

# The Department

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## Chapter 1: The Department

As the sun began to ascend, its light emitted in great big beams which slowly crept across the crowded landscape. As the light drew closer and closer the nearby glass skyscrapers and houses began to shimmer like a large, golden diamond. But the streets were still empty. Except for the occasional spider or lush green lawn there were absolutely no signs of life. The entire city looked as if it had hastily been deserted.

Then the city's clock hit exactly 7:00 am and everyone began to rise simultaneously. Every single man and woman put on the same dirty gray government suit, ate the same government-issued food rations and brushed their teeth with the same toothbrush and toothpaste. By 7:30 am every person was out of their house and on their way to one of the many available jobs.

Ever since the government banned thinking undesirable thoughts each citizen had to get up at 7:00 am, leave the house at 7:30 am and take the Commuter Express to whatever job they'd been preprogrammed to serve. About four times a day the computer chip in their head would exchange info with a large mainframe located in the basement of the town's administrative building, also known as The Black Spire. Finally, after one last data exchange at 10:30 pm each person would fall asleep, all at the same time. Life had somewhat become automatic. Yes you could think, but only what the government wanted you to

Every day certain government personnel (nicknamed "Takers" by the rebellion) would scrounge the streets looking for citizens to use in their brutal "experiments". People would just disappear off the streets, never to be seen again. A fortunate (or unfortunate) few would survive the horrific mental and physical trauma and be dumped back onto the streets. Most of the time these people would kill themselves within days but a few were able to endure the intense trauma and join the rebellion.

Very few were allowed to think without restriction. This group included law enforcement, government workers, medical personnel and government computer technicians. Even with the freedom to think there were still many things to keep you in line, keep you from disobeying. Brutal beatings and public executions would be held for those who dared to resist, to instill fear on each and every citizen in the entire city.

Mark sat at the small steel desk in the right hand corner of his cramped sleeping quarters. He sat slouched over a small terminal. His fingers danced across the holographic keyboard, hitting the perfect key every time. The computer emitted a high pitched whine. The keyboard made an artificial "click" sound each time he struck one of its many holographic keys.

Mark gradually raised his wrist to catch a glance at his watch. "7:00 am" read the small device. His eyes darted to the large gray and white clock with the word "QUARTZ" stamped in big, bold letters on the front. This clock read "7:00 am" as well.

He felt that he was forgetting something but he couldn't quite figure out what that something was. He stood up next to the chair and looked up. Nothing. Then he looked down. Still nothing. Finally he glanced to the right and saw the large door. It was still closed but on one of its coat hangers Mark saw a large, blue fur jacket with the word

“POLICE” sewn onto the left sleeve and several proud badges sewn onto the right. Suddenly he remembered what he had previously been unable to figure out. He had to get to work.

Mark bolted towards the closet and jerked open each and every drawer in his dresser until he found his pants, socks, and belt. He hopped across the room on one leg while inserting the other through the leg of the pants and then switched legs. Once that was taken care of he hastily removed the jacket from the hook and began to thread his thick arms through each of the holes as he dashed out the door and through the large plaster corridor of the his building.

Once he reached to the door Mark slammed it open and sprinted towards the nearest train platform. Mark swore at the intense cold under his breath. He spent another five minutes waiting at the platform for the commuter express to come so he could be picked up. Finally after a short while of fiddling with his watch and humming the train entered the station and the doors thrust open. Several hundred people stepped out of the cramped rectangle and several hundred more entered. Mark looked around at the train. Each car was three stories high and there were around forty cars attached to the express. The entire thing was painted silver except for a thin faded blue line running down the side.

He regained his train of thought and started to walk towards the giant, gaping doors which looked like an open mouth. Of course all of the seats were occupied. There were only around twenty seats and yet the transportation department was trying to cram hundreds of people into a single car! They claimed that this was to “save on the ever-rising costs of rail travel,” Mark begged to differ. He cursed them every night in his sleep for making the most enraging public transport solution in existence.

As usual he grabbed a small section of the metal railing going across the inside of the car. Besides the few hundred zombie citizens there were only two people that he recognized, Oliver Smith, the tech who worked at The Black Spire, and Cynthia Thompson who was the chief of the police station that he worked at.

As the train accelerated faster and faster, the lights and scenery swept by the train windows. Every mountain, building and street was reduced to a blur of color.

As the train zipped down the rails at 300 miles per hour, producing a noise that sounded like a thousand forks scraping across a thousand plates, Mark began to read “LA Life Magazine” which was the only publication allowed by the new world order. The cover page's headline read “Supreme Head Officer Dale Increases Rations and Pay”.

“Bull crap. Absolute bull crap. Every single goddamn month they decrease the rations and pay by , only to raise them by a tiny bit a few weeks later, just to make it seem like it went up” thought Mark. He continued to flip through the extraordinarily thin red and white magazine. Nothing interesting at all. Just more filler, bullshit, and lies.

Mark reached into the front pocket of his jacket and fumbled his hand around before pulling out a fresh pack of cigarettes, still in the shrink wrap. As part of the usual monthly ration cut, the government had decreased the cigarette ration by a two-fold yet again.

He fished his hand around the pocket of his large, black pants before wrapping his fingers around a metal lighter and pulling it out. Mark balanced the cigarette in his mouth as he tried to light it, all while watching the train's infotainment screen to see when he reached the desired station. A small flame flickered on and off, seemingly floating from the nozzle of

the polished steel lighter. At that exact moment the little flame transferred to the tip of the long checkered cigarette, causing smoke to billow from it.

Just as Mark deposited the lighter back into his pocket a robotic monotone voice from the intercom began to speak.

“Now arriving at Grand Central Station. This is the last stop. Please exit the train in an orderly fashion” buzzed the voice.

The doors slammed open and almost immediately all of the train car’s human cargo had exited and was on their way to work. He pulled the hood of his coat over his head and began to move towards the train station’s exit. The room smelled like a combination of freshly polished floor, paint and burnt rubber. He looked down at the the beige and orange tiled floor and started to walk.

Just like he did every day Mark approached the small pretzel stand, mostly hidden from view by an assortment of other stands just like it. He arrived at the stand and tossed the now used up cigarette butt onto the floor. Then he looked up at the menu and began to order what he always ordered.

“Hey could I get the usual?” said Mark.

The stand’s only occupant who went by the name of Calvin said “Sure thing Mark. Here you go” and pulled a miniscule buttered hot dog wrapped in a pretzel.

Mark handed him ten dollars and took the pretzel dog, eating it in a single bite. Yes, you didn’t get very much food for the money but that was the nature of food rations. The government allotted restaurants very little food to use. They could either run out before the next month or overcharge for tiny portions.

Mark walked away and he couldn’t help but feel bad for Calvin. Every day he saw Calvin’s cheery face as he paid for his food. Was he aware that he was just a government zombie, that he had almost no free will? He started to feel a very uncomfortable feeling overtake his entire body and decided that it would be a good idea to quit thinking about it.

Once he reached the large glass sliding doors of the station he stepped out into the outdoors and got into a shuttle. Within the period of a few minutes he had reached his final destination, the New Los Angeles Department of Authority and Discipline or “NLADAD” for short. The large gray building loomed over him, casting a shadow which went on for many blocks. The building was at least one hundred stories high and its width stretched out for at least one mile.

## Chapter 2: Keith

As Mark approached, two rusted metal doors crashed open, emitting a sound which was equivalent to the sound that a piece of sheet metal makes when you drop it really hard onto the pavement. He began to enter the building. The air conditioning unit blew a sharp, cold breeze across his neck making the hairs stand straight up. Around five people wheeling around two large mainframes on carts passed by. Another younger man pulling a cart full of terminals followed suit.

At last he finally reached the check-in desk. Standing there with a luxurious red fabric suit and flowing obsidian black skirt was Patricia Lane. Mark stood there awestruck as he eyed her soft flowing brown hair, her dazzling uniform. Oh only if she knew that he longed for her to be his wife.

Patricia slid a clipboard in his direction before handing him a pen and saying without any hint of emotion "Write your name down on the sheet and go get a timestamp."

Mark snapped out of the trance and quickly signed his name in black ink before storming off in the direction of the timestamp machine. He felt quite awkward. Marrying? How silly could he possibly be? You didn't marry or fall in love. The only reason for bonds was to produce more children and provide the government with more humans. The whole process was completely devoid of any thought or emotion. Mark knew that.

The elevator ascended floor by floor and Mark stood there silently fiddling with a tag on his coat. No one else was in the elevator but there were cameras everywhere. It was clear that the department was quite serious. A small glowing display on the elevator displayed which floor it currently was on. Once the display read "89" the elevator ground to a halt and the doors slid open revealing a sea of gray cubicles.

Mark walked towards one and sat down in the chair. He rarely ever did any field work. No one did anymore. Just as he began to start writing one of his many assignments one of the techs who also happened to be his friend, Keith, walked over to the cubicle with a combination of pride and excitement plastered across his pale face.

"Hello Keith. What is it this time? Did you save The Department from yet another inadvertent disaster?" said Mark.

"Well Mark, you see it wasn't that, but it is something else. I finally got that old machine working again!" exclaimed Keith.

"Which machine? You have at least a few thousand different objects laying around that qualify as machines."

"You know, the one that we found by the dump? The silver one with the buttons on the front?"

"Oh yes, now I remember that one quite well. Can I come down to your office and see what it does?"

"Of course you can! I must warn you that it's slightly hard to make out the video but keep in mind that I don't have the particularity best vision."

"Video? What video?"

"Oh I haven't told you yet. The device seems to take a reel of thin images strung together which allows it to play back video."

"So like a DataTape?"

“Sort of.. Unlike a holodisk it used light beamed onto little photographs that are then magnified and projected straight onto the wall. Just come down and look at it.”

Mark stood up and followed Keith all the way down the winding corridor to his left. They reached a few bends every now and then and made a few false turns but finally arrived at their destination.

Keith reached for the large metal handle attached to an even larger dark oak door and pushed it down, revealing the contents of the room which, quite frankly, was a colossal fire waiting to happen. Hundreds of electronic devices and machines were stacked on top of each other, forming tall stacks that sometimes reached the ceiling. Attached to the back of the wall were several large see-through vats full of golden and blue liquid.

“This looks like a science lab,” said Mark.

As he motioned towards the video machine Keith replied “I’ve gotten that many times,” and flicked a very large switch which was located behind a large sign that read “ON” and was attached to the side of the machine.

Two reels began to spin and the strung together images began to pass in front of a light at very high speeds.. Keith was grinning a very wide grin and Mark was quite captivated. What he saw looked like it was impossible, like it had never happened. He was confused yet got it at the very same time.

From the image projected onto the wall he was able to see people who looked just like him going about their daily lives. There were actual children with what seemed to be their parents going to buildings called schools and playing with other children at places that the video called “parks”.

“Parks. Children play at parks,” repeated Mark as his jaw hung open.

People didn’t seem to take the crowded Commuter Express. They traveled in small rooms with four wheels that had text on them. Some read “Chevrolet,” Other’s read “Buick” and some read “Oldsmobile”. These humans seemed to be particularly attached to these machines.

“This is an automobile.”

There was a day called “Thanksgiving” where entire families ate an entire month of food rations within the period of only a day. There was another day called “Christmas” where people celebrated the birth of a person who they called “Jesus” and pretended to be a magical figure named “Santa Claus” and gave each other presents.

A man was standing at a podium giving a speech in front of a large crowd. Behind him was a flag that appeared to be red, white and blue with many tiny white little stars plastered all over it.

“We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard!” said the man to a cheering and clapping crowd.

One after another each scene played out. There was a fellow human wearing a bulky white suit maneuvering around on what appeared to be the moon, shoving the same flag into the surface of it. Another scene showed a child with thick black plastic glasses grinning while holding a small model of a rocket ship.

Then suddenly smoke began to pour from the side of the machine and both reels caught on fire. The video slowly dissolved into black and the reels turned into ash. Keith ran over to the other end of the room, hastily grabbing a red fire extinguisher and

immediately putting out the fire.

