

An Angel's Descent

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Introduction

The world is a mess, but he couldn't care less. He had his own concerns, his own problems. His name is Vincent Cash. The year is 2267. The place is Angel City, formerly part of 'The Waste', formerly San Angeles Barrier City, formerly Los Angeles, formerly El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles, formerly jack shit. One could point out the irony of this reprobate infested hell-hole being named after heavenly and spiritual beings, but that comparison has probably already been made once or twice in the last 250 years.

As for him, he wouldn't want his job to define who he is as a person, but it seems like the most obvious place to start. He works for Seraphim, Inc, one of a handful of corporations that run Angel City. This corporation in particular is the most powerful in the city by a wide margin. In their early days they were just Seraphim, a group of survivors whose purpose was to transform the toxic San Angeles into a livable region again, before it was even being called Angel City. That was forty years ago. Now they have their hands in everything. Real estate, bio computing, weapons manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, genetic engineering, cybernetics, you name it, they do it. They have offices, warehouses, and laboratories spread throughout the city, but most of their work goes down at Mercy Hospital, and it's there where his story begins.

For a long time his earliest memory was of the angel Gabriel. There is a massive iron statue of him in front of Mercy Hospital. He is kneeling down on one knee, sword in hand. His six wings spread out in every direction covering everything beneath them. Seeing the angel brought Vincent the hope and the strength to keep fighting. He was twenty-seven years old at the time. He worked as a Seraphim employee even back then. He doesn't remember any of it, and truthfully, he suspects much of what he's been told to be a lie. He was a low level worker at a pharmaceutical plant when there was an explosion. Not many of them survived, if what was left of him can be called surviving. He lost his legs below the knees, his entire left arm up to the shoulder, and the left side of his face to that explosion. He would have been dead in under an hour if it hadn't been for Seraphim. As a single man with no family and death a near certainty, they found in Vincent a test subject for the next generation of technology.

Seraphim had made significant advances in prosthetics in years past. Living technology. Half created in a factory, half grown from a Petri-dish. They didn't just save his life. They made him into something more than human. On the streets the people call them meta-humans. The "doctors" told him he was their most successful case of practical bio computing to date. His legs, his arm, his face, all living technology. There is no easy way to explain his false limbs. The technology has advanced faster than the language to describe it. His arm and legs are practically indestructible, but he still feels everything from a butterfly landing on his hand to stubbing his toe on the ground. More than

indestructible, they are also indistinguishable. There is no difference between how he looked before and after. He can feel his fingers and toes like any other person feels them. It was like they attached a third arm to his body, and he could control it and feel it as though he's had it since birth. His face had enough damage that people who knew him before the accident don't recognize him, which is not surprising since among the casualties was his left eye. The eye replacement is significantly more advanced than even all of his limb replacement combined. Some of the smaller companies don't even have a yearly gross equal to the net worth of that eye. Which is ultimately what led to Vincent's debt.

They didn't charge him for the surgery, at least not explicitly. Shortly after recovery he was approached by a Seraphim representative. He informed Vincent of their new arrangement. They saved his life and spent millions on him, and he gets to work for them for the rest of his life doing jobs that are suitable to his talents. This wasn't an offer he felt he could refuse, but he knew his future even then. A meta-human worth several million credits in parts doesn't earn their keep through anything but the most dangerous work.

He is and has been what is called a Seraph for the company for two years. There is no specific job function a Seraph has. To put it as accurately as possible, a Seraph promotes the Seraphim, Inc way of life. When some one needs protecting, they protect. When some one needs threatening, they threaten. When something needs stealing, they steal. When some one needs killing, they kill. Business as usual in Angel City. Everything they do is completely legal. Legal in the sense that Angel City hasn't had an official government body within five hundred miles since the city-state of San Angeles fell. These days the corporations are the law. If you don't work for a corporation in Angel City... well, consider yourself nothing. Lucky for Vincent, he works for the biggest one in town.

Chapter 1: The Assignment

Vincent wakes up to the slight hum of the cleaning bot as it sweeps across the floor in front of his bed. It's the Seraphim, Inc model DA-4515, courtesy of the company of course. This particular model arrived just last week. His old bot managed to get infected and started attacking the furniture. The infection was due to an airborne nanotech pathogen specifically designed to target Seraphim technology. It's Vincent's third bot this year. He would chuckle at the thought of some rival company's apparent quest to keeping his flat dirty if he didn't know why they were breaking. Realistically, those companies are targeting Vincent and the technology he has in him. The cleaning bot tends to function as a modern day canary, warning Vincent of anything potentially harmful to him in the air.

Vincent's job affords him certain luxuries like the little DA-4515. Clothes, cars, bots, weapons, women, anything a citizen could want, he gets. He can never really trust any of the gifts completely. The innocent DA-4515 probably has a listening bug. The women are probably company spies. The cars are being tracked. Vincent is an investment that Seraphim want to safeguard. He is an asset that needs protecting, even from himself.

He starts his routine like every other day. Shower, shave, teeth, vitamins, antitoxin shot, and a drop of chemically advanced steroids in his eye implant. Breakfast is a blueberry scone and a cup of coffee with two packets of sweetener. Real coffee had only hit market in the past year. Greenhouses grow the coffee bean, tobacco, hops, barley, etc needed to supply the city with their vice of choice, but sugar still hasn't become readily available to the masses due to the high availability of sugar supplements. After breakfast he gets dressed. Part of being a Seraph is the style. The dress code is that there isn't one. The Seraph's image reflects the company's image, so they tend to encourage a healthy mix of high style and intimidation in clothing. Designer black pants and shirt, dark gray trench coat, genuine leather boots, and black rimmed goggles.

The goggles are a mostly practical accessory. While goggles are fairly trendy in non-citizens and outlanders, they are rarely seen in Corporate Point. Vincent wears the goggles to keep his eye free from the same airborne viruses that broke his cleaning bots. No sense in risking a multi-million dollar sensitive implant to the unforgiving and virus-filled world. Plus, he isn't ignorant about the company. He is a number to them, a dollar amount. Working implants, producing positive results from his work, not getting shot; these are the things that keep him in their good favor. He likes to keep the company decision-free.

