

Winds from the East

TOKYO

When the world ends, the last thing left alive in the radioactive wasteland will be cockroaches and airport security guards. Sometimes I feel I've seen every face. You can always spot them, whether male or female, black or white, Christian or Buddhist. It's the dead eyes, I think. The knowledge of possessing a job that is utterly useless, of being a drone in a hive of grey meaningless bureaucracy.

I suppose that Narita is not the world's worst airport, and the poor Japanese guard I was staring at probably wouldn't appreciate hearing all that, but airports were starting to get boring. Endless concourses filled with duty-free stores selling identical products, as if all people flying suddenly decide they need overpriced perfume. I could see my quarry having his ID checked now. I knew for a fact it was fake but considering how deep Mitsubishi was embedded in what was left of the Japanese government, it probably checked out. He wasn't much to look at, given that he wasn't much more than a yakuza street kid, practically raised to serve the corporation. Slicked back hair, weathered face, too-eager smile, and an arm sleeve covering a tattoo- he was about as generic as you could get. Maybe that's why he was sent. To make it obvious who was doing the sending. Handed a passport, a gun and a pocket filled with cash, kids like him were a statement. My ID situation was a little more difficult, seeing as how its data had been hacked out of a Yugoslav government server eighteen months ago, but there had been three rounds of coups there in the last couple years, and Volkswagen-Siemens was running the show now. I doubted there was anyone left who cared who was a citizen and who wasn't. All that mattered now was whether you were an employee or not. Chances were, fake or not, this passport would only be good for a little longer, before the German conglomerate stopped pretending that they didn't own the remains of the Balkans.

I looked at the gangster I was tailing again, wondering whether I could really mock him, considering what I was doing, who I had become. I was the product of the transition to the information age, the litter left-over from when the new age of techno-capitalism smashed headfirst into the collapse of nations. Robbed of the state education my parents would have been guaranteed, I fell into the cult of the computer, where I gained the casual disdain for the body, the physical flesh. From there, life was fueled by an increasing realization that I had been born into a poisoned world. Every day, environmental collapse killed a few more million, and there no longer existed a force to oppose it. Like many radicals before me, I had found my source of angry outrage, but unlike the terrorists of centuries passed, this time there wasn't a hope of winning. But that wasn't why I fought. I fought to show there was still a fight, that people were still people, not cells in a database. I smiled. The thing about a last stand was that it instilled a suicidal joy in those on the losing side. They know that they'll never have to bury the bodies afterward.

I had to focus. My target would board the Japan Airlines hypersonic to Paris. In Paris he would pick up a diskette from the corporate office there, and then fly to Kyiv, where he would hand it over to a representative from Raytheon/General Electric. Mitsubishi had a problem at the time. The small issue of street protests, factory bombings and assassinations of corporate leadership. These problems were currently most prominent in Warsaw, where anarchist groups and police had been clashing continuously for days. Something had to be done. And why take the blame when the Americans were so willing to do it for them? After all, once RGE's Enforcers were through with the city, no one would dare question the

new world order. And all it would take is money, or something shiny. In this case, Mitsubishi's latest hit product: the Neotek corporate AI core. For managing your conglomerate, accept no substitutes. Walking out onto the concourse, I found myself with 45 minutes to kill. I spent it pretending to browse the magazines while reading the latest posts on the anarchist 'net. The internet was a funny thing these days. Once viewed as the ultimate people's tool, it took only a few scant years for it to become wholly owned by corporate actors. People think that when it's easy to access all the world's information, then everyone will magically become cognizant of the world. These days, Microsoft, Apple and Yandex don't even bother banning dissent. No one sees it anyway, and the regulars get fewer and fewer each year. What's left is the hardcore few and the crazies. And those in between. I spent some time reading about fresh riots in Manila, the latest banned books in Beijing and a new doomsday cult in Texas. Some said we were days from the apocalypse, true biblical revelations, but Fukuyama told us that wasn't true, there were no more history books to write after all.