Out of nowhere the door burst open and two very frightening and muscular men wearing black suits barged in, trampling and knocking over several of Keith's large machine tower's in the process.

"We need to speak with Keith" said the first man.

"Come with us Keith" said the second man.

"I advise you leave now" said Keith as he shoved a tissue into his rear pants pocket.

Mark quickly exited the room and walked back the way he came. On the way back to his cubicle he swore that he heard someone screaming. Keith maybe? He was still unsure however and decided to focus on something else. Patricia walked by and yelled at him to get started on his work.

"More procrastination, less rations," said Patricia nasally.

He immediately got to work and maybe, just maybe Keith would be alright. Maybe they'd increase his rations. Maybe everything would work out. This, however, would later prove to be false.

### Chapter 3: Assignment

Keith failed to show up to work the next day. Mark took the Commuter Express to work as always and read the same magazine that he always did and bought the same pretzel dog, just like he did every morning. In the lobby the same men were carting around different electronic devices as they did every single day.

As he signed in Mark quickly flipped through the sign-in sheet. Out of all the names neatly written in ink he couldn't find that of Keith anywhere and Keith always arrived way before him. Before Patricia came back and yelled at him Mark pushed back the sign-in sheet and went to get his timestamp.

In the office Mark asked his fellow co-workers and officers whether they had seen Keith around but they either pulled a blank face or denied ever seeing him. Keith was nowhere to be found. His small cubicle wasn't jam packed with food waste and spent rations and the computer wasn't running any calculations.

Mark even checked his makeshift "laboratory" but it too was completely lifeless. Mark walked over to the other side of the large concrete room and accidentally walked into a large stack of DataTapes. The towering pile of black plastic rectangles full of tape toppled over and pushed him onto the steel floor.

"Aghhhh! Aghhhh! The pain!" screamed Mark.

A river of blood flowed from his nose as he pushed the hundreds of cracked and broken DataTapes off his body and got back on his feet. Mark grabbed a tissue, balled it up and shoved it up the affected nostril before continuing to scavenge the room.

Mark started to work his way through the large room, frequently pushing more large stacks out of the way and stepping over messy piles. Once he reached the other end of the room he could feel his feet dampen. He thought he was dreaming at first and then looked down to find that he was standing in a large pool of water. His eyes darted to the rear wall of the room and realized that the water was leading from one of the glass vats which was now broken.

A water-soaked book floated across the room before resting at his feet. Mark bent down and picked it up. Upon further inspection it turned out that the book was a journal that presumably belonged to Keith. He slipped it into his rear pocket and began to head out of the cluttered room.

Mark stepped over several more piles to exit the room and made his way through the halls and back to his cubicle. He sat in the large black leather chair before opening the drawer on the filing cabinet and stuffing the notebook inside. His nose felt better so he tossed out the bloodied tissue into the wire wastebasket.

Later that day during lunch shift Mark continued his efforts to find Keith but hadn't come up on anything else. However, today was quite significant as it was role-assignment day. As expected the intercom announced, in the same monotone voice, that new roles would be assigned to officers.

"All officers must report to the auditorium immediately for job assignment. Failure to show up will result in termination," droned the voice.

He finished the last bite of his cheddar and turkey sandwich and started walking to the auditorium. The auditorium was a ways away but thankfully Mark recognized one of the people in the crowd as Charles, the person who worked in the cubicle right next to his, and they had quite an interesting conversation about the new law limiting civilians to



only two trips on the Commuter express per day.

Once they reached the auditorium every single one of the officers packed onto the extremely cramped benches. To his left was Charles and to his right was a tech whom he barely knew named Edward.

Mark leaned forward so he could get a better view of the stage. After a few minutes of sitting there a man wearing a gray suit stepped out from behind a curtain and began to speak into the microphone.

“Good day fellow officers. I’m sure you are all very excited for job assignment. This time around the government itself picked the assignments for maximum job compatibility. Now, let’s get into this. First off we have techs. Edward R. Trent, after careful consideration we have concluded that it would be best for you to be promoted to president of the government’s tech department...”

Edward stood up and started to jump up and down all while shouting about his latest achievement at the same time.

“I can’t believe that I actually was promoted! Is this a dream? The entire family, they will be so proud!” shouted Edward.

The man continued to read from the list of techs. Once he got to Keith’s name he let out a long and nervous pause before continuing.

“Keith L. Rogers... Keith you are...uhmm... reassigned to work on mainframe maintenance and repair”

Most of the rest of the list wasn’t particularly interesting. There were a few cheers as well as a few groans. Once he had read off the name of every last tech, custodian, receptionist, secretary and accountant he began to read off the names of each officer. Finally the man got to Mark’s name.

“Mark D. Phillips. You have been assigned to be on patrol duty,” said the man.

Mark’s eyes widened and his pace grew faster and faster. He had been dreaming of finally being able to quit doing repetitive desk work and get back to patrolling around the city and responding to reports.

Charles leaned in and whispered into Mark’s ear.

“Congratulations Mark. I’m quite proud of you” whispered Charles.

Mark leaned back in and whispered back to Charles.

“Thanks Charlie. I’ve been sick of desk work for quite some time and am pretty pleased about getting to do real police work again.”

The job assignment ceremony ended with the man in the suit giving a small speech about how he is grateful for the government's compassion and that we should all thank Supreme Head Officer Dale for what we’ve got. In all honesty he thought that it was one of the most scripted and ingenuine speeches that he’d ever heard but clapped anyways.

If you disrespected Supreme Head Officer Dale in any way then you’d get at least a beating along with decreased rations for the next five months. And that’s if you’re lucky. Spreading any form of negative rumor about Dale would end with you serving ten years in one of the most violent and brutal prisons in all of the United States of New America. Want to make a joke about Dale’s hair? That’s equitable to a being beaten in public along with decreased rations and no shower tokens for half a year. All of those crimes are quite minor, however. If in any way you attempt to actively resist the government then you will be burnt alive in front of the entire city. It was a horrible death,

more gruesome and painful than almost anything else.

Mark rose from the bench and exited the auditorium along with Charles. Behind them was an incredibly ecstatic Edward who was occupied with talking to his fellow co workers.

Mark made his way back to the cubicle just in time and began to work, only taking momentary pauses to drink from his water bottle or to enter one of his many documents into storage. The rest of the day went by at an incredible speed, especially for Mark. Nothing too eventful happened during the final lunch shift except for a pen leaking out onto some poor fellow after he thought it would be a good idea to change the nib without first draining the ink.

Before he knew it everyone had left the building and he was the only soul in sight. Mark pulled the filing cabinet open and removed the notebook. It was a small notebook, only about three inches wide and five inches tall. It was bound by a twisted length of wire and both its front and back were made from worn down black leather. The pages were incredibly yellowed and so frail that at every page turn you felt like they would crumble up and disintegrate into a pile of dust.

Mark set the notebook on his desk and slowly turned the cover over, revealing the first page. Scrawled in pencil towards the top margin was the word "Resist," Right below it was a small drawing of what appeared to be several half circles piled one on top of each other with lines shooting out of the side.

A thought went through Mark's mind. Mark had a hard time comprehending it. How? Why? Keith would never do such a thing! His eyes began to dart around. His heart rate rose. As he turned the page beads of sweat began to roll down his forehead.

He couldn't take it any longer. He shoved the book back into the deepest depths of the drawer and slammed it shut. He twisted his chair the other way and began to pack up his briefcase.

Suddenly Mark heard a raspy woman's voice coming from right behind him.

"So I see that you've been doing some late-night working? You know that being here after hours is prohibited," said the voice.

He looked behind him and there was Patricia, again. Mark couldn't help but have thoughts of beating Patricia right at that moment. Sure she looked good but she was constantly obnoxious and that terrible voice of her's... he shuddered as he thought about it.

"Uhhh yes but you see my watch was set wrong, again," gasped Mark.

"Patricia walked up closer and continued to speak.

"Excuses won't get you anywhere Mark. Certain people have certain responsibilities and yours is to do your job and leave on time. You know Mark, you could be fired from your job and be 'chipped' for that."

Mark's stomach dropped. He would much rather die than get "chipped". That chip was the difference between being able to think freely and being a government zombie. At least death meant peace.

Patricia stared straight into Mark's eyes. He felt an overwhelming hate for her burn throughout his body. He wanted to slam his fist right into her huge makeup covered face. He wanted to slam her against a wall and yell into her ear as loud as humanly possible. He hated her with a passion. His muscles tensed and his hands formed into fists.

"You know Patricia, I've always had a deep dislike for you. You act like royalty

constantly. All you do is walk around all day, yelling at people with that horrible voice of yours. And you pretend that you are the smartest and prettiest human being alive even though we all know that that's completely false! Hell, you can't even apply makeup without looking like you just came from a circus! I hate you. If I could choose only five people to kill I'd kill you. You are, by far, the nastiest human being alive!"

Patricia seemed as if she hadn't expected him to say that. Her face froze into a blank expression and she began to slowly look away from Mark.

"If that's what you think, Mark then so be it," she said as her voice began to quiver. Then, like a bolt of lightning, she started to run out of the room as fast as possible and started to emit a soft and quiet sobbing noise before stepping into a closing elevator.

Mark felt good, like he had power. He had stood up to the awful human being known as Patricia. If all his fellow officers found out they would be cheering for him! He would become a hero! Then it dawned upon him. If Patricia told somebody he could get into a world of trouble.

"Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!" exclaimed Mark. He darted out of the room as quickly as possible, only stopping to open the occasional closed door.

Once he got outside he realized that it was raining. His clothes slowly soaked up more and more rain as he ran through the doors of the Commuter Express just in time. Its door shut and Mark sat down, looking out the window at the falling water droplets.

His body began to slowly warm as he sat in the glow of the lighting's warm, orange glow.

## Chapter 4: The Old Man In The Business Suit

By the next day the Patricia incident had cooled down and after all, this was Mark's first day on patrol since six months ago. In the lobby he waited for Patricia to leave before hastily signing his name and running to the elevator.

Instead of reporting to his cubicle, however, Mark reported to the briefing room to receive his Vaporizer Gun and get assigned a patrol vehicle. In the room all the officers stood in line awaiting their equipment. To the left there was a screen playing a propaganda film and to the right there were two posters that were beginning to fall off the wall. One had the image of a clenched stylized fist with "POWER" written in bright red letters above it and the other detailed fire-safety procedures and what to do if you see a fire on duty.

The line slowly moved until it was Mark's turn. An impossible tall man of Russian origin handed him his gun and the keys to his hovercar before giving Mark his assignment. The man opened his mouth and began to speak in a thick Russian accent.

"Officer Mark Phillips. You have been assigned to break up a group of rowdy rebels. Use as much force as necessary and don't be afraid to kill. Good Luck" said the man.

Mark nodded his head and got into the vehicle before setting a destination on the build in GPS system and setting off. The landscape breezed by as the car accelerated. Mark slowly and carefully steered it in the right direction, all while keeping his eye on the GPS. He breathed in and out slowly, calming him in the process. All was silent except for the quiet purr of the engine and Mark as he inhaled and exhaled.

The landscape slowly got thinner and thinner until all that Mark could see was the old abandoned highway and a destroyed house every so often.

Then the gps began to beep, signaling that Mark had reached his destination. Without thinking he gracefully landed the hover car on a not to badly broken part of the freeway. There were rusted shells of what appeared to be those "automobiles".

Mark turned his head and saw it. A giant towering makeshift shelter made from rusty scrap metal and torn cloth. The shelter itself looked to be around three stories and surrounding it were unoccupied guard posts. He slowly walked towards the shelter. Before opening the door he turned around and scanned the freeway for any other forts or shelters. He came up blank.

Once Mark opened the door to the structure he walked inside. The room that he was in currently was very large and dark. It smelt of mist and there was a thin haze filling it. After not finding anyone in the first room Mark decided to move onto the next one.