A beeping noise signifying an incoming call sounds in the adjoining room. Vincent walks to it and a monitor flips open. A Seraphim, Inc screensaver turns into a picture of the caller. It's Rhett, Vincent's contact with Seraphim. He taps the accept button on the screen.

"Morning Vincent, priority one assignment today, skip the standard check-in." Rhett has been Vincent's contact during his entire career as a Seraph, and in fact has advanced quickly in the company largely due to Vincent's success as a Seraph. Vincent considers Rhett a good guy, and one of the few friends he has. Wife, kid, the type of guy that reminds Vincent there are good people in this city. He does what he has to do to provide for his family.

"What's the score Rhett?"

"There was a kidnapping last night. An executive's girlfriend, who just happens to also be his secretary. We suspect blackmail, though no demands have been made yet. We don't know much, but what little intel we've gotten so far suggests it was some people from Soliton Industries."

"Understood. What's my next move?"

"I'm transferring the details to you as we speak. Pick up Santino and go to the usual places, see what you can learn."

"Will do. I'll keep you updated."

"Good luck Vincent. Be safe."

The monitor returns to the Seraphim, Inc screensaver and the connected portable flashes 'Upload Complete' in green.

Vincent takes the portable and grabs his car keys from inside an antique ashtray and heads to the elevator while reading the intel. The kidnapped girl is named Sophie Duran. There is a picture of her on her profile. Pretty girl. Brown eyes, black hair, dark skin, age twenty five. She was raised by her father who worked at a rival company before his death. When he died she started working as an administrative assistant with Seraphim. She quickly worked her way up the ranks where she met Aaron Corinth, the Minister of Experimental Operations for Seraphim. Vincent thinks back to the time he met Aaron. It was at some mixer event where the Ministry could mingle with the Seraph staff to evaluate the project. From the brief encounter, Vincent considered Aaron one of the biggest assholes he has ever met.

As Vincent steps out of the elevator, a fellow Seraph named Oda is at the garage level waiting to go up.

"Ah, the favored son is called on an early mission." Oda says in jest.

Vincent grunts, looking up from the intel. "Something like that. You look like you had a full night." He says, eyes focused on burn marks on Oda's arm.

Oda puts his hand in the way of the closing elevator. "Nothing I couldn't handle. Where are you off to so early?"

"Rescue op. The gangs and corporations are getting bolder. We are a dying breed, my friend."

"Speak for yourself Vincent." Oda says, stepping into the elevator and not saying another word as the doors shut.

Vincent walks through the basement garage and to his car. The car is a top of the line Seraphim model, the GT-Farohar. A polished hood ornament that looks like two angel wings sits on the hood of every Seraphim car. Made for city driving, the Farohar is bullet proof and is equipped with a sonic defense system that will take out most projectiles. The defense system is just the beginning to its technical sophistication.

The freeway is dead as usual. The majority of the people in Angel City can't afford personal transportation like Vincent can. The technology and the manufacturing aren't the problem, but key materials are hard to come by. Even in Corporate Point, most of the people of Angel City take the public transportation. A modern railway loops around the outside of Corporate Point, but Vincent's job takes him well outside of its reach most of

the time. The wide highways are evidence of a much more populated Angel City in the past. Vincent puts the car on autopilot and continues reading the intel.

Rhett mentioned Soliton Industries. Vincent's dealt with Soliton before. They are a middle-weight company, but they are ambitious. Vincent knows a couple of people there, all of whom hate his guts. His last experience with them resulted in the killing of two of their operatives after they stole some prototypes from one of Seraphim's labs. What they'd want with Sophie Duran, Vincent can't fathom.

The car stops and an automated female voice speaks. "Arrival at destination is complete."

Vincent looks out the window, honks the horn, and cycles the intel on the portable to the beginning. The door to the house opens and Santino Morales comes out. Santino has been Vincent's partner for only a few weeks. He is twenty years old, young for a Seraph. Though he has no implants, he is still considered a meta-human. He takes genetic modifiers that the company provides. Increased speed, increased strength, and absolutely no known side effects that Seraphim would ever admit to. He was chosen to be part of the program because he earned his spot, but it didn't hurt that his father was one of the earliest Seraphs. He lives out in the absolute fringe of Corporate Point with his mother. The closest rail station is about eight blocks away. Santino has all the options Vincent does, but he won't leave his mother, and his mother won't leave the house that her husband built.

Santino gets in the passenger seat and Vincent tosses the portable on his lap.

"Reading material for the morning. You talk to Rhett?" Vincent starts driving.

Santino starts skimming through the documents. "Briefly, he told me what's up. You ever dealt with Soliton?"

"Occasionally. We shouldn't have any problems handling them."

"So where are we headed first?"

"I figure we go straight to the source."

Chapter 2: Showdown at Soliton

Vincent pulls up to the sidewalk in front of Soliton Industries. The company's headquarters in a rundown three story building in downtown Anaheim. There is a billboard on the roof with the Soliton logo and motto, "The future is our business."

Santino and Vincent get out of the car and a nearby security guard immediately becomes nervous. His heartbeat increases and his breathing rate becomes faster. All of this Vincent knows from a readout on his false eye. The guard's body temperature increases by a

degree and a drop of sweats rolls past his cheek from his head. He reaches for his walkie-talkie and speaks into it outside of hearing range from the two Seraphs. The readouts from Vincent's eye are almost like a different kind of vision. All the eye reads and displays to its owner is raw data. But after years of reading that data, it has been a kind of precognition to him. He often knows what other people intend to do before they know it themselves.

"He's harmless, let's go inside." Vincent says to Santino. They walk past two more guards at the front door who also do little more than give a nervous glare.

Inside is a large room with a marble floor. A blonde receptionist is on the phone behind the front desk at the end of the room. Chairs are against the side walls and are filled with a handful of people waiting for their turn to be called to the front.

One of the people in the waiting room whispers to another. "Seraphs..."

