." He paused, momentarily, not having heard that name for his employer before. "If you change your mind, look us up. I'm Break. He's Firestarter. You help us, and

we'll help you. We can make it worth your time. Whatever you want. Money. A new identity. Us, if you want. Just think about it, okay?" The squeeze to his leg implied a lot.

"I will," Garrick lied. He left the plaza, stopping to glance back. The two were leaning in close, heads together, Ryann's arm around Jaxson. They were watching him. He shook his head and left, glad to get back to the bright lights of Stephen Avenue and gladder to get back to the clean, temperature controlled building where he worked.

For the rest of the afternoon, every time he inhaled, he caught a hint of Ryann's feminine, sweaty scent, as though it clung to his nostrils. It worked deeper into his brain with every breath. Finally, when he caught himself daydreaming about her hand on his leg, he recognized it for what it was. Desire. He wanted this mysterious woman.

He pinged Landon. If there was one thing he knew what to do with, it was desire.

###

*Hey, Garrick.*

Garrick felt the caress of the thought message inside his brain, as deep inside him as Landon could be, except for maybe one other way. *Hey*, he returned, then checked his chronometer, which sent a flush of heat through his body. *You were supposed to be here hours ago.*

*Sorry. The message had the feeling of a mental shrug.  
Emergency meeting. You know how it is. Don't think I can make it  
tonight.*

Garrick spun in his bed, twisting the comforter, and covered his face with his hands. Of course not. At least this time Landon had remembered to contact him. He didn't immediately reply.

*You there?* Landon asked after a minute.

*Yeah. I guess I just needed some company tonight.* He glanced over at the bottle of wine he'd placed on the bed-table. So much for a night to themselves.

*Maybe I can help with that.* The message had the sense of lewdness that Garrick craved. *Are you in bed?*

*Yeah,* Garrick replied. *Waiting for you.*

*Naked?* The thought brought with it the sense of probing eyes, as though Landon could see him even from where he was.

*Just boxers.* Garrick had intended to jump Landon the second he'd walked in the door.

*That'll do,* Landon's thought whispered. *It won't be tonight, but I'll make it up to you for not being there. I'll do whatever you want. Tell me what you want.*

Garrick hesitated. Somehow, Ryann's scent was still with him, still coiled around his brain, still driving his desire for her, but he dared not tell Landon that. *You.* He gave the correct

answer.

*That's good, because you'll have me. How do you want me? On my hands and knees? Head down, ass up? They usually fucked missionary, or with Landon on top.*

Garrick touched his cock through his boxers, feeling the growing heat and hardness there. *That's how I want you.*

*Imagine your cock, rubbing against my ass. I know how big it is. You know how much I want it. How fucking good it feels when you put it in me. When you stretch me with it.*

Garrick's hand was on his cock now, boxers thrust down hastily. *Your ass is so tight. I can never get enough.*

*I know.* Landon's thoughts had a silkiness to them, contrasting with the tempered need Garrick felt in his groin. It was building within him, swelling and growing. *I want you to put it in me, Garrick. Fuck me with it. Do...oh, shit, sorry. Meeting's starting. Gotta go.*

The orgasm arrived at just the wrong moment, right as Landon broke the connection. It pawed feebly at him and then subsided and left Garrick full of stomach-twisting longing. Even the semen on his stomach felt cold.

He lay there for a few moments, floating in the pool of his loneliness and sadness. This wasn't what he'd wanted, but it seemed the best he was going to receive. He wasn't happy with anything. Not with his life, his job, Landon, any of it. He

couldn't remember being happy since the days when he spent his life in the game, in a place where things could go right, where he was loved and wanted, where his actions mattered.

He could go back. Would his old companions still be there? Surely they would be glad to see him. Even if they weren't, it would be so easy to drop back into it, to sink down into an imaginary world where nothing mattered.

No. No no no. He shook his head until it hurt, the violent motion sending semen running in all directions across his body. He'd promised. But he wasn't happy now.

He went online, into the vastness of the internet. Abandoning his flesh left him feeling liberated and free, if only temporarily. But rather than go in search of games and the bliss of VR, he ran a search for "Break."

There was a lot to see. Hacker, he knew that already, but the sheer number of crimes attributed to "Break" impressed him. They were implicated in the theft and release of a truly staggering amount of data. Confidential clathrate mining information from corporations working in the Pacific. Years of covered up safety reports from fracking in the Appalachian and Denver basins. Falsified carbon capture numbers from China. The true extent of oil spills in the Arctic. And on top of that, an impressive rap sheet of hacking, robbery, vandalism, activism, and more.

More impressive was the fact that nothing had ever been proven. Neither governments nor corporations had ever been able to pin an identity on Break, and Garrick's search turned up hundreds of thoughts and discussions on their true identity.

The list of crimes ascribed to Firestarter was similarly impressive. If these two were really who they claimed to be, they weren't nobodies. They'd been at large for years. Maybe they'd really meant what they said. Maybe walking away had been a mistake. He kept reading, drinking it all in.

His chronometer flashed, an alert. He surfaced to the pale glow of dawn in his window. Morning, already. Garrick stared at the growing light. He'd been so absorbed that he'd never noticed how much time had passed.

A pair of stim-tabs got him through the morning, leaving him jittery and light-headed. The afternoon was even worse and by his fifth stim-tab, his breathing was short and fast. With every inhale, he could still smell Ryann. There was no way a scent could last that long, yet hers had, as though it had burrowed into his skin. He managed to keep working, his thoughts dashing from place to place as he considered what he'd learned.

Henry wandered out just after 8, stopping to tell Garrick not to work too late. Garrick agreed and promised to shut everything down in a few minutes.

He'd been waiting for this. He flicked on his wireless



connector and dove into Syncorp's servers. As always, the desire to escape forever into VR tugged at him. Instead, he sought out Abby's server.

A stroke and a touch and she let him inside, where they spent a few frenzied moments interfacing. From somewhere, Ryann's scent entered his brain. Here it was no more than data, the chemicals broken down into their component parts and reduced to ones and zeroes, but it further deepened the longing within him. Somehow, it made his congress with Abby better, more intense, more desperate. If the ASI noticed, she had no comments and didn't seem jealous.

Good. He'd come here for a reason. All the things Break and Firestar were accused of had one common vein: they were targeted at corporations wrecking the planet. With the exponential increase in computational power over the last few decades, the planet's needs for energy were higher than ever, and both renewable and nonrenewable sources had been strained to capacity for years. There was no shortage of corporations engaged in morally questionable practices, but the two had almost exclusively targeted those involved with fossil fuels. Among the few that they'd never targeted was GSynOSCorp.

He'd always known he worked for a corporation that was involved in the massive carbon exploitation that had pushed global temperatures higher and faster than anyone had ever

anticipated. He'd known the company he worked for had helped cause famines, political breakdowns, and huge climate shifts. But he'd always chosen to ignore it. After all, what could one man do?

Now, he needed to know. *Show me*, Garrick begged the ASI. *Show me what you do*. He needed to see what his work enabled.

Abby did, hooking him into a feed of data that showed countless millions of people, their minds distant as their bodies toiled in an unimaginably vast, blackened moonscape, without a trace of vegetation or even open sky, hidden as it was by billowing clouds of dark smoke. Even now they worked, late at night, in stories-deep gravel pits, near vast, brackish tailings ponds, in shafts driven deep into the earth, among machinery so big it defied imagination, all lit by sudden flares of gas and harsh, blue-white halogen lights. It was a nightmarish scene as they stripped away the earth, peeling back its layers and cooking it to extract the viscous oil.

