

DARK HARBOR

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A PROLOGUE BY KRISTY

It was 2022 when things started to get really bad. The United States and Great Britain had already waged two separate wars over control of the oil supplies, first in the Middle East during the 2000-2010 period...and then again in 2016 when oil was discovered in the South Atlantic off the coast of South America. Great Britain controlled the Falkland Islands of course, and Argentina had claim to them historically. When a massive oil cache was discovered off the shores of the islands, confrontation was all but imminent. Two years later, NATO controlled more oil than the Middle East had left in its dwindling wells. Europe and Russia, along with China became desperate by 2020 when OPEC could no longer keep up with demand. Great Britain sought only to share her wells with her Common Wealth and ally, the United States. Other members of NATO began to groan and soon contention lead to the dissolution of NATO entirely...Germany and France forming a new anti-English alliance to secure fuel supplies. As you can imagine, things went downhill from there...enemy of my enemy and so forth. By 2022, World War III was well under way, fought by proxies in North Africa and South America. At some point, a French submarine collided with an American sub off the coast of Brazil...and the world held its collective breath...

The same day the submarines collided, a man by the name of Hinton Chamberlain, and Englishman, dropped dead without warning in Belfast. It would be three days before anyone figured out he'd died of a hither-to-unknown contagion, spread by touch, and destined to annihilate 95% of our population.

I suppose I should probably give you a bit of the details that followed the outbreak so that you're aware of how I came to be telling this story and how all of what is...is.

In **2022**, as I mentioned, on **April 3**, the end began. Proceeding events played out as follows:

Day 1

First known case of Virus K511, later known as “kay-five,” struck a man in Belfast.

Day 4

First confirmed cases of K511 are diagnosed in the United States.

Day 8

Fearing World War 3 has begun, and the French are using biological weapons, the Japanese close their borders and ban all traffic into and out of the Japanese home islands to prevent possible spread of the contagion within their borders.

Day 12

The CDC declares a “pandemic” and fails to rule out the fact that the contagion is man-made. Congress begins a push for the military to utilize nuclear weapons in response, against the French and their allies in Europe.

Day 13

A US Navy SEAL unit boards and destroys a French owned oil tanker heading into the South Atlantic to refuel French warships near the Falklands. Simultaneously, British special forces storm and liquidate an airfield in Argentina believe to be on loan to French forces for conducting fly-overs of the Falklands.

Day 14

France's president, in a shocking move, calls a press conference, but instead of declaring war on the English Alliance, presses for a cease of hostilities in light of the fact that the K511 virus has now been detected inside France, with forty known dead in Paris alone.

Day 15

English Alliance forces stand down and concentrate on aiding civilian elements in shutting down airports and harbors to prevent further spread of the virus.

Some people speculate still, that had the US and British focused on containing the spread of the virus rather than making war plans, the virus might have been stalled or at least more would have survived. But they didn't. And in hindsight, it certainly did appear that the French were going to war. Obviously they weren't, but the saps in charge at the time had no way of knowing that and the timing of the virus couldn't have been worse timed.

Day 20

The death toll in North America reaches 500,000 and in Europe, it exceeds 1 million. Travel in all forms, save that of military and emergency personnel are effectively banned and enforced with lethal means.

Day 22

State Guard units in Montana open fire on civilians attempting to cross the state's borders. Two hundred uninfected civilians are massacred attempting to flee the contagion.

Day 26

The Department of Defense reports to Congress that it cannot effectively continue to function. Military personnel have been reduced by 80% due to the contagion. Only 40 members of Congress are present for the session...the rest are either dead or in hiding. It is also reported that the Vice President, who had been in a secure location since Day 1 of the contagion due to the threat of war, has fallen ill with the virus and is not expected to live. The President, opting to remain in public during the fight against the virus now regrets his decision and is forced to name a potential successor who will not have Congressional approval.

Day 30

The United States government ceases to exist. **May 5, 2022**, the preeminent government of the world, falls into crumbling ash...not from the boots of an enemy...not from a failure of civilian rule...not from within...but from the tiniest of creatures...a virus called K511.

Day 35

Professor Jim Rubacher, working with a private team in seclusion near Flagstaff, Arizona discovers a way to neutralize the effects of the virus. The Rubacher team figures out that the virus is very susceptible to death and as such, tries frantically to preserve itself in any host it can find. In humans, it literally presses its own DNA into the human cells causing a collapse of cellular function. Rubacher's serum, as it will become known, does not kill the virus, but merely neutralizes its genetic imprint which stops the human cells from realizing it's foreign. Basically, the human cells accept the extra DNA and live to tell about it...and the material itself does not harm to the cell once it penetrates.

Day 38

Human trials of the Rubacher Serum begin and prove successful, but the team has no means of mass-producing the serum in order to treat what remains of the human population.

Day 40

Professor Rubacher phones the Japanese government, the only government still known to be functioning, by satellite-phone and begs them to send teams to Flagstaff to pick up the serum and their team. The Japanese government, fearing contamination, refuses to do so and ignores the call entirely. Word of the conversation later reaches **Professor Takuya Morita** of Kojima Bio-tech in Tokyo. He approaches his boss, Ren Kojima and explains that he knows Professor Rubacher and can vouch for his integrity.

Ren Kojima, a single man, devoted only to making money, finds he has nothing to lose by taking a chance on the Rubacher claim and possibly everything in the world to gain. He secretly defies Japanese authorities and dispatches Professor Morita along with a security and scientific detail, to Flagstaff by air. Two days later, Morita phones him from the Flagstaff facility and confirms that the Rubacher Serum works.

When Kojima confronts the Japanese government with his findings and evidence, they call him a fool and show him the door. Angered, Kojima mounts a massive mission to the United States, led by himself and a large contingent of **RENTECH SECURITY** personnel, para-military forces, specially trained to deal with any and everything. Prior to this event, RENTECH tested military equipment for the Japanese Defense Forces as well as engaged in the development of military tactics and systems. Essentially RENTECH is a private army of well-equipped and highly trained warriors.

When Kojima's force arrives in North America, it is quickly ascertained that they cannot secure any particular location against attack by roving bands of looters and infected persons. To preserve the security and safety of scientific personnel, Kojima's planners select an island off the coast of San Diego, known as San Clemente Island, a former Navy facility used for training SEALs and home to a private airfield. The island, redubbed as "Darwin Harbor," quickly becomes a secure and functioning research facility and Professors Morita and Rubacher are both relocated there along with all of their research.

By **June 2, 2022, Darwin Harbor** is manufacturing enough Rubacher Serum to inoculate five thousand people a day. Delivery of the serum is slowed by lack of equipment and manpower. Raw materials for production of the serum are also running dangerously low and Kojima realizes he needs resources from Japan.

Fearing loss of valuable resources and personnel, the Japanese government blatantly refuses his pleas for assistance, despite his offering them the cure for the contagion.

Frustrated, Kojima places a huge order for supplies, personnel, as well as ships and vehicles. When it becomes known that he has the cure, multiple Japanese corporations jump to fill his request in hopes of gaining a piece of the profit pie. **ORON**, a massive conglomerate formed by these corporations, prepares a massive civilian fleet and launches it toward North America, only to be halted by elements of the Japanese Defense Force. This becomes known as the "**Great Sino Exodus.**"

Kojima, realizing that the Japanese government was acting with no regard to the rest of humanity and was in fact endangering the survival of their own people by refusing to aid in the defeat of the virus...acts with stern intent, ordering a small contingent of **RENTECH** personnel to attack the **JDF** naval blockade force. In a

daring midnight raid, six JDF warships are disabled and the Sino Exodus fleet manages to exit Japanese waters.

One week later, elements of the JDF surround and blockade Darwin Harbor in a standoff that eventually led Kojima to threaten dropping virus canisters by air, into Tokyo. The threat is taken seriously when members of Kojima Corporation still inside Japan, stage a massive coup by spraying non-lethal canisters in public.

The Japanese people, thoroughly scared by the faux attack, begin to pressure the government to back off of Kojima and demands for the cure mount further weight against the political machine.

One week later, the Prime Minister resigns in humiliation and the Japanese parliament flees when protestors over-run their building. Chaos ensues and for three days, no one knows who runs Japan. Out of the smoke, General Okai Yohama arises a high-ranking member of the JDF and also a back-pocket asset of RENTECH. He declares martial law and then that Kojima is the savior of mankind.

On **July 4, 2022**, the Japanese Government, last remaining democratically elected ruling body on Earth, ceases to exist, paving the way for the rise of rule by the corporate elite.

With currency a thing of non-importance in this post-apocalyptic world, the only things which have value are food, medicine, and military power. Kojima finds himself in control of two of those commodities and soon takes hold of the third, food. The RENTECH forces are expanded exponentially as Rubacher Serum becomes the preeminent commodity and currency. Survivors of the contagion quickly volunteer for service in order to receive food and badly needed medical care.

Kojima, unmarried and without children, dies of a heart attack in 2025, leaving no heir to his massive conglomerate. The ORON board, made up of heads of other subordinate corporations, votes

to declare Rubacher head of Kojima, awarding him 51% of all stock in Kojima since it was he, who's work made the company possible. He accepts and takes control of the Kojima machine.