Vincent does a quick read out on the people in the waiting room looking at them. All signs point to fear. A grin sneaks its way onto Vincent's face.

As Vincent approaches the counter, he smells the receptionist's perfume. Her large chest is accentuated further by the low neck line on her baby blue suit. She continues to talk on the phone. Vincent clears his throat and sets the credentials from his trench coat down in front of her. His credentials just happen to be a Seraphim, Inc brand pistol with depleted uranium shells.

The receptionist looks up and speaks into the phone. "Ummmm, I'll call you back. Can I help you?"

"We're here to see Mr. Clayton." Vincent says with a slightly condescending smile.

"I'll let him know you are here, Mr...?" She asks as she reaches for the phone.

Vincent gently grabs her hand and pushes the phone back on the receiver. "Mr. Cash, and if you don't mind, just his office number and directions. We'd like to pay him a surprise visit."

She looks around nervously. The security guards are no where to be seen. Probably hiding some where with their tails between their legs, she thinks to herself. "Room 227, up the stairs, third door on the left." She points to the hallway behind her.

"Thanks, ma'am." Vincent tosses her a wink and follows after Santino who is all ready walking down the hall.

Up the stairs and through the hallway, they stop in front of a wooden door with '227' painted in black lettering. "This is it." Santino says. He twists the door handle, but it's locked. He nods at Vincent, and they both step back.

A joint kick to the door sends it swinging open. They arrive just in time to see Bob Clayton's fat rear end sticking out the small window on his way to the fire escape. Santino shuts the door behind them.

"Get back in here you tub of lard." Vincent resists the urge to shoot him in the butt.

Clayton shimmies backwards through the window and slumps in his chair. "Fuck you Cash."

"Not happy to see me Bobby?" Bob Clayton, middle management at its finest. Or worst, depending on ones view of middle management. He works at Soliton because no other corporation would have him. Vincent and he have run into each other often during the two years Vincent has worked as a Seraph. The last meeting ended with a shootout.

"How is that bullet wound treating you?" One bullet to the shoulder, courtesy of Vincent.

"Oh, you know, I have a scar the size of my hand, but other than that, hey, really great. I never got to thank you for shooting me by the way. What the fuck do you want? Why are you here?"

"Sophie Duran." Vincent monitors his vitals when he says her name. Bingo. This job is too easy sometimes, he thinks to himself.

"Don't know her."

"Bobby, c'mon, who do you think you're talking to here? What do you know?"

Sweat pours down his face. "I swear I don't know much Vincent. We hired out some Lost Boys for a job. I don't know the specifics but I overheard her name once about the job. I swear that's all I know."

"Vincent." Santino interrupts, takes out a dual pair of Uzis, and walks to the wall. "Trouble is coming." He pushes a bookshelf sideways to block the door.

Clayton is already under his desk. The footsteps stop. Time stops as a train of thoughts enter Vincent's head like they always do before a fight. He begins to wonder if these are his last moments. He wonders if he made the right decisions that brought him to this point. He wonders if there is life after Angel City. He wonders if there is a God he'll have to answer to if the fight doesn't go his way. And then the door and half the office wall explode, and none of that matters any more.

Gunfire erupts that is heard for miles away. Santino yells a battle cry and returns fire. Vincent's eye automatically enters infrared mode and a list of targets, their individual threat values, and where to shoot them enters his vision. He drops to his knees and pulls the trigger twice. The two guards with the greatest threat value fall dead.

A red light flashes in his field of vision warning him a gun is pointed directly towards him. Vincent aims and shoots but the shot is too late. The guard pulls the trigger and gets the shot off as a red line streaks across Vincent's vision warning him of the bullet. In an instant, his left arm moves into place and he feels the bullet enter his arm, blocking it from the rest of his body, and feeling only moderate pain from the wound. The red line fades from his vision and the security guard's threat level cools as his heart stops.

One last pull of the trigger and Vincent's vision automatically returns to non-combat mode. No targets with threat remain. He stands up and reloads his gun. Santino takes this as his cue to stop yelling and shooting into the walls.

Vincent pulls the bullet from his arm. Santino laughs. "Getting slow in your old age, eh?"

"Lucky shot. Besides, I blocked it didn't I?" But then again, Vincent doesn't typically need to block a bullet outside of training.

"Looks like Clayton wasn't so lucky." Santino nods towards the floor at the back of the room.

Clayton lies dead in a pool of blood which is squirting out of a wound from his throat. "Doesn't matter, he gave us what we needed," Vincent says coldly.

But it did matter to Vincent. They were far from being friends, but they weren't quite enemies. Previously Vincent had only shot Clayton so he wouldn't have to kill him. Bob Clayton was one of the few people who really knew anything about Vincent beyond his job. And now he's dead.

"You all right bro?" Santino asks.

"Yah, I'm good. Let's get the hell out of here."

They walk through one of the gaping holes in the wall and over the pile of dead bodies in the hallway. When they get to the lobby, it's deserted. The people in the waiting room and the receptionist are all long gone. As they walk through the front doors, the street is as empty as the lobby is.

Their next stop is a place neither of them wants to go. The Seraphim sphere of influence only extends so far. It stops at the edge of West Hollywood.

Chapter 3: Unusual Ally

West Hollywood is one of the few places where corporations aren't the law. The streets are instead ruled by rival gangs. The 555, the Lost Boys, the Technate Underground, the

Broken Hammer, and about a dozen more like them compete for power with each other. Most have a love, hate relationship with the corporations. The gangs use the corps for more power against the other gangs. The corporations use the gangs for more power against the other corps. When the Seraph program started, the gangs were no longer deemed necessary. There is no more dangerous place than West Hollywood for any citizen of Seraphin.

Lucky for Vincent, he has a few contacts there. One of which is RJ7, a self proclaimed informatician and member of the Technate Underground. The man knows more about the happenings of Angel City than most do. His personal knowledge rivals that of even the information departments of most corporations. Vincent would get him a job at Seraphim but he knows RJ7 would never take it. He likes the streets too much to ever leave them. And plus, his tolerance for corporations extends very little past Vincent.