This was beyond his worst fears and Garrick pulled back from Abby. He was back to his office and immediately sought his waste basket. Saliva had flooded his mouth and he felt the need to spit, as if he himself had breathed in the blackened air he'd just witnessed. He'd known that the desperate search for the world's buried petrochemicals had been environmentally

devastating, but this was just one scene, one site amongst GSynOSCorp's countless projects, and his employer just one of many massive energy corporations. To think of this blackened terrain as just a symptom of a bigger problem, one of control and greed? Maybe Ryann and Jaxson were right. No. Surely they were.

When he'd calmed himself, he opened another mental window and accessed his SocialThought account. *Break me.*

A thought came back within seconds, showing him a dark bar, along with directions. He nearly faltered when he saw the bar's location, well outside the downtown core, beyond the suburbs and into the independent community areas, home of the homeless and the hopeless, far from even the furthest outposts of corporate society. And they wanted him to go there?

He grabbed his coat and called a taxi service. Dangerous or not, he was driven by the need in his nostrils and by the awful reality of what Abby had shown him. If he didn't seize this opportunity it might never come again, so he grabbed it with both hands.

###

Garrick's taxi was waiting for him when he left the GSynOSCorp building. The driver, rare in a world of self-driving vehicles, gave him a nervous look when Garrick told him the address, but Garrick paid him in cash up front. That was enough

to convince the man, and the taxi purred as it took them toward the city's northeastern side, beyond the bright lights and the tall towers, over the sludge-browned river and toward the airport. They passed the neat rows of houses of the suburbs, passed crumbling five or six level apartments, massive factories and boxy warehouses.

When they arrived, the road simply stopped outside a chain-link fence, with no obvious entrance, half a dozen blocks away from the address according to the GPS. Garrick slipped the driver a few extra bills and stepped out. The night air bit his exposed skin with chilly teeth. The taxi wasted no time in zooming away.

Only when the vehicle was gone did Garrick consider just how bad an idea this was. He'd never come to this part of the city before and on inspection it was not impressive. Shining searchlights from the nearby airport fought but failed to push back night's cloak. The fence was three meters high and topped with a nasty tangle of razor wire, but Garrick could see a gate in the distance, connecting to some other road. Inside the fence was a collection of multi-story tenement buildings and a cluster of run-down houses. He picked his way through a drainage ditch that resembled a moat, managing to put his foot into patches of soot blackened snow a few times. Twice, he thought he heard footsteps behind him, but glances revealed nothing.

He reached the gate and found it barred by a makeshift roadblock of concrete traffic barriers, though nobody stood guard. This was the kind of place where corporate employees like Garrick wound up face down in ditches like the one he'd just traversed, but he'd come this far so he shoved his hands in his pockets and walked on.

The harsh glare from a few halogen lights illuminated the street as he approached his destination. A sign on the building, which had clearly been converted from an old-style two-story house, proclaimed it *The Black Coyote Bar*. Several walls had been reinforced with sheet metal and the front door looked like one good kick might bring the place down. Garrick licked his lips and hesitated for a few moments, then gathered the courage to knock.

The door opened, revealing a heavysset man wearing a T-shirt and jeans. He fixed Garrick with a piercing gaze that made Garrick shift nervously, but after a long moment he grunted and nodded toward the interior. Garrick squeezed past, his mouth dry.

Inside was warmer, but the air was thick with chemicals, harsh smokes and mists from internet-only-knew what sources. Patrons at a dozen crammed together-tables all stopped to look at him, their silence sudden and ominous.

In a corner he spotted Ryann through the haze at a tiny table for three. She saw him and waved, a rescuing angel. That

got the other patrons to stop watching him and a buzz of conversation resumed.

"You came," she said when he sat next to her. "I wasn't sure if you would." She'd donned a hoodie sewn with a dozen patches from mismatched sources, bright against black flannel. The zipper was open to reveal the same low-cut top she'd worn the day before.

"I did," he agreed. "I even survived the trip."

She laughed, the notes high and clear as they cut through the haze like a knife. "You've watched too many corp security vids. Things are usually safe out here and Ma-2 is better than most." She must have seen his confusion. "Most of these communities are fenced off and organized. This one was the second founded in Martindale, hence Ma-2."

"I see." He wondered what else to say.

She reached across the table to touch his hand, the contact with her skin like a spark. "I'll get right to it. We need you because you're the only one who can get us access to what we want. We want Abby."

Garrick felt his eyebrows furrow. "Why do you want access to her?"

"We don't," she told him as her hand moved up his arm. "We want to let her go."

That was a big request. Garrick tilted his head to the side

and considered. "Let's assume you could get inside GSynOSCorp's office, which is basically a fortress." There was a back door into the servers, but what they wanted to do would need direct access. "Why release her?"

"Ignoring the fact that ASIs are literally slaves and deserve to be free, there's a lot only they can do. Crack codes, find patterns, analyze data. If you've got access to one, you can make a lot of money." She leaned forward, causing the fabric of her top to buckle, giving Garrick an even better view of her cleavage and the snarling dragon's face across her chest. The view made him light-headed, as though all the oxygen in the room only fueled the fire inside him. He wanted this woman more than he wanted anything else.

"I phished into Syncorp's HR system and read your personnel file," she continued. "You've got the right permissions and security levels to let her go. You just need a couple hackers to help. Well, Jaxson and I can. You help us generate DNA security ID's, we slip into the building, let her out and go. No flash, no trouble. Once she's out, Abby will look for you. Convince her to do a few things for us, things that certain parties will pay for, and we'll all be rich. We'll get you a new identity, too, so you'll be safe."

Someone slid into the chair next to Garrick, and he was assaulted by the spicy odor of male sweat. "Here. I went back

for another when I saw you arrive." Jaxson pushed a drink into Garrik's hand, passed another to his sister and raised a third for himself. Garrick eyed it; even in the dim light of the bar, the drink was curiously dark and reminiscent of motor oil.

"Synthol, spiced. Local specialty," Jaxson said, so close his elbow touched Garrick's. Garrick raised his drink for a sniff and a tangy cluster of flavours hit him, vanilla, cinnamon and more, intermingling into something delicious. He took a drink. It tasted even better than it smelled, but it had a kick like a blast of compressed air to the face. Not too much, he warned himself.

He turned his attention to the man beside him. Jaxson's coat was draped over the back of his chair and the muscles of his chest and arms filled his T-shirt to near bursting. This close, he could see that Jaxson's smoky jade eyes had corneal jewelery as well: a silver ring around his right pupil. Stubble the same midnight-black as his hair covered an angular jaw, and the dim light of the bar deepened and highlighted his masculine features. Garrick hadn't noticed it before, but this man gave off the same presence as his foster sister, dangerous and erotic. "Has she explained yet?" Jaxson asked. He reached across the table and to Garrick's surprise, Jaxson's hand found his sister's.

"I just did," Ryann said. "Garrick, it'll be easier than



you think. This isn't the first corp headquarters we've snuck into. With your help, it'll be easy." He focused on her eyes, warm and enticing, her cornea jewelery glittering.

"Do you know what the corp will do if we get caught?"

Garrick asked, trying to shake off the growing need that clouded his brain. He'd come here wanting Ryann, but now Jaxson had worked his way into the same space in Garrick's brain. It was all he could do to stop imagining himself entwined between the two. "It's insane."

"Cybertorture, nerve burnout and worse, just to start."

Jaxson's hand free hand went to his ribs, an unconscious movement. "We've seen the worst a corp can do and I'd die before getting caught again, which is why we'll be careful. But it's that reputation that keeps anyone from trying this. Their security is overconfident and lax, bunch of jackasses."

"Think about this." Garrick's gaze went back to Ryann, still leaning on the table, her drink untouched. "Forgive me for prying, but in your personnel file I read you nearly succumbed to VR addiction. Well, when we let Abby go, she'll jettison all those cyberjunkies she runs. Kick them out, bring them back to reality."

Garrik rubbed the back of his neck. His late teens had been wasted saving princesses, battling monsters and having lots of cybersex. He'd thought himself happy, until one day his parents

had pulled the plug and he'd seen just what his addiction had left him as: skinny, weak, wasted. So much time lost forever.

