

## What We Leave Behind — By: Cecil Cao

### I.

Guilt hung thick on Victor's hand as he knocked his hand against the steel door in front of him. His bio-sensors indicated an elevation in heartbeat and breathing rate, his dermal implants had already begun to vent the excess heat from his body. One second passed, then two, then three. The silent rain and hover cars left him feeling exposed at the doorstep. He never got used to that feeling, rather it only got worse the more he lived as a merc.

The monitor next to the door whirred to life. Ms. Ratta revealed herself on the other end, eyes red from what were likely sleepless nights. A warm smile dimly lit her face, the loss of Petrol clearly took a toll on her. He returned a smile, but he felt out of place here. His home away from home felt foreign now.

"It's nice to see you Victor. Is there something you need?"

"Hi Ms. Ratta," he said, feeling like a child again, "I just wanted to check up on you. Heard that you were planning the funeral soon."

"Thank you Victor, but I'm doing fine. I'm sure you're quite busy yourself."

The steel doors opened, and Ms. Ratta welcomed Victor in.

"Please, come in. Make yourself at home."

Victor sat quietly on the couch in front of Ms. Ratta, watching her pour some black tea for herself. It was over half a year since he came to visit, back when he and Petrol spent the night together here. Memories bubbled to the surface. Of the good times, and of the bad. A cup of coffee sat beside him, warm steam meandering out from the dark liquid. He remembered when Petrol would make coffee for the both of them. Used a drip stand, with

the finest beans he could get. He felt it was a waste of eddies, but Petrol always told him it tastes better this way. Taking a sip of his coffee, he realized he was right. He was always right.

“Look, um. Ms. Ratta—”

“Just call me Philia, dear. I prefer it.”

“—Philia. Thank you, for letting me in. I know it might be hard to have me around.”

“No, it’s quite alright—” Victor could see her body heat rise when she said that, “—I’m used to visitors coming to visit now and then. It’s nice to know my Patrick was loved by many.”

“He was. He really was.”

## II.

Victor still remembered the raid, and the night he died. Those corpo bastards attacked them first, and attacked them hard. Who would have ever expected it? A random crew of mercs, and they would send a personal squad to them out. Explosion took out half the crew. The firing squad nearly took out the rest. In the flames and bullet rain, Petrol ran out and saved as many of their crew as they could. Victor kept telling him to run. Gave him the best covering fire a man could ask for, but he still wouldn’t run.

“Just run, Petrol! We need to go!”

“No! Not without Adam, Ajax, and the rest! We’re all leaving together!”

“Don’t be naive! Start the car now!”

Petrol bit his lip, almost cursing Victor for a moment, and ran towards the garage. Their enemies began to strike fiercely upon them. Several soldiers came into melee, with mantis blades, cutting down several stragglers.

“Goddammit! Come on, you corpo puppets! Let me take you to the reaper!”

Sliding out of his cover, Victor unsheathed his katana, bisecting a soldier like butter. His blade glowed red hot, searing the blood and viscera off it. A flurry of red swipes followed his movements, slicing apart one corporate soldier after another. He let out a maniacal laugh, slicing and dicing people apart, while barely avoiding getting shot at.

His crew looked back at him with a mix of horror and awe, cheering him on as before they jet. Petrol stayed back, looking on as he watched Victor eviscerate their attackers.

“Victor! Get a move on! Move!”

Listening to Adam, Victor leapt back and turned on his leg thrusters, sprinting at inhuman speeds towards the garage. Petrol was still there, waiting for him.

“The hell you doing? Go!”

“I couldn’t leave without you!”

“Well now I’m here! Let’s jet before we get zeroed!”

Petrol took their getaway car and sped out of the garage. Victor sat shotgun, unloading his pistols on their pursuers. Their comms were a mess, and everyone was yelling over each other to see who was still alive. Sirens began to blare throughout the city, as cops began to chase after their crew. Luckily, none of them were as good at driving as Petrol. He quickly made distance between their new pursuers, dodging out of traffic and onto the highways. Victor couldn’t help but let out a holler as he watched their lights fade from the horizon.

