

ORIGIN

STORY BY DUNCAN . C

CHAPTER 1: THE CITY

MY EYES FLUTTERED OPEN SLOWLY, MY HEAD WAS THROBBING AND I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING. I COULDN'T SEE MY SURROUNDINGS AS THE SCENE AROUND ME WAS BLURRY. A WOODEN ROOM SHROUDED IN DARKNESS CAME INTO FOCUS FROM THE BLUR. "WHERE AM I?" I CALLED INTO THE DARKNESS, EXCEPT TO NO AVAIL. I REACHED DOWN AND FELT THE HEATHERED FABRIC OF MY SHIRT.

A FLICKER OF LIGHT GLOWED THROUGH THE BATTERED OAK RAFTERS. I STARED AT THE BEAM FOR A SHORT MOMENT. NOW ADJUSTING TO THE LIGHT, I LOOKED AT MY SURROUNDINGS. AN OLD DOOR WAS BECKONING AT THE BACK OF THE ROOM, GLOWING TOWARD ME.

I STARTED TOWARDS THE ARCHAIC DOOR WITH A RUSTED METAL KNOB AND EXTENDED MY ARM TO THE DOORKNOB.

I FELT THE COLD, WEATHERED IRON OF THE METALLIC KNOB TOUCH MY SKIN. RECOILING IN A JOLT OF UNCERTAINTY, THOUGHT ABOUT THE DOOR.

WHAT COULD BE BACK THERE?

SLOWLY LIFTING MY HAND TO THE KNOB ONCE MORE, I TWISTED THE OLD HANDLE. THE DOOR'S HINGES FEEBLY CLICKED AND I PUSHED THE OAK PANELS OF THE DOOR OUT OF MY WAY. A BLINDING BURST OF GOLDEN LIGHT FLEW OUT OF THE DOOR INTO THE ROOM, I BLINKED AND TRIPPED, FEELING THE HARD UNEVEN PLANKS OF WOOD ON THE DUSTY FLOOR. I OPENED MY EYES AND BEHELD A SCENE OF LIGHT

THE DARKNESS SEEMED TO EDGE AWAY AS I STOOD UP AND STEPPED INTO THE GOLDEN LIGHT AHEAD OF THE DOOR. BUT WAS IT SUNLIGHT? IT DIDN'T FEEL HOT ANYMORE. A LARGE METAL SHIP WAS THRUSTING AHEAD, THE ENGINES CREATING A TRAIL OF FLARING FLAMING GOLD LIGHT BEHIND IT.

I SPUN AROUND AND SAW GRASS, TREES, AND OTHERWORLDLY SOIL. FOR SOME STRANGE REASON, I WAS IN A CITY INSIDE A LARGE FLICKERING BLUE DOME. THERE WERE FLOATING ISLANDS WITH GRASS AND BLUE AND WHITE PADDING, COVERING THE BOTTOMS OF THE ISLANDS LIKE A BOWL. IT WAS SUCH A SURREAL LANDSCAPE, I THOUGHT. I FIDGETED NERVOUSLY WITH MY RIGHT HAND, FEELING THE SKIN ON MY ARM.

EXCEPT I FEEL IRON. COLD AND HARD. I LOOKED AT MY ARM AND NOTICE AN UNFAMILIAR GLOWING WRISTBAND MADE WITH METAL. IT HAD A PULSING INDIGO LIGHT EMANATING FROM A LAMP IMBUED INTO IT.