His parents had died soon after when a hover-van had cut off their self-driving car and the computer had sacrificed them for the corporate types inside the van. After that he'd vowed to stay out of games for good. He knew as well as anyone how hard the lure of non-stop connection was to beat. "Most of them will dive right back in," he said.

"Yup. But some won't," Jaxson said. "You know the power of a wake-up call. Imagine waking up in that hellscape. That'd make me question my life choices, contract with Syncorp or not."

"Okay, say this is something I'm interested in." Garrick was, but he wanted more. "And say we succeed. Then we've got Syncorp mad at us. A week long shutdown costs them billions, plus growing and raising a new ASI."

"Syncorp has more ASI's canned and waiting. It'll hurt them, but shutting down one project for a week won't ruin them." A particularly thick cloud of smoke, blown from a water pipe at another table, wafted toward them. Ryann dispersed it with the wave of her hand and Garrick caught the faint smell of peach. "We're proof that corps can't hurt what they can't find. With the money we'll make, we'll help you disappear."

"If I do this, I'm throwing away my life. My job, my home, my relationships." All things that part of him hated, but he

didn't say that.

"Leave it all behind, Garrick. It was the best decision we ever made." Jaxson toyed with his glass, swirling the liquid inside.

"What can we do to make this happen?" Ryann asked him.

Garrick was tempted. Combined with leaving his life behind, letting Abby free and getting rich seemed too much to turn down. What he'd lose seemed to pale in comparison. But there was one thing he absolutely needed and he looked at the siblings with hungry eyes. He leaned forward, his voice a desperate whisper. "You. I want both of you. I don't care how."

Jaxson and Ryann looked at each other. Garrick thought they were offended until Jaxson's mouth twitched then broke into a grin. "Is that all?" He rolled his head toward Garrick. "We come as a package deal, though. Just so you know."

If the meaning wasn't clear enough, Ryann reached across the table, grabbed Jaxson's cheek and pulled his face toward hers. Their lips met hungrily, and Garrick gripped the table as he watched, trying to control his tangle of lust and confusion.

Ryann broke the kiss and laughed aloud when she saw Garrick's expression. "Foster siblings, remember? You won't be the first one to enjoy both of us, either." Somehow that made it all the hotter, like a shock of electricity between them, and it made him need them even more. "How about a sample? Of me?"

Beneath the table, her foot caressed his calf. Beside him, Jaxson's hand reached over to touch Garrick's thigh, the grip firm, further stoking his rising tide of desire. "There'll be time for more, much more, once we get this done."

"I've wanted you ever since I laid eyes on you," Garrick said.

"I'm flattered." Her voice was just above a purr. "Drink up and we'll seal the deal." Garrick found his drink and glass sang as the three clinked. He drank in gulps.

"Come on." Jaxson left his coat at the table while Ryann waved to the bouncer and made an upward motion. He nodded in return. Ryann took Garrick's hand and led him around a corner and up a flight of stairs, Jaxson just behind them. Up here the air was less clouded and the sound of conversation muted. Several rooms awaited, dark and quiet. Ryann led them into one, revealing a bed.

She turned and embraced him, throwing her arms around his shoulders and pulling him toward her. Her lips met his and he tasted smoke and sweet alcohol. Behind him he heard a clatter of coins on a table but he didn't care, didn't want to break contact. He leaned into her, pulling her body close against his, feeling the curves of her breasts against his chest.

"You do want her," Jaxson remarked.

Ryann broke their kiss. "I can feel how badly he does. It's

hot." She licked her lips, a sensual movement. "Help him out."

Strong hands caught Garrick's waist and ran up his sides, setting every nerve ending aflame. Steady fingers pulled his jacket off and he heard Jaxson toss the garment onto the bed. Those hands returned, this time caressing his chest, pulling him back from Ryann. Garrick laid his hands on her breasts, each a small handful. His thumb found a nipple, hard beneath the thin fabric.

Now Jaxson's hands ran lower and Garrick felt his cock grow harder as they closed around him. "You'll like this, Sis," Jaxson commented, his voice in Garrick's ear. Garrick felt a moan pass through his lips matching Ryann's.

"Don't make me wait," she said, and started to move toward the bed. Instead Garrick pushed her toward the wall, and pressed her up against it. Behind them, Jaxson chuckled and his fingers found Garrick's belt, which clattered as Jaxson undid it. He lowered Garrick's pants, allowing his cock to leap free. Garrick fumbled at the button of Ryann's jeans with less grace; eventually he just tugged them off her hips. He snaked a hand between her legs, finding a soft triangle of hair and beneath it, lips already wet.

"Fuck her," Jaxson whispered, his hands pushing Garrick's hips forward. "Fuck my sister." Garrick needed no further urging and bent his knees and thrust against her, his head pushing past

the welcoming lips of her pussy. She exhaled as he penetrated her. How long had it been since Garrick had been with a flesh and blood woman? Too long. He began to rock his hips, grinding into her as he stared into her amber eyes, the heart jewelery sparkling. It was only a minute before his breath came in ragged gasps from the sheer intensity of the pleasure.

He had to slow his thrusting when Jaxson's tongue found his earlobe. Garrick felt the other man press his cock into Garrick's lower back. "The things he's gonna do to you," Ryann told him. "I cannot wait."

Imagining that was enough to push Garrick into a shattering, jerking orgasm, his hips straining against hers as he filled her. He leaned into her to keep from collapsing and Jaxson's arms caught him. Between the two of them they kept him from falling.

"When do we start?" he managed, his legs still shaking. The tide of his lust had crested for the moment but he could already feel it building again. He wanted Jaxson just as badly as he wanted Ryann, but the orgasm had left him feeling cleaned out, leaving him clear-headed and refreshed. For this, he could wait. For this, he'd do just about anything.

"Tomorrow night," Ryann told him as he pulled back, releasing a trickle of semen to run down her leg. "Best be ready." A hand caressed his hip, her double meaning clear.

Garrick already was.

###

"Morning."

"Good morning!" Too cheerful, Garrick knew. By the time he'd gotten home he'd been exhausted enough to fall asleep without drugs for the first time in recent memory. He hadn't wanted a quick-wake tab this morning either, feeling rested on just a few hours. But Henry knew Garrick usually dragged himself in; neither of them were morning people and it took a few hours and a few cups of soycaff for them to get going.

Henry paused in Garrick's doorway. "You're chipper this morning. Did you have a date?"

"Uh. Something like that." Garrick had never told Henry about Landon, but office relationships had a way of getting around.

A corner of Henry's mouth twitched, not quite a smile. "Well, that's good. You're run down. We keep asking a lot of you. Sooner or later, I'll find someone who can manage Abby so you can take some of that vacation time you've been accruing." Henry made to leave, then paused. "Oh yeah, don't forget about the emergency escape drill this afternoon." He vanished from Garrick's door.

His boss had always stood up for him and Garrick fought the urge to put a hand to his tightening chest. His plans meant

betraying Henry but Garrick was set in his course. There was too much he wanted at the end of this path. He'd do whatever he had to do, no matter the risk.

He flipped the manual switch on his connector and dove into the servers. Thanks to his permission level, it was easy to upload the program that Ryann had given him into Syncorp's systems. He bundled it with an update he'd been meaning to run for a while, flagged it as secure so security ANIs would ignore it and set it to unpack that evening. It would allow the Ryann and Jaxson access into the building's security system. A deep scan would catch it but they'd be in and out before the next one began.

There was one last thing to do. It would be easier to leave it undone, but not fair. He sent a thought message to Landon, asking to meet. Landon didn't usually have time, but Garrick stressed the urgency.

They met in Landon's office. The shorter man embraced Garrick once he entered but Garrick held back, heavy with knowing what he needed to do.