The hypersonic was a classic metaphor for the modern age. Designed by Kawasaki's secretive aeronautics team deep in the mountains of the Home Islands, it would make the crossing to Paris in just under five hours. It burned so much fuel, it would violate every environmental law ever written, if such things still mattered. Shaped like a silver dart, with beautiful swept, elfin wings, it built on the aeronautic legacy of the Concorde to fly paying passengers as fast as it has ever been possible. It featured no crew and was steered entirely by computers. Within two months of its design being sent to the main bureau to begin construction, the lab it was created in was hit by corporate soldiers from Airbus, who kidnapped most of the engineers, murdered all the guards, and blew up half the mountain for good measure. Airbus's rival to the hypersonic, the *Stratoforce*, was on the market within four months. Three had been destroyed by hired Kawasaki operatives already. The corporation clearly feared reprisals, as gun toting rent-a-cops filled the JAL terminal as I boarded. I sat down and lit up my first cigarette of the day out of a faded, beat-up packet of 7.27's. The cheap Korean blend was an odd contrast to the space age interior of the jet. Slick white plastic and smooth leather. As a recorded voice spoke softly over discrete speakers, my smoke swirled through the air, catching the glitter of laser beams.

I reflected on the irony of the first-class seat I occupied. I couldn't afford it, hell, I couldn't really afford an economy class seat. Yet here I sat, thanks to the virus program slotted in my laptop, neither of which I could strictly afford. The world used to run on two things: information and money. These days, the difference between those things was vanishing. And, if you were a member of the new technological priesthood, a lay brother of the order of techno-mystics, you could control the first. Which meant you could control the second. At least until they caught you. The seat more accurately belonged to a senior manager of a company that manufactured industrial glue, a partial subsidiary of the Sony group. He probably wasn't a bad man. But right now, he was angrily cussing out the poor woman at the gate, demanding his seat on the aircraft.

As the hypersonic took off over Chiba city, I laid back and pulled a thin cable out of my laptop case and jacked it into the discrete slot behind my ear. No reason I couldn't get some work done. The beautiful hallucination of cyberspace kidnapped my brain as I hit the activation stud. Description fails. Millions of points of light filled my mind, glowing darkly, pulsing the color of midnight. They formed patterns and antipatterns, great structures of ordered clarity, of ideas made manifest. Sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste merged into a single great river of sensation. I swam through the light, watching the reflections of their glow closely. I crossed down through the pathways etched in un-reality, searching for the darknet markets where my species of parasite worked. I needed two things in Paris. A gun, and a Soviet visa.

PARIS

I leaned out of the entrance of Depot 156, a low-end grocery chain on *Rue d'Aubervilliers*, watching my target push open the door to Mitsubishi's Paris HQ. My third cigarette smoldered at the edge of my mouth. Graffiti was visible on every imaginable surface except the building I was looking at. Each street corner in the area was occupied by an enthusiastic young person in an extremely bulky windbreaker, moving with the practiced grace of hired muscle. Every half hour, a convoy of SUV's would pull into the garage, Asian faces in the back seats. The comforting weight of the Glock 112 rested in the small of my back, tucked into the belt looped through my faded black jeans. It was a better find than I imagined I would be able to get. I'd picked it up from a locker at Charles de Gaulle airport, along with two magazines, 16 rounds of custom 8mm gleaming in the reinforced plastic of each. The high explosive rounds were probably overkill, but it's not like I had actually paid for them. Millimeter wave sensors stabbed out from the compound, but they swept over me without a second look. Guns were becoming depressingly common in Paris, and I didn't look like much of a target. Gaunt, pale, deeply unhealthy face, thin underfed body, tired expression. You could pick up a few bodies like mine on any street in la Defense. I finished the cigarette, then proceeded into town. I scanned a local street map, searching for the name of a café.

The person I met there was another type that could be bought all too cheaply these days. A hired gun, a veteran of some forgotten war who had decided they despised the modern system, but not despise it so much they weren't willing to profit off working for either side. This example was an annoyingly philosophical one, who hung around forums professing a desire to help the cause. They claimed to be ex-US Special Forces, but they were so coked out that I didn't believe they got past the Green Beret interviews.

"You come alone?" They asked.

"You see anyone else in this café asshole?" It was a fully automated one. No staff at all, just trays moving around on chains above us, sliding in and out of industrial looking coffee makers and cake dispensers. The rattling of the chains moving in and out of the automated machines was annoying, but enthusiasts claimed it was therapeutic. The metal fetishists just enjoyed the show. No one else really came to them anymore, they were considered sad even by Paris standards. It wasn't even clear who owned them anymore, they had computer systems which automatically ordered mechanics and cleaners from external companies to the point that they were self-sufficient. You stumbled upon them frequently while navigating the Paris financial net, banking servers accumulating money, with the occasional transfer out being only to pay rent or cleaning contracts. Occasionally one would get smashed, and it would either get fixed, if the computer survived or left to rust. In the nastier *arrondissements*, you could find a ruined one every other street.