By **2027**, the JDF officially dissolves and the RENTECH SECURITY forces become the only sanctioned and armed force on the planet. By that point, all known survivors have been inoculated for the virus, but with so much of the population dead, it becomes imperative to relocate most of the refugees into groups. Facilities in the largest cities, world-wide, are walled up, secured, and set up to house incoming survivors. Utilities are restored and housing is assigned. Within months, sectors, named after the city in which they are located, become havens of civilization...but only to those who accept the rule of Kojima Corp. Those who do not, are kicked out and left to fend for themselves in the desolate wastes that lie between the city sectors.

Eventually Kojima Corp begins to demand work from refugees in order to support the system. This causes much chaos and even hints of open rebellion, but for the most part, the general population goes along with it.

Japan remains, however, mostly a free functioning society and economic state. ORON's board controls it, but rely on RENTECH to maintain their lock on authority. The rest of the world belongs to Kojima.

In an effort to ease Kojima's grip on armament, ORON begins production of mechanized drones...robotic systems that can be controlled by humans or operate on their own. Gradually, these drones begin to replace RENTECH forces in Japan.

Kojima's board doesn't like this, but it relieves their forces to focus in other troublesome areas, such as North America and Europe where rebellion begins to foment more and more.

In **January of 2029**, Professor Morita, still working on the K511 virus, makes a startling discovery. Essentially he finds that the K5

virus is in fact man-made and not naturally occurring. It is his belief that the virus was created to inject a third strand of DNA into hosts, thereby changing the host forever. The problem being, that the host was generally killed in the process. The Rubacher Serum, however has allowed the third strand to enter human DNA, but it now remains dormant. Morita begins to wonder what could be accomplished if he could reprogram that strand...use it as a method to control the other two strands of human DNA. He is later ordered by the Kojima Board to strike his assessments from the records, and that all knowledge of the virus being man-made, is to be destroyed and retracted...denied. The fear is that it could be used to incite further rebellion in the city sectors, if it became known that someone created the virus. It would, in fact, seem that Kojima itself might be the culprit, since they were the ones to profit so much from the contagion. So out of self-preservation, the information is buried.

Morita later discovers how to use Nanotechnology to reprogram the blank strand of viral DNA. Using it as a springboard, he manages to accomplish impossible feats. By taking control of human DNA, he is able to halt the aging process entirely, create human body regeneration and halt the progress of any and all diseases. Overnight, mankind goes from the brink of oblivion to immortality.

The Kojima Board, however, sees a new opportunity. It can put a stop to rebellion and bring ORON back under foot, all at the same time. The new currency becomes DNA manipulation. Morita's development leads to the creation of a power-ocracy. The Elite of the corporations become the first to see the benefits of the treatments. After a time, it is decided that the treatments will be allocated to persons who serve the corporate body. The higher your position, the more access you have to the technology.

Essentially, if you want to be immortal, you have to work your way up the corporate ladder. Remain a worthless, non-working person, and your days are numbered. The lure of immortality quickly spreads and as the Board suspected, rebellion melts into full compliance with the corporate dogma. To make matters more contained, the treatments for the DNA reprogramming are intentionally made temporary, so that subsequent treatments are required to maintain the physical state of the person. In a nutshell, to remain immortal, you will do the bidding of the corporation forever.

By **March of 2030**, ORON is under heel once more, and their robotic drones, even more advanced now, have taken over most security and almost all manual labor tasks. In the Sectors, work with the corporation begins to dwindle. The unemployed section of the populace begins to grow. Crime and back-alley DNA treatments begin to run rampant. While education is provided for the up and coming new generation, their parents, many left only partially educated because of the plague, find themselves without use to the corporation.

Food and housing are still provided to all, as is basic medical care, but for the most part, the Board is all too happy to allow the uneducated masses to grow old and die...while they train the next generation to be obedient servants of the corporate elite.

Gak! Okay, the fucking history lesson is over now. So maybe I can get on with my story. Sorry, but I had to set the stage for my story...sort of lay out the background to my world, so that you understand what kind of place we live in now. I suspect, ages from now, I may not even remember it myself, so I'm putting it down on paper or digital paper, at least...as much for myself as for posterity. One civilization died and another sprang into being in the blink of an

eye...so who knows what may happen between now and the next moment.

So who am I? My name is **Kristy Tanner**, I'm twelve years old, and I am what is referred to as a child prodigy. I was actually born after the plague to a woman named **Anita Tanner**...a survivor. She was eight years old at the time of the contagion...and I have no clue who my father is, since my mother was raped by a gang of roving survivors in 2026 just outside of Chicago Sector. When the Kojima team setting up the initial camp in Chicago learned she was pregnant, they took her in. By the time I was born, Chicago had been sealed up and turned into a veritable fortress. My mother was 13 when she gave birth to me.

She fell in love, or so she claims, with a man **named Narma Yoshito**, a Japanese humanitarian working for Kojima Corp. He was the one who insisted they take her into the camp while she was pregnant with me. They were never married because of the age difference, but two years later, in 2028, she gave birth to my brother **Kendal**, who despite being half Japanese, fails to meet the intelligence level one would tend to expect. I sort of remember Narma, but he was killed on an expedition into the deadlands in 2030, so he was gone by the time I was four. Kendal has no memory of him at all.

It is 2039 and my mother is 25, though she looks 45...and I am nearing 13 and my brother is almost 11. I have no real affection for my mother. She has little to no education, barely reads at all, and has had no job in nearly five years. We survive off of the Corporate rations, housing and clothing allotments. When Mom wants something not covered, she sells herself to whomever will have her for the night. Men come and go routinely in our apartment. I suspect she may also be a drug addict...I know she's an alcoholic.

She despises me, I'm sure...mostly because I remind her of the gang rape she endured so many years ago. She shows preference to

Kendal and he gets away with everything, including tormenting me, but in all honesty, I really think their relationship is a little bizarre. Maybe I'll get into that later, but for right now, I still need to record the pertinent information for my narrative.

As I mentioned, I'm a child prodigy, meaning I'm super smart. Or at least that's what the teachers tell me. I have already mastered nearly every manner of math and science that they've shown me. By accessing the data-net, I've managed to learn a great deal more than what they teach in the grade-schools. I graduated and was dismissed two years ago, but I've yet to gain access to a corporate secondary school. The only university level schools are located in Japan and there is still apparently a phobia of outsiders since the contagion, so I am in limbo now...too smart for school and not old enough to work for the corporation. Or wait, they're calling it the "Kojima Conglomerate" now...since ORON was pressed back into the command structure. I remember that, because I remember everything. I have a photographic memory...and what's odd is that not only do I recall everything I see and hear, but I can replicate actions that I have witnessed precisely. It's a strange phenomenon even for those with photographic recollection. To reiterate heard words or describe scenes accurately is one thing...but to be able to do something you've seen perfectly, is all but unheard of.

So I sit at home now in this horrid little shit-hole...no more than a three room closet in one of the worst parts of the Sector, wasting my days away, aging and watching data-net broadcasts of old movies and...well...getting fat.

I can't say much for the taste of Kojima food rations, but they are high in protein and essential calories...so eat enough of them and your ass balloons up like a whale. And I'm not the only fat one around. The low-lifers...[that's what the employed call us non-employed bunch]...well we don't get real food...we get rations. Those that work for the Conglomerate get the good stuff...fresh

meats and fruits...vegetables and I've even heard they have real milk. And most qualify for rudimentary DNA adjustment, so even the lower echelon assholes have rock-hard abs and perfect hair. None of them are fat or ugly. If you work, you got it made. But if you don't, then you eat shit that makes you fat and you hang out all day trying not to kill yourself from boredom.

It's funny really. Being fat seems to be the defining factor that identifies us low-enders from the elite. A lot of people have taken to flaunting their fatness as a badge of defiance to the elite who pass us by in their armored cars and trains.

I will, at some point, be old enough to be employed and I suspect it will not take long for them to discover my talents and begin promoting me. It is only a matter of time before I become one of the elite, I'm certain, so I have a hard time hating them too much when I aspire to become one.

Perhaps I should explain the levels of our civilization in more detail in case by the time you read this, no records are left of it. I'll start at the bottom and work my way up:

NON-WORKERS

This is the class that I am in. Nicknamed "low-lifers" and "low-enders," we have no jobs, little education, and receive absolutely no rights or DNA adjustments whatsoever.

LEVEL ONE WORKERS

These are base-level employees of Kojima...they are the front line of the conglomerate and handle things like construction supervision and contact with low-enders. Human security personnel fall into this division. They live in actual houses and receive real food, but are not given DNA adjustments.

LEVEL TWO SUPERVISORS

These are the people who supervise the Level Ones. Most are professionals...such as doctors and other specialists...those who survived the contagion...and ones they've taken in and trained. They live in a walled up section of each Sector behind high security. They are given DNA anti-aging treatments.