This one smelled more like freshly cooked bacon but was still hazy as well as empty. In the center of it was a scrap metal table and on the wall was an ancient microwave and stove.

Suddenly Mark heard a small sound coming from behind the basement door. It wasn't very loud. It sounded like someone had dropped a tin can or small metal object of some kind onto the floor.

He slowly crept towards the door. He was almost there when he heard another sound. This time it was slightly louder and sounded like stomping. He reached for the door and swung it open.

Mark wrapped his hands around his Vaporizer gun as he descended the steps leading to the basement. As he got closer and closer a humanoid figure slowly started to emerge from the haze. Mark pulled out his gun and pointed it at the figure.

"This is the Police. You are under arrest under the highest count of treason. Anything you say or do can and will result in worst punishment. Please step out with your weapons down and hands up," exclaimed Mark

"Congratulations officer. Congratulations on finding us rebels. Congratulations on finding our home and breaking in," said the figure.

It walked towards Mark. The other human was a male who looked to be in his 80s. He was dressed in an old torn business suit and his gray hair was neatly combed to the side.

"Resisting right now would be a very bad idea. Put your hands up and drop any weapons immediately or I will have to shoot you," exclaimed Mark, this time with a sharper tone.

"I'm not afraid of death. I've been waiting for it to come for the past forty years. I would rather die a free man than live as a government slave. Before the War on Thought I was a successful businessman. I was a billionaire. Everyone knew my name. Life was amazing. Back then thinking was encouraged. Creativity and intellect were celebrated. Once the war ended with The Party winning all what I had spent my entire life working for was meaningless."

"Sir, cooperate or I will vaporize you."

"Go ahead. Vaporize me. Make your friend Dale proud. I'm sure he cares about you in every way possible. You're lucky. You never got chipped. I however only escaped it by pure luck. Somehow the Chippers didn't see me crouched down on the conveyor belt at the chipping facility and I was able to pass. Sometimes I like to think that God is on my side. Of course saying that in front of you or any other member of the damn government would make my punishment even worse since all Religion was banned."

"You have three seconds to cooperate or I will kill you."

"Go ahead."

"One."

"My time has come."

"Two."

"What a damn fool!"

"Three!"

Mark pulled the trigger and instantly the man was reduced to a pile of burnt ashes and dust. Nothing was left of what once used to be the world's richest business tycoon.

"What a pity. The man works for so much and yet he disobeys the government. Complete fool"

Mark walked out of the settlement and once he arrived at his car he began to open the door. Out of nowhere a bullet flew from his right and hit the hover car door. He turned around and saw several more rebels right behind him. They all had guns clenched in their hands and were aiming right towards his face.

Mark quickly holstered his gun and started rapidly firing in the direction of the others. Within seconds all of them had also been reduced to ash.

Without a care in the world Mark kicked the ash pile to his right and opened the door to the car. Once he got back in he took a swig from a large bottle of water and

plotted a course for the station.

That night Mark tossed and turned in his bed. He couldn't stop thinking about the rebels, mainly the old man.

The phrase "I would rather die a free man than live as a government slave" echoed in his head all night long. He tried to think about something else but couldn't.

For some reason, he thought, he hadn't cared at all earlier that day and yet now he was starting to feel something. It was an odd feeling. He began to, in a way, feel bad... feel remorse for his actions.

As the night went on the feeling got worse and worse and Mark still had yet to get any sleep. Rain began to pour from the sky, hitting into the roof.

Mark decided to count each raindrop as it smacked into his apartment complex. Maybe that would take the rebels off his mind.

"One. Two. Three" he whispered.

Within minutes he had dozed off to sleep, ready for a new day at work.

## Chapter 5: The Sawmill Down By The Forest

Nothing else too interesting happened for about a week. Mark patrolled around the city, not arresting anybody nor needing to issue any beatings. It was another Wednesday except it wasn't. Today would be a major turning point in his life.

Mark found himself standing by the door to the hovercar landing bay yet again. It was a new day and a new day always meant a new case to work on. He sighed and began to reach for the door.

Then out of the blue came running a short man wearing a blue and white striped shirt with extremely thick glasses began to run in his direction. Mark turned towards him.

He couldn't discern who the figure was. Suddenly it began to shout his name at an incredible volume.

"Mark! Mark! It's me!" shouted the person.

Mark then realized that the mystery person was his friend, Keith.

"Keith! Keith! Where the hell have you been!?" shouted Mark

"I'll tell you later, Mark. Oh my god it is nice to see you!"

As Keith got closer and closer Mark realized that there was something wrong with him. It wasn't apparent at first but as Keith got closer and closer Mark realized a few things about him.

The first thing was that both of Keith's arms had been replaced with cyborg-like replacements.

The second thing that he noticed was that his eyes were no longer there. All that was left were two black, empty sockets.

The third thing that was wrong with Keith was that he was unusually skinny. Keith wasn't obese or overweight. In fact he was quite skinny normally. But this time he was extremely skinny. He looked incredibly malnourished.

Finally Keith had a rectangular metal "backpack" sewn onto his back. This rectangle of metal had a large charging port on the back and a large amount of antennas sticking out of the back.

“KEITH! WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU?” exclaimed Mark.

Keith began to speak but he suddenly dropped onto the floor and began to convulse rapidly. He aligned his eye sockets in the direction of Mark and began to scream in agony.

Mark couldn't see any more. Two more men ran towards Keith and hauled his now deactivated body away without any explanation whatsoever.

Tears began to rush from Mark's eyes as he slumped against the building's plaster wall. Bits of paint flaked off the wall and stuck to his jacket

“WHY? WHY DAMN IT? WHY DID THEY HAVE TO BREAK KEITH? WHY?” yelled Mark. Mark stormed over to the landing bay and rapidly opened the door before bolting into his hovercar.

Today's assignment was shown on the screen.

“BREAK UP A GROUP OF REBELS. LEAVE NO SURVIVORS,” read the screen.

Mark couldn't bear to kill more human beings but this was his job and failing to complete it would result in a prompt chipping. Yet again Mark set a course for the rebels.

However, this time he had something in mind. He would make things right, even at the risk of his own life. Mark sat in the car as it whizzed off towards the second group.

As before his car headed towards the same highway. However this time it was a different as well as cleaner section. There were also many more buildings and less rusted out shells of metal.

The car landed softly right next to the settlement's many buildings. Mark stepped out and for the second time walked towards the building.

Behind him he heard the clicking of several guns and someone shout at him to stop moving. Within seconds there was a blindfold over his head, a rope tied around his hands and he was being dragged across the ground.

Mark woke up tied to a chair in a cold room. Around him were several rebels. One of them was a middle aged female wearing a torn up suit. Next to her was a very tall and much older man wearing an antiquated military uniform and dog tags. Right behind the man was another much younger man wearing a white tank top and battered silver calculator watch.

The woman began to speak.

“We are the resistance. You have come for the government and for this you must die!” she shouted.

The younger man pulled a matte black butterfly knife from his pocket and began to inch towards Mark. As he got closer and closer Mark began to try and free his tied up limbs but it was no use. Just as the man was about to stab him the older man with the dogtags grabbed the younger man's arms and pulled him back. The woman began to protest but after a few seconds she stopped.

The older man stepped forward and started to speak.

“Sorry for the rather... rude introduction. My name is Harold. The wonderful woman to my right's name is Helen and the guy who pulled the knife on you is my son, Scott.”

Scott walked over to Mark and apologized.

“Sorry for pulling that knife out on you dude.”

Mark let out a scared facial expression and quickly thanked him.

Helen turned to Harold and started to talk to him.

"You know that he is a cop, right? You know that if he shares any of our information with the government we're dead. Got it?" said Helen, harshly.

Harold looked straight into her eyes and said "My beloved Helen, just give the poor man a chance, Okay? You know, I used to fight in the government's military, back when the War on Thought was raging. I watched, and participated in, the killings of thousands of men. My friends were blown to death in combat. My hand," Harold raised and showed Helen his hand which was a massive lump of blisters and mangled up fingers. "This man doesn't know anything else. All he knows is listen or die. Please just give him one more chance. For me, Helen?"

Helen rolled her eyes and sighed. Scott began to lift a flask from his pocket but Harold swatted his hands away from it.

"I hate to rain on your parade but the government already knows where you live. That's why they sent me. I promise that I won't hurt anybody. Just free me. Please," said Mark.

Scott groaned and untied Mark who immediately stood up.

"Thank you. Thank you for not killing me on the spot," painted Mark.

"Glad I could be of service," said Harold.

Mark tumbled onto the floor and sat up against the wall.

"Please. Please help me. My friend..." Mark took a breath "he was taken by the government. They ruined him. I can't take this anymore. Just help me please!" shouted Mark as he slammed his fists into the wall.

Helen walked over to him. "You're either on our side or not. You're either with us or you're dead. You got that?" she said sharply.

"I got that," whispered Mark as he almost choked on his own saliva.

"Okay. Now, tell us where we need to go to not get caught."

"There's an old abandoned sawmill down in the woods. They say it hasn't been used in years. It's perfectly secluded and practically hidden from government GPS systems. I advise you to move there as quickly as possible. Next week on Monday I'll take a quick detour to the mill and meet with you. Does that sound good?"

"Whatever you say. We'll tell the others. If all goes well expect at least fifty people. Remember, you tell anyone and you're dead."

"Sounds like a Plan."

Scott reached for a green canvas bag and handed it to Mark.

"Take this bag. It's my old military bag. It served me well in the war and it should serve you well too. Now we've got a sawmill to get to."

"Thank you for everything!"

"No problem, Mark."

Mark waved goodbye and walked back to the hovercar once again. This time, however, he entered it with a sense of pride and excitement. For the first time in his life he actually felt alive to an extent.

This felt quite good. A popup appeared on the screen in the center console of his car prompting for him to enter in a report of what happened during the assignment. He pressed a small green button to the side of it and a keyboard shot out from the side of the console, covering his lap.

He answered each question one by one. The faked details that he had written in



were hopefully enough to fool the androids that check over these. For the photo he took a quick snap of the makeshift shelter.

Mark felt uncertain about returning to The Department but he knew that he had to. The car's HoverDrive burst to life and his car zoomed off into the distance.

## Chapter 6: Patricia.

It was finally the big day. The day that Mark had been waiting for. It was Monday. Today he'd participate in his first resistance movement. It was about time.

Just as before he found himself standing behind the door to the HoverCar docking bay. Every day Mark wanted to ask about the whereabouts of his friend that had been taken away quite unceremoniously but he decided against it as he didn't want to face the same fate. Still, he risked even more working for the rebellion. If that wasn't dangerous then nothing else was.

After opening the door and walking to the car he stepped in. This time the screen just read one word, "Patrol". Mark was relieved to not have to do another rebel-raid.

On the GPS there was a waypoint set for the perimeter around the Business District. Using a trick that he had been taught by Keith many years ago he tricked the gps into thinking that he was on his way to the Black Spire when, in reality, he was taking a detour to the sawmill.

After landing the HoverCar in a nice spot Mark stepped out and headed towards the big red sawmill. It was beginning to fall apart after years of neglect but still held strong. In all honesty it was quite impressive that the structure had held together for such a long period of time.

Right in front of a makeshift stage there was a large crowd of rebels gathering. Mark walked over to the crowd and was immediately reminded of the job assignment meeting.

Mark looked at the stage and immediately recognized the person as Patricia Lane. For a second he couldn't believe his eyes. Patricia a rebel? Then he looked again. Patricia was still there.

"I can't believe it!" shouted out Mark.

"Can't believe what?" said a random voice from somewhere in the crowd.

"Nothing."

The "new" Patricia began to speak from the stage.

"Everyone please quiet down, this is a very urgent message" shouted Patricia.

The entire crowd died down and began to listen to what Patricia was saying. She started to speak again.

"Thank you all for coming to this marvelous event which has been arranged by our own Harold and Helen Douglas," the entire crowd clapped.