Driving through West Hollywood in a Seraphim, Inc model car would normally be a risky venture. Lucky for the Vincent and Santino, each Seraph issue car comes with a visual projection module that makes every one outside the car see whatever those inside want them too. The cars are even capable of near invisibility. As Vincent and Santino drive through West Hollywood, the few people who are out in the street see a beat-up red 2153 Firebird GT instead.

The deeper into the city they get, the more decrepit the buildings get. A yellow light blinks inside the Farohar signifying increased toxicity levels. The atmospheric renewers in the area are makeshift at best. Some of them are the original renewers from forty years ago. Some of them are made homegrown by the gangs based on corporate technology. And once in a while, a corporation will build one in exchange for a nefarious deed from a gang. Viruses infectious to both man and machine thrive in West Hollywood. All the toxins from the corporate section of town mix with the toxins from the original detonation, and they just don't have the resources to keep it clean. There are plenty of places outside of Angel City where the toxic environment isn't an issue. But those places are typically without power or water. Add in the thousand mile trip to get to such a place, and there isn't much incentive to leave Angel City, bad air or not.

Vincent is used to the state of West Hollywood. Santino on the other hand, begins to feel sorry for them, until he sees a dead man tied to an old billboard. Vincent stops the car.

"Oh God..." Santino says.

Dried blood stains the wood behind the man that poured from his body, and a large "Citizen Go Home" is written in black spray paint beside him. Welcome to West Hollywood.

Seraphs may have a reputation of being gods on earth, and they are hard to take down, but never impossible. The one thing a Seraph doesn't have is a retirement plan. The lifespan of a Seraph is short, at best. There are only a handful of Seraphs at a time, but even in that small number they are replaced monthly due to deaths. In Vincent's case, he

has no alternative to being a Seraph. It isn't just some job that he can quit. He owes the company, and will never be able to pay off his debt. Santino is one of the few exceptions. He could quit at any time and move on to a different position within Seraphim. But there is no convincing him of that.

Santino starts spewing obscenities. Vincent keeps driving.

"Forget about it, we need to focus on the job at hand." Vincent says.

They soon pull up to the garage of a warehouse that is indistinguishable from any other nearby warehouse. The video screen in the car turns on with a black and white scrambled face. "Who the hell is it and what do you want?"

"RJ, its Cash."

The screen goes black and the red light above the garage turns to green as the door rises.

"How did he override our video monitor without accepting the call?" Santino asks, confused as Vincent grins.

They drive into the garage and get out of the car. A turret in the corner follows their every move and puts Vincent's eye automatically into combat mode. Automated weaponry puts him into combat mode even if it poses no threat. The garage door shuts behind them.

RJ7 opens the door inside the garage with a gun pointed on Santino. "Who's the scrub?" RJ7 is young, barely in his twenties. Digital tattoos glow and change beneath his tattered clothes. Each is lightweight implant just underneath the skin that almost acts as a projection screen. On his left arm is a design of an angel that he created himself. On his right arm is simply the word 'Resist!' in dark red. RJ7 can change the designs on the fly, so they are something different every time Vincent sees him.

Vincent's threat reading for RJ7 is a cool blue, which means no threat intended. "He's my new partner. Santino, RJ7. RJ7, Santino."

RJ7 lowers his gun and turns his attention to Vincent. "It's been a while Vincent. I heard about Robyn. I'm sorry..."

"Yah. Me too." Robyn Turpen, his previous partner and the only Seraph with a better record than Vincent. Robyn was more than just a partner to Vincent. She got ambushed by a rival corporation in her own apartment. She left her attackers dead, but she ended up with eleven gunshot wounds in the process. She could have been saved, but Seraphim crunched the numbers and decided against it.

"I'd ask what brings you here, but I already know. I caught your trip into Soliton on their security feed. Always a delight to keep tabs on your movements. Eight guards and an employee dead?" RJ7 grins. "Not bad. I assume it has to do with the kidnapping?"

Vincent nods.

"Well then, step into my humble abode."

They follow RJ7 through a long hallway into a giant open room filled with electronic equipment and video screens up to the roof.

"Holy shit." Santino says with his mouth wide open. "At least half of this stuff is illegal, and that's only what I recognize. What are we doing asking for his help, we should be taking him to headquarters for questioning."

"Your company laws don't apply to us simple folk in Hollywood." RJ7 cackles. "Cash I'm disappointed your new partner is a company man." He walks up to Santino. "I suggest an attitude change my man. You need to learn to play the game."

"Screw this Cash, I'll just wait in the car." Santino walks back towards to the garage.

"I like him." RJ7 says with a grin.

Vincent laughs. "I bet you do. So back to the secretary."

"Ah, yes, yes. A Miss Sophie Duran, correct? I got word of the kidnapping a few days ago. I would have warned you but you know my policy."

"Don't sweat it."

"So I get word about the kidnapping and I do some digging. The man she is both seeing and working for, Aaron Corinth, has secrets. Lots of them. Some business, some personal. And Sophie probably knows most of them. And whatever she knows could probably end up hurting Seraphim. Or at the very least, hurt Aaron Corinth. Secrets are only as strong as their weakest link, and she is it. You know how it is, standard company warfare. I'm sure you kidnap people all the time." He grins.

"Occasionally."

"A company unknown to me hired out the Lost Boys for the kidnapping job. Though I assume the company was Soliton after your job there. As far as I can tell, the Lost Boys took her to their safe house on Sunset to await delivery. You know the place?"

"Yes."

"The next step is yours."

"Thanks RJ, I appreciate it."

"Any time my man. You should stop by more often."

Vincent turns to walk back to the car but stops. His mind wanders to his dead partner and friend. "Can I ask you a question RJ? It won't affect our partnership, I'm just curious."

"Shoot."

Vincent turns and looks at RJ7. "Did you learn about Robyn before or after it happened?"

RJ7 turns serious. "Much later I'm afraid. I would have broken policy if I had known before. She was my friend, too." Vincent's eye detects no lie, but he probably would have believed RJ7 any way.

Vincent smiles, nods, and continues to walk out.