LEVEL THREE GOVERNORS

Each Sector City has a governor and a staff under them. These people are untouchable and are rarely seen outside of data-net broadcasts or animated billboards. They don't touch us...they don't talk to us...and we are not allowed to even look upon them. Most are Japanese and they despise us. The conglomerate routinely punishes its upper echelon by assigning them governor duties in far-away Sectors. At last count, there are two hundred and forty seven City Sectors in total...meaning probably two hundred and forty seven really unhappy Japanese governors. But, despite their exiles, these people have access to once-a-year, genetic manipulations or enhancements and they can allocate them to anyone in their family, so their wives and husbands are generally sexual play-toys, giant boobs and penises are the norm. Most of them hope to earn their way back into corporate favor, so most rule with an iron fist. Our sector is run by **Misaki Takuya**, a woman who is reputedly 54 years old, but who looks 19 at worst. She's a total bitch. Even the level two people hate her.

LOWER ECHELON

These people are the actual members of the original Japanese corporation and remain the movers and shakers of the elite. When people refer to the "Elite"...they're usually talking about Level 3 and Lower Echelon people. LE people receive access to any DNA treatments they like at any time for anyone they see fit to give it to.

Most reside in Japan. A large number of them, mostly researchers and lower management, reside at Dark Harbor. Actually its real name is Darwin Harbor, but it's since earned the nickname of "Dark" harbor because of all the twisted DNA manipulating shit that emerges from there. Generally the scientific staff are Lower Echelon, so think of them as the big brains. This is where I hope to be some day.

UPPER ECHELON

No one knows the number of these people, but they are the absolute top management of the conglomerate and hold the most power of anyone in our society. The corporate "boards" are made up of these people. All but a handful are Japanese. To be precise, the only non-Japanese I am aware of are the members of Jim Rubacher's research team. It is odd that an American is now head of the Japanese empire. Maybe Kojima should have had them genetically engineer him a son. Odd also that he croaked. He died on the toilet, so the rumor has it. No one found him for hours and by that time he was too far dead to assist. Irony at its finest. Had he suffered a heart-attack at work or anywhere else, they'd have jetted him off to a medical ward and fixed whatever was wrong with him or simply replaced what was broke. But at a certain point, dead is dead, as they say. Sometimes I wonder though if perhaps he wasn't assassinated somehow. Seems like a man in charge of such a large bevy of scientific and medical technology would have been monitoring his own health well enough to detect a clog or faulty ticker, right? Put on your tinfoil helmet...I could feed you some serious conspiracy theories. Fat do-nothings have way too much time to think up crazy shit and spread it on the data-net these days.

Well that about sums up my world in a nutshell. I hope that explains things a bit to you, so things aren't too awfully confusing.

DARWIN HARBOR FACILITY

San Clemente Island off the Coast of San Diego

Forty stories up, at the top of Central Tower, deep within the primary administrative offices of Kojima Corporation, Professor Jim Rubacher, discoverer of the Rubacher Serum, savior of mankind, and now, most recently, the CEO and master of Kojima...stands quietly staring out one of his massive observation windows. The window is not real though, but merely a projection transferred electronically into the bowels of the facility to his office. Security concerns made paramount since Ren Kojima's death, have forced all Kojima administrators to take refuge far within the stone and steel walls of their fortress. At sixty two, he should have been contemplating early retirement, and he would have been had it not been for the K5 plague. He'd only been 45 when it struck back in 2022, barely old enough to even be running a research project and had his predecessor not fallen to the illness himself, he would not have been. In the final days, he'd taken the initiative, declared himself head of the project and ordered everyone he could round up to follow him into isolation in Arizona to continue their work. Weeks later they'd found the cure, or at least a treatment, and barely in time to save his own wife, Elana from dying. He had been right to do what he did. Someone had to take charge, someone had to make demands and do what had to be done. It wasn't politics or law or freedom in jeopardy...it had been the very existence of mankind at stake. Ren Kojima had recognized his efforts when they first met and the Japanese business man had seen him as not only an asset, but as a worthy protégé. When he'd died, he'd left a full 51% of his corporate holdings to Rubacher, making him, effectively, his replacement as owner and CEO of Kojima Enterprises. Currency no longer held any value, but stock...stock was the new gold, and

when Ren left him his fortune, it made him, overnight, into the richest and most powerful man in the world. And why? That was the question that Rubacher rolled around in his head every night. Why had the man done that? He'd eventually arrived at the answer to the question the same way he arrived at every answer...simple mathematical deduction and reasoning.

Ren Kojima saw him as a man, like himself, who could make a decision and follow through with it, no matter the cost or consequences, and like Ren, he would do what needed to be done to preserve the whole, and to hell with those who sat on the sidelines and second-guessed his decisions. The world was built by people who did things...not those who sat around and talked about it endlessly.

I tested the serum on my own wife, he remembered all too well.

It had been unethical and crazy, but he knew her days were numbered. She would die even if he didn't give it to her. So he'd made the hard choice of chancing it...and it had paid off. She'd been the first person cured of the disease in all the days that it had ravaged the planet.

He did what needed to be done and not just for her sake. Even if it had killed her, he would not have stopped...he'd have carried on until he found a way to make the serum work...or he was dead himself. There was little in the way of choice in the matter. It was succeed or perish. The universe had been kind though, for once, and mankind had continued on through his efforts alone. Did that grant him some right...some privilege? Surely not, but yet here he stood, now the most powerful man alive, the fate of a little over 20 million people resting his in his hands...the last vestiges of a race once numbering over 6 billion.

He had done a lot, but Ren Kojima had done more. Had the man not defied his own government...had he not risked waging war against that government...had he not taken the risk of believing in

Jim Rubacher to begin with...none of Jim's discoveries would have made a damn bit of difference. Ren was no saint though. Jim knew that. The man had been motivated by profit, but in the end did his motivations truly matter? His actions had saved mankind. His reasons and his actions somehow took a backseat...became unimportant when weighed against the outcome of his mission.

The Board had never even questioned Jim's takeover of the company. Everyone recognized exactly what Ren saw in him. The two men were of the same caliber...one devoted to profit, the other to science...yet both crossed into the path of the other. Profit drove science and science created profit. It was a cycle that perpetuated and pushed development further and faster. Many people used to say the cycle would be the death of mankind...but when the day of reckoning came, it ended up saving us...or at least some 5%...or so the numbers guessed. They still didn't have an accurate estimate of how many people still survived on their own outside the gates and walls of the city Sectors. A few has pushed the suggestion that there were tens of thousands...but that was optimistic and the real numbers were probably in the bare thousands, scattered world-wide. Most would probably die out on their own within a matter of a few years...either from malnutrition or sickness. Without the serum, most would eventually succumb to the K5 virus.

Who'd have guessed sixteen years earlier that the virus would turn out to be the key to mankind's immortality? Morita...one of the most brilliant men he'd ever met, did. The man was an unfettered genius when it came to biogenetics. He'd been at the top of his game when the plague struck, and even now, pushing seventy, the man was still coaching that same game. By using the virus' own genetic material, Morita had managed to figure out a way to use it as a means to reprogram human DNA.

K5 was an easily killed organism. It wasn't meant to survive in Earth's atmosphere...it was weak for the most part. How it had

come to exist in the first place was a great mystery. Morita had expressed to he and Ren once that he believed it may have been engineered...perhaps man-made. Ren had told him to shut up and to never mention such a thing again for fear it would incite chaos and destroy what they'd all fought so hard to create. Fears that the virus was a bio-weapon had almost ignited a world war on the eve of the outbreak...and were it to be discovered that it was in fact, a man-made creation, those old rivalries would surely spring into being once more and tear apart what little remains of society there was. Morita had agreed...the knowledge was buried.

But K5 was not dead. The little beastie was weak, but it had a mind to preserve itself. Once inside a human host, it forced its own DNA into the hosts' DNA...a bizarre combination of genetic tissue not meant to be. The hosts' DNA immediately began to fall apart, and cellular degeneration began instantly until the person simply died. It could take hours or days...but the end result was the same. Organs would simply stop functioning at some point and the body would shut down.

The serum Rubacher created didn't kill K5 and it never could. What it did do, was destroy the virus' own genetic makeup. By attacking an enzyme in the virus that was unique to it, the serum essentially erased the virus' own DNA. The infected person was left with a third strand of DNA...a blank one. With no conflicting genetic components or coding vying for dominance, the human DNA simply accepted the third strand and carried on. No breakdown of cells occurred and the host continued to live. Rubacher hadn't made a cure, he'd only come up with a treatment.

Morita though, saw more than that within the body of Jim's work. He saw something he'd been working on for a decade prior to the epidemic...the holy grail of genetics...a triple helix. Morita wasted no time tinkering with the third strand until he managed to find a way to program it using enzymes and nanotechnology. By

duplicating known genetic parameters and coding, he was able to use the third strand to guide the natural double strands that existed within man's body. The result was that he was able to give survivors the ability to resist disease, to regenerate body parts, and to even halt aging...and just within the last few years, he'd developed the means to actually reverse the process...a breakthrough that most of the Board and his own wife even, had jumped at the chance to test.

And it had worked beautifully. Elana, his wife, though being technically sixty years old, didn't look a day over nineteen. It was amazing. But he, himself, had chosen to merely halt his own aging. He felt that his appearance, his graying hair and wrinkles, created a sort of physical manifestation of wisdom and authority...two things he needed badly if he was to continue to hold the reigns of control. And in the coming years, he suspected he was going to need every ounce of help he could get.