"It has come to my attention that we're almost ready to finally move on this. After more than a year of careful planning we have almost everything ready. All that's left to do is some quick surveying of the Black Spire's interior and revise all our plans. We may finally have a shot at this," Patricia's voice took a more serious tone, "If our plan succeeds then a much needed change could come. The people could finally be free. The Black Spire is the capital of the world. Destroying it would almost certainly cause the government to collapse or at least become extremely unstable, triggering a larger revolt. However, if we fail a brutal and most certainly painful death is inevitable."

Patricia walked off the stage and the crowd went wild with applause and praise. A taller man wearing a red plaid shirt and black jeans stepped up and shouted at the crowd.

"Everyone quiet down for just a split second. We will be holding another meeting here in two days. Please get there if possible. It's urgent."

Then he too stepped off. After that the crowd began to disperse, walking off in separate directions. Mark began walking to his car when he passed the right side of the stage. He looked over to his left and there he saw Patricia leaning against the wall. She turned her head as if she knew that Mark was there and looked straight at him.

"Wait is that you Mark?!" exclaimed Patricia.

Mark replied "Uhhh yea," before bolting off in the opposite direction. Patricia stopped leaning on the wall and began to chase after him.

"Come back here Mark!" shouted Patricia.

"I already told you that I don't care for you at all," replied a very exhausted Mark.

The two kept running for a good 200 feet across the large grass field. Finally Mark couldn't run any more and stopped right in the middle of the grass. He began to exhale rapidly and sweat was flowing from all over. When Patricia arrived she stopped as well and turned towards him.

"Why the hell are you here?" demanded Patricia.

"The real question is why the hell are you here? I never thought of you as the rebel type, more as the whiny ass hat type," replied Mark.

"I was just doing my job, Mark. You know, I get paid more when I yell at fools such as yourself."

"I'm a fool? I do everything that you ask of me and you still treat me like a citizen. You're the actual fool, Ms. Lane."

"Whatever you say Mister Genius. You're absolutely perfect, obviously."

Mark looked up at the sky. A group of clouds moved by, including one that loosely resembled Supreme Head Officer Dale.

"That's great Patricia. Think what you want. Now, does that cloud look like Dale or not?"

"Changing the subject. What a great example of what a fool you are. And yes, that cloud does look like Dale."

"Hey, at least it beats arguing and talking about how much of a fool everyone is. That material gets old real quick."

"Eh I guess it wouldn't hurt to talk about a more interesting topic. Just keep it quick, fool."

"Alright, why are you a part of the resistance? Also, what happened to Keith?"

"You will learn of that later."

"Okay, Patricia."

The two kept talking about their hopes and dreams along with everything in between until the sun had set and the moon was ascending in the sky.

Mark and Patricia laid down on two blankets that he had taken from Harold's backpack. All the way until 1AM they looked at stars, pointing them out. The sky looked a perfect obsidian black and the wind blew softly across the landscape.

After that they packed their items up and said goodbye. As they parted ways Mark couldn't help but feel some sort of a "connection" to Patricia. It seemed as if she knew that he longed for her.

He sat down on the HoverCar plush seat and looked up at the stars through its moonroof. A smile shot across his face. The ride back went so quickly that Mark could barely remember it.



## Chapter 7: Distractions

As Mark signed in at the reception desk he couldn't help but notice that Patricia still wasn't there and that the timestamp machine appeared to have been smashed to bits on the floor. He looked at and frowned before carefully stepping over many shards of glass and what appeared to be a minute hand.

Upon reaching the 89th floor and stepping out Mark was greeted by Cynthia Thompson, chief of The Department.

"Come with me officer Phillips. It is quite urgent," demanded Cynthia.

Mark forced himself into accepting her request. He began to think about why she was calling him in. Was it because he never returned from the meeting?

She firmly grabbed hold of his upper arm and began forcing him towards their destination. Mark kept trying to think of why he was being forced to Cynthia's office.

Then it dawned upon him. Mark realized that this was most likely for not returning to work the other day and for not writing his daily police report.

A nervous feeling filled Mark. He felt like he could vomit all over the checkered floor any minute now but he refrained from doing so. That would get him into even more trouble which was the last thing that he needed right now.

"Come through this door," said Cynthia sternly.

"Yes Chief Thompson," replied Mark.

She pushed open a worn down bright oak door covered in pieces of sheet metal and let go of Mark's arm.

Cynthia pointed at a rusty metal folding chair right in front of a desk.

"Sit in this chair!" she demanded.

"Okay Chief Thompson. I shall do so," said a now very nervous Mark.

He slowly and very carefully walked over to the chair. His rubber boots squeaked on the floor.

Cynthia shouted at Mark. "FASTER! WE DON'T HAVE ALL DAY!"

He dashed towards the chair quickly lowered himself onto it with extreme precision. Cynthia walked over to the back of the worn down green steel desk and sat in a badly torn leather chair.

"Hello Officer Phillips," said Cynthia

Mark gulped and began to speak.

"Thank you Chief Cynthia."

"It has come to my attention that you didn't return to work yesterday. Is this true, Officer Phillips?"

"Yes Chief, this is true."

"And what may be the reason for that?"

"Well, you see, my vehicle ran out of charge and because of this I couldn't get back."

Cynthia took out a large slate with a screen on it, pushed a few buttons and turned it towards Mark.

"That's funny because it says here that your vehicle has no reports of running out of battery within the last 30 days."

"It must have not logged it then."

"Ha. That's never happened before mister. You are doing quite a terrible job at

outsmarting me.”

“I swear that it forgot to log! I swear!”

“It doesn’t seem that I’m getting anywhere with you. Let me ask you something else. Where were you yesterday?”

“I was out patrolling the Business District.”

“And how should I believe you?”

“Because the GPS shows that as one of the visited locations.”

Cynthia pressed a few more buttons on the device.

“Fair enough. Now, what if I were to pull up CCTV footage. Would you be caught on camera?”

“Wait, weren’t the CCTV cameras in that district down that day?”

“I greatly doubt that.”

Cynthia pulled out another device. This one had a smaller screen on it along with more buttons and it was incredibly thin. It was also green. She pressed a few of the buttons and set the device face down on the desk.

“I guess you’re right yet again Officer Mark.”

“Exactly. I was there. You have all the proof that I can provide.”

“Except for why you didn’t return the car,” added Cynthia.

“I already said that it never logged the vehicle running out of battery.”

“Arguing with you is no use, Mark. You know what happens to those who argue?”

“Not exactly…”

“They get killed. Their heads are hacked off, they are lit on fire. Their limbs are slowly torn off one by one. We kill those who argue, those who lie. You simply can’t have those kinds of attributes in a functional society. I hate to think of how the world was before, when any random person off the streets could think and lie and argue whatever they wanted. The entirety of society is better off without those unnecessary distractions. Do you understand?”

“Yes Chief, I understand.”

“Good, because you better if you want to retain the little worth that you have. Is that clear?”

“Yes Chief Cynthia. It is very clear.”

Cynthia slowly rose from her chair and looked down at Mark.

“I’ve got my eye on you. Don’t try to play any more funny business or fuck with the NLADAD. I can tell when you’re trying to deceive me. You’re lucky that I believed you. The next time I won’t be so lenient. Do you get it?”

“Yes chief Cynthia. I get it.”

“Good. Now leave my office immediately before I call security!” shouted Cynthia.

Mark jumped up from his chair and bolted out of the room.

“What a close call,” whispered Mark under his breath.

He ran through the many redundant hallways. It was patrol time yet again. Thankfully with no rebel meeting to get to he hopefully wouldn’t raise any red flags today.

Then his hand-held communicator that was stored in a pocket began to vibrate. Mark picked it up. On its small scratched display was an encrypted message. Mark

tapped on a dialogue which said “Secure Decrypt” and within seconds the message was readable.

“Meet at the abandoned book factory” read the message.

Mark put the device to sleep and slid it back into his pocket.

## Chapter 8: The Book Factory

Mark stood outside the abandoned book factory, smoking a cigarette as he leaned against its red brick wall. He carefully surveyed the surrounding area. Nobody had arrived yet.

The bright sun radiated onto Mark and the nearby surroundings. He began to tap his foot on the badly cracked cement ground. Mark looked around again. There was nothing but the faded brick factory and several rusted Old World cars.

“Damn it, why aren’t they here yet?” said Mark under his breath.

He looked to his left and saw a giant block of concrete with badly twisted blocks of metal sticking out of the side. To Mark this looked like a pretty decent space to sit.

After sitting down he couldn’t help but notice that the entirety of the factory’s exterior looked like a construction site that had been through a really terrible earthquake.

Then from the corner of his eye Mark could see a vehicle approaching from the air. It looked to be a well used police grade transported HoverVan.

“Oh shit they’ve come for me!” shouted Mark as he ducked and bolted for cover.

From his space hidden behind a stack of barrels he could see the van slowing down and eventually stopping right above the courtyard like area that he was in.

The van then proceeded to land right in the dead center of everything. Mark was absolutely dead silent. If he got caught then the entire operation would be over.

Mark clenched his fists and closed his eyes as he sat balled up behind the barrels. From behind him he could hear footsteps and what appeared to be the voice of a man. This voice sounded very familiar. He had clearly heard it before. Still, he couldn’t quite make out who it belonged to.

The footsteps slowly got closer and closer. Mark started breathing faster and faster. Mark was right on the verge of bursting out into an angry fit when the voice began to speak.

“Hey Mark,” said the voice.

“Who is this?” said Mark.

“Turn around and you’ll find out.

Mark stood up and turned around what he saw, though, came as a great surprise.

“Keith! You’re still alive! I never would have thought that I would be reunited with you for a second time!”

“Man, I’ve been thinking exactly the same thing.”

Mark then noticed that Keith was even more of a robot than he was before.

“Why do you look even more like a robot? What the hell did they do to you?!”

“It’s a long story. Are you sure that you want to hear it?”

“Yes, I would be quite happy to.”

“Okay then, here it goes. After showing you that reel of images those two men came and took me away. As it turned out those two men worked for the government and had found out that I was in the resistance. They were about to execute me when the executioner realized that I was one of the best techs in all of New California. However, they did remove my eyes and arms as punishment while also turning me into a cyborg that could interface with the government computers. However, they also “chipped” me and that “seizure” which I had in front of you was the chip kicking in.”

“That’s terrible!”

“I know. Anyways, after that the station figured that I was too high maintenance so they compacted all of my organs into a nice, large block and tossed me out with the rest of their waste. Luckily a resistance agent who I was acquainted with happened to notice me while on a periodic scouting mission and took me back to the resistance. Thankfully they were able to put my mind into an old android and that is the story of how I was taken away, thrown out and reunited with my friend twice.”

“That’s quite the story.”

“I know, right.”

“Where are the others?”

“They should be coming right about... now.”

Just as Keith finished his sentence another van came into view and performed the same landing procedure before landing next to the other vans.

Eight people stepped out of this van. They were Harold, Helen, Deborah, Scott, a man named Steven and three others that he had never met.

Deborah walked back over to Mark and began to talk.

“So Mark, it seems that you got the message.”

“What message?”

“The one which said where we were meeting.”

“Oh yes, I got that message. On an unrelated note I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“Where did you get all these vans from? You didn’t steal them from The Department, did you?”

“Nope. I got them from a government landfill with two other guys some years back.”

Scott walked up to the trio and began to speak as well.

“Hey guys, we gotta start the meeting soon. Everyone else is waiting on you all to quit talking,” said Scott.

“Fine, kid. We’ll go,” said Mark as he rolled his eyes.

The interior of the building wasn’t much better than its exterior. The entire place looked as if it had been hit by at least three tsunamis, two earthquakes and a tornado. In other words, it was a wreck.

The floor was covered in small chunks of rotting paper and cement that had fallen off the ceiling.

“Couldn’t you have picked a place that doesn’t look like a damn homeless camp?” blurted out Scott.