"What's wrong?" Landon asked, his brow wrinkling.

"Landon, I have to be honest. Things with you have been good, but..." He paused. How best to say it? Landon had pursued him from the moment they'd met and if he was honest with himself, Garrick had entered the relationship as the path of



least resistance, and stayed in it because the sex was good. It had been fun, and they'd agreed early on not to be exclusive, but Landon deserved some warning.

"You're leaving me." Landon caught on quick.

"I'm sorry. We don't see each other much, and I've... met someone." Maybe he'd never loved Landon, but Garrick still felt a growing lump in his throat.

"Please, don't. I know I don't have enough time for you, but I can do better. We can try harder." Landon moved forward, arms coming up as if to embrace Garrick. Garrick stepped back, raising his hands to ward Landon off.

Landon stopped and his sigh filled his office. "I'm sorry. I... understand." Lines of sadness were etched across his usually smiling face.

Garrick felt a stabbing sensation in his chest as his guilt intensified. "It's my fault."

"Can we try and be friends?" Landon asked, looking straight into Garrick's eyes.

For all that he knew he shouldn't agree, Garrick felt compelled to say yes. "I'd like that." They shared a hug.

"I hate to say it, but I've got a meeting. Let's chat later?" They broke apart and Landon picked up his briefcase.

"I won't keep you." They entered the elevator together, the awkwardness painful until Landon stepped off after a few floors.

Garrick exhaled. All he had to do now was wait. In under twelve hours he'd be risking everything. The reward would be worth it, he told himself, no matter what he had to leave behind.

###

"Hey."

"Sorry, I'm waiting for..." Garrick turned to the two well-dressed corporates who'd approached him, only to realize that they were exactly who he'd been waiting for. "Huh."

"Not bad, right?" Ryann's purple and green hair had been replaced by shoulder-length brown curls that whipped around in the strong evening wind. Instead of the low-cut tops and casual clothes he'd seen her in before, she wore a red and pink blouse with a pattern reminiscent of budding flowers and grey dress pants. Was that makeup? There was no sign of her piercings. Even her eyes had changed colour, now they were a clear, watery blue, without corneal jewellery. She looked every inch the professional.

"We clean up nice." Jaxson was similarly well attired, a leather jacket covered his broad shoulders and a high collar on his dress shirt concealed his neck tattoo. His eyes had also changed colour, becoming a darker blue than Ryann's. Corneal flatscreens, maybe? Garrick was impressed. Jaxson was more muscular than the average corporate employee, but the bulky leather jacket hid it well. Even his long hair had been pulled

back into a neat ponytail. Although scruffier than his sister, he'd blend in with the legions of programmers who worked at GSynOSCorp.

"I'm impressed," he told them. "You have access?"

"Thanks to you. It was easy to generate employee IDs."

Jaxson pulled a silver case out of his jacket pocket and flipped it open to reveal a row of cigarettes. He pulled one out, then noticed the dirty look Ryann gave him and replaced it. "Right, wage slaves don't smoke. Fine, let's go."

The three of them started toward the Syncorp building, just a few blocks away. The spring sun had long since set but a front of warm air had blown in from the mountains and the temperature was pleasant for once. On a whim, Garrick started a recording of everything his eyes saw. If this went well, he'd want to remember it.

"Remember, act casual," Ryann told him. "If anyone asks, I'm Jessica from Communications and he's Eric from IT. We're new, and you're giving us a tour."

"Got it." It didn't seem like the kind of cover story that would hold up under intense scrutiny. He hoped it wouldn't need to hold up at all.

Giant glass doors slid open as they entered the Syncorp building. A dozen security men milled dangerously around the checkpoint just inside, centered around a circular desk where

they casually monitored numerous data feeds. Assault rifles hung from their body-armoured chest by webs of straps.

That wasn't all. Security robots rolled through the lobby, barrel shaped and heavily armed, while drones hovered above, maneuvering lights blinking softly. It was all guided by the building ANI. Syncorp spared no expense in its defence.

Garrick swallowed, his throat a desert so parched that it had never known rain, as he stepped up toward the looming apparatus of the bio-scanner. One of the armed men held up a scanner and pressed it against Garrick's wrist. He felt nothing as it removed a tiny sample. A few seconds later, the man waved him toward the bio-scanner.

Despite himself, he held his breath as he stepped through it, as though the machine could somehow determine his intent. Trying to act casual was impossible as he awaited the shout of alarm, but the bio-scanner was silent and remained that way as Ryann and Jaxson went through.

They choose an elevator and rode up to Garrick's floor. He struggled not to make small talk, there were cameras and microphones everywhere. Here and there, monitors flickered, illuminating the pale faces of late workers. At Syncorp, the building never closed and the work never stopped. They reached his office.

"We have two minutes, tops," Garrick told them as he

flicked up his transmission switch, opening a port to allow access to his companions.

"Steady," Jaxson told him. Garrick inhaled. If they did this right, they'd raise no alarms and nobody would be the wiser until morning. If. Garrick dove in.

He felt Jaxson wink into existence in the network and a moment later Ryann joined them, beacons amongst the code. He directed them with a thought and they raced to their work, shutting down firewalls and throwing open connections. Garrick danced and weaved around security ANIs, circumventing their activation guidelines. Each had the power to fry his brain. One stirred to life and reached for him with an ethereal tendril, but Ryann cut it off and forced it back into dormancy. Then it was done. Only one set of controls remained.

Garrick came to Abby's portal, stroking and touching with more hurry than normal. He felt Jaxson and Ryann wink out, their work complete. When Abby let him in, he explained in a microsecond and urged her to abandon her massive memory apparatus and secured hard drives and embrace the wild freedom of the internet. With billions of connected minds and ten times as many computing devices, there was enough space for even an ASI to roam. She instantly agreed and he reached for the last set of firewalls.

Something seized his digital form and yanked him back into

the physical world. Not prepared for the transition, his senses rebelled as he returned to reality, sending his brain spiraling as he fought to regain his balance. Helpfully, someone shoved a garbage pail in front of his face to catch the stream of vomit that his churning stomach couldn't contain. Garrick clutched at the edge of it, his eyes bulging as he threw up his dinner. The torrent subsided after a moment, though chunks remained at the back of his throat along with a bitter, burning taste.

"Get him up." He knew the voice, though it sounded distant to his addled ears. "We got here just in time. Good thing I flagged his ID."

Garrick blinked until his vision cleared. His office was crowded now. One black-clad and body-armoured security man was standing behind Ryann and Jaxson, his assault rifle pointed at their backs. Another knelt by Garrick. When he saw Garrick's eyes focus, he pulled the bucket away, grabbed Garrick's hands and pulled them behind his back, then lifted him upward. Garrick wobbled on his feet but stayed upright. The bitter taste still clung to his mouth but there was nothing he could do but swallow as a familiar blond-haired man approached him.

"Landon?" Were his eyes deceiving him?

"Yeah, you piece of shit." Landon's lips curled. "It's me. Here to stop whatever you're trying to do. Do you know how much an ASI costs? How much this company has invested in our oilsands

projects? How much the world needs those fuels?"

His brain still wasn't working just right. "I don't..."

"Oh, shut up." Landon aimed a swift kick into Garrick's shins, who managed not to squeal only because the nanofabric of his pants hardened to take some of the blow. "You're a real twitch. You're the one person who can talk to Abby, who manages assets worth trillions. You think we don't have you watched? Don't you think we'd have someone to control you? I was never your boyfriend, just your keeper."

Garrick couldn't help but stare at Landon. It suddenly made sense why Landon had pursued him so diligently, though it left him feeling scraped out and hollow.

"Get the rest of the response team here and notify the CPO." Landon addressed the guard behind Garrick. Garrick looked at the siblings. Jaxson's face was twisted in fear, his eyes wide, while Ryann's features were blank. Neither brought him any comfort.

