

UC B1 CH 2

Freeing himself from the shackles of rest, ready to celebrate late at night, an older teen boy sits up off of a torn and weathered mattress and stretches widely.

Easily able to fight off the aftershock exhaustion, he stands quickly and bears the pull of his tired mind and body with little effort. He swipes a black shirt, bright red jacket, and pair of black trousers placed on a multi-layered office shelf nearby, donning them and stretching once again.

He walks to a ladder nearby, leading out of the dark, damp chamber, which he calls his bedroom, after grabbing a small handgun with few rounds left and holstering it on the belt of his trousers. Climbing up the ladder quickly, he escaped his room but didn't close the hatch behind him, for it was only unlockable from the inside.

Then, he walks slowly through a round tunnel. His clothes were plenty tattered from things like wear, tear, and scratches from rough surfaces. Upon reaching the end of the tunnel, he moves a large, corrugated metal sheet on the outside of the tunnel and walks outward into a large, abandoned, rotting underground railway station. It had not been touched for years and was a great place for rats and street rats alike to fester.

He shivers for a moment, suffering the all-too familiar whiplash the open underground tomb of the past brought upon him. The cold wind of ancient emptiness brushed over his face and paradoxically smooth, messy, brown, but overall luscious hair. His deeply tanned, lightly brown skin also paralleled the conditions he should garner from living in such a concealed home.

Leaping over a large gap where the train track once was, then another, he reaches the wide stairs that leave his den. He takes these stairs upwards and eventually sees the pitch black night sky, illuminated by thousands of bright green beacons outside through the rubble and wooden boards at the end of the stairs.

Light from below projected green onto all of the clouds above, skyscrapers also glistening the same spectacular jade. It contrasted the cities' usually grey palette.

The boy smiled at this. Despite it being annual, it never got old to see the lights up and around the city.

He climbed over the metal bars and wooden planks out of the rotting entrance to the abandoned railway, making his way across an old road and onto a small street on the outskirts of a usually bustling city.

The next few minutes were spent simply walking to the seaside, where he spotted no one at all. After a while, he reached his favourite spot to see the ocean. It was at the beginning of an old pier, where there was a large hut-like entrance with a sign that read,

'Quartz Pier'

No one ever went to it. It was dangerously close to collapsing and practically so old it was a miracle it still hung over the sea. But that just meant it was quiet; a refuge where he could enjoy the cold wind of the ocean alone.

Though, going across the actual pier itself was dangerous, but that wasn't a problem for him. The entrance above was flat, brick-layed, and at such a perfect height so that you could see the ocean and even the great central city from across continents.

That was why the boy came here on this night.

He climbed up some forged holes in the side of the entrance that he carved himself, making his way up and eventually on top of the entrance itself before taking a seat off of one side of it, admiring the viridescent beacons along the skyline of the city across

continents. It was a beautiful sight. One he wouldn't believe existed without seeing it himself.

He spent a couple of moments just taking it all in. Enjoying the great sight seen only once a year. He even heard faint cheers of celebration in the distance, all the way across the sea.

He smiled.

A rare event had also occurred on this night, completely from chance. The stars shone brightly above, not obstructed by smog clouds.

Something about the glint in each star fascinated the boy. What might be out there. What other worlds.

He couldn't think of anything too interesting.

But that just ignited his will to explore. The fire to find what may be out there, find something he couldn't imagine.

He had thought the same thing this time every year since he was a child. Every time he did, he became even more excited to think what was out there.

But he hadn't even explored past his hometown. Lived beyond the grimy depths of an abandoned railway station.

What made him think he could explore the stars?

It was but an impossible dream.

For his real world, though, there was one thing he could do. One thing he had worked for since he first thought of escaping the atmosphere.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his old phone. He dialled the number of his aunt in a different part of the world he had never met in person. After a moment of waiting, she picked up.

"Hello? Who is this?" She asked.

"Hey. It's me, Aunt V. How're the lights from the central city?" The boy replied.

"Awww! Sugar cube! I didn't think you would call! The lights are great." She ecstatically replied.

"Come on. Who do you think I am? Of course I was gonna call you. I actually have a present I want to tell you about too."

"Aww, really? You shouldn't have."

"I'm actually coming down to the central city next week. I finally scraggled out enough money to afford a boat ticket. I can finally give you that hug I owe you."

The aunt paused for a moment, bewildered that her nephew was going to do this for her. She had never made enough money herself to afford anything luxury. But she was still going to see her nephew for the first time in person. A tear fell down her face.

"Sugar. I'm so proud of you. Your ma' would be. I bet she is." She said, sniffing and tearing up with happiness.

Hearing that, the boy froze up a little bit. He only had heard about his mother through his aunt. She seemed like such a good person. He blamed himself for her death, though, but hearing that she would be proud of him, he teared up a little too.

"T-thank you, aunt v. I bet she is."

They both sat in silence for a little bit, not saying anything of their own and basking in the happiness they shared. But the boy spoke up.