RJ7 yells. "There will come a point when Seraphim won't care about you either Vincent!" But Vincent just keeps walking.

Chapter 4: Lost Boy Massacre

Santino and Vincent head for the safe house on Sunset. Seraphim make it their business to know the location of just about every competitor's location in Angel City. Whether a big time corporation or small time gang, Seraphs get briefed on it. The Lost Boys may be small time, but they are no exception. You never know when a corporation will back them.

They park nearby the safe house at an abandoned car garage attached to a shelled out office building. Santino grabs two cases from the trunk of the car. They walk up the stairs to the roof, and Santino walks to the ledge and looks through a pair of binoculars. Vincent zooms in and goes infrared with his eye.

"Holy damn Vincent, this place is swarming with Lost Boys," Santino says nervously.

"What are you worried about, you'll be up here the whole time." Vincent answers. "Twenty seven on the outside by my count. Looks like another nine people inside, one of them presumably being Miss Duran."

"You can't be serious. That's a helluva lot of guards for a kidnapping. Are you sure Rhett was straight with us?"

Vincent shrugs. "Probably a big payout for them. We proceed either way."

"How do you want to handle this? Should we get a positive id before we start blasting?"

"We don't have time. Soliton will be here soon, especially after they know we are on to them. I need you to go DFA and cover me from here." 'Death from above' as they call it. Santino usually goes spray and pray at close range with his Uzis, but he is a god with a rifle.

"Understood. What's my backup plan?"

"If I fail... wait till they move the girl to a new location and then take her out. Just get yourself out safe."

"I don't need babysitting Vincent."

"Whoa, hey! I didn't say you did. If she is transferred to Soliton then she will disappear and die anyway. We'd lose her either way. Can't risk it."

"Sorry, gotcha."

"Good. Just cover my ass while I'm down there."

Santino nods. A moment of silence passes and without saying anything, they part ways. Vincent heads towards the stairs. Santino opens a case and starts assembling the silenced sniper rifle. Before Vincent gets to the bottom of the car garage, Santino has already started picking people off.

At the bottom of the stairs, Vincent crosses the street and hops a fence into a dirt lot next to the safe house. He takes out his gun but finds no opportunity to use it. Every time a guard comes close to seeing Vincent, the guard falls dead from sniper fire. Santino paves a way of dead bodies to a door on the side of the safe house.

Santino speaks on Vincent's ear-piece. "All you, baby. I'll keep spreading the love to our friends out here."

Vincent reaches the door and bashes it open with his arm. Two men within immediate vicinity inside the building are caught off guard and reach for their guns but Vincent guns them down before they even get close to the triggers of the guns. The echo of Vincent's gunshots ring throughout the building.

A blast of gunfire sounds from outside and then a steady stream of gun shots and screaming follow. The Lost Boys guarding the perimeter have become aware of Santino and return fire. Unfortunate for Vincent, he also hears yelling from inside the building. He does a quick scan of the interior and runs towards the most populated area.

Vincent enters a large open room and there are a handful of guards on alert. One sees Vincent and opens fire before he gets a chance to initiate shots himself. Vincent curses at

his haste and carelessness and ducks behind a wall as all the guards open fire on his position. He waits for an opportunity and peaks through the doorway, shooting one of the guards dead. More gun fire, and then another opportunity. Another dies.

Vincent hears one of the men yelling from inside, "Fuck you Seraph!" He takes that as an open invitation and he reaches around the corner long enough to shoot the Lost Boy between the eyes.

The gun fire opposite the wall stops briefly and Vincent realizes a second too late that a group of Lost Boys have come in behind him. He scrambles to take cover as they unload on him. Vincent returns fire and extends his biotech arm out to shield himself from on-target bullets. He drops the men quickly, but his arm takes several hits. One bullet nicks his side, and another hits directly on his shoulder. Vincent curses as he feels the blood soaking through his shirt.

He gathers his composure and enters the open room, making quick work of the two remaining guards. An infrared scan of the interior shows two individuals in the next room.

Vincent enters and sees a Lost Boy holding Sophie Duran by the throat with a gun to her head.

"Don't fucking move man, or the bitch is dead!"

Without hesitation, Vincent fires and blows the punk's arm clean off at the elbow. The Lost Boy drops the girl and Vincent takes a second shot at his head which explodes in a storm of blood and brain on the wall behind him.

Sophie coughs and looks up. "Thanks..."

Vincent pulls his goggles up and leans down to her. When he looks at her, he finds himself caught off guard. Her face is bruised and beaten, her clothes are ripped, and her wounds are bleeding from being tortured. And yet as he looks into her brown eyes, there is something in her that reminds him of Robyn, his old partner.

Vincent clenches his teeth from the gun shot wound as he takes his jacket off and kneels down to put it on her.

"Let's get you out of here," He says as he lifts her up. "Are you ok to walk?"

She forces a smile, "Yes... I think I can make it..."

Santino's voice once again comes in on Vincent's ear-pierce. "Vincent, get the hell out of there, Soliton just arrived for the pickup. Three vans full of heavily armed guards just pulled up." A loud explosion booms outside the building. "Oh shit..." And another explosion, but only static sounds on the ear-piece.

"Come on, we need to leave." Vincent holds her hand and they head towards the exit. They run through the building as the gunfire outside gets louder and louder until they finally get to the door Vincent had bashed in.

"Wait here," He tells her as he opens the door and steps outside.

Dead bodies of Lost Boys are strewn about the lot. In the sky above them, smoke from the exploded van mixes with smoke from an explosion on the roof of the car garage.

Santino has, upon losing the element of surprise, switched to an SI-Suppressor minigun and is ripping through the remaining Soliton members who are hiding behind the armor plated vans, desperately trying to return fire. Vincent zooms in on Santino. His vitals are low and he's lost a lot of blood. Vincent knows that even with Santino's genetic modifiers, he can't last much longer against that heavy gunfire.