I WALKED ALONG THE GRASSY PLAIN, REALISING I HAD NOTHING COVERING MY FEET. SUDDENLY, I SIGHTED BUILDINGS MADE OF GREY CONCRETE AND STEEL. A MAJORITY OF TOWERING DWELLINGS STOOD SILENTLY AHEAD OF ME, AND SMALL FLYING METAL SHIPS SOARED OVERHEAD. STEPPING UNEASILY INTO THE MAIN ROAD OF THE CITY, I NOTICED PEOPLE WEARING SILVER SUITS WITH BELTS AND OTHER SORTS OF UNUSUAL CLOTHES. THERE WERE SHOPS AND VENDORS BECKONING MEN AND WOMEN WITH FOOD, AND THEY STARED DOWN AT ME INQUISITIVELY AS I PASSED. "HELLO?" I ASKED A PASSING MAN WEARING A SUIT WITH A GRAVELLY BEARD. HE RECOILED IN CONFUSION AND CALLED SOMETHING AT ME IN A STRANGE LANGUAGE, PROBABLY AFFRONTED. RAIN BEGAN THUNDERING DOWN FROM THE SKY, POUNCING ONTO THE STREET, AND LANDING INTO TRICKLES OF WATER. "MUST GO INSIDE," I THOUGHT.

IT WAS THEN I NOTICED A LARGE WHITE BUILDING WITH A GENTLY GLOWING NEON SIGN THAT SAID 'INFORMATION'.

I HURRIED AHEAD TO THE BUILDING AND PUT MY HAND ONTO A WALL, FEELING THE ROUGH PATTERN OF THE CONCRETE AND THE GRIME GROWING ON THE STONE, BUT THEN RANDOMLY SCRAPED MY HAND ON A SHARP METAL CABLE. A SPLATTER OF BLOOD SPREAD ACROSS THE WALL AND I WINCED IN AN OVERWHELMING PAIN.

A BOY MY SIZE WITH DARK HAIR AND BLUE EYES WEARING A VIBRANT GLOWING BLUE SUIT TRAMPLED OVER TO ME AND HELPED ME UP.

"OI! YOU OK?" HE ASKED ME, EYES GLEAMING. "OHHH... THANKS." I SAID TO HIM, STABILISING MY BODY. "YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE, ARE YOU?" HE INQUIRED CURIOUSLY. "I- I DON'T KNOW WHERE I AM." I STUTTERED NERVOUSLY.

“INTERESTING! THAT’S A NEW ONE! I KNOW THE AREA. YOU ARE AT ‘URER ADSTOY’, OR FOR YOU, ‘UPPER STATION’,” HE SAID WITH CLARITY. ‘SO, ONLY FEW CAN SPEAK THIS LANGUAGE, I SEE YOU CAN TOO!’ HE PAUSED SUDDENLY. ‘HERE, TAKE THIS. IT HELPS WITH THE PAIN’

THE BOY PRODUCED A CAPFUL OF STRANGE GREEN OOZE, AND GENTLY APPLIED THE SUBSTANCE TO MY BLEEDING WOUND. AT ONCE, THE WOUND’S COLOURS SWIRLED AROUND, MIXING UNTIL SOMEHOW IT WAS SEALED.

‘THANKS! I DON’T REMEMBER ANY OF MY PAST...’ I REPLIED TO HIM, WARMLY. ‘MY NAME’S ARCHIE.’ HE STATED SIMPLY. ‘I’M TRYING TO GET TO THE INFORMATION CENTRE OVER THERE’ I POINTED OUT, STARING AT THE GLOWING STRUCTURE BECKONING ME TO ITSELF. I WONDERED WHAT COULD BE INSIDE...

CHAPTER 2: INFORMATION?

WE STOOD, GLOWING IN THE POUNDING RAIN OUTSIDE THE INFORMATION BUILDING, MY FEET TOUCHING THE DAMPENED GRASS AND CONCRETE UNDERNEATH IT. A GUIDE GREETED US, AND WE TOOK A SEAT INSIDE.