Morita was a strong and trusted ally, but he was incapable of thinking outside the realm of science. Human politics befuddled him...social expectations were an annoyance to him. He cared nothing of what people thought of him. The only thing Morita cared about was scientific and technological advancement. The only time the man smiled was when he approached Jim with news of some new discovery or breakthrough.

Jim had been in power now for nearly 17 years...during which time he'd directed the construction of Darwin Harbor research and management facility as well as the construction of hundreds of secure city Sectors all over the planet. Nine years earlier, in 2030, when Morita succeeded in manipulating the third strand, he'd used the lure of immortality to bring Japan back under Kojima control. The ORON group...the corporate conglomerate that had supported Kojima and made the dissolution of the Japanese democratic state possible, had never truly wanted Ren in control of the world *OR* of

them. They simply wanted free of governmental restriction and saw backing Ren Kojima as a method with which to make that happen. When Ren flexed his control over the conglomerate, his power began to sway somewhat, and by 2025, just three years into his reign as supreme power on the planet, Ren mysteriously died of a heart attack. The man had been through rigorous health testing monthly...and had no problems at all just prior to his death...and Jim still suspected ORON was behind it. And when Ren left Jim in charge of Kojima Enterprises, it only added fuel to the fire. ORON hated having an emperor...but to have an American one? It was unacceptable to them...especially when it had been Japan who had been the sole surviving nation. To expect them to lie down at the feet of a man not of Japanese descent was considered appalling to most of the corporate heads. The fact that he was the man who had discovered the serum that saved everyone...was the *only* reason they had ever submitted to his command in the first place. Had he been any other non-Japanese...he'd probably already be cold in the ground next to Ren.

He had to watch as Japan turned itself into a veritable fortress over the years and how ORON had taken to the construction of massive robotics factories in Europe, laying claim to the metallic ores and manufacturing facilities that had been abandoned across the old continent. Despite having set up the city Sectors in Europe, over the last ten years, Kojima had effectively lost control of them, their various governors defecting to ORON direction.

ORON now had an estimated 30,000 robotic drones and some guesses were 500,000 mechanized and sentient androids. The drones were equipped with heavy weaponry and some could fly. They were frightening to watch in action. A single drone under the control of a human pilot, lying buried deep in a secure bunker anywhere on the planet, could lay waste to a small town all by itself. The androids still weren't trusted enough to be equipped with

weaponry, but they were excellent police officers and could be allowed to handle sentry and various other duties including farming and civil services.

ORON had pushed the androids on them right after Ren's death and reluctantly, Jim had allowed it. He simply didn't have the manpower to construct cities and secure them...much less to feed the population of 20 million survivors that flocked to their doors. The androids were a necessity at the time...reliable, untiring, and requiring no means of payment or promotion. The androids had made reconstruction possible. The problem now, was that they were filling jobs that humans could have done, but the reliability of the androids made their dismissal seem as though a ridiculous concept. Why get rid of something that did a great job for no pay to replace it with mediocre workers who required downtime, payment to some degree, and eventual promotion to motivate it? Not to mention, most people didn't want to do the jobs the androids did. And so now, the androids comprised about 30% of the entire Kojima workforce...meaning 30% of his company...his power, was created by the hands of ORON...and he suspected, could be turned against him at any time.

With Morita's development of the DNA treatments, most of the ORON board members had provided their support, but he knew it was only a matter of time till ORON reverse-engineered Morita's work and set about handling it for themselves.

They had started building their drones four years earlier and he knew now, that was probably about the time they managed to conduct their own genetic modifications, sans Morita. The North and South American Sectors represented an enormous amount of raw materials for the Conglomerate...and Kojima stood in the way of ORON's development of those resources. Not to mention, the old money of Japan did not intend to be ruled by an American forever. It was only a matter of time before ORON made a move against

Kojima's holdings...a move that was likely to come in the form of violence and all-out war.

Kojima didn't have the capability to build its own mechanized military. Anyone who was capable in robotics was under the heel of ORON. They had even made it a point to thwart every effort to re-establish universities in North America...obviously to make sure anyone who was educated was sent to Japan...meaning to ORON.

With synaptic input, and genetic modification, it was not impossible to teach people to do anything. Give them a photographic memory and make them read...and voila...instant smart people. The problem was, the Kojima Board bucked him on allowing the technology to be used for the general public. He suspected that ORON had already infiltrated the company and its governing board. And while he retained 51% of the stock, he could do very little on a large scale without support of the board.

With monetary currency a thing of the past, it fell to the basics of human society to fill in as objects of value. So food, medicine, shelter...and of course power over others, became the hottest of commodities in this new world order. The company had provided and still provided enough food to keep the population from starving and they'd also set up community medical centers as well as having assigned secure housing to everyone. These things everyone considered necessary. But with androids doing most of the manual labor and undesirable jobs...and now with genetic treatments, no one was retiring or dying...well...jobs were becoming a rare commodity all to themselves. And how do you motivate people to work for the common good without payment? People were essentially lazy and their good sense of community lasted only a short time. Some stood out, but most simply faded off into the crowd when the work continued day in and day out.

So when open rebellion had begun in 2032, Jim had been forced to agree to a Board supported system of rewards for work. It

seemed on the surface, to be a good idea at the time, but human lethargy being what it was, a growing section of the population had been dropping lower and lower in rankings. In the last seven years since the program had been set into place, two distinct groups had emerged...those who worked for the corporation...and those who did not. The workers had perks...better housing, better food, better clothing and access to genetic manipulation. Immortality was within their grasp so long as they were willing to work for it. It sounded good when he read it on the first billboards, but in hindsight, it had been a wrong turn, socially. Now, rather than having put the rebellion to bed, he'd manufactured an entire underside to their new society...one that was violently opposed to corporate control...and one that he suspected ORON might be directing and arming. Why attack an enemy when you can let him rot from the inside out, right?

The system was in place now, though, and try as he might, the Board refused to support him in breaking it up.

"Why should we give to those who do not offer efforts in return? If they will not do for themselves, why should we extend our hands to them?" It had been the declaration of the Secretary of the Board on their behalf when he'd proposed providing at least education and genetic provisions to everyone a few months back.

And to an extent, the man was right. His argument was sound. So many children had been in the midst of school when the plague struck...and had grown up uneducated over the last decade. Many were also devastated mentally and emotionally from their losses and suffering during the epidemic. Not all of the lower class were lazy...some was just fucked up...or incapable of learning. It wasn't their fault...but they were a burden nonetheless.

And honestly, Jim didn't want to reward them all either. His motivations were purely directed toward heading off a class war...one he knew the low-enders would lose. He'd saved humanity and

it was not his intention to have to order the troops in to annihilate an entire class of those he'd saved. His ideology was simple...preserve humanity...preserve society...preserve our technological advances...and he would do this no matter what the cost might be. So if it came to it, he knew he'd give the order to shoot. But if he could prevent it, he would.

The problem lay with those who had worked to get their rewards. If he gave to the lower class whom did nothing, those who did work...those who had earned their piece of the pie, would turn on him, and that was not acceptable. It was *they*, who made society possible now. The low-enders could be sacrificed without detriment to society...but not the elite. If they fell, then all was lost and a dark age would be upon mankind once more. So when push came to shove, Jim knew which side of the line he had to remain on.

It had been Morita who approached him sometime back with a potential solution.

"We can create clones, Jim...I've done it in the lab already. I have manufactured a whole man in a month's time, from an embryo to six foot tall," he'd explained as he led him through the massive genetics lab in the basement of Darwin Harbor. Pointing at the huge glass tanks lining one wall...tanks filled with hairless, naked male forms, he'd continued.

"We can program them via synaptic input...I've given them all photographic memory...and the best part, Jim...is they can be taught to be perfectly loyal to us...to Kojima...to serve mankind!"

Cloning had been frowned upon from back in the twentieth century even, and no one outside Morita's lab even knew what he'd been working on for the past two years. But at that moment, Morita's smiling face spoke volumes about what he'd been up to.

"Clones?"

"Rapidly produced clones...we can make them almost as quickly as ORON can construct and program androids!"

“Why?” he’d asked Morita.

“Well you told me about your fears...about ORON being able to control the android force...and their construction of the drone army and...well, since we don’t have the means to build our own army without them knowing...I figured perhaps a small contingent of highly trained and genetically engineered soldiers would be perfect for opposing them.”

“So you’re building me a clone army, Taku? What is this, a scene from Star Wars? What am I...the evil galactic emperor now?”

“No, no...certainly not,” Morita had replied, laughing nervously, his smile starting to fade. “But even if we trained survivors, we cannot guarantee they aren’t plants...we can’t guarantee they won’t turn on us. Their loyalty will always be in question. But a genetically engineered and synaptic trained force...well, we would have complete control of them. We could program them to believe whatever we want them to believe.”

“And you think this will fly with the Board, Taku?”

Morita had frowned for a minute and it was then that Jim had realized the man’s ineptitude for social systems had once more come to light. The science had been his focus...and he hadn’t given a single thought to the political end of his research.