“Where do you expect us to meet? In fucking dreamland?” replied Helen.

“I’m sorry MOM,” said Scott sarcastically.



Cyborg Keith walked up to a large desk and dragged it across the room to the center. He then lifted a stack of chairs over to it before setting them down and distributing them to each attendee.

Deborah sat down in the one at the head of the table. At the other end was Keith and everybody else was squashed into the sides.

“Okay everybody, listen up as what I am about to say will change your lives,” said Deborah.

Every person at the table settled down and began listening attentively.

“Hello my fellow members of the rebellion. Thank you all for taking the time out of your day to meet with us. The participation is greatly appreciated. Now, I said that what I would say would change your lives. Here it is. The plan... we might, and that’s a very big might, be able to finally move on it.”

Everyone but Mark began to clap and cheer. The feeling that all their hard work and dedication hadn’t been for nothing.

Mark was incredibly confused about what Deborah meant by “it”.

“Excuse me,” said Mark, “What do you mean by ‘it’.”

“It seems that I have not told you yet. Promise that you won’t tell anybody, got it?”

“I swear.”

“Okay, here it goes. The other rebels and I have been planning to well... sneak into the Black Spire.”

“What? You’re gonna try to sneak into the Black Spire? That’s the most guarded building in the entire city! Are you insane?”

“Insane, maybe. But this insanity just might work. Our main obstacle has always been the expansive and brutal security system. It’s impossible to get in and out of the place without causing a racket when there are at least ten thousand security bots, one hundred wall-turrets and on top of that the entire police force all after you at the same time.”

“And how what are we going to do about that?” asked one of the unnamed men.

“Good question, Bruce. As it turns out, our very own Keith possesses the motivation and the skills to disable at least the robots and the turrets. Unfortunately, the system’s advanced intruder detection software only gives us about thirty minutes before it comes back online, re-enabling all of the robots and sounding an alarm with it.”

“Isn’t thirty minutes a lot of time considering that all we’re doing is coming in, planting a timebomb and getting the hell out?” asked Scott.

“Thirty minutes seems like a long period of time but when factored into the astronomical size of the building then thirty minutes becomes more like twenty minutes to get there and back plus another five used while avoiding/bribing/neutralizing the guards. In reality we only really have five minutes to attach and set the bomb.”

“And what supplies are we going to need?” asked Steven.

“Yeah, where are we getting the rest of the supplies?” chimed in another voice.

“Simple. We locate the items and send parties to collect them. So far we need weapons, bullet-proof vests, the explosives, a working terminal and a vehicle.”

“About the vehicle, don’t we already have ten transporter vans? Why can’t we just use those?”

“First off they’re too slow. If we want to even stand a chance on the way back we

gotta outsmart the cops. A hover-vehicle would be too easy to spot, not to mention that the vans are painfully slow. Thankfully I've located an old school 'land-vehicle'. According to my research it's what Old World folks used to call a 'muscle car'. It isn't the prettiest thing that you've ever seen as it has been sitting for over fifty years but it's better than nothing. Now, who would like to get the weapons?"

"I would!" replied both Scott and Harold.

"Okay. Next, who is gathering all of the vests?"

"I think that we should," answered two of the unnamed men.

"Nice choice Brendan and Daniel. What about the terminal? Who wants to get that?"

"Yeah. I know a guy.," said the man whose name Mark had just found out to be Bruce.

"Anybody else want to go?"

"Fine. I'll go with him," groaned Helen.

"Okay, now finally we gotta get that car. Mark and Keith,"

"Yes?"

"You two go to the highway and drive the car back to here. I'll give you guys a lift there but once I drop you off you're on your own. Understood?"

"Yes Patricia. We understand."

"Good. Now, once everyone had everything gathered up and has contacted me we'll schedule when we finally put the plan into action. Good job everybody and see you all next time."

Patricia stood up from her chair and staggered to the other side of the barren room.

"Oh and one more thing, you can't return to your job. It's too dangerous."

## Chapter 9: Welcome To The Underground City

“What do you mean it’s too dangerous? Isn’t being in this very room with these very people dangerous?” replied Mark.

“Sure, but we don’t want to risk even more than we already have,” said Deborah.

“So where am I going to stay?”

“You’re going to live with us at one of the many rebel camps across the highway.”

Mark couldn’t believe that they expected him to live in one of those easy-to-spot camps.

“Are you kidding me? I’d be better off hiding in dark alleyways and under soggy boxes. Do you realize how easily the government tracks those down? We’ll be dead within the matter of a few days!”

“Believe it or not, I’m entirely serious. Look, where you live now isn’t secure enough for what we’re doing. If anyone finds out they can trace the trail right up to your door. Also, this place is almost impossible to spot. It’s underground.”

“Oh. I see. I guess it could work out but I really like that apartment.”

“Like I said earlier, you’re either with us 100% of the time or against us. Now, would you like me to wait outside your place while you gather your possessions?”

“Yes, I would be quite fond of that.”

“Then what are we waiting for?”

The pair exited the building and headed for his police cruiser. Once they were both in the doors automatically swooped down and shut with a loud “woosh”.

“Wow, fancy,” said Patricia.

“I know,” replied Mark as he entered a string of numbers into the vehicle’s console. He pressed a button and the car lurched ahead at a ludicrous speed.

A look of surprise flashed across Patricia’s face as she grabbed onto the back of the seat.

“What’s wrong?” asked Mark.

“This car is way too fast, that’s what is wrong,” replied Patricia.

“Well, didn’t you work at The Department with me?”

“I did but still, I never went in one of these before. This is scary!”

“Yeah, well you better get used to it.”

The vehicle pushed on ahead through the solid midday air. Several clouds flew past. Mark could see a large portion of Downtown New Los Angeles in the rearview mirror.

They continued on and on, further and further. The city land slowly turned into patches of grass and abandoned highways. Not before long there was absolutely nothing left to see.

“Destination has been reached,” said the monotone voice of the computer.

Mark tapped a few more buttons and the vehicle slowly descended onto the ground below.

“So where is this place exactly? Because to me it looks like we’re in the middle of nowhere,” said Mark.

“Look over there,” said Patricia while she pointed to a small depression in the otherwise level ground.

Mark slowly walked over to it. Once he got really close he could see a manhole cover that was just the right size for somebody to go down it.

"Well I'll be damned" he said.

Come on, let's go!" said Patricia.

Mark lifted the extremely heavy steel manhole cover up, revealing a row of ladder steps integrated into the wall.

"After you, Patricia," he said.

Patricia thanked him before getting into the hole and descending into its depths.

Mark felt uneasy but he knew that he had to live here. It was either live here or face both the entire government and the entire resistance.

He slowly climbed into the hold, still holding the manhole cover in his right hand. Once he had gotten his footing on the ladder Mark ducked, setting the cover over the hole and letting go. Once that was finished he slowly but carefully began to climb down.

With each step it felt as if the ladder steps could come tearing out of the wall at any moment. At last he was able to see Deborah looking up at him from the Darkness.

"I see you right above me!" she exclaimed.

After reaching the bottom he hopped off the steps and turned towards Deborah.

She pointed towards a camera and said "Look at this camera so they can let us in."

He obeyed and the two both looked into the camera. From a speaker hung on the wall behind them came a voice.

"Hey Deborah! Long time no see! I see that you've brought a friend along," said the voice.

"Thanks Doug. My so called friend here is another employee of The Department turned rebel," replied Deborah.

"Oh boy, that's nice to hear! Here, I'll open the doors up so you can get in."

The doors in the front of the room swung open with a large crash.

"Thanks for being here, Doug."

"Thank you two for stopping by!"

They slowly walked through the doors. What Mark saw left him astonished. Behind those doors was a huge underground city. There were tons of small buildings and sidewalks and... people. Lights hung on telephone poles and provided most of the light.

"Man, this place is impressive! How many people live here?" exclaimed Mark.

"Around ten thousand ish to ten thousand five hundred," replied Patricia.

"Wow. Just... amazing."

"I know, right."

At that moment a man who happened to be passing by stopped and turned towards them in what was a complete coincidence.

The man had very dark skin, gray hair and was wearing a beaten up cowboy hat.

"Oh my, Deborah, is that you?" asked the man.

"Wait, is it you, Sheriff Richard?" said Deborah.

"Oh my, it really is you. Well damn, it's been an eternity since I last saw you."

"I can't believe it's actually you!"

"Thank you for the praise. Last time I saw you around here was I don't know, maybe ten, twenty years."

"It definitely feels like a lifetime, that's for sure."

“Hey, who’s that friend of your’s over there?”

Mark stood there and looked down at the ground.

“Speak up, pal. No one can hear you when you’re talkin’ to the dirt!”

“My name is Mark and I used to work as a police officer, that was before I became a resistance member.”

“Well, you sound pretty damn serious. Hey Mark, if you’d like a tour just hit me up.”

“Mark, would you like a tour?”

“Sure. I guess that a tour of my new home couldn’t hurt.”

“Okay then, right this way,” the trio began to walk towards a line of makeshift buildings and shelters.

“First up there’s crazy old Pete’s Junk Shop. If you ever need something Pete almost certainly has it.”

“Interesting.”

They continued, passing a few places before reaching a new one.

“Next we have the good old Soup Kitchen. You can get your daily free bowl of soup here so you don’t you know, starve. And it tastes good as well so that’s a plus.

“Sounds better than rations.”

“Rations?”

“Back in every place owned by the New World Order we were given a small ration of food that we were allowed to use each month. Usually the food was terrible and the portions were miniscule.”

“Hmm. I’ve never lived in the city ever so I don’t know much about it.”

“Then where did you come from?”

“I was born and raised in The Underground City.”

“Wait, your parents gave birth to you?”

“Yeah. Is that odd back up in the cities?”

“Not odd, just the idea of having a child is so... outlandish.”

“Now follow me over to here and I’ll tell you all about the history of this place.”

Sherif Richard lead the way as Mark and Patricia trailed behind him.

“Sit down you two,” said Richard.

Mark sat down.

“Aren’t you going to sit down as well?” inquired Mark.

“Naw. I already know the history of this place,” replied Patricia as she walked over to the building right in front of it and leaned against the wall.

“Okay then, suit yourself,” answered Richard.

“Okay newcomer, do you know anything about The Underground City?” asked Richard.

“No. I never even knew of it’s existence until today,” replied Mark.

“Well then, city folk. Let me tell you about the history of The Underground City. Are you listening?”

“Fully.”

“Okay then. It all started back after The War on Thought all those years ago. The New World Order was building all it’s infrastructure. While all that was happening the newly formed government decided that due to a lack of resources and infrastructure citizens would have a small period of around nine months to prepare for the chipping etc.

During that time the common citizen could think and live their life, albeit with more restrictions. That also meant that people had the will to move away from the city and hide somewhere and guess what, many people did just that. One day a small group of these people got in a car and headed straight for the mountains. They drove for around an hour before finding a nice, secluded spot by the mountains. They decided to set up camp here and before long they had discovered a hatch leading to an abandoned ultra-secret underground military bunker. They realized that this was the perfect place to colonize and they did just that. In the remaining months residents of the bunker sent many messengers to the city, telling the citizens where they can come for guaranteed safety. Are you still listening, Mark?"

"Yes sir."

"Let me continue. Anyways, within a few months the population had turned from a mere ten people to a whopping ten thousand people. Civilization was thriving. Everyone in the cities was being subject to endless torture while us down below the surface were having a great time. There were businesses and houses, the place even had its own non-corrupt government. However, as they naturally do, people began fighting. Many left and the once great Underground City had lost a quarter of its population. However, somehow it was able to rise from the brink of social and economic collapse. The city became a great place to live in yet again. Unhindered by microchips in their heads or odd government rules people got together and well, reproduced. Soon most of the people living here had never experienced the pre-antithought days. Now the town is thriving as ever. However, we have been taking in less and less people each year. Seems that the situation up there is starting to get better."