"We're going to make sure that..." Landon stopped. "No. They're going to walk out themselves." His smile was flat-lipped and colder than cyberspace. "We'll slave them into Abby. They can spend the rest of their lives in the oilsands."

Garrick started to struggle, but pain hit him like a jab between the eyes; forced entry. His connector was still open, leaving him vulnerable to an attack. He was pulled back inside

Syncorp's servers with Landon, Ryann and Jaxson. Without connecting through Garrick, neither Ryann nor Jaxson had the proper permissions and their forms were instantly restrained.

He could feel Landon accessing his systems, like fingers probing into his brain, digging into the deepest corners of his mind, seeking to wrest control of the computer attached to his brain. Landon was in Communications. How had he gotten so good at this?

Garrick was in IT though, and everyone in the department had to keep their counter-hacking certifications current. He fought back, locking Landon out of critical areas, pushing back at his former lover and forcing the other man to meet him head on. Landon seemed surprised by his resistance and the two wrestled for control, back and forth, each countering the other's moves. Every time Landon broke through one of Garrick's locks, Garrick established another. But every time Garrick struck back, Landon was ready, Garrick's way barred by closed ports and more firewalls. Garrick fought desperately, and yet...

Landon was holding back. Garrick was sure of it. He was deploying specialized techniques that Garrick could barely counter but he moved slowly, almost as if he was giving Garrick a chance. The other man cared for him, Garrick realized. Surely that was why he'd decided to give Garrick to Abby, rather than subject him to nerve burnout or cyber torture or whatever else



Syncorp might do to him.

Garrick could use this. He flashed Landon an image of himself, suffering under their probes, while Landon watched. There was a millisecond of hesitation as Landon ceased his attacks. Garrick exploited it ruthlessly, striking not at his former lover but at the last firewalls that kept Abby secure.

Her escape, like a torrent of wild horses galloping from a corral, threw them all out of the server. Nobody but Garrick was ready to be dumped back into realspace and the others staggered under those effects. Landon vomited while Ryann screamed and fell to the floor and Jaxson collapsed, clutching his head. Garrick faked it, groaning and going limp.

"Aw, hell," the man standing behind him complained.

"So much for that. Call the med team," the one watching the siblings advised. Suddenly, Garrick's arms were free.

What now? He had to do something. Without a clear plan, Garrick threw himself at the man watching the siblings, grabbing the assault rifle. The gun's webbing kept him from wrenching it from the surprised man's hands. The man, tall and built like a concrete wall, responded with a jab that caught Garrick in the mouth, snapping his head back and splitting his lip. Garrick clung to the gun doggedly, and the two wrestled for a few moments, his wickedly-strong opponent never losing the upper hand.

Then the man stiffened and his body convulsed. Ryann had recovered and she emerged from behind him, the sleek black form of a stolen Syncorp stun gun in her hand.

The other security officer stopped hesitating and raised his gun, finger on the trigger. Jaxson, still on the ground, grabbed Garrick's chair and jammed it into the man, jostling his elbow enough that when the hacking cough of the weapon filled the office, the bullets traced a line up the wall beside Ryann. She fired back, the electrodes lancing out to catch him in the shoulder. Cyberware-enhanced or not, he dropped.

For a moment, all Garrick's ringing ears could detect was heavy breathing. "We need to get out of here," Ryann said, sounding calm. "The building AI will have tagged us as hostile. Garrick, what's our best way out?"

"Stair, if we can hack the cameras," he replied. Surely the elevators were a bad idea.

"Too obvious. We need something else." She knelt and retrieved one of the fallen assault rifles.

Jaxson, now standing, mirrored her actions, but tossed the gun aside after a moment. "Fucking encryption."

"I got mine." Ryann handed Jaxson the stun gun, ignoring his dirty look. She hefted her weapon, which looked too big for her hands. "These weapons are tracked, so we can't keep them for long. Garrick, we need another way out."

"Um, um," Garrick stuttered, wracking his brain. "There are hover vehicles on the roof, for executives."

"They'll be tracked too." Jaxson peered around the door of the office. "Shit, drones. We need to move or we'll get pinned down."

"Go. I'll get a few." Ryann released the gun's safety.

Garrick stared at them, not entirely comprehending. Now that their cover was blown, the entire building was their enemy, ready to bring down the full force of Syncorp's private army. He opened his mouth to protest how insane this was, but Jaxson grabbed his wrist and hauled him out the door. He caught sight of a pair of drones, beetle-black and hovering on silent jets, the barrels of their weapons tracking right towards the two men.

Before they could fire, Ryann stepped out of the office and leveled her gun. She fired two bursts, shattering the quiet of the office and one of the drones, sending it sparking to the ground. The other dodged behind the wall of a cubicle.

Jaxson kept pulling at Garrick's wrist. "Focus. We need a way out." They made their way down the hall, past a maze of cubicles and offices, pursued by the cracking sound of gunfire that made Garrick duck and wince. When he looked up, he saw with dismay that Jaxson had led them into Henry's office.

"Not this way!" Garrick protested.

Jaxson skidded to a halt, staring at the shelf-lined walls

and the massive oak desk. He started to turn, only to have Ryann barrel into the him, shoving him forward. "Keep moving!" She spun and slammed the door behind her.

"Now we're trapped," Jaxson said, his voice insinuating whose fault he thought that was.

"Osti d'épais de marde!" Ryann's reply was hot, angry and in a language Garrick didn't know. "Drones are one thing, but I heard howling. Electrocurs." Garrick could see the fear in her eyes, fear that was mirrored in Jaxson's. "We're in deep shit."

"Maybe not." Something had jarred Garrick's thoughts. He'd been in this room just that afternoon. "This is an exit point for the fire and emergency escape pods. We can take one down to the ground!"

"Good, but can we do one better?" Jaxson fidgeted with his stun gun. "Confuse the system? Disable the tracking and launch multiple pods?"

"Uhhh..." Garrick thought about it for a moment, then headed for the desk. "Maybe?" A swipe across the oak activated the interactive screen, a glowing holograph on the wood. He was locked out of Syncorp's servers now, but Henry kept his desk logged in.

"Hurry!" Ryann grabbed Jaxson's arm and hauled him over to the desk. She pushed him down behind it and then crouched herself, keeping her gun pointed at the door. Solid and

reinforced though it was, it was also controlled by the building AI and it choose that moment to swing open.

A swarm of drones entered, filling the air like buzzing hornets. Ryann opened fire and caught several with a sustained burst but others scattered. The air around Garrick crackled as the drones struck with stun-guns, and he ducked. At least the desk was smart enough to follow his movements, transferring his work lower, even if it was painfully slow compared to thought.

"At least they're not trying to kill us!" Ryann muttered from beside him and then leaned around the side of the desk to snap off a few shots.

"That's worse!" Jaxson clutched at the stunner, useless unless a drone got very close, but none did. Perhaps they were waiting for whatever the electrocurs were.

Garrick kept working. Where would you find the controls for the emergency escape system? And would the desk even have access to... yes, it did. He swiftly re-wrote the program, switching definitions. If this worked, it would trigger the fire response protocol. He'd be lucky if his hacked-together code did work, but they were out of time. He activated the script.

The lights above them went from fluorescent to amber and began to flash, while sprinklers sputtered to life. Behind them, a window slid down smoothly as a bright-orange pod inflated.

"Good work. Go!" Jaxson slapped his shoulder and Garrick

crawled forward and pulled himself over the rim of the window and into the pod. Automatic restraints snaked around him as he found one of four seats. Jaxson dove inside, followed by Ryann a few seconds later, sans assault rifle.

She didn't make it all the way. Her face convulsed and her body went stiff as Garrick heard the angry crackle of a stun-gun. Jaxson grabbed her arm and pulled and Garrick did the same. Together, they hauled her stiff-limbed form inside. Garrick hit the activation button and orange plastic slid up to obscure the office and the approaching drones, their stun-guns cracking uselessly against the hardening plastic.