A vacant turret catches Vincent's eye to the left and he runs to it, moving its previous and now dead owner out of the way. The turret is warm to the touch. It must have gotten some use before the previous operator got hit. Vincent turns on the targeting system and pulls the trigger, catching Soliton in a crossfire. Some of them fire back and some of them try to take cover. The ones that fire back die the quickest. Under heavy fire from two separate sources, one of the vans explodes, taking everyone around it to the grave. With focus fire on the last van, it ignites in an inferno just like the one before it. Vincent doesn't see any signs of life, but Santino continues to fire.

"Santino. Santino!" Vincent yells to him across the radio but gets no response. Before long, the minigun runs out of ammo and only the faint clicking of the empty chamber can be heard. "Santino, leave the guns, get down to the car." Vincent repeats.

"Yah..." Santino says in pain over the radio.

Vincent runs inside the building and once again extends his hand to Sophie who is sitting against the wall on the ground. "Let's move." She grabs his hand and they run out of the building towards the car.

They run across the lot and across the road to the car. Santino is already in the back seat. His shirt is caked in blood and he wheezes as he breathes. Vincent helps Sophie into the passenger seat and looks back at Santino.

Santino coughs, "Vincent... take me to Mercy..."

Vincent starts the car. "Mercy is too far, I need to take you back to RJ's. You're gonna make it." As he says that, Santino's vitals go blank.

Chapter 5: Grave Decisions

RJ7 sighs and rests his hands on the cold metal table that holds Santino's body. RJ7 looks in Vincent's direction. "I'm sorry. There was nothing I could do."

"I know..." Vincent leans against the wall opposite the table. Bandages wrap his shoulder and side from wounds.

RJ7 takes his bloody gloves off and throws them in a bin in the corner. "How's the chick?"

"They messed her up pretty bad but she'll be ok. She's asleep right now. Lost Boys had over thirty guys there, the payout must have been huge."

"What's your next move? You know you're my boy Vincent, but if you stay here I'll take some serious heat for it."

"I'll contact HQ and then take the girl in. Go check on her for me will you?"

RJ7 nods and Vincent walks back to his garage.

He gets in the car and sees two missed calls, both from Rhett. The back seat is covered in dry blood. One of Santino's Uzis sits on the opposite end. Vincent sighs and dials Rhett's number. His face appears on the screen. "Vincent, thank God you are all right. Where have you been? Our monitoring on Santino shut down, what happened?"

"He's dead, Rhett."

"Shit... And the girl? Where are you right now? I'm not getting a read on your position."

"Did you not hear me? I said Santino is down!"

"I'm sorry Vincent but I need you to focus on the mission. I need a status update on the girl and I need a status update on you."

"We got her out. We're in a safe place."

"Good. Listen Vincent, you aren't going to like this. A new executive decision has come down about the girl. Mr. Corinth wasn't as forthcoming as he should have been about what the girl knows. The Council has decided that she is an extreme liability. I'm sorry Vincent, orders from the very top, you are to kill her and come in for debriefing. They don't want to risk letting what she knows fall into the wrong hands."

"What? Santino died trying to rescue her and now you want me to just kill her?"

"I know... I'm sorry, I don't make the rules any more than you do. Can I count on you in the next hour?"

Vincent nods. "I'll be there."

"I'll see you when you get back. HQ out." The monitor goes black.

Vincent takes his gun out and walks back to Sophie. She's still sleeping on a cot set up in RJ7's lab. Small white bandages covering her cuts are spread around her dark skin. She's wearing Vincent's coat with the blood stain on the shoulder. Her long black hair rests on the cot beneath her.

Vincent massages the trigger to his gun. The decision seems simple to him, but he can't go through with it. The backup plan if he failed was to kill her, but this is some how different. Not after he's seen her. Not after Santino died. Not after she has reminded him so much of Robyn.

"The resemblance is uncanny. I'm sure you've noticed it too."

Vincent turns around to see RJ7 behind him. Vincent nods holsters the gun.

"You were ordered to kill her, weren't you?"

"Yes."

Sophie breaths deep, yawns, and opens her eyes

"Heh. You can't do it, can you?" RJ7 asks.

"Can't do what?" Sophie asks as she sits up.

"We need to leave."

"Vincent, it's nice to see you finally grew a pair and all, but they'll kill you, you know that right? If you do this, you are off the reservation and are good as dead. Don't get me wrong, Seraphim can go to hell, but you don't realize what you're doing."

"I've always realized it RJ. They let Robyn die. They could have saved her but they let her die. It wasn't in the budget. And I did nothing. I didn't even blink. She knew the risks like I did, and didn't have a choice either. But now Santino is dead, too. And for what? Seraphim asks me to not only make that choice worthless, but to kill another in the process? We are nothing to the Council. "

"Where do you think you can hide? You sure as hell can't stay here. You aren't safe in the city limits."

"I don't understand, what's going on?" Sophie stands up and pulls the jacket tight around her.

"Seraphim ordered you dead, and Vincent here isn't going to kill you. Which means he's officially gone rogue."

"They want me dead?" She looks at Vincent. "Why would you do that for me?"

"I owe it to my partners."

"Bullshit man... what, are you doing this because of Robyn? This chick is not Robyn, man. No offense to Sophie, but helping her isn't going to bring Robyn back, and its not going to fulfill any bull shit notion of redemption floating around in your head."

"Doesn't matter."

"Seriously Vincent, how far do you think you can get with that locator in you? Hell I'm starting to get a little nervous that your car is in my garage."

"I won't be able to leave here without them knowing."

"Exactly. And they'll find you eventually, and you will take me down with you. "

"Which is why I need you to take it out of me."

"Take it out? What, your locator? You know where it is?"

Vincent lifts his goggles up. "In the single thing that is worth more than I am. It's in my eye implant."

"Oh hell no."

"It's the only way."

"That eye is what has kept you alive. Without that kind of tech, they will kill you if they find you."

"Then I guess I'm dead either way. Please RJ."

"Son of a bitch. I'll go prep the lab." RJ7 sighs as he leaves the room.

After a few moments of silence, Sophie stands up and walks over to Vincent. She puts her hand on his arm. "I... I don't understand..."

"Nothing to understand."