‘HELLO! YOU MUST BE ARCHIE, AND YOU..’ THEY PAUSED, THEIR FACE CALCULATING. I WAS ABOUT TO SPEAK, BUT ARCHIE INTERRUPTED ABRUPTLY. ‘HE ISN’T FROM AROUND HERE. HE DOESN’T KNOW ANYTHING FROM HIS PAST’ SAID ARCHIE. THE GUIDE THEN NOTICED THE STRANGE WRISTBAND. ‘WHAT’S THAT THERE?’ SHE STARED AT THE GLOWING OBJECT. ‘INDIGO?’ EXCLAIMED THE GUIDE. ‘WHAT’S GOING ON WITH THIS PLACE!’ I BROKE THROUGH. STARING OUT THE PANES OF GLASS IN A SILENT MOMENT,

“WOAH.” I SAID TO THEM. ARCHIE THEN REVEALED WHAT WAS GOING ON. “WAR! THERE IS R.E.D. TAKING OVER!” “THAT’S WHAT IS HAPPENING.” DAZED AND CONFUSED, I STUMBLED OVER. STANDING UP, THE GUIDE WAS AMBLING BACK BEHIND THE MAIN DESK OF THE PLACE. “I NEVER HEARD OF AN INDIGO.” ARCHIE MURMURED.

I WALKED CAUTIOUSLY TO THE FRONT DESK AREA, AND ARCHIE FOLLOWED. ‘HEY, YOU KNOW YOU CAN LEARN THE LANGUAGE!’ HE CALLED OUT, STILL BURSTING WITH ENERGY. ‘HOW POSSIBLY COULD I LEARN A LANGUAGE IN 5 SECONDS!’ I SAID IN DISBELIEF.

ARCHIE CALLED SOMETHING TO AN ASSISTANT CLAD IN A GLOWING BLUE SUIT WITH SILVER PADS STANDING STATIONED AT THE FUTURISTIC DESK IN FRONT OF US, AND THEY LED US TO A DOOR AND THROUGH INTO THE BACK ROOM.

A LARGE SILVERY MACHINE WITH A CLEAR BLUE GLASS POD CONTAINED IN-BETWEEN TWO METALLIC CLASPS WITH AN IRIDESCENT BLUE LAMP FLICKERING INSIDE OF THE METAL.

‘WHAT IS THAT FOR??!’ I REMARKED NERVOUSLY. ‘THIS IS THE L.A.N.G MACHINE!’ SAID ARCHIE. AN OMINOUS AIR EMERGED SLOWLY.

THE GUIDE WAS MOVING TO A SILVER CONTROL PANEL, THEIR FACE ILLUMINATED BY THE GLOWING LIGHT OF THE SCREEN, A LOOK OF CONFUSION ON THEIR FACE.

THE POD’S CHAMBER DOORS HISSED, WHITE GAS SPILLING OUT FROM THE HINGES, THEN IT’S DOORS OPENED.

I FUTILELY ATTEMPTED TO BACK AWAY BUT ARCHIE PUSHED ME AHEAD, INSISTING I DO IT. I EVENTUALLY CONCEDED TO IT, STEPPING INSIDE THE CHAMBER OF THE POD AND STANDING THERE. A ROBOTIC VOICE ECHOED FROM SOMEWHERE INSIDE

THE MACHINE 'INITIATING LANGUAGE ADAPTATION NEURON-GAIN TRANSITION PROTOCOL...'.

DROPLETS OF SWEAT WAS SLOWLY SEEPING OUT OF MY FOREHEAD AND I WAS SLOWLY RELUCTANT WITH MY CHOICE. BUT BEFORE I COULD EVEN MOVE AN INCH, THE HEAVY POD DOORS SLAMMED SHUT WITH A DEAFENING HYDRAULIC THUD.

I WAS LOCKED INTO A SUFFOCATING, STERILE SILENCE. THE WHITE GAS SWIRLED AROUND MY KNEES, SMELLING FAINTLY OF OZONE AND OLD COPPER.

OUTSIDE THE TINTED GLASS, ARCHIE'S ENERGETIC GRIN FADED INTO A BLURRY SMUDGE. THE GUIDE AT THE CONSOLE WAS FRANTICALLY TYPING, COMPENSATION BUILDING UP AT THE SCREEN OF THEIR HELMET.