"No, it's getting way worse. If you disobey at all you'll at the very least be starved for a few months and get your shower tokens taken from you."

"Really? I always expected you know, to be some war up there but not some dystopian where everybody obeys the government. Why hasn't anybody taken the government down by now?"

"You see, we've been trying to but there is so much surveillance and rules that keep getting in the way."

"Then it must be a miracle that those fools never discovered this place."

"Believe me, if it were in range of the cameras then it would have been discovered within the first few days but no cameras look out here, especially in such an odd barren location."

"That's unsettling. Well, I guess if they haven't found us yet then they hopefully won't in the future."

"Well, thanks for the tour. It's always nice to meet a fellow law enforcement officer."

"Wait, you're a cop?"

"Yes. I have been for all my life."

"Dang. Do you get any special privileges over anybody else?"

"Not really. I get to think which is a pretty big plus if you ask me. Other than that you're forced to work all day under extremely strict conditions. How is being the sheriff of this city?"

"It's pretty good work. People seem to like my presence and I feel pretty satisfied doing it."

“Hey Mark, want me to show you to where you’ll be living from now on?” asked Patricia.

“Sure Patricia. Bye Sheriff Richard, nice meeting you.”

“Nice meeting you to, Mark.”

“Come on Mark, this way,” said Patricia as she lead Mark through the many sidewalks to where he would hopefully be staying.

“What does it look like?”

“I don’t know, Mark. Like an apartment.”

They turned a few corners and waved to the occasional pedestrian. Finally, after climbing into and then out of someone else's back yard, they had reached the building.

## Chapter 10: Nonexistent

It was about 50 feet high and was covered in tons of cut out little windows. Mark couldn't help but notice that it seemed to be made out of sawed up and welded together shipping containers.

"Doesn't that look like a bunch of shipping containers?" asked Mark.

"Sure does, captain obvious," replied Patricia.

Mark walked through the makeshift front door and was immediately greeted by a young indian man with a very thick accent sitting at a big "L" shaped wooden desk.

"Hello sir and mam. How can I help you?" said the man.

"This man here would like a room here," answered patricia.

The man thumbed through a notebook before setting it back on the desk.

"I have one room available. It isn't very much but hey, it's a room."

"And how much is this room?"

"One hundred per month, mam."

"One hundred. Damn, that's a lot for a crappy little room made out of a some storage containers welded together."

"Look, if you want to live down here they you gotta pay for it. I am not doing any lower."

"Can we see a photo of the room?"

The man opened a drawer and pulled out a sheet of paper with the photo on it.

"Here's the room for you to see."

"Man, that looks crappy."

"Look, this is the cheapest place in town. What are you expecting? A penthouse suite?"

"Are you sure that you won't do eighty?"

"No negotiations."

"Okay then we shall be on our way. Mark, this man isn't worth our time.

They began to exit the building when the man shouted at them to stop.

"WAIT!" exclaimed the man, "I'll do eighty."

"Okay then," said Patricia, "I guess it's settled."

Mark walked over to the desk, grabbed a pen, and proceed to sign a ton of paperwork and legal papers.

"Man, this is a lot of paper just to rent a small room," whispered Mark.

At a certain point during signing the man behind the desk motioned for him to give the pen and papers back.

"That's enough, sir," said the man, "Take this key so you can get into your room."

The man grabbed a key out of a desk drawer and handed it to Mark.

"Take it, Sir."

Mark grabbed the key out of the man's hand and shoved it down deep into his back pants pocket.

"Well Mark, nice seeing and hanging out with you today," said Deborah.

"Thanks, Deborah. Was a real pleasure to spend time with you today as well," added Mark.

Deborah turned around and started walking towards The Underground City's exit.

"Wait!" shouted Mark, "Where is all the stuff back at my old place going?"



“Oh. I forgot to tell you. The other rebels and burnt the place down while we were gone.”

“THEY WHAT?”

“They set the entire apartment complex where you used to live on fire. You know, so you don’t leave a trace.”

“WHERE THE HELL IS MY STUFF? DID IT BURN ALONG WITH THE BUILDING?”

“Don’t worry, your belongings are fine. We sent some guy to gather up everything in your room. Heck, he even took the bed along with the mattress.”

“That’s a little more relieving but still, YOU BURNT THE DAMN PLACE DOWN! WHAT ABOUT MY NEIGHBORS?”

“They’re all at work being zombies, remember?”

“Oh yeah, I forgot. Still, why did you burn the place down?”

“Because, we didn’t want you to leave any trace that you lived in that apartment complex.”

“What else?”

“We wiped your entire record from the city’s computer, The Department and pretty much anywhere else. As far as record-wise Mark Phillips doesn’t exist. Even if people have photo evidence of you or see you they can never prove your existence without the files.”

“Wait, so that means that I pretty much don’t exist.”

“Exactly. It’s a good feeling, isn’t it?”

“It makes me feel odd. Like something is wrong or out of place. Like I’m missing something.”

“Well hey, welcome to the club. The nonexistent club. The club for those who don’t legally exist. I’ve been nonexistent for a few weeks. You’ve been nonexistent for less than a few hours.”

“So there’s no turning back?”

“Exactly. Like we’ve all always said from the beginning, you’re either with us or against us. Take your pick.”

“With with with. Don’t worry, I’m 100% with you.”

“Smart choice, kid.”

“I’m only a few years younger than you.”

“Then you’re a kid.”

Mark began to walk towards the shipping container. He turned his head and said goodbye to Patricia.

“Goodbye Patricia and thanks for the room!”

“No problem. I’m more than happy to help a fellow rebel.”

“I’m a fellow of yours?”

“Sure are.”

“Well, I got to go. See you, friend.”

“Yeah yeah whatever see you soon.”

They parted ways until next time which Mark thought wouldn’t be that far away. She was always calling him to one of her meetings or taking him to strange places. And yet she was the same person who yelled at him and who he insulted around a month ago.

It wasn’t until he was right in front of the door to the storage container apartment

that he snapped out of this train of thought and became focused on getting into his brand new room.

The guy looked at Mark as he passed by and climbed up the steel stairs. Once at the top Mark walked down an aisle which had been made from wood between the two sets of welded together storage containers.

At the end of the corridor were two doors, one to the right and one to the left. The right door had the number ten in large red bronze lettering plastered on its front. The door to the left had the number eleven etched into the wood, presumably by a laser.

Mark looked down at his key for any clue to which room was his.

The key's topside read "Room eleven" in bright red ink.

Mark slotted the key into the doorknob before slowly turning it. Much to his surprise the key actually worked the first time and the door swung open revealing a very bare-bones simple apartment.

"Well hey, it's better than nothing," bellowed Mark.

He walked in and immediately noticed the lack of a desk, table or bed. In fact, the only piece of furniture in sight was a ratty torn sofa and a garbage can to the corner of the room.

Mark quickly checked the time. According to the watch it was 8:23 PM. He had to find something to do until somebody hopefully dropped off his belongings.

First he started trying to stop the stopwatch function built into his wrist watch at exactly one second. However, this got very dull very quickly. Next he tried to read his clothes tag but this too was boring.

After a solid two hours of waiting for something to come he heard a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" asked Mark.

"I have a package, well really a few packages, for you sir," said the man with a Boston accent.

"Just drop them outside the door."

"Are you sure, sir?"

"I'm sure about it."

"Okay then, I'll be off on my way."

Mark heard a footsteps getting further and further away from him. Once he thought that he was gone he opened the door and stepped out of the room.

Right next to the door were two medium sized boxes. Next to those was a disassembled bed frame and a mattress.

As he hauled the mattress inside Mark wondered how the delivery guy was able to haul it across the entire hall, let alone across the entire city and up all the stairs. In fact, how did he even get it down the ladder?

Once the mattress was down Mark gathered the rest of the boxes before reassembling the bed, putting the mattress on top of it and shoving the pair into the corner of the room.

Since there was no desk, table or drawer in sight Mark set all of his belongings including his computer and all the clothes onto the dirty floor. After realizing how unsanitary this was he hauled all the clothes off the floor and tossed them into a pile on top of the sofa.

"That gotta be good enough," he said under his breath.

He looked out the tiny window at the side of his room. Beneath him he could see a few pedestrians walking across the otherwise empty sidewalk. In the distance he could make out many houses and apartment buildings similar to his new home.

He decided to go to sleep earlier than usual. After all, he had a very full day and more sleep couldn't hurt.

Mark lied down in the bed and pulled up the sheets. From what was presumably the room below his he could hear a loud banging sound. At first it was annoying but eventually it became soft and soothing.

Mark slowly fell asleep, ready for whatever the next day would bring on for him.

## Chapter 11: Automobile

Mark was awoken by a loud banging at his door which was also accompanied by a voice.

“Come on you big idiot, wake up already!” said the voice.

He slowly opened his eyes and groaned for the better part of ten seconds.

“Quit ignoring me and come on! I don’t have all day!”

Even in his groggy half-asleep state he could instantly recognize the voice’s owner as Patricia, again.

“ONE SECOND!” shouted Mark.

“Yeah whatever, idiot.”

“DON’T CALL ME THAT!”

“Whatever.”

Mark groaned for five more seconds before brushing the sheets off himself and onto the floor.

“Ugh. The sheets are on the dirty floor again.”

“Well then pick them up!”

“Not enough strength.”

“I greatly pity you.”

He deeply exhaled and slowly sat up. Then he turned to the side of the bed and immediately leapt to his feet, making a loud crashing noise on the metal floor.

“Hey, keep it down up there! I’m trying to eat!” shouted a voice from below.

“Sorry, sorry,” replied Mark.

Mark slipped on whatever clean enough looking clothing that he could find on the sofa. After that he rushed to the door and opened it.

“Hey Patricia, it’s you again.”

“I know, I’m always here.”

“Well why do you keep coming? Aren’t there other people that you could visit instead?”

“Why do you think? Maybe to help you. Maybe because I like you?”

“Sorry, I forgot. Anyways, what is so urgent that you need to bash on my door and wake me up for?”

“Remember the car that we needed?”

“Oh, Keith and I are getting it today.”

“Exactly. Follow me to the van and I’ll drop you two off at the location.”

“Wait, where is Keith?”

“In the van, where did you think?”

“I thought that you’d have him with you.”

“Nevermind that. Come on, let’s go!”

And on they went. Mark followed Patricia all the way down the stairs and out of the building. They navigated the city until the two finally got back to the ladder.

Mark’s eyes shifted to the right and he noticed a large metal door that said “LOADING ONLY” in bright red letters.

“So that’s how they got the entire mattress and bed frame down here,” commented Mark.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Come on, let’s go!” said Patricia.

They then proceeded to climb up the ladder. Mark was the first to climb up with Patricia tailing his lead.

He was finally back on the surface. The cool air blowing across the lush green grass felt nice. For one of the first times in ages he actually enjoyed being outdoors. Being underground even for three quarters of a day made him miss being able to look out his window and see the sky and plants and people.

Sitting in front of him was the van that would be taking both him and Keith to their destination. He looked closer at the vehicle and through the side window he could see Cyborg Keith sitting in the passenger seat.

Mark waved at him before both him and Patricia got into the van and it flew off towards the muscle car.

“So why are we getting this so called muscle car again?” asked Keith.

“Because it’s the fastest car that we can steal without raising any suspicion,” replied Patricia.

“And why did you choose Keith and I for the job?” added Mark.

“Because,” said Patricia, “you’re pretty decent, or at least better than everybody else, at driving and Keith, well, he once read an old book all about land cars and repairing them.”

“Well, this seems interesting enough. At least you know, it’s something to do,” commented Keith.

All the way from now until they landed there was absolute silence, minus the sound emitted by the car’s HoverDrive.

On an unrelated note this reminded Mark of when he was four and he accidentally touched an uncovered HoverDrive while learning how to operate a vehicle at the police academy. He then realized how ridiculous the idea of teaching a group of easily distracted four and five year olds how to drive was and promptly started thinking about something else.