I pitched the mission, going over times and places, but I could tell that they weren't interested. Too much precision, too much thinking and not enough emotion.

"Where's the style?" they interrupted. "Where's the old Errol Flynn?"

"I don't play like that."

"I do. I don't play any other way."

“This does matter, at least to me. It matters to others; it matters to the world.”

“No, it doesn’t.” They stopped me. I lit my second to last cigarette. Long slow drags as I watched them over the metal table.

“What about a blaze of glory?” I asked. It was their turn to pause, and watch, sipping their coffee.

“I’ve heard it said glory is just what they call it after they’ve cleaned up the bodies.” They finally said. “The days of glory-”

“Well, if not glory, then do it for honor.”

“Don’t interrupt” they stopped me, laying a submachine gun on the table. I became very still. Looking over what appeared to be a custom Uzi, the telltale signs of underground manufacturing were there, but it wasn’t a rough copy. Judging by the cutouts and plastic look, this was a variant made from polymer, with sections removed for added lightness. Sized as the ‘micro’ variant, it nevertheless had a 60 round, clear magazine, the glint of armor piercing bullets visible. A complex looking box sat on top toward the barrel end, evidently connected to some sort of auto aiming system, with wires snaking down to the grip, where biometric data ports allowed access. It was almost erotic, with the phallic data jacks piercing into the glinting, begging apertures in the hand of my confederate, sweat dripping around them, slipping in, a perverse wetness. They were high out of their mind, now that I was paying attention, with pupils like dinner plates in the Parisian afternoon.

“There’s no honor in war, I discovered that long ago. Not because there is something evil about war, but because we don’t want it that way. We don’t go to war for honor, we go to war for fun. Killing is the last word in pleasure, to hold life and death in the crook of your finger. Allow me to demonstrate.” They finished, before pulling an ancient looking fragmentation grenade and standing. They looked back down winked and continued.

“I’ll be seeing you.” I watched the grenades arc, lounged in my chair, tumbling end over end. I noted, just before it smashed through the glass of a crowded Turkish electronics store, that the grenade was painted white.

I ran for the door, keen to get out of the area before the cops showed up. Sprinting down the sidewalk, the sound of sirens grew ever louder. I slowed to a walk, panting heavily, lungs beating against my ribs. I pulled my hood up and started walking in a random direction. I finally noticed that it was late. I had been walking on streets where you could not see the sun for the concrete too long. My jacket suddenly seemed far too thin. A line of armored police cars sped past me, following the rapidly proliferating sound of gunfire. The red and blue seemed to show two sides of a coin, the cold blue of fear and the red fire of terror. For just a moment the light of order outshone the sun. As they sped onward, the distant gunfire took on an even more feverish pitch as more police assault rifles and shotguns joined the fray. I lit my last cigarette.

The second flight of the day was far less pleasant, partly because the plane was so much worse, partly because the knot of terror in my stomach refused to unravel, regardless of how much vodka I drowned it in. Instead of the shining modernity of modern capitalism, the old Tupolev made the hop to Kiev in four hours, and the inside smelled of vomit and jet fuel. There was no first-class. Nor was there internet. I would have to spend the time with my own thoughts, hence the vodka. For a being of cyberspace, to be locked out of it for hours was torture. A connection built up over the course of decades, severed. Worse than any mere drug withdrawal. To see infinity, and then be blinded. The occasional bark of Russian blared out of rough speakers. After an hour passed, the cold sweats began. A combination of Cyberspace Disengagement Syndrome and lack of cigarettes. The fact that I hadn't had any food in three days apart from bad sushi in Tokyo certainly didn't help. I was trapped in a prison of my own flesh, banished to the plain of normal human existence, where 99% of the world functioned. I was no different from the billions of souls who lived each day the same, milking their cows or field stripping their AK-47's. I was even lower than the corporate officers who were forced to endure long shifts in offices, coding sub-routines of sub-routines of sub-systems. Fuck me. But I still had my eyes on my target, sitting smugly 3 rows ahead of me.