'3, 2, 1..' THE ROBOTIC VOICE DRONED, ECHOING DIRECTLY INSIDE MY SKULL RATHER THAN THROUGH MY EARS.

'COMMENCING COGNITIVE DOWNLOAD.' A SHARP ECHO OF PAIN REVERBERATED THROUGH MY HEAD. MY GLOWING INDIGO WRISTBAND FLARED VIOLENTLY, CASTING LONG, FRANTIC SHADOWS INSIDE THE CHAMBER.

IN A FLASH THE ROBOTIC VOICE SPUTTERED BACK AGAIN 'WARNING: CORRUPTION ERROR, SIGNATURE INDIGO' IT WARNED IN AN ALARMING TONE. THE IRIDESCENT BLUE LAMP OVERHEAD FLICKERED SLIGHTLY, SEEMING TO MALFUNCTION AND THE BULB TURNED A DANGEROUS, WARNING CRIMSON.

SUDDENLY, MY MIND EXPLODED WITH DATA. GEOMETRIC SYMBOLS, ALIEN WORDS, PLUS MILLIONS OF FOREIGN DATA ALL AT ONCE. ERROR VISAGES WERE FLOODING MY HEAD, WASHING DOWN THE PREVIOUS DATA QUICKLY.

THE HYDRAULIC DOORS OF THE CHAMBER HISSED VIOLENTLY AND RELEASED ALL THE GAS OUT, THEN OPENED WITH A FEEBLE “CLANK”.

MY SKULL WAS ACHING AND HOT, BUT QUICKLY IT SOOTHED, AND WITH MY AGONIZED HEAD COOLING OFF, I SLUMPED ONTO THE HEAVY METAL PLATED GROUND IN FRONT OF THE NOW SMOKING CHAMBER. THE GUIDE WAS LOOKING MORTIFIED, DARTING THEIR EYES AT ME, THEN THE SMOULDERING MACHINE SPEWING OUT FLAMING SPARKS.

‘WHAT!!’ THE GUIDE SHRIEKED. THEIR FINGERS FLEW ACROSS THE SPARKING CONSOLE, DESPERATELY ATTEMPTING TO SHUT DOWN THE ERRORS AND THE MACHINE. "THE SIGNATURE INDIGO... THAT SHOULDN'T EVEN EXIST!"

I THEN REALISED ARCHIE'S ENERGETIC GRIN HAD FADED. HE STARED AT ME, HIS BLUE EYES WIDE WITH A MIXTURE OF TERROR AND AWE. ‘ARE YOU OKAY?’ HE REMARKED, STILL STARING. ‘OR` SEIS DARA URUR ADESTAE?’ HE SAID SUDDENLY IN A STRANGE LANGUAGE, EXCEPT I DECODED WHAT HE HAD SAID ‘CAN YOU SPEAK IT? TRY!’.

I NOTICED THAT STRANGELY I KNEW ANOTHER WHOLE LANGUAGE ALL OF A SUDDEN.

‘SEP, GORO AL SEIS. ’ I MURMURED SLOWLY, ATTEMPTING THIS NEW LANGUAGE. I BLINKED, REALIZING WHAT I HAD JUST SAID. ‘ALL GOOD!’. THE KNOWLEDGE WASN'T JUST A LANGUAGE; IT WAS TRILLIONS OF OTHER UNKNOWN DATA AND ALIEN SKILLS I NOW UNDERSTOOD!

SUDDENLY, A SWIRL OF CRIMSON LIGHT EMANATED FROM A LONE WARNING LAMP SECURED ONTO THE WHITE DUSTY PANELS OF THE CEILING WHICH NOW SHUDDERED.

THE PIERCING SCREECH OF SIRENS ECHOED ABOVE AND I COULD HEAR THE FRANTIC MOVEMENT AND CAUTIOUS CHATTER OF PEOPLE SCAMPERING ABOVE.