The landing was initiated without a single hitch and in fact was the best landing that he had experienced so far.

“Wow. That was the most perfect landing that I have ever experienced!” said Mark.

“Yeah, don’t worry about it too much,” replied Patricia.

“You know,” said Patricia, “You two should probably get out of the van. The thing is only a few hundred feet away.”

“Okay okay. We’ll get out,” replied Mark.

Both Mark and Keith climbed out of the vehicle simultaneously. Keith began walking towards the muscle car while Mark said goodbye to Patricia.

“Well,” said Mark, “see you soon I guess.”

“Thanks, I guess. Oh and one more thing,” said Patricia.

“What?”

“Once you get the muscle car please call Steven on the communicator.”

“But I don’t have his number.”

“Here’s his number,” said Patricia as she handed him a slip of paper.

“Hey Mark, get moving!” shouted Keith.

“I’ll be there in a second,” groaned Mark.

“Well thanks, Patricia.”

“Bye Mark. Be safe.”

“I will.”

Keith started shouting at Mark to get moving again.

“Come on,” shouted Keith, “I don’t have all day!”

“Okay okay Keith, I’m coming!” exclaimed Mark.

Within ten seconds Mark had caught up to Keith and they began to have a conversation as they walked. Mark was telling Keith a story.

“So you know, I’m just minding my own business and patrolling around the city when out of nowhere some fool with two heads and three arms appears out of thin air and walks up to me. So I ask him why he’s here and he asks if I know where some guy named Arthur is. I, of course tell the guy that he should mind his own business and then just like that he vanishes. Poof! Gone!”

“And why did that happen?” asked Keith.

“I just told you. The weirdo just walked up to me, asked if I had seen an Arthur and then vanished into thin air.”

“Well that’s cool!”

“Keith, be honest. Were you listening to my story just now?”

“Yes. Why wouldn’t I?”

“Then who did the three armed guy ask me if I had seen?”

“Uhhmm... Billy”

“So you didn’t listen.”

“Alright alright. I maybe got bored and my mind wandered.”

“And you never used to act like this before.”

“So?”

“You aren’t acting like the Keith that I remember.”

“Look, a lot has changed since the incident, okay? If you had been in my shoes you would be acting the same way.”

“How well do you remember the incident?”

“Please don’t speak about it. I’ve tried forgetting. It’s too painful to think about.”

“Okay then. I guess for your own sake I should probably quit talking about it.”

“Smart idea.”

They continued to walk through the patches of lush green grass, occasionally stopping to rest. Many minutes went by and the car still wasn’t in sight.

“Man Keith,” said Mark, “I think that Patricia’s estimate of the thing being only a few hundred feet away is completely inaccurate.”

“I know, why didn’t she land any closer?” replied Keith

“Laziness. Most likely the culprit.”

“Always is, always will be.”

The grass slowly turned more and more brown. The highway in the distance became closer and closer and closer by the second. Not by much but just enough to reassure them that they were actually going somewhere.

Mark and Keith both suddenly saw a line where the grass stopped and the highway asphalt began. They both looked to the right and sitting there in all its glory was the muscle car.

“Man, that’s one beaten up car,” commented Mark.

“And? It’s one of the few land-cars left in existence,” replied Keith.

“What happened to rest of them?”

“Progress along with the advent of the HoverCar phased them out of existence. After the War on Thought their numbers really started to decline. I think that this car is one of the last of its kind.”

Mark slowly walked around the rusted vehicle, carefully examining each and every badge, logo and chrome on its faded red body panels.

On the front grill he could make out the word “Charger” along with “R/T”. As he continued to look he noticed that it was missing all of the glass as well as the fenders and both of its doors.

“Hey Keith, since you’re the car whiz could you tell me what a Charger R/T is?” asked Mark.

“I think it’s a muscle car,” replied Keith.

“No shit, Keith. Tell me something that I don’t know.”

“I think that it was made by a Pre-War company called Dodge.”

“What year is this thing from?”

“Sometime in the 60s.”

“Thanks for all the help, buddy.”

“Well, Mark, why don’t we get in?”

“I guess we should. I call driver.”

“Shotgun!”

“You realize that that was unnecessary, right?”

“How come?”

“There is no one else to ride shotgun, therefore there is no reason to call it to prevent someone from taking it.”

“You’re confusing me.”

“Just get in the damn car already!”

Mark climbed into the driver’s seat of the car. He noticed that there was already a key in the ignition and he turned it.

“I swear that if this rust-bucket actually works after who-knows-when...” said Mark under his breath.

Surprisingly the machine immediately sprung to life. The engine produced a satisfying roar which was very pleasing to Mark’s ears.

“I can’t believe that this thing actually works!” exclaimed Mark.

Keith then crawled out from under the car and stood up.

“I fixed it with this handy device,” said Keith as he held out a small pen-shaped device.

“What is that, what does it do and where did you get it?” asked Mark.

“It’s called a Repair-O-Matic 2000. I know, terrible name but it’s pretty handy for repairing mechanical devices. All you gotta do is point it at the device and within second it’s fixed.”

“That sounds awesome. Where could I get one?”

“You could, well, steal it from a government facility.”

“Wait, you stole from a government facility? They’re most likely trying to find you at this very moment!”

“Says the guy who stole a police vehicle and never gave it back. Says the guy who is planning to go and destroy a government building. And besides, I doubt that

they'd care too much about their little device that was mixed up in someone's pencil cup."

Mark pointed to the torn passenger seat.

"Get in, Keith. We've got a car to deliver."

Keith walked over to the seat and slumped down into it. He looked at the floor before looking back up, frowning at Mark.

"Come on, Mark. Patricia told you to call her. Patricia doesn't wait on people," groaned Keith.

Mark let out a loud sigh and slumped his head down.

"Keith," he said nervously, "is there an afterlife? Something like heaven?"

"Why are you bringing this up, Mark because-" Keith paused, "Look, how am I supposed to know? A mangled up half-human half-cyborg."

"It's just that, I have a feeling that the final plan, the road to freedom, is nothing but a suicide mission. I want to die knowing that I can freely live on somewhere else, without the government's artificial shackles holding me back."

"You should die knowing that you're doing something for a greater cause. We all joined the movement knowing that it would someday be the death of us."

"But if we don't succeed then all of our hard work would have been for nothing."

"There is no such thing as something being for nothing. Every single revolt, every single action whether it's bad or good, big or small, always ends up inspiring somebody somewhere, and that's something."

"Fair enough. What do you say, let's call Patricia."

"Go ahead, Mark."

Mark reached for the communicator and entered in the password. Just as he was about to call Patricia the communicator began to vigorously vibrate and ring in his hands. He answered it.

"Hello, who is this?" said Mark.

"Is this Mark Phillips?" asked the person on the other end of the line.

"Who are you? Could you please tell me?"

"Just tell me, are you Mark Phillips?"

"Yes, quit asking. Who are you and why do you know my name and Communicator ID?"

"Trevor Hernandez, resistance member. Look, it's urgent."

"Tell me then! I haven't got much time!" demanded Mark.

"You need to get back to cover! The city finally realized that you and Deborah weren't coming back and put the entirety of New Los Angeles under lockdown. The place is swarming with cops. They're everywhere. They've even sent some to search the highways."

"Shit! I'm on the highway! Quick, tell me where I can hide!"

"Take the canals. You're bound to find something. Just get going!"

"Okay then."



## Chapter 12: In Pursuit

The line cutout and he was left listening to a harsh static.

“We’re in deep shit, you and I!” shouted Mark.

“What do you mean?” responded Keith.

“The cops, they’re onto us! Come on, hold on to something!”

Mark fiddled with the transmission lever before the vehicle finally got into gear. For a split second Mark turned his head and when he did he saw something that scared the living everything out of him.

“There’s a line of cop cars right behind us!” shouted Mark

He slammed his foot on the gas pedal and the vehicle lurched forward. He gripped the steering wheel as he violently jerked it from side to side.

Just as the vehicle was approaching a turn Mark heard a bullet hit the back of the muscle car. Then he heard another one and another one after that.

“KEITH! DUCK!” screamed Mark.

The pair ducked as he skillfully drifted through the turn. The car’s aerodynamic body molded perfectly with the wind as it swung across the bend.

In front of them was a longer straight of road to each side there were many obstacles such as rusted out vehicles.

“GET OUT OF THE DAMN CAR NOW! RESISTANCE IS FUTILE!” shouted a voice from behind over a bullhorn.

“NOT TODAY!” shouted Keith as Mark continued to navigate the road, still ducked just enough that he could see the road ahead.

They were quickly approaching a makeshift wooden ramp, and fast. Sirens wailed in the distance while the voice continued to shout over them.

“SURRENDER NOW OR FACE UNIMAGINABLE PAIN!”

“WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?” shouted Keith as the wind blew into his face.

“DON’T GO OFF THAT RAMP OR BOTH OF YOU ARE GOING TO GET IT!”

“Sorry bud, too late!” shouted Mark as the car went over the ramp.

Its front end flew gracefully through the air while its rear end kept up from right behind. As the vehicle soared through the air its tires kept spinning slower and slower. For a split second confusion stood, plastered over the faces of each cop as they watched

the ancient automobile flying through the air.

However, this flight was short lived. Within seconds the car had landed on the ground and was heading towards the canal. However, the jump did confuse the officers just enough that they were behind by a few precious seconds.

Mark and Keith jerked back in their seats as both wheels came back in contact with the ground and their brief moment of flight came to an end

“I PREDICT,” shouted Keith over the earsplitting sound of the wind, “THAT THEY’RE GONNA CALL IT QUILTS PRETTY SOON.”

“WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT?” shouted Mark as the car’s engine drowned out almost all noise

“BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT THEY CAN’T GO DRIVING THROUGH THE CANALS!”

“AND WHY IS THAT?”

“BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE KILLED IF THEY WRECKED THOSE CARS!”

Mark brought his focus back to the task at hand, getting the cops off their tail. As the opening for the canal got closer and closer Mark jammed his foot into the gas pedal even more. By the time that they had reached the incline that eventually channeled into the canal the vehicle’s engine was screaming and Mark could barely contain it.

“THIS IS ONE INEFFICIENT MODE OF TRANSPORTATION, ALBEIT A PRETTY DAMN COOL ONE!” shouted Mark.

“DON’T GO INTO THAT CANAL OR.... WE’LL DISCUSS IT LATER!” screamed the voice.

Mark flipped off the cops for a brief second. This gesture seemed to anger them even more. The voice began to shout again.

“COME ON MEN! CATCH THOSE BASTARDS!”

The car with Mark and Keith in it was going into the tunnel that lead to the canal. As the car went in Mark could head the police vehicles coming to a stop and the voice swearing uncontrollably.

“DAMN IT WE LOST THOSE BASTARDS! SHIT!”

They both chuckled to themselves as the sky behind them turned into tunnel. They had escaped the cops. Mark felt very good about this.

“Well,” said Mark, “we escaped them for now. I guess it’s time to call Patricia.”

Mark jammed on the breaks and the car halted to a stop. He then took the communicator out of his pocket and found that Patricia had already sent them a message.

“I heard about the cops. If you’ve escaped already then keep driving down the canal. At the end there is another rebel camp. They should be able to help you. Sorry that I can’t pick you two up. Busy right now. Will meet with you tomorrow. -Patricia” read the message.

“Well, I guess we gotta drive down the entire canal. Buckle up, old friend,” said Mark.

“Sure thing, friend,” replied Keith.

Mark hit the gas again and the car was once again driving through the tunnels, turning with each bend that came up. They could see the light at the end of the tunnel approaching faster and faster. Mark kept driving towards it. Before long they had exited the tunnel and were now barreling down the path to the canal’s side.

This relatively easy straight-driving went on for about ten or so minutes. They reached a few more bends before finally making it to the camp.

After entering through the gates they left it in the parking lot. When they walked out there was a resistance member that they had never met ready to pick them up.