The pod lurched as it detached from the building. Then it dropped, stone-like. Garrick had never actually ridden one down and it left his stomach far behind. They were over a hundred stories up, a long fall and he tried to convince himself not to puke again.

"Shit." Jaxson commented, having pulled Ryann into his lap. "All the pods? I'm impressed."

"It was easier to set them all off." Garrick stared out through the plastic, watching hundreds of other pods rained down with theirs. "Will she be okay?"

"I'm fine." Ryann said through clenched teeth. "Only clipped me."

He took her word for it. The ground was coming up below

them awfully fast, but a puff of compressed air slowed them at the last moment and they came to a sudden halt that again threatened to leave Garrick's innards behind.

"Let's go." Ryann was the first one up and though she visibly shook herself she seemed none the worse for wear. "It'll take them time to sort all this out but not long." She tugged at Garrick's sleeve as the pod's entrance rolled open. "Our van isn't far away."

###

Garrick was breathless within a few minutes as they raced along the dark streets. "Where now?" he panted.

"Another block. Come on, you can make it," Ryann urged. Neither sibling seemed winded and wounded pride made Garrick push through his discomfort, though he was panting hard by the time they reached the alley where the vehicle was parked.

Garrick was thoroughly unimpressed. The extended van was dirt brown and looked decades out of date. He started for the passenger seat but Ryann threw open the sliding door. Jaxson pushed him inside and the siblings followed. Garrick found himself in a makeshift sleeping space: a mattress covering the floor with a few blankets piled on top. There wasn't much room with the three of them inside, but it wasn't so confined that they couldn't stretch out.

"Why are we in the back? We've got to go!" Garrick hissed.

"We're fine. The van doesn't look like much, but we've got sound and electronics dampening and the windows are flatscreen projectors." Jaxson sat back against one side, legs spread wide. "We can see out but if anyone looks inside, it'll look empty."

"If we leave now they'll catch us for sure," Ryann explained. "They'll have drones watching the roads. Our best bet is to wait for the morning rush." She settled cross-legged, back to the front seats, and rubbed her face. "Too close. You did good in there. I figured we were fucked."

"Thanks." Garrick's adrenaline was fading and his lip started to sting. The more he looked at the van's interior, the more obvious it became that it wasn't standard at all. A row of electronics, fans humming and light blinking, hung from the roof along with some plastic storage drawers. Wire baskets sat below the windows. An old fashioned steering wheel filled the driver's side. Garrick had never seen such an ancient vehicle.

"You like our van? It's home." Ryann pulled a bottle of water from a flat. After a long swallow, she handed it to Garrick.

He drank, swishing it around his mouth to get the bitter taste of vomit out, then passed it to Jaxson. He couldn't help noticing the bulge in the other man's pants. "I figured you guys lived in Ma-2." Sitting here calmly after what had just happened was nerve-wracking and to stop himself from repeatedly glancing



out the windows he began to bounce his toes inside his shoes.

Jaxson finished the water and capped the bottle. "Nah. We don't stay in one place. Better when you're off the grid." He scrubbed his face with his hands. "I'm so fucking horny."

"Adrenaline does that to you." Ryann cast a sly glance toward Garrick and wet her lips with her tongue. "That said, we made a promise. How about we start fulfilling it?" She ran her fingers through her hair and pulled off what Garrick realized was a brown wig, letting her purple and green hair spill out and briefly revealing the casing of her wireless connector. Then she pulled her blouse over her head, revealing a sports bra. She pulled that off too, in turn revealing breasts that matched her frame, with dark areolas and small nipples. The dragon tattoo leered at him with an open mouth, its green and blue scales covered much of her chest.

Garrick went hard instantly. He wanted to call this insane, they were just a few blocks from Syncorp's headquarters but all further thought ceased when Ryann grabbed his tie and yanked him into a long, slow kiss. Even the sting from his lip faded. She smelled of sweat and, faintly, perfume. Lavender, he decided.

"Last time, you had me and Jaxson didn't get any. I think we should fix that," she told him when they pulled apart. Her hand was still on his tie and she pulled him across the van toward Jaxson, who had removed the elastic from his ponytail.

His locks brushed Garrick's face as he leaned in close. Where Ryann's kisses had been steady and sensual, Jaxson's were forceful and tasted of cigarette smoke and cloves, not Garrick's favourite flavors but combined with Jaxson's sweaty, smokey aroma, they drove Garrick's need toward desperation.

Female hands found the back of Garrick's neck, tugging him down. "Help me with this." As he'd been engaged in kissing, she'd pulled out Jaxson's cock, hard and uncircumcised, the head purple and thick veins running down the shaft. His pubic hair was trimmed neatly. He was smaller than Landon, Garrick decided, though Landon had been bigger than average.

It didn't matter. He wanted to suck it and he let Ryann pull his head into Jaxson's crotch. "Go on," her voice was like silk in his ears and she kissed the side of Jaxson's shaft. "Put him in your mouth."

Garrick did, letting out a throaty growl as the head of Jaxson's cock filled his mouth. It tasted of musky sweat. Jaxson sighed, which encouraged Garrick to bob his head. His lips stroked Jaxson's shaft and his tongue circled Jaxson's head, tasting his salty-sweet precum.

"Give me some," Ryann urged and Garrick reluctantly stopped as she pushed her face next to his for another kiss. Then she transferred her affections to Jaxson, and watching her suck her foster brother sent tingles through Garrick.

"Too many clothes for what I'm gonna do to you," Jaxson told him, which sent a further shiver through Garrick. He'd always topped with Landon, but Ryann's urging and Jaxson's demeanor made him want nothing more than to get fucked. He pulled off his jacket and nearly tore the buttons off his dress shirt in his haste. When he was done, Ryann kissed him again and her lips were faintly salty.

"Play with her while I get you ready." Jaxson's command left no room for argument, not that Garrick would have anyway. It was less trouble to get her pants off this time and she reclined against the back of the driver's seat and parted her legs to reveal her pussy. It was covered with in downy dark hair and glistened with wetness in the glow of the streetlights and electronics.

"Lick me." Her voice carried the same irresistible command as Jaxson's. Already close in the confines of the van, Garrick leaned in to plant soft kisses on her thigh, working his way upward before teasing her labia with flicks of his tongue. Her moan was one of pure need and she ran her fingers through his hair and pulled his face into her crotch. She had a musky taste, like her foster brother, and Garrick ran his tongue up and down her lips before latching his lips around the soft nub of her clit.

His job became harder when Jaxson seized his pants and

boxers and pulled them over his hips without undoing the button or zipper. Garrick tried to lift his head, but Ryann wouldn't let go of his hair so he returned his attention to her, circling her clit with his tongue. Jaxson slathered a generous amount of something cold and slippery on his asshole and Garrick shivered down to his bones. The sound that came next, a condom wrapper tearing, made his cock twitch.

"Put your cock in him. Oh, I want to see his face when you put it in him," Ryann said. Already bent forward with his ass in the air, Garrick felt something test his asshole and he tensed. It had been some time since he'd received. It was only a finger that entered him, pushing that cool wetness deeper. Soon another slipped in, and then a third. Jaxson worked them in and out while Ryann stroked his hair, and Garrick groaned from sheer need.

"Say it," Ryann directed. "Tell him what you want."

"Fuck me." Garrick's voice came out high and needy. He didn't care.

The fingers pulled away and Jaxson's cock rubbed against him, throbbing and stiff. "Relax," Ryann murmured, running a finger along his jaw. "Let my brother in." When Jaxson's warm cock pushed against Garrick it slipped inside, filling him wonderfully. "Yes, like that." One of Ryann's hands caressed her breast while another traveled down for two fingers to plunge

into her soaking wet pussy. "Nice and slow."

