“Log off, private,” the overclocked tactician relayed. The layered sounds of the utterance came to Dylan in delayed steps, one after the other, forming an alien, persistent thought in his mind, echoing its serious tone. Although connected to the Backend, it remains trivial to manipulate his neural-interface and transmit basic information.

The tactician operates in the Frontend, overclocking their mind to around six times reality—their messages to the Backend grunts are artificial, typed up to avoid the gnat-like nagging of a normal connection. The inhumanity still surpasses the panic-inducing pace of overclockers.

Dylan frantically camouflages his remaining equipment a few meters from an exposed patch, its stream flowing softly despite the bustle. Trees sway around the clearing, creaking with anticipation of the oncoming storm. The sun remains below the horizon, but maniacally crawls its way up to illuminate the remnants of the platoon. Dylan and two others remain, with 17 disconnected.

Dylan is one of homeless cogs in machine.