KIEV

I bought a packet of Lucky Strikes from a kiosk at the airport. I reviewed the plan in my head as I hungrily sucked the smoke into my lungs. The kid I'd been trailing had taken up a strange position in my mind. In many ways he was a target for a hunt, but he had taken on the position of a muse in this myth I was writing for myself, the final and suicidal odyssey I was embarked on. There was no wife to be met at the end, no kingdom to reclaim. Just a death to proclaim, to be able to say to people who did not know your name: I defied you. I pulled my laptop out in an airport bar and started working. The exchange would happen like this: my muse would hand the diskette over to the local Raytheon/General Electric officers, who would plug it into their system. It was of course encrypted, but they had been provided with one-time keys from Mitsubishi so they could verify that it was the genuine article, if not actually make any use of it. Once the engineers had been satisfied that they weren't being cheated, the local managers would give the order for their European security division to quell the uprising in Poland, East Germany, and Latvia. Once this had begun and was being executed with enough energy that made it impossible to reverse, Mitsubishi would transmit the other codes to RGE, and the deal would be concluded. The only way to stop them was to make RGE think they were being double crossed. My original plan had fallen through in that rusting Parisian café, so I would do as many hackers had done before me: wing it. Without a well-trained trigger man, I would have to use the only things I really knew how to use, namely computers and raw knowledge. I already knew where the exchange would take place. I couldn't corrupt the first code, because Mitsubishi would just send another batch by encrypted email. I couldn't corrupt the Neotek core myself since I'd need to crack those same codes. But an intriguing possibility showed itself. If I could corrupt the core after it had been verified by the first codes in such a way as to seem like RGE had been slipped a dummy, then I could, in theory, provoke if not hostility then at least suspicion.

The basics of any hack begin as follows: Education. I had absolutely no idea what the internal and networking structure of a dense piece of code like a full-blown AI was like. Luckily, I found leaked copies of documentation written by a Tokyo sysadmin who had been responsible for designing the networking hardware of the first core's server building. After the leak, he had been found lying on the street dead, on account of having fallen from the roof of his apartment block. The jury was out on whether it was shame or murder, but I felt it must have been murder. I had found the files on an imageboard dedicated to high speed computing, along with a string of posts that seemed to me to be

questions someone out of their depth and trying to figure out how to save their jobs would ask. The files detailed the networking stack, at the core of which was an asynchronous hardware accelerated C server whose only goal was minimizing I/O time, consequences be damned. And consequences there were, since this C code, attached to the AI code as part of its self-hosting nature was utterly insecure, almost certainly by design. While the surrounding architecture described was laughably out of my reach, this was a hole. The other piece to this puzzle was the nature of how it would be tested for fidelity, how RGE would know if they were cheated. The diskette, despite being a high quality, high capacity model would tell them absolutely nothing. The AI was not a machine, no program is. It is a form of magic, except it works. Just as cultists mutter cantrips to extract some sliver of energy from their patrons, so hackers can move words around and manipulate arcane symbols to cause the universe to change, except that unlike magic it doesn't exist to make people who've been abused feel powerful. It exists to allow Man to manipulate nature, to move electricity to his will. It is Beauty made manifest. My answer came shortly. The section of the AI that would be unlocked would be only a part of its core, without any of the outer functionality and hooks which allows the core to be leveraged into corporate stacks and utilized for advanced data analysis, mass monitoring of incoming data or automated, self-modifying testing. This means that an on-site AI expert from RGE would be able to verify the nature of the structure he was seeing, but not able to reverse engineer it. Pulling down some recent research by Zurich polytechnic on the data structure of modern GPAI systems, I set that down for later. The other part of my Education would be to work out exactly how I'd even get close enough.

Many hours later, I emerged from a trance. I blinked, staring at the empty packet of cigarettes, the pile of butts on the table evidence of my long work. My fingers were trembling from the overstimulation. The high of success. I had my worm. It was crude, ugly and poorly designed, but in a few short hours I had a worm. My fingers still trembled. My mind was failing me. Too many hours plugged into the net. They said that if you stayed there long enough, you'd never emerge, your mind ensnared by it, pulled into a deeper layer. The Wired, The Deep, The Void. You'd stay so long, your body would die, fading away in meatspace. But maybe you'd find something in there. I was riding a bizarre combination of creativity generated high, starvation and nicotine that propelled me onward into the madness of my life. It was time to go, time to do the dance, a final tango with death himself. He'd been requesting it for so long, but I always turned him down. I extracted my pistol, checked the magazine, and cocked it, not for any martial reason, but for the simple satisfaction of feeling the mechanical action. I turned on my laptop Bluetooth transmitter, ready to broadcast the attack and stepped out the door onto Medova street.