“Take that, you gonks! Now that’s what I’m talking about!”

He slapped Petrol’s soldier, and the two celebrated their moment of victory like children: screaming and bouncing in their seats. Once the coast was clear, Victor leaned in

and kissed Petrol. Taking the time to savor the moment before they had to deal with reality. The two smiled at each other, smiling like idiots as they savored the moment.

“I’m glad you stayed for me, Petrol. Never thought we could check off: ‘Kiss each other after a cop chase’ so early.”

“Babe, I’d stay if it meant we could save everyone together.”

“Heh, we ain’t heroes, Petrol. But I appreciate the sentiment.”

“You’re a hero to me, Vic. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

### III.

Victor spent a little more time reminiscing with Philia about Petrol, enjoying each other’s company as they talked. He reminisced about their first meeting, how Petrol came to him to learn about how to do business. Victor tried his best to keep Petrol’s secret from Philia. He didn’t want his mom to worry about his life as a merc. Told her that he was the best mechanic there was in Night City, rivaling even the nomads and their expertise on wheels. She laughed at all their foolish antics, like how Victor got chewed out for pouring wiper fluid into the engine, or how they drank themselves silly and woke up half naked and heavily bruised in a wrestling ring. He told her about their first kiss, and how they wanted to spend their lives together, watching the sun set into the ocean in the suburbs, or maybe move to Europe, or even Canada. She laughed terribly at the thought.

Before he left, Victor decided to leave Petrol’s dogtag next to his coffee cup and left without a word while she went to the kitchen. Seeing her smile was enough for him, and he didn’t want to make things more difficult for her.

He spent the next few days with what's left of his crew. Adam, their leader, took charge of managing what was left of their safehouses and their supplies. Soon, a week had passed, and things started to feel like normal again, as normal could be. He had to talk to Adam about this.

"Why the hell are we not hitting them back for this? They took everything from us!"

"They took everything from *you*," Adam said, "I'm not going to entertain this idea of trying to stick it to Arasaka. Do you have any idea what we're up against?"

"So what? Are we going to just let them have our friends? Our mates? Why didn't we take the fight to them? Who knows when they'll attack again?"

"They won't," he said grimly.

"What?"

"They won't because they got what they wanted. They wanted Petrol."

"The fuck? Why the hell do you know that?"

"... You wouldn't like it."

Victor unsheathed his katana, leaning the tip against Adam's neck. The heat of the blade quickly burned at the dermal lining of Adam's chrome.

"Tell me now, or you wouldn't like what I plan to do to you."

Adam stared back with a snarl, the rest of their gang stared at the two with a mix of fear and concern. Victor leaned in closer to Adam, his red with fury at the thought of betrayal. Adam calmly continued:

"We tortured one of their men. Apparently they need him for an experiment or something. That's all I know."

"Fucking lies. Where are they taking him? Where are they taking his body?"

"Arasaka tower. Don't know where, exactly."

Victor lowers his blade for a moment, giving Adam a chance to punch him in the face.

Victor crumples to the ground, still clutching his katana.

"There we go. Much better," he says, spitting onto the ground, "how about we not point blades at each other."

"You knew... You fucking knew and you kept quiet about it."

"Yeah, I did. Because you were about to go and tear those corpses and their mercs a new one," Adam gestured to one of the guys to prop Victor back onto a chair, "you really think we'd be so stupid to try and attack Arasaka like this?"

"I don't care. I'm going to tear them all limb from limb if I had to. Those corpo fucks had it coming the day they set foot in our city."

"They *own* the city, Vic. Just like every other megacorp. You seriously think some small-time gangers like us are going to walk up to Arasaka and take back what's ours? Think with your gray matter, choom."

"Then sit back and lick your goddamn wounds. I need to save him."

#### IV.

Victor lay face-down on the operating table, waiting for the ripper-doc to finalize preparations for the new cyberware installed on his body. He was going to 'borg up, cyberpsychosis be damned. The ripper-doc looked back at him, looking at all the chrome on his body already.