Both Mark and Keith got into the van and rode off into the night.

## Chapter 13: The Big Plan

Mark was at The Underground City's grocery store when he got the phonecall that would change his life. He was sorting through a stack of carrots when his communicator began to vibrate and ring in his pocket.

He pulled it out and pressed the accept key.

"We're ready to move on The Big Plan, Mark," said the voice.

"Is this Keith on the other end?" asked Mark.

"Yes," said Keith, "We've collected all the things that we need. All the planning is finished and we've even picked a date."

"Wait, you mean the THE Big plan?"

"Yea. That's the one that I'm talking about."

"Well, what's the date that you've chosen?"

"Thursday. This Thursday."

"Wait, you mean tomorrow?"

"Yeah, tomorrow. Sheriff Richard has been generous enough to let us meet at his station. Be there by 5:00am."

"Well, then," Mark sighed, "I will be there. Bye, Keith."

"Yeah bye."

The communicator hung up and Mark was left standing in the middle of the produce aisle with nobody in sight.

This was it. This was the grand finale. The end of the road. The final challenge. Everything that had been happy or sad or even in between had been working up to this very point.

Mark, who by now had wandered out of the grocery store and was walking back to his apartment, felt a sense of uncertainty. He felt the clutches of death looming right above him.

He knew that he could try to escape the resistance and spare his life from what was almost definitely a suicide mission. But where would he go? And how could he live with the thought of abandoning the people who he had spent so much time with?

No. He had to go through. There was no other choice. He'd either succeed or die a noble death trying.

On the way to the apartment he passed a small newsstand. There was an old man sitting in a chair reading a magazine. When he saw Mark approach he lowered it and began to speak.

"Hello sir, how can I help you?"

"What's your best newspaper?" asked Mark.

"That would be The Underground Post, of course."

"That sounds good. How much does it cost?"

"Only one credit, today only. It's part of my sale."

Mark thumbed through his pocket before finding and pulling out a five credit piece and handing it to the old man.

"Here," he said, "take this

The old man grabbed the newspaper from the wall and handed it over to Mark.

"Would you like your change?"

"No, you can keep it."

"Really?"

"Look, Tomorrow I'm going to make big news. I just know it. Unfortunately I'm destined to die in the process and a dead man doesn't have any use for credits."

The old man looked confused.

"What do you mean?"

"Just take my word for it, when the news drops you're going to sell quicker than you ever had before. I guarantee."

"Really? You guarantee?"

"Yes. Really. Now, enjoy your credits while you can because in a day or two you are going to be rich."

"Well sir, thanks but..."

By then Mark had already left the area and was almost to his room, newspaper in hand. The Indian man looked up at him slightly before putting his head back down on the desk.

Once he reached his room Mark sat on the side of his bed and read the headline on the newspaper.

"Man Eats 100 hot dogs in eating contest, collapses and dies," read the headline.

Mark tossed the paper aside and lied down on the worn out mattress. He was going to need sleep tonight more than ever.

## Chapter 14: Finale

Mark woke up to his alarm clock blasting its earsplitting alarm. He turned onto his side to get a glimpse of its LED screen.

“4:00am” read the clock.

The room was still very dark and Mark almost accidentally bashed his head into the wall while getting up.

“That was a close one,” whispered Mark.

He stood up in the center of the room and deeply breathed in. He was finally ready. The grand finale had begun.

He grabbed all the clothes that had been lying all over the sofa and threw them on. He grabbed his trusty communicator and his favorite watch.

“What must be done must be done” said Mark as he opened the door to his room and left.

Within a few minutes he had arrived at the sheriff’s station and was waiting for his friends to arrive.

After a few minutes of waiting Keith arrived. Then Harold, Helen and Scott. After that was Steven. A few more people arrived and finally, Patricia showed up.

“Well guys,” said Patricia as she wandered into the station’s lobby, “This is it. This is what we’ve been waiting such a long time for. Several years of planning in the works and finally, we’re ready.”

The entire group broke into applause.

“Thanks guys. I know this is exciting. I know. Does everybody remember their roles?”

“Could you recap?” asked Mark.

“Alright, M. I’ll say it again. First off we need our hacker. Thankfully Keith knows how to hack into the security system and disable both the robots and the cameras. However, we only have 30 minutes to work until the system goes back online. Everybody else goes in with me and deals with any enemies that we encounter along the way. Finally we need somebody to go into the reactor core and plant the explosives... Mark, you’ll do that. Any questions?”

“Yes, I have a question,” said Mark.

“What is it?”

“What do you mean by the “core””

“You know, where the city gets its power from.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Okay, let’s roll!”

The group left. Once they exited The Underground City they packed into the muscle car. Patricia opened the trunk and handed each person their supplies before closing it and getting back in the vehicle. Once again Mark was driving. This time, however, he was taking the highway instead of the canals.

As he drove down the highway further and further the city began to appear. First the large skyscrapers, then the apartment buildings and finally the small shops and houses.

Before long they had entered the city and were blasting down the rarely-used road.

“Great driving!” yelled Scott, sarcastically.

“Thanks, kid!” shouted back Mark.

They planned to park a block away from the building so them and their unique vehicle didn’t attract too much police attention.

Mark chose to park behind what looked to be an abandoned stripmall.

The brakes screeched to a halt as he jammed on the brake pedal.

Mark was the first person to get out of the car. Then Patricia and after that he lost count.

“Everybody, listen up! I have something important to say,” shouted Patricia, “We may die today. We may not succeed. In fact, we may not even make it into the building. But if we don’t try then how can any change come? Many years ago when The Party launched the War On Thought no one thought that they’d win against the entire US army and yet they did, because they tried. Actions can only be created as well as reversed with effort. Now, let’s give it our all. We will succeed. Long live the resistance!”

“Yeah!” shouted somebody from the small crowd.

Everybody took their weapons from the trunk and tucked them into their holsters or under their jackets. Then, like that, they were off.

As they approached the building a man wearing a police jacket stopped them and demanded that their Police IDs.

“Only authorized personnel can access this building. Either show your ID or get the hell out!”

“Well you see, I left my police ID back at home,” replied Mark.

“Then too bad! Now leave immediately or I will have to beat you!”

As they argued Harold grabbed his gun by the barrel and slowly snuck up behind the officer. Once his head was right in position he smashed the handle down into the man’s head.

He fell to the ground and blood began to rush from the newly created wound.

“Well, that’s unfortunate,” said Scott

Mark bent down and removed the unconscious officer’s jacket as well as his ID before putting them on.

“Well guys, I’ve got a computer to hack. See you later!” said Keith before running off in the opposite direction.

The group, lead by Mark himself continued towards the door. Next to the hulking steel door was an ID reader. Mark took the officer’s ID and ran it through the machine. It waited a few minutes before spitting out a sheet of paper and opening the doors.

The room was painted entirely black except for the stamped metal floor. There was a tubular hallway leading down the back of it and to the right hand corner there was a desk with two more officers standing at it.

One of them stepped out and walked up to the group.

“Show your ID,” boomed the officer.

Mark handed him the ID card. The officer looked up at Mark and then back down at the ID card a couple times before handing him back the card and asking him to state his purpose.

“State your purpose.”

“Well,” said Mark, “I’m transporting these prisoners to be executed.”

“Alright then, I’ll go open the door.”

The officer walked to the hallway's door and entered in a PIN number. The door flung open and they proceeded ahead.

As they walked further and further down the corridor an odd feeling came upon Mark, like he was being watched by somebody.

Once any officers were out of sight they bolted for the door that read "Core Access" in bright red letters.

"Come on people, move it!" shouted Mark.

"Well," said Patricia, "This is easier than I thought it would be. Too easy."

Right then and there a guard jumped out from behind a bend in the hallway and opened fire on the group.

Just as the bullets were about to hit her Mark jumped in front of Patricia. Each of the three bullets deeply embedded itself into his chest before Scott blasted the guard's head off.

"MARK!" screamed Patricia, "WHAT HAPPENED!"

Mark couldn't feel anything. His entire body was numb. As he laid almost motionless in the center of the hall he could hear Patricia crying as everybody else watched.

"Come on g-guys. We m-must go on," croaked Mark.

"NO! I'M NOT LEAVING YOU!" screamed Patricia.

"Shit. Another good man down. Why! Why!" shouted Scott.

The others stood in the corner with their heads down.

"L-leave me. My j-journey is done. Let y-your's continue," said Mark.

Harold wrapped his arm around sobbing Patricia as they bolted down the corner.

Within a minute an officer arrived to the dying Mark.

"It's the end of the line for you, Buddy," said the old officer as he pointed a gun at Mark.

Mark took a deep breath.

"Well," he said, "T-then so be i-it."

Mark smiled at the officer. Somehow in a sudden change of heart the officer slid the gun back into its holster and crouched down beside Mark.

"I guess there's no use in shooting a dying man, take your time," said the officer.

Mark looked up at him again.

"A-at least you c-care. Y-you're a g-good man," said Mark.

"Thanks. You know, I remember a time. A time before the war. When thought wasn't punished. When it was embraced."

"W-was it nice?"

"It was wonderful. It was amazing. I can't even believe that I'm saying this. I'm just an old man who happens to be an officer."

"W-well, I-I was an o-officer."

Mark saw his vision blurring everything was disappearing.

"G-goodbye, sir," croaked Mark

"Goodbye, officer. Now you're making me cry," replied the officer.

Mark felt warm. He remembered Patricia. He remembered Keith and how they used to hang out around the office. He remembered the muscle car and the damned commuter express. He remembered the man with the newspaper. As he lie on the ground with the officer over him he felt at peace, finally. Free of the world's madness.

He heard an explosion sounding from the other side of the building. He knew what this meant. His final objective was complete.  
And then, the world went black.



## Epilogue - Thirty years later

Cyborg Keith sat at his hard oak desk, twirling a pen. He looked across the room at the identical oak bookshelf. Nothing.

He looked back at the clock. Still nothing. Keith grabbed the calculator that was sitting on his desk and began to press keys at random. As he was doing this the door at the front of the room burst open and a tall man ran in holding a clipboard.

“Keith! Keith!” he shouted, “Your book, it’s selling fast! You’re famous!”

Keith chuckled as he began to speak.

“Is that so? Well, that’s good to hear, that my story is finally out.”

“Well, you’re rich now, Keith! Enjoy basking in all your wealth!”

Keith chuckled again.

“You know, I’m just happy that people are reading my story. Wealth doesn’t matter.”

“What do you mean that wealth doesn’t matter?”

“This story, it’s worth more to me than wealth. I’m writing about the world’s greatest group of heroes. Hell, I was one of them!”

“Wait, you knew Mark Phillips, Patricia Lane, Harold Oak, Steven Oak, Helen Hill and Steven Richards?”

“Sure did. More specifically, Mark and I were the greatest of friends, until The Mission.”

Keith looked out the window at the graveyard. There was a row of weathered gravestones that stood out against the others. Keith pointed to them.

“You see that, Gerald? That row of six gravestones? That’s where they’re buried. That’s where the people who I helped single handedly take down The Party, that’s where they are now.”

“Well, I must be going. See you, Keith.”

“Later, John.”

The man ran back out of the room and once again, Keith was alone. Without anything else to do he opened up his desk drawer. The watch was just where he had left it.

Keith grabbed the watch and set it down on the top of the desk.

“And to think that out of everything in that building, my old pal Mark’s watch was all that survived.”

Keith grabbed a small, brown book that sat on the desk. Its cover read “The Department” in gold letters.

He opened it to the first page and began to read.

“Chapter 1: The Department

As the sun began to ascend, its light emitted in great big beams which slowly crept across the crowded landscape. As the light drew closer and closer the nearby glass skyscrapers and houses began to shimmer like a large, golden diamond. But the streets were still empty. Except for the occasional spider or lush green lawn there were absolutely no signs of life. The entire city looked as if it had hastily been deserted,” it read.

“And to think I was the narrator!” he exclaimed.