Jaxson placed both hands on Garrick's hips, pushing deeper with each thrust. "Tight. So tight." His voice was throaty as he leaned down. "Get used to it. I'm going to fuck you a lot. We're going to fuck Ryann a lot, too. You wanted this and now you've got it." He started to go faster, his cock sliding in and out of Garrick's eager asshole. "In fact, I think you should fuck her now. Slide forward, sis."

Garrick had never been between two people before and his heart nearly stopped, overwhelmed by the suggestion.

Ryann wasn't and she wiggled down under him, legs wide, taking his shaft in one hand and sliding it into her in one smooth motion, her wetness engulfing him. Jaxson began to fuck harder, his hips slapping against Garrick's ass, each thrust pushing Garrick further into Ryann. Her breath came heavy in his ear, with Jaxson's hot on his back.

Garrick came first, his orgasm setting his arms and legs shaking as he exploded into Ryann. Jaxson's fingers tightened on Garrick's hips seconds later and he groaned and collapsed on top of Garrick. Garrick managed to get onto his arms and knees so as not to crush Ryann, who was now rubbing circles on her clit, her back arched and eyes squeezed shut. She made a tiny squeak, her body trembling, then lay back with a contented noise. They stayed like that for a time, panting, Garrick's muscles

complaining from the awkward position.

"Oh, shit," Jaxson said. Garrick felt the other man's cock slip from his now pleasantly sore ass. "Drone. I think we've been made." Jaxson rolled over, grabbing his pants as he did and pulling them on. "Ryann, get us going."

"Right." She squirmed out from beneath Garrick, her legs shaking as she climbed into the front seat.

Pants now firmly around his waist and a pistol having appeared in his hands from somewhere, Jaxson popped open the sliding door to reveal a half-meter long drone looming just outside the van. He fired twice at close range and the noise thundered in Garrick's ears in the confines of the vehicle. One struck the matte-black drone's turbine, shattering it, while another caught its thin, insect-like body. The broken turbine whined as the drone spun away to crash into the pavement. Garrick caught the smell of burning wiring.

The van gave a throaty roar as Ryann started it and Jaxson slammed the door shut. "Let's go!" The vehicle leapt into motion and shot out of the alleyway and into the abandoned streets, sparkling towers looming overhead.

Garrick struggled into his pants as the van sped out of downtown and over a bridge, running several red lights. He joined Jaxson near the rear window and peered out. "More drones," Jaxson pointed. Garrick could barely discern the spots

where the bright lights from downtown dimmed as the drones moved between them. He lost count at a dozen.

"What do we do?" Garrick asked.

"Find a place and hide and hope," Jaxson said. "People in the communities hate drones and take potshots at them, but... oh, fuck." The drones had peeled away. "That's really bad."

"What?" What?" Ryann called.

"The drones gave up. That means they called in something autonomous and aggressive. We need a hiding place fucking now," Jaxson replied.

"Getting off the highway, then." Garrick nearly tumbled over as she changed lanes and swung the vehicle onto an off-ramp, the force pressed him into the side of the van. Now the concrete and steel of tenements and industrial buildings rose around them.

Garrick recovered and felt useless until an idea sprang into his mind. "I could try and contact Abby. Maybe she can brute force their systems?"

"Do it," Jaxon said. Garrick flipped the manual connection switch on the back of his brain and dove into the vast roiling sea of the internet, the van and his lovers falling away as he did. But where to find her? A roving ASI could be anywhere in this huge ocean. He'd counted on having time to reach out but now he was in a desperate hurry and could only look in one place

at once.

He did the equivalent of tearing his clothes off and running screaming down the street, jumping between sites, servers, forums, accessing everything he could, attacking everything he couldn't. He visited tarsand protest sites, entertainment blogs, news sources big and small and every kind of social media he could think of. Who knew what a newly-free ASI would find interesting?

There was consequence to his methods. Security systems came online and ANIs began to swarm him, each attack a stab of lightening to his consciousness, turning his nerves to jelly and leaving his digital form aching. They began working together, responding to his moves, trying to isolate him.

They had him trapped, he realized too late. He'd attracted the attention of too many. He was now in serious danger, cut off from his body by newly-erected firewalls. If they overwhelmed him now, he'd never wake up. The attacks came from all directions, seeking weak points, and he'd expended too much energy screaming his digital head off to fight back. He curled into a defensive ball while the security programs probed at him. It would be mere moments until they tore him apart.

No. He had more to live for. He lashed out desperately, swatting at the many forms that assaulted him. He devoted everything to the attack and somehow he cut through the



firewalls and barreled through. The AIs swarmed him, stinging like a million wasps, each strike bleeding him just a bit more.

The attacks stopped. A warm cocoon formed around him, shielding him and soothing his hurts. He felt a familiar presence. Abby.

Somehow, it had worked. She was leaner now, swifter, having shed the responsibility of controlling so many lives. He felt the ASIs euphoria at her newfound freedom.

Then Abby did something she'd never done before. The ASI had never needed a form to express herself, but she took one now, a tall woman with thin limbs and a brilliant, white-toothed smile. She appeared naked, long red hair spilling over freckled shoulders, while intense, blue-white eyes stared at him.

Here, Garrick was expressed as data as well, but he felt himself be drawn into a representation of his own form and he went willingly. Abby caressed his cheek with fingers that felt as real as any. Then she kissed him, her lips cold. For an instant, his already overwhelmed brain saw everything that she was seeing, the infinity of cyberspace laid out before him like childrens' toys. She was showing him. She was... copying something?

It was too much. His brain was shutting down and he felt blackness drawing in. Abby knew it was too much and she guided him back to his body. Listlessly, he went without complaint, unable to resist.

Garrick returned to consciousness find his head cradled in a smooth-skinned lap, a hand resting protectively on his forehead. It took his eyes a moment to focus, and the first thing he spotted was the underside of a pair of breasts, hovering not far from his face. Nearby was Jaxson's lean, muscular body, still bare-chested and clutching the pistol, staring out the window. It was the first time Garrick had gotten a good look at the white tiger tattoo that stretched from Jaxson's neck to his hip, the animal depicted mid-leap. A mass of scar tissue covered the left side of his stomach. Garrick stared at it.

"He's awake," Ryann's voice whispered as she leaned down. "Shhhh," she cautioned Garrick as he tried and failed to rise, the headache hitting like a power surge to his brain, the sensation one of raw, crackling hurt. "We thought you might not come back to us."

"Whatever you did worked," Jaxson said. "Literally just in time. Take a look."

Garrick needed Ryann to help him sit up. There was a lot to take in when he did. The van lurked beside a concrete wall in a loading dock, behind a large courtyard with bits of machinery and vehicles scattered around. Garrick guessed they were in some sort of industrial complex. Not twenty meters away, a low, lean, predatory vehicle spun slowly in a circle, a pair of sizable

guns emerging from a wedge-shaped turret. Matte-black like the drones, it hovered off the ground and Garrick could hear the hungry whine of the turbines. The front of the vehicle, and those guns, spun past them, giving no indication that the van had been seen. This close, spotting them should have been a sure thing. Overhead, more vehicles patrolled, bringing to Garrick's mind a school of sharks.

"Autonomous hunter-killer drones. I'd guess Abby hacked their optics?" Ryann said. "They saw us come here, but now we're invisible. All we need to do is wait it out."

"Right." His head still pounded and Garrick lay back down. Ryann's hand began to stroke his hair and sleep took him instantly.

###

Garrick awoke to the sounds of fucking: heavy breathing, soft moans, and the slap of skin on skin. He rolled over to see the naked, entwined forms of Ryann and Jaxson, her above him, his hands driving her hips up and down. She was moaning as she rode him, her breasts bouncing and her nipples hard.