"You sure about this? Like, eddies are eddies, but you're already at your limit. The immuno-suppressants can only do so much."

"Just do it. I already paid you."

“What would Petrol think?”

“Shut up.”

Victor snarled at him with bloodshot eyes and gnashing teeth. His frame barely able to contain the unbridled fury that pulsed through his systems, which already warned of his overdue medication. With a languid sigh, the ripper doc began his work, injecting immunosuppressants and anesthetics into Victor.

Victor woke up in the back of Petrol’s old car, cold sweat covering every part of his body. He stared at the driver’s seat where Petrol sat, quietly driving home. He quietly got up and looked out the window where the sea of neon lights lit every part of Night City. He looked to Petrol, who was quietly driving down this lonely stretch of highway.

“Hey,” Petrol said lovingly, “fight really took a lot out of you, yeah?”

“Yeah...” Victor looked towards Petrol, reaching out a hand to touch him, only to have it be swatted away.

“Choom, you can have me once we get home. Just rest up. Dunno when we’ll be in the clearing soon.”

“All the better for me to keep watch for any of those Arasaka bastards then. I’ve rested plenty.”

“If you say so.”

The car ride continued for a few dozen miles, quietly driving on an eerily empty freeway. Victor couldn’t help but feel like he was forgetting something important, like he went on a drug trip or a booze cruise or something. A cool feeling just ached against his chest, as if he needed to do something. He needed to remember.

“Hey Vic, you look tired, still. You sure you don’t need to rest?”

“No, no. I’m fine.”

“Seriously, you’re always trying to push yourself for others. Let me handle it this time.”

“Like you handled breakfast? Nearly burned down our kitchen,” Victor said, confused about the words coming out of his mouth.

“Well, maybe one day, we can live together. Enjoy some scrambled eggs and toast like old people and have those ‘normal’ lives that corpos always talk about.”

“Yeah, I’d like that.”

“Haha— wait really?”

“Yeah.”

And then it hit him, just like the explosion that blew up their car.

...

“...borged up and still kicking, eh? Surprised you’re still conscious after all of this.”

“Ugh.”

Victor barely understood what the ripper doc said, having barely come out of anesthesia a few minutes ago. His head felt like lead, and burned up something fierce. His bio-sensors are going crazy, warning of the overload on his systems.

“Thanks doc,” he said, while turning to leave.

He thought he heard the doc say something to him, but he couldn’t really understand what he was saying. All he could do was wander towards some destination he was unaware of.



Sirens blared from every corner of the room, as guards and security rushed to the front door, where a cyberpsycho rampaged into the Arasaka Towers. Machine guns roared to life, tracing a line where the psycho ran, just unable to land a clean shot onto him. Brandishing a bright red katana, the psycho slashed his way through the main hall of the tower and deeper into the building. Security continued to make calls and quickly locked down the building. At the very least, they weren't going to let the cyberpsycho run free. The guards that held their ground were quickly sliced to ribbons, despite their extensive cyberware, as the psycho continued to make his way deeper into the tower.

"Where is he going?"

"Third floor, 2nd atrium!"

"Stop him!"

Security drones began to swarm on him, taking fire at the intruder with missiles and semi-automatic rifles. The psycho quickly ducked to cover and unfolded a pair of mini-guns in his forearms, sniping down the drones with ease. Suddenly, a squadron of heavy riot forces descended upon him, raining armor-piercing rounds onto him.

Victor looked as the hoards of mercs surrounded him, taking aim as he and Petrol barely crawl out of the burning car. He heard Petrol silently curse them for doing so. A legion of guns pointed squarely at their faces, ready to fire at a moment's notice,

"Don't," Petrol weakly said, "please."

The psycho quickly dashed into the fray, almost taking a fatal blow from the ungodly bullet hell that rained upon him. Without stop, he leapt across the room with immaculate speed and precision. His katana cut through multiple enemies with every slice. The psycho continued to wander through the buildings one by one, tearing down every door, every wall

that tried to shut him out from the rest of the tower. He saw researchers and late-night employees running away in fear of him, seeing him as nothing more than a bloodthirsty predator.