“Taku...this is brilliant...it’s fantastic...but the Board will never agree to the creation of a clone army...no matter how well you train them or perfect them. Their very existence would threaten the elite...and they look human...they are human...telling them apart from real humans...well it’s not going to fly, my friend.”

“And what...what if they didn’t know?”

The question was posed almost childishly, but its ramifications held serious and dire consequences.

“What are you asking me?”

Morita cocked his head to the side slightly and a tiny smirk appeared on the left side of his mouth.

“What if we simply didn’t tell them? As you noted, they look human and could blend perfectly. What if we said they were recruits from the badlands...we program them with different languages and ship them off to various Sectors. Who would question where they came from? I could even make them look Asian, eh?”

“Wait...are you insinuating that we could create and utilize this clone force to penetrate...to infiltrate ORON?”

“We could do many things with them...not limited only to military use...not in a direct sense.”

“Takuya Morita...get to the point, man!”

“ORON infiltrate us with their androids...and now they surround us...possibly watching us...reporting back to ORON and its boards.” Morita’s smirk morphed into a wide grin. “What if we in turn, created clones that were infiltrated into the highest ranks of the ORON Conglomerate?”

“How does that happen?”

“Sexual slaves,” Morita popped back a little too eagerly.

“What?”

“Think about it...would not most of the ORON elite jump at the chance to have a living, breathing sexual companion that could be completely subservient to them? We could engineer them to be whatever the fools wanted...male, female...something in between.”

“And we program them to do what...assassinate the ORON masters on our command?”

“We could do just that,” Morita replied.

“They master tech...we master genetics I suppose,” Jim had told him, speaking as much to his partner as to himself. “But can you manufacture a significant force of these clones to do any good and how do we do this in secret?”

“That’s the beauty of it...we don’t. We openly admit we are constructing...let’s call them, ‘Companions’ ...for lack of a better

name...and we allow ORON members to even come here to Darwin for direction of creation...we appear completely transparent. But we can use our operations to cover construction of the army."

"That's almost brilliant, Taku."

"It is very brilliant...and I just came up with that!"

"Okay...fine...create me a beautiful woman...something sly and irresistible...and we'll go to the Board with it...with her...whatever."

That conversation had been nearly a year ago and the Board had fell all over itself when they saw the pixie that Morita had waltzed into the meeting room. Playing off of Japanese oriented sexual preferences, he'd launched his plea with a girl, who looked no older than fourteen...Asian in all characteristics save her wide and glowing blue eyes. She'd followed him in and then undressed and then crawled down the board table sensually. The vote for authorization took less than a minute.

The clone was named Miho, which Jim thought funny, but he never had the heart to tell Morita why. The girl could pass for human...hell, she *was* human. Rather than being a clone of another person, she was, in fact...a totally genetically designed human being from the ground up...and she would never age and never have the desire to do anything other than what she was instructed to do. She was educated only enough to serve her purposes.

The only stipulation the Board placed on the project was that no one outside the upper echelon was to know these beings were artificially created to be subservient. Essentially, it wouldn't do for the low-enders to find out the elite were manufacturing sex slaves for themselves. Morita and Jim had agreed.

But now, Morita had approached him...less than a few hours earlier, with a serious problem.

Apparently training a Companion wasn't a problem. They could be taught anything, but implementation of that knowledge sometimes required physical conditioning. In a nutshell, you could

teach a genetically engineered soldier all he needed to know to rappel down a rope and slit a throat...but having him actually perform the feat, become something altogether different. A photographic memory only served as a method of teaching, but as Jim was all too well aware...history was written by those that did things...not knew about them. A brilliant soldier was of no use if he didn't possess the physical ability to utilize his knowledge.

"Well can't we program them to do that?"

Morita had frowned slightly as he paced in front of the massive view port that lined the entire wall of Jim's office. The setting sun and clouds was beautiful. He sighed and finally turned to face Jim.

"We reverse engineer genetic components, Jim. We find someone with the traits we want...we dissect their helix and then replicate it in the laboratory. But the ability to see something and then magically perform the feat afterwards without training or practice...well it's just unknown."

"So how long to physically train our force?"

"Two years...maybe a little less."

"A protracted campaign will require replacement troops, Taku, and it takes only weeks for ORON to set a new android on the table, even less than that for a drone. We'd lose if the war lasts long."

"I know," Morita admitted with another sigh. "I could probably figure out a genetic program...but it could take me decades to get it right...and then...well there's the possibility the skill doesn't exist at all...hence why we've never come across it."

"We've invested too much in this...we've got orders from ORON executives already for companions...and I'm not giving them slaves without the ability to rain fire down on them later. It's unethical."

"I've begun a search for survivors with natural photographic memory...and I'll start testing them all as soon as possible."

"If it exists...you find it Morita...find it or engineer it."

Now, standing alone in his office, he stared out the artificial windows at the darkness beyond. The moonlight glinted off the waves crashing up against the facility and he imagined that he could hear the sound they made. But to dare step outside the security of the compound was a luxury he couldn't afford...and feeling the spray of water on his face wasn't worth the chance of death even on a good day. No, no...he had far too many things left to do in life to chance everything on momentary whims of fancy.

CHICAGO SECTOR

Near the Division Four Ration Distribution Center

Anita Tanner walked briskly down the street, her son Kendal in tow, both carrying boxes of high protein rations. There was serious reason to rush. Rations, despite not being of the greatest taste, generally held a high value on the underground market. Robbery was a very real risk any time that she went to collect them. The presence of the android security swarm only went so far in regards to making her feel secure. Once they were outside the distribution center's perimeter, they'd be on their own. Guns were illegal inside the Sector boundaries, but they got in from time to time and nobody could enforce a prohibition on knives. Would-be robbers had been known to even threaten people with clubs and sticks. Not having a gun didn't mean you couldn't kill somebody.

Only a week earlier, she'd had a friend that was found strangled in a back alley not three hundred feet from an android security station...one that had an actual human supervisor. Nowhere inside the Sector was really safe if you were a low-end.

"Mom...slow down," Kendal groaned from behind her.

"Fuck that...you move faster," she hissed back at him as she made to double her own pace. They were nearly to the entrance to the transit station. Once there, at least they'd be on cameras. While that in no way meant they'd be safe, it at least meant a security force would be monitoring and would hopefully respond in time to prevent their murders...or worse.

Or worse...

As bad as life was inside the Sector walls, it was far, far worse on the outside. Beyond the concrete barricades and mine fields, were the literal dregs of what was once called America. Not everyone had been killed by the plague...and not everyone had

bowed down to the hand of the Kojima Corporation. Outside the perimeter of the city lay bands of loosely organized gangs. Most concerned themselves with only two things...food and fuck. If you didn't provide one of the two, you had no purpose in life. She'd been only about eleven or maybe twelve, when she found that out the hard way.

It had been just about the time that Kojima first arrived in Chicago...what would become a sprawling walled city, was then just an armed camp outside the old city. She, like many other survivors, had wandered in to see what was going on...to get vaccinated for the plague. Hopes abounded in those days...hopes that mankind would regroup and rebuild. But what grew up in the ashes of the old world was nothing so similar to what had been before. And the Kojima people acted as if they were all more or less, just cattle to be herded. Only the fact that her belly was round with a baby rather than from malnutrition, had saved her life. It was ironic that the fact she'd been raped...had ended up saving her.

She'd been about ten days outside of Chicago when she and another woman she was traveling with...*what was her name?* *Regina...Regina Smith.* She was an older woman...maybe late thirties...lost her entire family, just like she had. They'd met on the road to Chicago just a few days before, and figured it was safer together than by their selves. It hadn't mattered much when they ran up on the gang. She didn't really have a better name for them than that. They were just a gang of survivors...mostly male, but one or two women...some even children...probably fifteen or so in total. They claimed the highway was their territory and that she and Regina had to pay a toll to pass if they wanted to get to Chicago. Food or fuck, they didn't mix words about it. She didn't have any food and neither did Regina...that was why they were heading to Chicago...to eat...to find salvation from certain death in the wastelands. There was no android security in those days. No one

to protect them from the gang...and when they could offer no food, Regina courageously volunteered herself to them in exchange for both their passage.

The gang boss had other rules. Every person accounted for themselves, no exceptions...and apparently a middle-aged pussy wasn't worth the same as her own.

Regina jumped one and yelled for her to run, but the distraction attempt wasn't anything new and it took none of the aggressors by surprise. The man she jumped merely knifed her in the ribs and slung her to the ground as the mass crowd fell in on her and crushed her beneath them to the filthy asphalt upon which she'd stood moments before.

Hands ripping and clawing at her...the stink of filth...human sweat and excrement...all adrift in the very air she gasped at as they pulled her clothes off with violent force. The men fought with each other for the first chance to penetrate her...one after the other, ramming their dicks into her...most not even lasting more than a few strokes before they ejaculated inside of her. After a while, the crowd pulled back some and she managed to look up from her position on the ground...up at their faces. The women were laughing and pointing at her...one even leaned forward and spit on her face then started to slap the man who was currently inside her. He was apparently her pick...her mate, and it pissed her off that he was fucking her right in front of everyone. He back-handed her and continued on till he was finished, then climbed up off of her and grabbed the haggard woman by the hair of the head and dragged her off into the darkness while another man took his place between her legs.