WARSAW

Staring into a mirror. Staring at the drug, turning the pink lozenge in my fingers. I sat there for some time, contemplating. My young companion was waiting for me at the bar, having taken their own already. I could hear the heavy beats of the party, dozens of young anarchists celebrating the end of all things, and the coming of a new age. I popped it. The mirror shattered into millions of pieces, and each piece reflected my corneas back at me, a pair of painfully human eyes glaring with silent hatred.

My companion was saying something to me, it could have been about cars, maybe. All around, young, beautiful flesh pulled on bulletproof vests and raincoats, checking the status on their drone guns. I couldn't think my own thoughts - my consciousness blasted away; my raw psyche exposed by the powerful drug. I checked my pistol. Its clean perfection was gone, the barrel darkened from carbon

residue, both magazines empty. All I seemed to be able to do was stare. Someone handed me another magazine, which I dutifully loaded, the mechanical click bouncing around the room, drowning out the music. We stepped out into the rain, my companion giving me a kiss. I stared at them, not even remembering their name, before I was pulled along. I felt the pathetic draw of addiction as I pawed at my empty laptop bag, whose contents were smashed and abandoned in a Kiev ditch. We exited the alleyway onto Marszałkowska, a scene from the inferno presented before us.

Red flares, burning like torches in the raised arms of the rioters. Behind them, a thin line of riot soldiers, black as midnight, soaking in the glare, pools of cave water on the street. Flames clawed at the sky from a bombed out armored vehicle, a wave of human flesh crashing forward and back with the tide of violence. Lasers glittering like stardust. Drones wheeling overhead, mechanical vultures for the slaughter. Huge monsters, mechanical killer whales emerging behind the riot troops, vast armored behemoths. Horror of horrors, death incarnate. The rioters were only pouring in, multiplying like cancer cells, disgorging from side streets for the final confrontation. We started to run.

As we ran the rain flashed to snow in my abused cortex, the sickly white of narcotics, of cocaine, heroin, crack, and the pills, swirling around us as we accelerated. We hit the thin line at full gallop, a sudden snowstorm closing my view, snowflakes crashing into me, my spine cold as steel. I shoved my pistol under a riot troopers' breastplate, stared into their eyes as I pulled the trigger. I didn't blink as their life drained into the gutter. A few of those around me pointed their drone guns into the sky, a low hum as the electromagnetic pulses flashed into the sky. As my gaze tracked back down, I noticed a brash street samurai climb onto one of the riot tanks, casting a Molotov onto the engine compartment like Jesus in the temple. A flash of red blood jumped into the sky, the cough of cordite following it soon after, as he fell backward onto the concrete. Next to me my companion smashed a trooper's helmet with a crowbar as they tried to block them with their arms, the mask cracking open to reveal a terrified young face, a twisted mirror of my companions gleeful, demonic visage. But there was no visage, only a blue facemask and black goggles.

Suddenly my brain surfaced from the dark pools of intoxication, an angel passing, a pause in the noise and emotion. Blood in the gutter, rain now pouring from the heavens, the Palace of Culture burning like it never had before. Smoke had obscured the sky, harsh lights from the north end of the street, screams all around. As quickly as it had faded, the universe shattered again, the beat of life crashing into disharmony, psyche oozing back into the endless waters. Machine gun fire erupted, long staccato bursts, chasing the mob away from itself, dispersing and disrupting. I noticed every single rioter seemed to be carrying a camera. I realized I was too. We ran, the snow morphing into ash, streaming from everywhere, many had become two as me and my companion fled up Zielna street, diving into a side alley.

"There's an apartment, I have the keys..." they gasped, dragging the mask down. I nodded, turned away, and vomited into a drain.

They were pressed against the window later, as the orgasm rose, or maybe I was. Sex and drugs was the great high of yesteryear, but modern synthetics created an out of body experience the likes of which shamans and rock stars could only dream. All I recall is staring at the burning city out the window

and a distant voice I couldn't place a name to screaming mine. That was all I could recall from the end of history.