"I'm going to go now. I need to get some rest first and pack everything. See you later, Auntie v." He said.

"See you soon, sugar cube." She replied, ending the call.

The boy put his phone back in his pocket and then stared back at the central city, which was going to be his home this time next week.

He smiled again and whispered to himself;

"I'm going to make you proud, mom and dad. I wo -"

However, interrupting him in his own mind, he caught something in the corner of his eye.

A shooting star. A wish.

He thought about what he wanted. Exploring the stars came first, but aside from that, he couldn't think of anything more than basic survival necessities. Maybe fame and / or riches would be nice.

But he was kinda lonely, too.

The shooting star then suddenly burst into flames. It had entered the atmosphere. It turned in the sky, growing in size more and more until it eventually looked like it was going to hit the ground nearby.

On a hillside probably two hundred meters to the right, the shooting star crashed with only a small fireball rising into the air above the impact zone.

The boy immediately jumped up, climbed down the entrance to the pier, and began to rush across the nearby plains and over onto a hill to see what had hit the ground. Hundreds of thoughts ran through his mind in an instant.

What was it? An asteroid? A comet? Something else?

Was this his chance to explore the stars?

He had to get there first.

As he reached the climax of the hill that blocked his view of where the supposed shooting star landed, he took a moment to rest after all the uphill running he just did. After regaining enough of his strength, he looked down at the crash site.

He couldn't believe his eyes. There lie in front of him wreckage of technology that looked completely alien just from a first glance. It was all burning, falling apart in front of him, broken lights flickering beneath the flame.

Something inside of it was moving, writhing about. That was clear by how erratically some metal sheets were moving around.

The boy didn't want to chance it. It could be dangerous. But he didn't want to lose his shot at the stars either.

He slid down the hill towards the crash zone before him.

Upon reaching the bottom of the hill and coming up to where the space wreckage landed, he was quickly hit with a large cloud of smoke. The fire that had consumed the extraterrestrial object made it hard to get too close, the heat starting to get to him already.

Instead of diving straight in, he began to circle the wreckage, scouting out for anything worth scavenging. A few loose small circuit boards were scattered around, which the boy quickly looted. Selling them would be lucrative, maybe even enough to get his money back for the boat ticket.

After a few minutes of scavenging around the wreckage, the fire had become less fierce, allowing for the boy to get edge closer to the centre of the crashed thing. Though, he still couldn't make out what it was.

Upon lifting a metal panel out of the way, a stark and very jarring hydraulic whirr comes from under wreckage to his right, causing him to jump away and unsheathe a knife from his belt.

An uncanny metal endoskeleton slowly surfaces from under metal scrap, slightly burning and erupting in sparks. Its head was like a screen, but shattered, the corrupted display beneath only showing blank and pink textures.

It tried to stand but fell over in its own tangled wires and melting polymer casing, attempting to extinguish itself, but its robotic will was not enough to keep it standing for long.

After collapsing to the ground, it made beeps that were reminiscent of a broken radio tower, fruitlessly screaming out to nowhere.

The boy slowly approached the broken robot and stood above it. It was clear that it was not of this world; the technology still seemed intricate and profound despite all the damage. It didn't take long before the boy crouched down nearby its dying screen, going to chip at it with his knife for salvage.

Right as his blade touched the screen, it returned to life. The boy scuttered away like a mouse, dropping the knife and distancing himself a few meters.

A blue screen came present on its monitor head. There were two white dots that resembled eyes and a white bar that resembled a mouth. It was barely able to keep itself alive, the metal body lifeless as it had diverted all of its power to the screen.

It spoke, its machine voice clearly not human and garbled beyond comprehension, but somehow able to string its words together through the glitches present in its broken speakers.

"I-I-I mean you no harm. I came to w-w-warn this planet. Destruction imminent."

The boy stood speechless at the unsightly machine locked in on his face. He had never seen or heard anything like it, and now wishes he hadn't. He replied to it, sceptical and scared.

“W-what do you mean? Destruction? How?”

“There is n-n-not much time. Your planet is in grave danger. The R-r-rexon Ascenda... n... Is rapidly approaching. Take thes-e...”

A mechanical claw and arm erupted from the ground beside him, holding a very secure but small safe. The boy opened it, seeing two things inside:

A handheld device, something similar to a PDA, which had an extendable antenna loose near the top of its case,

And the hilt to a non-existent sword, wrapped in fine leather. An unscrewable panel stood in place of a pommel on the bottom.

“Th-... Loy-a... T...” The robot cried with its final spark.

Bewilderment overcame the boy. He couldn't fathom the destruction that the machine foretold, instead taking a blind spot to it and only thinking of the riches the technology in front of him could bestow.

The robot powered down fully, no longer able to power itself. Whirrs of hydraulics halted, sparks fizzled out, and its 'head' fell to the ground.

It was now a dead metal skeleton in a mechanical graveyard.