"Well, for what it's worth... thanks."

Chapter 6: An Eye for an Eye

Vincent has a dream while the nitrous oxide forces him into a deep sleep. It's a dream of his former life, the life he can never remember while awake. He's just a boy. He sees his father. His father goes over to his mother and kisses her. It's obvious they love each other. Vincent giggles nearby with his little sister while watching them kiss.

And then he wakes up, and the details of their faces are already lost to him. The only part of his past he remembers comes in dreams. The one place in his mind that wasn't taken from him.

His own face is numb and a bandage is wrapped around the top left side of his face covering his hollow eye socket. For the first time since the accident, he can't see out of his left eye.

The room is mostly quiet, with the slight hum of electronics buzzing from nearby rooms. Sophie sits asleep in the chair next to Vincent, not knowing he is awake. She is still exhausted from the kidnapping and torture. She still has his jacket on.

Vincent gets out of bed and puts his shirt on. A digital clock displays 8:13 in neon red indicating the night has passed into morning. Vincent knows that Seraphim will start sending out scouting parties to find them, if they haven't already.

Vincent walks to Sophie and brushes the hair from her face with his hand. He grabs the gun from the counter and leaves the room to look for RJ7.

He finds RJ7 in his primary decking room with dozens of monitors in front of him. Some display news feeds, some are video surveillance, and some are just raw data flowing down the screen.

RJ7 notices Vincent and turns around. "Morning, how's the eye?" His tattoos have changed. On the left is the Technate Underground flag. On the right is the word 'Vanish' in a soft orange color.

"Gone. But I don't feel much pain."

"Good, I had your eye destroyed and sent the car to be stripped like you asked. It was a shame to part with that kind of tech." RJ7 grins.

"You hear anything yet?"

"Seraphim has issued a primary warning about you. It's only a precautionary move right now, standard operating procedure for Seraphs who don't sign in, but they should have escalated it hours ago. Something is up, but whatever it is, you don't have long."

"Have they started sending scouts?"

"Just a handful of search drones. They'll be looking for the homing beacon from your eye implant for now, but they'll get wise and switch methods before the day is out. There are other ways to find you. Oh, by the way, I called in a favor and got a new ride for you."

"Thanks RJ."

"Tell me Vincent, is she worth it? Is she worth this?"

"You were right about what you said. If she was any one else, maybe I'd have done the job. But something about her reminds me of Robyn. Maybe I've been given a second chance. I don't know, but I feel like it's the only choice I can make."

"You aren't a slave to fate, man. You determine your own choices."

"I know... but sometimes fate just pushes you in the right direction."

"Or the wrong one."

"Heh. There seems to be a fine line between the two." Vincent grins. "I better wake Sophie and get moving."

"Vincent, wait. Before you leave, where do you plan on going?"

"Don't really know, RJ. Maybe New Vegas, maybe further."

"Come on Vincent, Vegas will smell the corporate all over you, you won't last a day."

"Better chance there than here."

"That isn't your only option, man. There is always one other place you can go. I know some one who would like seeing you there."

Vincent is initially puzzled by what RJ7 is hinting at. "What... how could you possibly know about that? You're good RJ, but you aren't that good."

RJ7 grins. "I should be offended at that, but you're right. Long story man. I was welcome there once, a long time ago." He winks. "Just consider it, will you?"

Vincent nods. "Maybe I will".

"Good. Now you better get moving, I'll get your stuff ready."

Vincent walks back to the lab and Sophie opens her eyes when he gets near her.

Vincent smiles at her. "Hey."

She smiles back. "Hey, how are you feeling?"

"I'll live."

Sophie stands from the chair. "I'm glad to hear that."

"Sorry to rush things, but we need to leave here as soon as we can."

"Vincent where can we go to escape them?"

"I think I know a place. It's outside the old wall, and not even the gangs go that far. There are people there who will keep us safe."

"I still don't know what to say... you are giving up everything for me..."

"It was a long time coming Sophie, I guess I just needed an excuse."

Sophie walks close to Vincent and holds his hand. "Thank you."

Vincent lifts his hand up to Sophie's face and moves it softly down her cheek. He stops at her chin and gently pulls her toward him, moving in with his own and kissing her on the lips. She hesitates, but kisses him back. It's the first kiss Vincent has ever given someone that he genuinely cared for, and in that short moment, everything he has done for her seems right. Part of him feels like the only reason he is kissing her is because she reminds him of Robyn. He had the same feelings for her, though he never spoke to her about them. It was something he had always regretted. Maybe these feelings for Sophie are just a reflection of what he felt towards Robyn. Maybe the feelings are wrong. Maybe they are dishonest to both of them. Maybe the only reason she returned the kiss is because he saved her life. But most of Vincent's life has been wrong. And that kiss as right as anything else he'd ever done.

Vincent pulls back, "Sorry... we better get going."

Both grab what little things they have scattered around the lab. Vincent checks the ammo in his gun and tucks it away. They walk towards the garage, where RJ7 is laying on the ground fiddling with a motorcycle.

RJ7 looks up at them from the ground and grins. "Just doing some last minute touches on her."

"A motorcycle?" Sophie nervously asks.

RJ7 stands up and throws each of them a motorcycle helmet. "Yep, they won't be visually looking for you anyway with the exception of a few checkpoints. And with the bike you'll be able to avoid those."

"I don't know how to thank you RJ."

"No need." RJ7 shakes Vincent's hand and smiles. He walks to the door and flicks a switch that makes the garage door rise. "Good luck getting to Terra." He winks.

Vincent looks back. "I'm going to ask you how you know so much one of these days, RJ."

Vincent smiles and nods at RJ7, and then drives out of the garage. The door closes behind them.

Chapter 7: Escape From Angel City

Vincent and Sophie speed down the road on the motorcycle. She sits behind him with her body against his and her arms wrapped around him.