‘R.E.D HAS TRACKED THE INDIGO ENERGY! MOVE!’ THE GUIDE EXCLAIMED DIRELY, FIDGETING WITH THE BUSTED CONSOLE.

AS WE WERE ABOUT TO MOVE, A BURST OF FLAMES EXPLODED FROM THE ENTRYWAY. ‘STOP THEM!’ I COULD HEAR SOMEBODY COMMAND BEHIND US.

WE SCRAMBLED BACK THROUGH THE REAR DOOR, BURSTING PAST THE STUNNED ASSISTANT IN THE BLUE SUIT AND RACING INTO THE MAIN LOBBY.

THE PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE OF THE INFORMATION CENTRE HAD COMPLETELY SHATTERED; CIVILIANS WERE PANICKING, POINTING AT THE SKY. THOUSANDS OF R.E.D STARSHIPS WERE DESCENDING, CRIMSON SEARCHLIGHTS SCATHING THE CITY.

WE THREW OURSELVES THROUGH THE FRONT DOORS BACK INTO THE THUNDERING RAIN.

THE HIGH-TECH DOOR PANELS SHUDDERED, EXPLODING INTO SHARDS OF GLINTING SPACEGLASS WHICH SCATTERED AROUND THE DAMP GRASS.

A WAR-CRY BROKE THROUGH THE SILENCE, SOLDIERS CLAD IN WHITE-BLUE RADIANT ARMOUR APPROACHED THE SCENE, AN ASSORTMENT OF SPACE ARSENALS IN THEIR ARMS. A BATTLE UNFOLDED AS THE B.L.U.E BATTALION FIRED THEIR BLASTERS.

I WAS FROZEN IN SHOCK AS I STARED AT THE FIGHT AS IRIDESCENT BEAMS OF ELECTRIC BLUE AND RED BURST THROUGH THE STORMY AIR.

SUDDENLY, I FELT MY ARM BEING TUGGED. ‘DOWN HERE!’ ARCHIE YELLED, PULLING ME TOWARD A DARK, METAL-GRATED ALLEYWAY BETWEEN TWO CONCRETE HIGH-RISES.

AS WE SPRINTED INTO THE SHADOWS, I DIVED, JARRING MY SHOULDERS ON THE FROSTED, WET METAL GRATES. MY INDIGO WRISTBAND BEGAN TO PULSE IN SYNC WITH MY RACING HEARTBEAT. A POWERFUL INDIGO GLOW FLICKERED IRIDESCENTLY, MORPHING AND SHIFTING INTO A HOLOGRAM DISPLAYING A MAP.

I REALISED I HAD SOMEHOW CONJURED A BLUEPRINT OF THE DOME'S UNDERGROUND POWER GRID, AND THEN A BLINKING CURSOR FLICKERED INTO LIFE, ALIGNING AT A CIRCUIT BOX WITH A LABEL: “DIVERT POWER TO WING #2”...

CHAPTER 3: A GREAT ESCAPE.

HEAVY, COLD RAINDROPS LASHED AGAINST MY FACE AS I STARED AT THE SHIMMERING HOLOGRAM FLOATING ABOVE MY WRIST. THE BLUEPRINT OF THE DOME’S UNDERGROUND GRID PULSED WITH A VIVID INDIGO LIGHT, CASTING SHARP SHADOWS AGAINST THE WET CONCRETE OF THE ALLEYWAY.

SUDDENLY, A FACELESS DROID WITH A SLEEK, METAL PLASMA RIFLE IN DARK CRIMSON ARMOUR WITH GLOWING RED PADDING TURNED QUICKLY INTO THE ALLEY. “A R.E.D ENFORCER!” ARCHIE TREMBLED, REELING BACKWARD WITH DROPS OF SWEAT TRICKLING OFF HIS FOREHEAD. THE ENFORCER WAS CLOSING IN.