Over and over, one after the other, they fucked her, viciously and without concern for her well-being. And finally, when they were done, the men holding her let go and all of them just faded off into the darkness...leaving a gaggle of children behind, most of

whom were boys...just boys...maybe four or five of them and one girl who looked like she was older than her...fourteen or fifteen maybe. She was blonde and rough looking...not pretty at all but something about her made her afraid of the other girl.

"You gonna let them have all the fun, you little bitches?" the girl called out to the boys who stood around Anita. "You men or punks, huh? Who's next...which one of you's got the cock to tear it up?"

One of the older looking of the boys stepped forward and dropped his pants and knelt between her legs...but by that point she couldn't feel anything below the waist anyway...nor did she much care at that point.

"C'mon you pussies...get up here and show her who owns this fucking road, you bitches!" the girl shouted at them. In turn, each of the boys began to pull their dicks out and step forward as if to get in line behind the one who was fucking her already. "Fuck that, you bunch ain't gonna hit the sides in her now...get up here and jerk off on her...paint her little bitch ass with your shit!"

At her direction, the boys formed a ring around her and began to jerk off on her until a rain of semen began to pelt her as she lay helpless on the ground at their feet. That's when she'd began to cry...and it set the gang girl off. So angry was she, that she hauled off and kicked her in the side of the head so hard that she lost consciousness.

She could still feel the impact of that bitch's boot some thirteen years later...and she still had a scar on the right side of her head, just above her ear to remind of the rape and then humiliation.

Five years later, at the age of seventeen, she'd seen that same girl again...picking up rations at a distribution station. They were roughly the same size now, but the gang bitch had fattened up from the high protein rations. Apparently she'd been eating well...better than most survivors at that time. She'd followed the bitch back to her apartment...seen where she lived. A week later, she'd caught

the cunt alone in the alley outside the building and she'd slit her throat for her. As the fat fuck gagged on her own blood, she'd rolled her over so she could see her face.

"You remember me bitch?" The expression on the cunt's face had spoken volumes without a word being uttered. "Yeah, you remember me don't you...well that's good. 'Cause I want you to know who just cut your ass and why." She leaned over and spit in the bitch's face and walked away and never looked back.

It hadn't been the first fucker she'd ever killed...and in time, it hadn't been the last. She'd lost track, quite honestly, on how many assholes she'd sliced over the years. More, it seemed, inside the walls than on the outside. And again she wondered just how safe it really was inside the Sector. At least inside her kids could go to school and would always have something to eat. Outside, you knew nothing except that death stalked you.

"Fat cunt," she more mouthed than said as she stepped around a fat woman that was blocking her path heading toward the transit station. Glancing back, she eyed Kendal to make sure he was still behind her...still keeping up. He was.

Everywhere she looked, the crowd was fat and nasty. Damned protein rations were high calorie, high yield meals. They tasted like ass, but they'd keep you alive. Kojima had millions of acres of farmland being tended by androids and labor supervisors...more food than the entire survivor population required, but they wouldn't share it with the low-enders.

"Get a job and eat real food!" the posters had proclaimed. But she only had an elementary education...could read okay, but anything too advanced was lost on her. She couldn't get or keep a job for shit. Kojima used fucking androids for anything laborious. And unless you were Japanese or happened to have had a college degree before the plague, you weren't worth spit to Kojima.

So there was this massive segment of the population, like her, that had no jobs and thus received no entitlement from Kojima. Food was a currency for Kojima employees. If you had no job, you got the shitty ass ration meals to keep you alive...or you were welcome to check out of the Sector and try to survive on the outside. Not much of a real option. So most of the low-enders remained firmly inside the walls, munching down on their less-than-delicious protein packs...their asses getting bigger by the day.

She wondered if it wasn't all part of Kojima's plan to get rid of the undesirables like herself. Conspiracy theories abounded. Most believed Kojima wanted the low-enders to simply die off...some believed they were poisoning the rations...some so firmly that they did leave the Sector. But if they'd been poisoning the rations, they'd all have been dead a lot sooner than now...and fattening them up on purpose was just ludicrous, wasn't it? The fact was that you were only supposed to eat one a day...but most people ate more than that...plain and simple. Too many calories...and your ass started to spread.

The disgusting part wasn't that all the low-enders were getting obese...the nasty factor in the matter was that it was growing into a form of civil disobedience. Low-enders were starting to consider their obesity a sign of solidarity. And upper the upper crust bitches who worked for the corporation...well they were all mostly slim and trim, perfect models of human health...due completely to genetic manipulation and decent food, she was sure, but the low-enders all hated them for it. When one would speed by on the street in an armored car or buzz by overhead, it was not unusual to see people pulling their shirts up and jiggling their bodies in protest. And lately it had even become acceptable to just let your lard hang out in the open all the time. Men and women both were starting to roam around topless. At first, the women had worn bras and bikinis, but as time passed and the upper echelon bitches didn't seem to care,

the protesting nudity grew more and more bold. Now, it was common place to see fully topless women in public, their fattened torsos bared for all to gaze upon. Had her mother lived to see such displays, she'd have dropped dead of a coronary. As a child she wasn't even allowed to wear shorts that rose higher than her knees in public. And now these fat cunts let their saggy tits hang out like it was nothing. And oddly, after a while, it seemed that no one really even noticed...especially not the upper echelon...and certainly not the masters of Kojima. What began as a protest had simply devolved into a form of socially accepted fashion...or lack thereof.

She and Kendal finally made it inside the station and drew close to the waiting train car. Their ride would last at least fifteen minutes as they crossed the width of Division Four of the Chicago Sector. They lived in a shabby excuse for an apartment on the twentieth floor of a building that had once been a hospital. The room had been barely large enough to support her and her two children...but she didn't complain, for at least it had a private bathroom and shower. Not all Kojima provided living quarters were so well equipped. And the really nice apartments and penthouses across the city had been turned into living quarters for the Kojima employees...or remained completely vacant with all utilities cut off to them. Again, the corporation used better housing and standard of living as a motivating factor to force people to work for them. But with a lack of jobs, it just seemed stupid to bar people from the buildings.

And the androids...those fucking androids. She turned her head and glared down the length of the train at the one standing guard duty. Everyone hated them. They were stupid...they were inept...they weren't worth the sum of their components if your stripped them down for parts. Yet they stole your job and did it for free. She wondered if any of her fellow passengers were thinking about attacking the damn thing. It wasn't beyond the realm of possibility.

More than one transit guard had been found ransacked and spray-painted with graffiti. A few had been found with bullet holes in them from time to time. Cameras aboard the cars had put a stop to most of that, but androids still got vandalized all the time.

She remembered how Narma had hated androids. The Japanese man had been a construction contractor for Kojima, sent out to help direct construction of the Chicago Sector thirteen years ago. He'd seen her standing in line for food at the camp perimeter and noticed she was pregnant. He'd literally shoved an android security guard out of his way to reach her. She been barely twelve and only six months out from her gang rape on the highway.

"What's your name, child?" he'd asked her, but she'd not answered him. She was afraid of him. The Kojima people had given them food every other day, but they were rude and seemed bothered by their constant and growing presence as they tried to construct the walls around the inlets of the city. "Are you pregnant ...with child?" he asked, motioning to her distended belly sticking through the front of her tattered blouse. She began to cry and he pulled her to him, then pressed his way through the crowd of refugees and brutishly pushed back into the secured section and past the bevy of curious androids.

"Refugees are not permitted within the secured encampment's perimeter, Mister Yoshito," one of the robotic fucks had droned without intonation.

"I don't see any refugees, robot," he'd replied.

"The refugee is next to you, sir," it said without hesitation and directed its taser pistol at her. "I must contact security command."

"Contact my left nut," he replied and reached forward and snagged the taser gun from the android...then turned it on it and zapped its front facial plate. It staggered and dropped to the ground.

The remaining androids all turned to look down at their fallen comrade as if perplexed as to what happened to him.

“This unit has malfunctioned,” Narma snapped. “Report with him to the repair station immediately.

The gaggle of androids gathered up their fallen ally and trotted off with him leaving Narma to continue into the encampment with her.

“Stupid bots...their operating protocols are given precise levels of importance...maintenance is higher than restrictions governing employee communication,” he rambled to himself as much as to her as he led her further inside the secure zone. “Damage one and they’ll shut the fuck up and leave you alone.”

Narma had known people inside the Kojima management who owed him favors. He had them provide her with an ID and permission to remain inside the camp. He’d taken her in and let her live with him...and had even helped her care for Kristy when she was finally born some months later...treating both of them as daughters.

When Kristy was about a year and half old though...and she was nearly fourteen, she’d decided to show Narma her gratitude in a most unexpected way. She’d climbed atop him one night and though he’d resisted, he eventually gave in and took her. It was never something he asked for or even hinted at. She suspected he was just lonely and missed his own family and children back in Japan. She knew he was married. She knew they’d never have anything on paper between them, but he’d given her a life and security...extended his hand to her when no one else had cared if she and her daughter lived or died. When others raped her and spit on her...Narma Yoshito had gone out of his way to protect her. Like Regina, he’d risked himself to provide a way out for her. The problem was that she had nothing to give him in return...save that which lay between her legs. So in the end, she gave it to him

without question, without prompting and without hesitation. And in the end, she felt that he knew that...knew why she did it, and he didn't want to act as if such a gift was not appreciated nor worthy of him. He took her that night as much out of honor as out of lust. No man held as much in her mind or heart as Narma Yoshito. He was beyond reproach as a human being...and the proudest moment in her life was when she delivered his son, Kendal.

