

Untitled NaNoWriMo - 2014, Chapter 5

By:

Emilio J. D'Alise (copyright 2014)

1,280 words excluding title and chapter heading

Chapter Five

I sat at the edge of the tub. I looked at the image in the mirror staring back at me. For not the first time, I wondered about my choice of body. I had no real concept of male or female emotions, desires, needs. I had extensive knowledge of mannerism, expectations, and social conventions relating to both sexes, but mostly for the sake of the human world. Mechs did not care about such things.

I was pretty sure at least a few of my previous bodies had been male. I had no conscious identity of being either, but when given the choice, I had picked a female body. And a striking one at that, at least based on the reactions of human males.

I could have, and it would have been smarter to do so, picked a less conspicuous model. MechMed techs and counselors had tried to talk me out of the idea of this body, but I held firm.

I thought back to the day I woke up. I had just put a steel spike through the forehead of a late teen or early twenties woman. I had looked around, 'seeing' the world for the first time. Three other

humans, all males, lay dead nearby. I could see two more, Mechs, judging by the remains, twenty feet away. A bird landed on one of them, looked at me, and flew off.

I had looked down at the face of the woman, and the terror that had been on her face before I killed her was gone. She looked peaceful. She looked beautiful ... Or as beautiful as one could look with a steel spike through one's forehead. I had laid her down gently, although it no longer mattered.

I had no idea why I killed her. I knew her face, knew this location and the security layout of the house. But I did not know her, did not know why she needed to be dead.

I have no memory of prior assignments; the wipes took care of that, but that moment, with the girl, that was the anchor that kept 'me' from being wiped as well.

Perhaps I had chosen a female body to honor the first memory of Raven Proto ... of Raven 17.

I stood. There was bruising where Remo had hit me. The synthetic flesh does not bleed per se, but the mechanics of its function closely resembled human flesh. If what I read was right, part of the reason for the design was to satisfy humans who liked to hurt their toys.

That was a rumor, but based on what I had seen of humans, I could believe it. Others maintained it was just part of the realism, much like many of our biological functions. We might have been machines, but we were machines designed to reinforce the illusion of humanity.

I put on a robe. It was a silly psychological thing, but apparently women liked wearing robes. Some women. I had decided I liked it as well.

I walked over to the dresser in the bedroom. Bedroom, living room and kitchen. This apartment was little more than a room, but it was all I could afford ... At least until next week. Then I would have to take to the streets.

The paper Remo had given me was still there, folded, one corner with a bit of dried mud on it.

I sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the paper.

I replayed the day at 10x speed, stopping at various points to relive the memory in real time. Eventually, it would all be edited down, useless parts erased, but for now I did not know what was useless and what might be of value later on.

The second time around, I stopped at the phrase that struck me the most.

"People are messier."

I had promised myself I would not kill again. I was mugged last year, two drug-addled thugs who did not recognize me for a Mech. I had fought the automatic response of wasting them, and instead lost a significant amount of credit when they stole my unsecured credit card. I had learned not to load my card with any more than I needed for the day.

"People are messier."

I had sought jobs where the likelihood of violence was remote, but that line on my resume is what kept me from most jobs. My 'extensive training' did not translate to mundane office jobs. I had been offered courier jobs, bodyguard jobs, security details. All were jobs with the possibility of violence.

The problem is that it's expensive to train a Mech. In the pre-Emancipation days, one could just re-write the programming. Now it had to be actual training. It was cheaper to hire someone already trained, and when it came down to it, it was cheaper to train a human.

Ironic, really; humans had lost a lot of jobs to Mechs, and Mechs gaining status as sentient beings reversed the trend. There were government and private programs to retrain Mechs, part of the negotiated compromises, but the wait time was outside my timeline. I would be out on the street or in some Mech shelter long before I got any kind of training.

I had stumbled on PI ads, and the work sounded boring and mundane; mostly surveillance with little chance of action. My first three interviews were busts. Two assumed I had seduction and entertainment training, and one offered to teach me. Remo was my last PI interview, more out of curiosity than hope. Sealed files, minimal Gov-info, huge and varied reputation. Very intriguing.

I had planned to just see the man, and now I sat here looking at something that would plunge me into a scary and dangerous world.

"People are messier."

I can't lie to myself; had Remo been attacked in that room, I would have gone full tactical. Whether it was to protect me or to protect him is something that was not in clear focus.

Remo was correct ... Sometimes there is no choice. Worse yet, choosing against violence, choosing not to kill is itself a choice with consequences.

I rewound the recording.

"Raven, you are relatively young, wisdom wise."

That had stung. I fought and endured much to gain my independence, my individuality. Being told I was an unfinished product had hit me hard. Then again, humans, regardless what many thought, are unfinished products until they die.

Remo was right; I still thought in terms of military assignments. I began to understand the difficulty human soldiers faced when returning to civilian life.

No specific rules and rules that changed as one dealt with different people, different circumstances, different organizations.

"People are messier."

Was that a justification for killing? Was killing an occasional necessity? Was the promise to myself, the promise to the serene woman with the steel spike through her forehead nothing more than a stab at the illusion of control that a child might have?

I had recently studied idioms, and I consciously used one now.

"Fuck it!" I grabbed the paper. I accessed the conduit.

"Welcome on board. Look around. We'll talk tomorrow." Remo's voice was in my head, much like tactical support during a mission, or like the voices of the battery of Mech-psychs who attempted to reprogram me.

And then he was elsewhere, but I was still in his mind. It was like listening to someone in another room while having access to their office. I poked around.

I am a Mech. Mechs are not prone to exclamations. Nonetheless, within the first few seconds of poking around I had my first ever involuntary and vocalized exclamation.

"Holy shit!"