For an unexplainable reason, the boy was struck with a feeling of guilt and empathy for the robot. It felt so human despite being nothing like he'd ever seen before.

He pledged his respect towards the robot by leaving it alone and not defiling its corpse for more scrap to sell.

After grabbing more of the other scrap around the wreckage, his instincts told him that he'd been in one place for too long. He surely couldn't have been the only person to see something falling from the sky, and he didn't want to get caught looting, so running and hiding now was his next course of action.

The pockets of his jacket weighed him down a little. They'd never been so full before. Though, instead of stopping, he chose to get back to his den first before indulging in his spoils.

What he might have looted could be illegal. That meant two things; he'd be wanted by authorities, but the loot would sell for much more. That sounded good.

Speedwalking down the street he used to reach the pier, he thought more about what that robot said to him. He thought that maybe he should take the warning seriously and heed the supposed 'imminent destruction' to a powerful figure so the planet may be protected.

But he declined that thought after realising how absurd that sounds. No one could take down an entire planet. The robot might've been malfunctioning, or it was all just an extensive prank.

Shouting then suddenly from the hill where the wreckage had fallen on.

How? He definitely would've noticed anyone approaching.

Then, a large explosion went off by the wreckage, rivalling the bang from the impact of it when it landed originally.

The boy had stopped in his tracks, staring at the cloud rising upwards again from the wreckage. If he'd stayed there only a minute longer, if his instincts didn't kick in at the right time, he'd be –

“Hey. Stop.” A voice came from where he was walking to. The boy froze again, slowly turning back to face where the voice had come from.

In front of him stood a white-haired but relatively young adult in blue and white formal attire, possessing several badges that looked important, had appeared seemingly out of nowhere. He spoke, his tone utterly furious despite trying to be nice on the surface.

“Say, street filth. Did you happen to see a broken robot back a few minutes ago? Apparently, a disgusting rat went through and stole some very important stuff from me. I want it back.”

The boy smiled in return, attempting to use his rough charisma to escape the situation. The man was either an authority figure, important, or a military general based on his clothing and stance.

“Oh, damn. A robot? I've never seen a robot before, unless you count those guys working at the burger place.” He joked.

The furious formal man grimaced, thinking the street filth was mocking him. He swore under his breath but turned away and looked back to the boy with a very cynical and almost crazed smile.

“I am Commander Ian. I instruct and control a giant fucking army that can turn you and your whole planet into a few specs of dust. Don’t test me, give me that fucking device, and I might let you live.”

The boy chuckled, a cocky smile beginning to creep up his face. There was no way this guy was serious. He sounded so self-absorbed that it was hilarious. He was definitely high off of his ass on something.

However, the explosion and extraterrestrial robot said otherwise. Maybe he wasn’t the one taking this seriously.

Believing the robot now, he knew urgency was needed.

“Well, since you asked so nicely...” He said sarcastically, reaching into his right pocket. However, in one quick motion, he pushed away his jacket and pulled out the small handgun from his belt. He fired three shots at Ian in an instant.

Ian dodged the first, got hit in the arm by the second, and hit in the leg by the third, collapsing immediately. Now seething in pain and on the ground, his fury skyrocketed. He looked upwards at the boy, his eyes full of hate and disdain.

“YOU... YOU DISGUSTING PIECE OF SHIT –“ He shouted but was interrupted by the boy, who pressed the handgun up against his forehead.

“Tell your army to leave us alone, or I’ll resign you from your position as commander. If you run, tell them Nickolas spared you.” Nick coldly stated, high on adolescent pride.

Ian kneeled eerily still despite bleeding out and seething with rage.

He started to grin. This unsettled Nick greatly.

“I-I’m warning you –“ Nick shakily began, hesitating to kill the commander despite the screams of his instincts.

Ian’s eyes, brimming with hate, flicked up and stared up at Nick once again, with his grin filled with vitriol.

“I’M SORRY, WHAT’S THAT?! THE MIGHTY THICK-OLAS HAS SPARED MY LIFE?!
HAHAHAHAHA! JUST FOR THAT, I’LL KILL YOU LAST.”

He suddenly disappeared in front of Nick, a bright white flash and a subtle shockwave pushing him backwards. His instinct was suddenly angry at him for letting the commander go, and even more scared as to the fact he may have just created a powerful enemy.

Or worse, unleashed an unfathomable evil.

He immediately holstered the gun in his belt and sprinted back towards the city. After just barely making it a few meters, an immense indigo flash of light in the sky shone behind him, being accompanied by a thunder strong enough to break the heavens.

And break them it did.

He turned around to see clouds moving away from a point above where the great central city would be across the ocean, an enormous shadow of a cataclysmic structure in the sky from above that point. A moment later, a thousand spots and wires of bright neon blue began to brim with light; power coursed through the giant metal space structure. Several vents expunged heat across the entire width of the structure, causing a technological roar to boom over the surface of the planet.

Nick shuddered with the realisation that he should've listened to the robot more carefully.