“THERE! WE CAN ESCAPE IF WE ACTIVATE THE CIRCUIT,” I BREATHED. I POINTED AT THE GLOWING CURSOR ON THE MAP.

“THEN LET'S MOVE BEFORE WE'RE GONERS!” ARCHIE SHOUT-WHISPERED.

OF COURSE I WOULD RUN!

WE SCRAMBLED UP FROM THE FROSTED METAL GRATES. MY SHOULDERS THROBBED FROM THE HARD DIVE, BUT ADRENALINE COMPLETELY NULLIFIED THE ACHE.

WE BOLTED DEEPER INTO THE SHADOWS OF THE NARROW ALLEYWAY, FLANKED ON EITHER SIDE BY TOWERING, FACELESS HIGH-RISES. EVERY STEP FELT HEAVILY NUMBERED AS THE ENFORCER CLOSED IN.

OVERHEAD, THE BATTLE IN THE CITY CENTRE CONTINUED CASTING ERRATIC STROBES OF RED AND BLUE ACROSS THE SLICK PAVEMENT.

AT THE END OF THE ALLEY, PARTIALLY HIDDEN BEHIND A CLUSTER OF RUSTED VENTILATION SHAFTS, SAT A HEAVY, RUSTED IRON HYDRAULIC DOOR.

IT WAS LOCKED DOWN TIGHT, SECURED BY A HEAVY PISTON MECHANISM. NEARBY, THE IRIDESCENT GLOW OF A BIOMETRIC CONTROL TERMINAL FLICKERED IN THE DARK.

"GREAT. IT'S ENCRYPTED," ARCHIE GROANED, SLAMMING HIS FIST AGAINST THE CONCRETE WALL. "WE'RE TRAPPED."

BEHIND US, THE HEAVY, THUNDERING FOOTSTEPS OF OUR PURSUER GREW LOUDER BY THE SECOND.

“MAYBE THIS COULD WORK...” I MUTTERED.

A SUDDEN INSTINCT FLARED INSIDE ME. I RAISED MY GLOWING INDIGO WRISTBAND AND PRESSED IT DIRECTLY AGAINST THE GLASS INTERFACE.

INSTANTLY, THE BAND PULSED, FLOODING THE TERMINAL WITH DENSE STRINGS OF ALIEN DATA AND ENCRYPTED CODE. THE SCREEN FLICKERED, SHIFTING INTO A VIVID, FUZZY GREEN AS THE WORDS ‘ACCESS GRANTED’ FLASHED ACROSS THE DISPLAY.

WITH A SATISFYING METALLIC CRUNCH, THE HEAVY PISTON LOCKS THREW THEMSELVES BACKWARD.

“WHAT?!” ARCHIE GASPED, HIS WIDE EYES DARTING BETWEEN ME AND THE GATE.

THE DOOR’S HYDRAULIC VALVES HISSED VIOLENTLY, VENTING A PRESSURIZED CLOUD OF WHITE STEAM AS THE MASSIVE BARRIER GROUND OPEN. SUDDENLY, A SCORCHING PLASMA BEAM BLASTED INTO THE WALL, BARELY MISSING MY ARM. THE BEAM TRUCK THE TERMINAL PANEL INTENSELY, EXPLODING INTO FLAMES. THE SCREEN SHATTERED INTO A SPLINTER OF FIRE, LEAVING THE CONSOLE IN SMOKING RUINS AND SPEWING A VIOLENT SHOWER OF HOT SPARKS INTO THE RAIN.

“WE NEED TO MOVE! NOW!” I YELLED FORCEFULLY INTO ARCHIE’S EAR! “RUUUNNNN!!”. I SWIFTLY LEAPED INTO THE DARK CONCRETE TUNNEL, LANDING ON A CHILLY, IRON CATWALK. ARCHIE GROANED, LIFTING HIS BLOODSTAINED