When Narma had been killed by outlanders a year or so later, she'd been devastated. By then the Sector was complete and operational and the Narma's friends who'd protected her, revoked her status, and she'd been cast back into the refugee pool and forced to take up residence with two small children in the slums of Chicago Sector.

As she sat down in the train seat, she glanced over at Kendal and smiled. He was very similar in appearance to Narma and held a strong likeness to the man in personality and honor. When she looked at him, she saw Narma staring back at her. Sometimes he reminded her of him so much that she almost felt the urge to take comfort with him...to do things his mother shouldn't do. It was twisted she knew, but it was what it was and she couldn't stop herself from thinking about it...at least every now and again.

The opposite could be said for her daughter, Kristy. Try as she might, every time she looked at the girl, all she could see was the gang of rapists who'd had their way with her on the scratchy asphalt in the dark of the night. The girl's face so very similar to the last to mount her...the young boy who'd climbed between her legs at the behest of the cunt she'd killed...some bitch she didn't even know the name of. She didn't hate her daughter, but she would never feel the bond with her that she shared with Kendal. Kendal was her entire world...her entire reason for being most days...despite the fact that Kristy exceeded him in every way. She was a fucking genius of some bizarre level...so smart the school had simply sent

her home one day and said they could offer nothing else to her and that she was a waste of personnel and material. The prompted her to make application to one of the many schools in Japan that offered secondary education. Her daughter had a photographic memory and could even speed-read. She was too smart to need school and yet too young to get a job with the corporation...and the odds of a low-ender getting a spot in a Japanese university half a world away was next to ridiculously improbable. So in a nutshell her brilliant daughter was wasting away at home, sitting in their apartment, getting fat and staring at the walls.

Getting fat...

Her own ass was nothing to joke about. She carried most of her own weight in her belly though, and with enough effort, she could suck it in most of the time...and strap it down with tight pants and belts the rest of the time. But sitting like she was right now, her gut strained against the confines of her pants and belt...making the ride home uncomfortable as hell.

Looking up from her box of rations, she glared across the aisle at the teenage girl that was seated across from them. With every buck and shake the train made, the girls bare breasts jostled and jiggled atop her huge belly. Had her navel not been deep and her belly soft, she might have been mistaken for being pregnant.

Anita sighed and realized her gut would probably end up being that big at some point and stuffing it into her pants wasn't going to be an option any more.

It was about that moment that she noticed her son, sitting beside her, was also staring at the girl...but not with an expression of disgust. She glanced down and realized his pants were a little more protruding in the crotch area than normal.

Anita rolled her eyes in disapproval and then returned her own gaze to the box of rations she held on her lap...but the idea that the fat girl had produced arousal in Kendal wouldn't seem to leave her

alone...and it continued to nag at her until she found herself looking up and over at the girl again...with not a feeling of disgust...but a feeling of jealousy.

CHICAGO SECTOR

Apartment 459 – Division Four – Building 59

Kristy sat staring at the display screen for her apartment's data-net connection. The keyboard was so worn out, she couldn't even read the letters printed on the keyboard any more...so looking down at it was just about useless...not that she needed to. She'd been able to type since she was three. Narma had taught her just before he got killed. She'd watched him type out an email to his supervisor and been able to type herself immediately thereafter. Mind you she couldn't read yet, so all she could do was repeat his keystrokes. He'd figured out something was up when his boss received twenty five copies of his email typed precisely identical to his original. Narma had been awed with her abilities and immediately set out to teaching her to read and write. It took precisely two months for her to become literate. He'd been killed by outlanders soon after though and her mother could have cared less about her early education or abilities after that. Her mother had never really cared much for her at all, she felt...and after Narma died, her mother seemed to focus on her little brother, Kendal. Despite him being a little dipshit most of the time, he could do no wrong in their mother's eyes. She knew it was because he was Narma's child with her mother. The woman went into mental meltdown when she learned of his death and she suspected, had it not been for Kendal, he mother would have probably killed herself to escape the grief.

Her mother's history with Narma was well known to both her and her brother and to anyone who would listen. To her mother, the man had been nothing less than a Saint...and to her own knowledge of the man, he was without doubt, an outstanding and charismatic person...one who not only inspired trust, but stood up

to the test of it. She'd always felt like he was her father even though she knew he wasn't. He had been a good man and a great teacher to her...and in his death, she missed him as much as any child could miss their parent. He had been the closest thing to a father she had ever had. But the rift between herself and her mother had done nothing but grow since his loss. And now that she couldn't even go to school anymore, and was forced to stay home all the time, the unspoken hostility between them was growing closer and closer to a head.

She hit the enter key and zipped off her most recent college application. Surely there had to be a school in Japan somewhere that would take in an American genius. She was no fool though, she knew the Japanese state had grown xenophobic and damn near racist of the last decade since the plague and that they were notoriously resistant to having outsiders in their universities, genius or not. It seemed the only way to advance yourself if you weren't Japanese, was to work your way up through the ranks of Kojima Corporation...or apply to the ORON industries as an apprentice. If you wanted out of the slums, one way or the other, you were going to work for the Conglomerate. And she had no beef with that policy, but the fact was that most wouldn't hire you until you were eighteen...and that was a good five years away for her...and in that coming five years, she saw herself diminishing into something highly undesirable.

She'd already starting pudging out just in the few short weeks since she'd been booted from the school. Standing up from the console desk, she walked toward the bathroom and looked at herself in the mirror that was pinned to the outside of the door.

Tugging the front of her baggy sleep pants down, she plopped her potbelly into view and shook it violently. Even after her hands stopped moving, her belly continued to quiver. Yep, no doubt about it, she was getting fatter than bacon. She turned and gazed

over at the table and the remains of a ration bar that lay there, half eaten. It called out to her mentally, begging to be eaten.

“You know...the problem is that those things are pure calories and sugars packed into concentrated form...no waste product at all. You eat it, but you’re still hungry, even though you’ve already had all the nutrients your body needs.” She said it out loud just to hear her own voice. “If they’d just give us a little junk mixed in with it, we’d probably never gain any weight...and the rations would go a lot further.”

She turned back to face the mirror again and glared in stock horror at her naked torso. Her gut was huge. She’d been in denial for a long time now. She’d been getting fat even before they kicked her out of school. Now it was just getting worse. She cupped her stomach with both hands from either side and squeezed in on it, then released it.

“Fuck, I’m fat,” she groaned. “Why does it all go to my belly?” she muttered to the mirror as her hands rose to cup her budding breasts. “If I just had half of it up here,” she added while attempting to make her boobs jiggle.

Just then she heard a noise from out in the hall and realized it was almost time for her mother to get back.

“Crap...gotta put on a shirt,” she blurted out loud as she turned and headed for her bed to obtain the one she’d pulled off as soon as her mother and brother had left a few hours earlier. Why her mother was such a stickler for clothing, she’d never figured out. Maybe it related back to her rape by the outlanders. When she told the story, which she did a lot, she’d always comment specifically about the crowd ripping her clothes off.

As she pulled the shirt down, she realized it didn’t quite hang low enough to cover her belly and a half moon of flesh lay exposed beneath the bottom of it. She poked at her flab with a single finger and grunted.

“Or maybe she just don’t like looking at your flabby belly hanging out,” she admitted out loud.

Not that she had much room to talk. Her mother had remained relatively thin over the years, but she had a definite pot-gut herself. She kept it under wraps though, wearing the tightest, highest waist clothing she could manage to get her hands on. And with a literal city full of clothing discards from dead people, there was never a shortage of fashion available...so it wasn’t like she could find bigger clothing that fit more comfortably. Her mother just liked the tight crap because it sucked her flab in...something most low-enders would think to be uppity. *Fat and Proud!* the graffiti along most alleyways declared. It was a social point of pride for low-enders. They considered the fact that they were fat, was what set them apart from the upper echelon of the corporations. And it was, to a great extent, but mostly it was the fact that they were uneducated and unmotivated, that left them to the slums.

And I’m gonna be stuck here myself if I don’t do something soon, she realized as she stared out the one window they had, down at the street where throngs of fatties waddled by on the street...one of them no doubt, her mother.

She’s a fatty too...just in worst denial than even she was. At least she didn’t put on airs about it...try to hide her gut. In fact, when she went out of the apartment alone...she often removed her shirt entirely, just to fit in with the crowds down on the streets. Hell, she could remember a few years back, when she wasn’t so big yet...actually pooking her belly out intentionally so she’d fit in. She had a serious issue with that...wanting to fit in, that is. At least she recognized it and realized it was a serious character flaw. But somehow it was just easier...simpler to fit in than to buck the system...to run against the tide. She possessed the skills and ability to fight the forces that guided their society, but she honestly just lacked the willpower to push herself. Why bother? There was no

motivation to change anything...not if she could get by working from within what system already existed. And she knew if she could ever get a position within Kojima or ORON...somewhere within the conglomerate...that she would excel and eventually find herself in one of the armored cars that whizzed by on the streets or maybe even in one of the aerial transports that flew by over-head all the time. If she could get the chance...just one opportunity, she'd make a success of herself within the system.