EPILOGUE

The smoke leaving my lungs disappeared out the window, blasted away by the train's furious energy. The endless dull, green view was momentarily spoiled by a group of teenagers lounging on a bridge -- smoking or drinking, no doubt. The sound of children crying leaked through my headphones, briefly providing distraction from my ennui in between beats kindly supplied by 'Sweet Dreams are Made of This'. Five-dollar wine burning away my liver.

As I took another puff, the sweet smell of nicotine, urine, unwashed seats and whatever the couple was doing in the compartment I had left was replenished in my head. I don't know whether it was me or the misery I had left behind in the concrete of Warsaw that made me love the sadness. The endless clattering was slowing. Machinegun fire morphed into artillery.

A town slid into view. I contemplated the smokestack of the only meaningful economic output the population could produce. The shapes of people trudging up and down the streets in the meaningless ritual of daily life, biomass exported from larger, more interesting towns to feed the sugar factory. A town square, a statue to the heroes of a forgotten decade, a church where opium is fed to the masses. Thus, civilization is established, maintained for a few decades before the relentless march of progress, capitalism or political energy is redirected toward somewhere else.

But now it was time to leave the train, to stand over the prodigal sons returning from failure and grandmas coming back to die. A young lady, with a sliver of hope in her eyes, stands on the blackened platform, searching the faces getting off. I was last to leave, the train pulling away as I finished my poison. She was watching the empty platform as I left.

The station was barely a station; a single concrete building built when it was important for train stations to look neoclassical and ignored ever since. A line of cars outside, a mix of low-end European economy hatchbacks and post-soviet rust. A single brand-new Mitsubishi, the *Zaibatsu's* stamped logo leaking memories out of my brain. A vision of corporate logos reflecting off plastic masks, funeral pyres of burning cars and spilt fuel. The rioters becoming data streams thrown into the void by my camera, flung into the deep to be repackaged into evening television. Cyberspace voodoo. Bile suddenly filled my throat, dislodged either by the still raw memories or the death by cigarette which I was too disgusted to oppose. I spat onto the cracked concrete, before tugging my jacket closer, an aegis against the midnight cold. Before I could stop it, the city I had left in my sediment welled up, bursting through the cold waters of my sadness and fury.

Laser pointers glittering in the smoke, remaining wisps of the last skirmishes tear gas still swirling between my legs. Smartphone cameras the only warmth in the dark. The smell of sweat and desperation, the taste of burning gasping rage. Digital signals bouncing from black swathed street warrior to urban guerilla. The sound of helicopter blades cutting through the sky like an airburst grenade, dangerously low. Rain splashing on plastic and pale skin. The holographic recollection of that frozen instant was interrupted by the tang of burning tires crashing over me like surf. It seemed the changing wind had pulled me back from the brink of flashback.

I looked up and down the road, waiting for the promised ride. Before too long, the shape of an off-road vehicle emerged from around a corner restaurant. The building caught my eye. It was built in an older style, its façade speaking to a deeper cultural root, a shared folklore. This fleeting moment of national glory was blocked by an imported Land Rover. A familiar face looked out, neutral expression, the remains of professionalism instilled by some ancient corporate courtesy training. I climbed in and let the radio provide a soundtrack. A third-rate Eastern European copy of a 20-year-old American imitation of French disco. A supermarket slides past as the singer reaches the chorus. The same sale on lightbulbs is happening here as was happening half a decade ago. A fashion store. Chinese clothes, price by the kilogram. A police station, brand new vehicles shimmering under the safety lights, the logos of German industrial-automotive syndicates pulsing in my mind.

At last township gave way to agriculture. A thin line of streetlights traces a lone strip of concrete. Every kilometer, a grand sign declares the name of a hamlet. No buildings are visible. Once, the sound of an engine breaks the gloom. A corporate chopper running a survey mission. Its LIDAR sensor means the multinational looking for a new place to put a megafarm can run flights all the way through the night. The sweep of red laser passes briefly through the vehicle flashing up our faces like arcade stardust. I glance up. The name and logo of the AgriSA conglomerate.

Finally, a destination. Warm light spills out of an open door, a concerned face looks up in relief. Gates swing out. A flight of stairs. A large, wooden antique portal. And finally, a long-delayed embrace. Nightmares of programmed savagery trickle back into the subconscious.