Victor needed to take care of the weaker guys first. He could tell by their hesitation. He quickly sliced them apart before they had a chance to shoot, then turned to the mercs that stood dumbfounded in front of him. He was proud of his speed, and he wasn't going to let them shoot back at him. Slicing down each one, he felt his body grow heavier by the minute. He was a fighter, but he wasn't a god. He was barely holding on as it is. He could feel his body getting colder by the minute.

Clutching his sides, he could feel what little blood was in his body begin to trickle out. His armor was struck and cracked like a spider's web. It was simply a well-placed shot. It didn't matter. None of this mattered.

Reaching a morgue, the psycho came to a stop. Victor looked at the rows of corpses in front of him, realizing where he was. He was in Arasaka Tower—the freeway with Petrol—in order to save him. His mind could barely hold itself together from all this heat. Soon, he came across a door labeled 'Patrick Ratta' and pulled it open. He saw Petrol, unconscious in his arms, barely breathing. Those bastards managed to get a shot in him. He was bleeding bad. Petrol never bothered to chrome up like he did. Just never felt the need.

Victor kept running, holding Petrol in his arms tightly, as if he would disappear if he let go. Bullets rained down on him in a furious hail, the hallways filled with smoke as the security alarms continued to blare incessantly.

He could hear the mercs continue to yell out orders, trying to stop him from escaping the encirclement, but the hole that he made was enough to break through it. They

kept aiming for him, trying to get through his armor with every shot, and he could feel his body breaking down with each one, he couldn't risk Petrol getting shot.

"Please, just let him live," he thought to himself, "just let him live on."

He thought about the time they spent together. All the new business ventures, the jobs, the bills, the fights. They were going to make it big before they left. They were going to be legends.

Or so he thought.

He thought about the plans they made. The dreams of growing old. To grow old, or to die in a blaze of glory. He wondered what life Petrol truly wanted.

A single person then stood in front of him, brandishing a baton and holding a defensive stance towards him.

"Stand down, cyberpsycho. This will be your last warning."

Shut it. Get out of my way, he thought. He fired his wrist guns at the assailant, only for him to deflect his shots and strike him down in a single strike. His bio-sensors blared red in front of him, but his mind was barely able to register the danger in front of him. Where was he again? Who was he trying to save? What was he trying to do? His mind continued to swim in his own thoughts as the man walked towards him.

Petrol lay beside him, barely able to breathe.

"Victor?"

"We're going to live Petrol! Just stay with me man!"

"Leave me behind. I'll just be dead weight."

"Don't say that kind of stuff, man. Alright? I'll get us out of this mess. I always do."

"Thanks," Petrol said, coughing out a bit of blood, "but you got to run. For me."

“We were going to live old, right? Just stick with me. I can get you out of here!”

“I had a great life, Vic. I really did. I’m glad to have met you. I wish we could had more.”

“No, no!”

“Live long, Vic.”

Handing off his dog tag, Petrol closed his eyes, watching the clouds above them. The mercs began to close in on them, leaving Victor with only one way out. Down.

The windows in this room were strangely open, despite the lockdown, and the view of Night City still glittered far from his reach. Victor sometimes couldn’t believe this shitty capitalist world would be where he would call home. He could feel his body begin to shut down. His internal systems had long shut down now. The guards swarmed in and quickly dragged him up from his feet, as he watched Petrol’s body grow farther away from him.

“We’re going to make an example of you,” they said, “you’ll wish you didn’t die earlier.”

“I already did,” he said, “this time, I’ll die on my terms.”

In his chest, he felt the explosives that were installed slowly come to life. The last of his body ready to burst at the seams.

“At the very least, I’ll die guilt-free. Eat it you corpo pigs.”

From the distance, a large explosion erupted from the side of Arasaka towers, shaking the entire city to its core.

Adam watched from a safe distance, wondering what it would mean to him and his gangers.

The city grew restless from this attack, fearing the worst for its future.

Victor continued to hold his hand with Petrol, continuing to dream of a future they could never have, maybe to be remembered in the afterlife.