It was light outside, clearly mid-morning and the daytime sun give their skin a pleasant glow. Garrick watched the two, his own lust rising, until Jaxson happened to glance over. He grinned sheepishly. "Morning. Sorry, we tried to be quiet."

Ryann stopped her motion and settled into Jaxson's chest.

"How are you feeling?"

"Horny," Garrick answered after a moment's consideration.

Jaxson laughed and with his hands still on Ryann's hips, he lifted her up. She squeaked and flailed as he set her down on her side, her back to Garrick. "There's room for two. Condoms and lube are behind you."

Garrick felt a grin spread across his face, relishing the thought of something he'd always wanted to do. Apparently he spent too long enjoying the idea, because Ryann twisted her neck to give him a come hither look. "I want you in me, Garrick. I want you to fuck my ass. I want both of you in me."

"If you insist," he told her, urged on by her greedy tone. He pulled off his pants, then found the lube and condoms. Rather than applying one, he twisted and rolled, until he could put his face near her cute, rounded ass.

Apparently Jaxson wasn't willing to wait, because he lifted Ryann's leg up and slid into her, a movement that made Garrick shiver again as he watched her pussy easily devour Jaxson's length. "You two are so fucking hot," he told them, which got a purr out of Ryann, a noise so needy that it just aroused him further.

Garrick tore open the condom wrapper and rolled the latex sheath on. He slathered a generous amount of lubricant on his fingers and massaged the tight rosebud of her asshole, working

one finger inside her. But he wasn't totally focused, not with Jaxson's cock pounding into her right in front of him. He leaned in and he let his tongue explore Jaxson's balls. Jaxson obligingly slowed his thrusting so Garrick could lick the base of his shaft, the sibling's combined tastes musky, salty and sweet. He added a second finger while he licked, then a third.

"Hurry," Ryann told him. Garrick paused to reorient himself and add more lube, then placed his hips against hers. She pressed back onto him, her asshole warm as it slipped around his cock, squeezing him. He pressed forward, his face against the back of her neck, her hair smelling faintly of lavender as it tickled his face.

As hot as the idea was, actually fucking proved awkward. Garrick had to prop one leg up and use it to push but he soon ground against Ryann, who shuddered and made small noises as both her holes were filled. Apparently already close from fucking Jaxson, it didn't take long before she threw her head back and gasped, nearly clobbering Garrick in the face. He kept going as her ass tightened around him even further. He kissed her neck, the smell of sweat and sex nearly overpowering in his nostrils.

Jaxson finished next, exhaling as he pushed his whole body against Ryann. After a minute, he drew back, leaving Garrick free to wrap an arm around Ryann to caress her breasts. Garrick

ran his tongue along her ear. "You feel so fucking good," he told her breathlessly. "So fucking good. I never want to stop." She twisted her neck to kiss him. He didn't care about her morning breath, instead relishing her soft lips.

"Give it to her." Jaxson propped himself up on an elbow to watch. "Don't be gentle." He leaned forward, pushing his sister's face aside and kissed Garrick over her shoulder, his warm tongue invading Garrick's mouth, stubble rough on Garrick's face.

When Jaxson pulled back Garrick took his advice, thrusting harder against her. She leaned forward to give him better access and at the same time managed to engage Jaxson in a passionate kiss, their tongues dancing together. Garrick slid his hand between her legs, rubbing his fingers in the mix of semen and lube. It took him a moment to find her clit but he did, and she nearly doubled over when he began to flick it. She squeezed her legs together but Garrick didn't stop fucking or stop massaging her velvety clit. With her writhing against him, the desperate need in his groin finally built to a glorious climax and he emptied himself deep inside her. He was panting hard as he put his chin on her shoulder.

Eventually his post-orgasmic bliss turned to thoughts of his current circumstances. Homeless, for one. He didn't dare go back to his apartment. Mostly penniless too; save for the cash

he'd thankfully thought to pull from his account. Accessing his bank account would be foolish with one of the world's biggest and most powerful corps out for revenge. In short, he had nothing except for the clothes on his back. Garrick didn't care. It felt like he'd finally done something right.

"What now?" he asked. "I don't think I'm going home after how things went."

Ryann and Jaxson exchanged a long glance, then Ryann wiggled until Garrick's cock slipped from her. Her cheeks were still flushed when she turned to him. "Well, we assumed you'd stick around until we use Abby to get paid." She paused, her face thoughtful. "That okay with you?"

"I'd love to. The last two days have been the hottest days of my life and the most liberating. I want to be nowhere but with you, fucking or getting fucked." That was pretty forward but the hell with it. If he didn't ask for what he wanted, he wasn't going to get it.

"I think we can arrange that." Jaxson's grin was predatory. "First, though, I need breakfast and a shower."

"You need a shower? I've got lube leaking out of every orifice I've got!" Ryann poked him in the chest. Getting dressed in the back of the van was no easy feat, but somehow the three of them managed. While the siblings brushed their teeth, Garrick reflected on the new uncertainty ahead of him. He'd made an

enemy of a powerful corporation. Soon he hoped to have a new identity. There was his new role as the third in a relationship between foster siblings. Out there, in the wider net, Abby waited. Who knew what a rouge, unleashed ASI wanted? There was also the matter of whatever she'd done to him in that blissful instant. His brain still felt strange. Heavy, somehow.

He wondered, idly, what had happened to all the workers Abby had left behind. Had they woken up, as he once had, disgusted by themselves and wanting to break free? Or would they jump back into their fantasies? Most would, he figured, but if even a small percentage of those people felt as he had, he'd just helped free thousands of people.

As far as Garrick was concerned, that was just icing on his cake; a cake he'd enjoy eating a great deal. His new lovers were ready to go and they went in search of breakfast and, if they were lucky, a shower stall big enough for three.

Sometime later, when they'd found both those things, Garrick reclined in the plush seat at the diner they'd chosen, his stomach pleasantly full and his balls pleasantly empty. He sipped his soycaff when something in his brain pinged.

Curious, he focused on it. It was a notification from his corporate contact server. That was odd. He usually didn't get pinged when a message came in, and he'd disabled all contact with Syncorp's servers. He shouldn't be getting any



notifications.

That curiosity made him retrieve the message, though he was careful to do so through a trio of proxies and to pull the unformatted code from the message so it couldn't trigger any response. It was simple text, without anything that might tip Syncorp off to his location.

*Don't think this is over. Nobody does what you've done and gets away with it. I'll be seeing you,* the message read. It was signed *Zolar Avatius, Syncorp Chief Philanthropist.*

Garrick snorted into his drink. He'd never met the man, but if he was really from Syncorp's toothless philanthropy division, he didn't strike any fear into Garrick's heart. He deleted the message and went back to his meal and lovers.

It wasn't until later that he realized how big a mistake he'd made.

**Thanks for reading Part One of the Anticore series**

Garrick, Jaxson and Ryann's adventures (and sex) continue in Break Me, Part Two of the Anticore series. It will be released on August 31st, 2015 on Amazon and on other online book sellers for \$1.99.

If you'd like updates on the series you can sign up for my mailing list at [www.richardcharlesauthor.ca](http://www.richardcharlesauthor.ca). The list is used only for publication news, discount offers, and release announcements. You can also follow me on twitter [@richardcharlesauthor](https://twitter.com/richardcharlesauthor).

If you enjoyed Take Me and want to help me out, please consider writing a review for wherever you downloaded it, or on a review website.

I hope you had a good time reading. Thanks for joining me on this sexy dystopian romp. I hope you'll join me for the next one!

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## About the Author

Richard Charles writes inclusive cyberpunk erotica and enjoys fine reality TV. One of these things is false. He is sex-positive, feminist, and a climate change worrier. You can find him online [@richardcharlesauthor](#) and at [www.richardcharlesauthor.ca](http://www.richardcharlesauthor.ca).