Just then, she heard someone rapping on the front door. Had her mother forgotten her pass code again? It wouldn't be the first time the woman had traded rations for liquor and staggered home drunk.

She walked over to the door and unlocked it. Swinging it open, she snidely initiated her tirade against her mother's stupidity...only to have it cut short by the fact it wasn't her mother standing in the hallway.

"Forget your passcode aga---," she began but stopped short and instantly as she gazed at the well dressed woman standing in the open doorway. The woman's tits were all that she could focus on, well that and the fact that she was obviously Japanese.

"I assume you weren't expecting me," the woman said in perfect English. She was tall and her face was perfect...no makeup, save some eye-shadow...and it was framed by a swath of hair black as night. Her eyes were colored though and it gave her a distinctly artificial appearance, like the sex-bots ORON sold through the underground markets. Gather enough valuable merchandise and you could trade it in for a mechanical sex toy of your very own. Labor contracts sometimes even offered credit...whereby you could work for a long period and finance your bio-droid. This woman wreaked of such an appearance...mechanical...yet soft and fleshy. She was harshly artificial to the point of making her nervous.

“May I come in?” she asked and then stepped inside anyway without waiting for the prompted invitation.

She wore some sort of business dress, complete with skirt and jacket...but the blouse she wore beneath the jacket was some sort bizarre garment that appeared stiff, as if had wired support within it...and rather than conceal her immense breasts, it seemed more to heft them up and present them to whomever chose to look. As she stepped inside, her ridiculous rack of tits jostled and jiggled, looking for the world, like they might pop up and completely out of the tube top thing that barely concealed the tips of them.

Glancing around the room, she smirked and commented, “So this is where you live with your mother and brother, is it?”

“Who the fuck are you?!” Kristy blurted and turned her head to look back out into the hallway. It was odd for an elite to be waltzing around the ghetto without at least some armed security. When she saw no one else out in the hall, she realized perhaps this woman didn’t *need* security. Maybe she wasn’t corporate at all...maybe she was a mobster...one of the black market dealers from the underground.

“My name is Manami Kichida,” the woman said with a slightly arrogant tone. “I work for ORON Biotech,” she added with a smirk. “And I would like to offer you a deal, my dear.”

“What kind of a deal?” Kristy inquired as she closed the door to keep anyone passing outside from seeing in. Being seen talking to someone who looked corporate was not likely to win her any friends.

The woman waited for her to close the door completely and then she tapped her watch and a high pitch whining began to emanate from it for several seconds. When the sound stopped, the woman smiled and lowered her arm.

“That will have fried any listening device within a hundred feet of us. Now we can talk without any problems.” She stepped over

to the bar and took a seat atop the barstool. After situating herself, which of course caused her tits to jiggle wildly, she looked up at Kristy again and continued. "You're a smart girl...very smart. I know all about your skills and memory. And, I know that you're wasting your talents remaining here in this hole."

"But you're not Japanese...and you're far from eighteen. You've got no chance of making anything of yourself if you remain here and do nothing." She smiled again and rubbed at her skirt tail to smooth out a wrinkle. "I'd like to offer you the chance to get out of here and to gain a spot in a Japanese university with promise of a job after you graduate."

"Work with ORON?" she asked.

"In a few days, some people will come here...to see you...to see your mother...and they're going to make her an offer...an offer that will benefit *her*, and not so much you." Her previous smile faded into something more stern and stiff-lipped. "I want you to go along with it...do whatever it is they ask you to do."

"Why?"

"You will eventually meet a man named Taku Morita...I'm sure you know of him...the man who aided Professor Rubacher in perfecting a treatment for the K5 virus."

"Okay..." she nodded with wide eyes, expecting there was more to this mission still yet to be told.

"When you see him, you will kill him. It's very simple."

"Are you crazy? Professor Morita?!?"

The woman smiled creepily once more before she responded.

"He is a brilliant man, but he has no sense of order, no sense of direction beyond science. He cannot lead, but he stands between one who can and the chair of authority. In the coming days, some very important things will happen and we need the Professor removed from the equation, do you understand?"

"I'll be shot on the spot!"

“No, you won’t...no one will even know you have done it. We’ll equip you with a special weapon which no one will know you have, and no one will realize you’ve even used. After contact with him, the man will simply have a heart-attack some hours later and die.”

“And then what?”

“That is beyond your need to know. You will however, be taken care of after the deed is done. We will have agents in place within Darwin Harbor that will get you out...and after that you’ll be given a new identity and genetic treatments to make you look Japanese. Your life will be perfect after that.”

“Okay...so all I have to do to get a perfect life is kill an innocent man who helped save humanity...wow...what a deal.” Her attitude was apparent and unabashed.

“You can rot here if you like,” the woman said as she stood up and headed for the door. “But this offer will not be made twice. And the others will come for you...Kojima will take you to Darwin Harbor and you will become a test project for them, so make no mistake...this will end badly for you if *you don’t* accept my offer.”

“Alright...say I do this...how will this work? I want details!”

“No details...operational security. If you agree to the offer, someone will contact you once you reach Darwin with further instructions. So do you accept or not?”

Kristy stood stark still and glared at the woman. Her pupils did not dilate at all when her face turned. It was at that moment, she realized she wasn’t talking to an actual human being, but a mechanical and biological construct. Rumors had abounded that ORON had started building androids so realistic that you couldn’t tell them apart from real people...and obviously, the rumors were true. She decided to let her new employers know she wasn’t an idiot up front.

"I'll accept your offer...but tell me something...are all the models designed like this one or do you vary the sizes, shapes and ethnicity?"

"Pardon?" the thing blurted and its head cocked to one side, mocking human disbelief.

"You're not a sentient android at all are you...you're a drone I'm guessing...a real person is probably hooked into your controls, you mimic their movements, their physical responses...far more effective and convincing than an android sorting through algorithms and pre-programmed processes to determine the best response and action. Am I right?" she asked with a smile of her own.

The thing stared a second and narrowed its eyelids as if it were studying her.

"Don't over-think things...and don't step over your boundaries again, Kristy Tanner. Do your job and don't ask questions unless it pertains to your assignment."

The woman opened the door and slammed it shut behind her or it, however you wanted to look at it.

As she stood there contemplating what she'd just done, she wondered if it was the right thing to do or not. She knew tension had been at an all-time high between the two opposing forces of the Conglomerate. ORON and Kojima had vied for control of everything since the fall of the Japanese democracy in 2022 and in the process had sought to undermine each other at every possible turn. Kojima was the defacto head of their governing system but the title was in name alone. Without the muscle of ORON, Kojima could govern nothing...and as long as Ren Kojima, Jim Rubacher and Taku Morita lived...they could never hope to envelope Kojima. But Ren had been dead a long time...and now they were instigating a move against Morita, though he was only a figurehead. Rubacher was the man in charge. So was a threat to him imminent? If she

was taking Morita out of the picture, then someone else must have already set their literal sights on Rubacher.

Would a move by ORON incite a civil war...or would the remains of Kojima's management simply kneel down to ORON and allow the world to be unified under the Japanese?

Her world was shit, that was a known certainty, but how much worse would it be if ORON controlled everything? At least Kojima had American people working within it. Kojima had not become a racist regime...not entirely. But ORON was fully racist. But if she appeared Japanese, what did it matter to her?

The question was whether she would be worth anything to ORON after she killed Morita...or would they kill her afterwards to keep her quiet? Chances were that they would simply murder her to hide their trail.

But if she could get close to Morita...tell him what was going on, then maybe...just maybe, Kojima would protect her. Certainly they would have no reason to kill her. And if she was inside Dark Harbor, then she would be safe. If they needed a twelve year old assassin just to breach security, chances were no one would be able to get to her, especially after she alerted Morita of the internal threat. And were they even aware of the realistic androids yet? Had anyone been "replaced" by one? Could they be? How many people on the street could be drones like the elusive Manami Kichida? All spying on them...waiting for the moment to strike?

She would play their game...pretend...but when the time came, she would save Morita, not kill him. She wasn't ignorant. They assumed because she was still a child that she was incapable of deep analysis, but she was not. Underestimating her would be their biggest mistake.

One way or the other, she was going to get out of the ghetto and find a way to make a decent life for herself...but she wasn't going to get herself killed in the process. She already had a handle

on what was going on but she also knew the truth was never what it appeared to be. Whoever Manami was...or whatever it was...was most certainly not what she should assume...so the fact that she claimed to be working for ORON, was probably a sure bet to be a lie. There was no way she'd just up and admit such a fact. No, there was more going on here than she could probably imagine.

This chapter is a written introduction to the world of DARK HARBOR, a new 3D comic from Crazyxxx3dworld.com coming in October 2012!

Subsequent chapters will be based on other characters within the Dark Harbor universe. The story of Kristy will continue in the actual 3D comic.