The destination Vincent has planned, Moreno Valley, is on the opposite end of the city. In old Los Angeles, the drive would not have been considered very long. But in the present, the corporations control the highways, and rival corporations will be on the lookout for Vincent as much as Seraphim will be. News gets around quickly when it comes to a potential rogue Seraph and an unprotected executive assistant. So Vincent and Sophie take the side streets, back alleys, and empty lots. Even then, Moreno Valley is outside the old San Angeles wall. There are only a handful of ways through it, each more dangerous than the next.

But right now Vincent is only concerned with making it to the wall. They have been driving for several hours and still have a huge chunk of road in front of them. Vincent was hoping to make it to Moreno Valley by midnight, but that possibility is becoming less and less likely.

They drive on a road in what was once vast suburbia. In times past, a thriving middle class neighborhood, now a trashed out wasteland of hundred year old houses. The only people who ever use the road are immigrants into the city or salvagers looking for any abandoned technology worth some credits. This would normally give Vincent and Sophie a clear ride to the road's end, but the road is occasionally patrolled by corporations. Today is one of those occasions.

The first explosion comes with very little warning. A loud pop and then a slight hiss speeds from an unknown location, and then the road in front of them is hit with a blast that sends asphalt, dirt, and dust into the air. In the minds of the corporations, there is no reason not to shoot first and ask questions later. No respectable person would be on this

route. The blast is an intentional miss intending to slow them down or make them stop completely. Not out of sympathy, but so that the patrol can collect any valuables they have in tact. Vincent isn't fazed and instead of slowing down, he increases his speed. He rides through dust and avoids the cracks in the ground and speeds past the corporate patrol.

Vincent catches a glimpse of the patrol as he rides by. The patrol isn't Seraphim, and that's all that matters. He doesn't stick around long enough to find out who it is.

"They are following us!" Sophie yells from inside her helmet as three cars pull onto the road behind them.

The patrol is out of firing range, but that doesn't last long as their superior speed starts to diminish Sophie and Vincent's lead. Another pop and hiss sounds behind them. Vincent strafes left and the ground explodes just beside the motorcycle. Vincent knows he has neither the speed to outrun them, nor the firepower to fight them. He only has one choice.

"Hold on!" Vincent yells as Sophie tightens her grip. Vincent slams the break and leaves a long skid mark of burnt rubber as he veers toward the side gate to a nearby house. Vincent pulls a trigger on the handle and small blobs of green plasma destroy the gate just in time for bike to go through. Behind him, a pop and hiss sound once again and the gate is decimated. The cars are still close behind.

Vincent speeds through the yards, breaking walls when needed. The bike's size and mobility lets them slowly gain distance on the patrol.

The pattern continues through several houses until Vincent levels a brick wall in front of him and narrowly avoids an empty pool just on the other side. The patrol is not so lucky as the lead car speeds through the wall and slams on its brakes too late as it crashes into the pool. The other two cars brake in time, and stop completely, choosing to give up pursuit.

Vincent gets back on the main road and continues the drive. "We're not safe on this path any more."

Sophie loosens her grip. "So what do we do?"

"We head east out of the city, and find a place to lay low for the night."

They soon leave the cover of suburbia behind. The barrier towers high in the horizon in front of them and gets larger with each passing second.

Outsiders make the trek to Angel City all the time, but few make it in. Each break in the once impenetrable barrier is guarded by wasteland bandits. Newcomers going through the breaks come out with their lives at best. Some are raped, some are killed, and some are

sold into slavery. All are robbed. Sometimes a well armed caravan can make it past, but those are rare.

The corporations could take the bandits all out in a single night, but the truth is, they want them there to do the dirty work in keeping new people outside of the city. In their minds, an outsider has no assets worth bringing into the city. For the most part they are right.

The hole in the wall isn't more than thirty feet long. There are only around four to five breaches along the eastern edge. The road block itself is basically a shanty town set up by the raiders. They disassemble the homes from the city and bring the contents this way. The town has an hourglass shape, extending wide on each side with the breach as the skinniest part.

Vincent has no intention of fighting the bandits, and he certainly doesn't have any intention of negotiating. Lucky for him, the sky is dark and the bandits' attention is usually focused on people trying to get in, not on trying to get out. As the wall gets closer and closer, Vincent turns off his headlight and increases speed.

The solitary lookout to the back stands up from his chair when the road of Vincent's engine gets into audible range. Before he has a chance to yell, Vincent flies by at an insane speed. Vincent unleashes the bike's armament in front of him clearing a path of whatever wood, tent, and rock is in front of him.

They speed through the tattered roadblock and out of the barrier gate. Screams and gun fire echo behind them, but they are long free of any retribution. The bandits would have no means of catching up to them even if they wanted to.

Only the wasteland stands between them and Moreno Valley.

In the distance is an off ramp that leads to a small town. Any road sign that told the town's name has long been destroyed. Vincent exits the road toward the town and stops in front of what used to be some one's home.

Vincent removes his helmet. The bandages still cover his missing left eye. "I hate to say it but there is no way I can find this place at night. I'm not familiar with any of the area outside Angel City. Let's just bed down for a few hours until the sun comes up."

"Thank you Vincent. Thank you again for all of this." They both get off the bike.

They walk inside and rest at an old wooden table. Vincent sets a yellow beacon on the table to give them light. The house likely hadn't had anything more than an animal in it for fifty years, and it showed.

"Sophie, you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

“Do you know why Soliton kidnapped you? And why would Seraphim change their minds about you?”

“Because of Aaron. I was his assistant and his lover. He is... not a good man. I tried to leave him a few times, but well, you can guess how that went. Aaron has his hands in many things he shouldn't. Things that could embarrass Seraphim if they ever got out. Or worse. My guess is Soliton figured they use me to their advantage against Seraphim. As to why they changed their minds, he probably confessed up to the Council about what he is doing. It's amazing what the Council will overlook for each other. The greatest sin on the Council is getting caught.”

“They'd kill you to protect him?”

“It isn't like they haven't done it before. You've probably done it for them on more than one occasion.”

“Maybe...”

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...”

“No need to apologize. Let's get some rest. Find a place to sleep upstairs, I'll keep watch down here.”

Chapter 8: Last Stand

Vincent wakes up to the sun creeping in the window. He had pulled an old mattress from the downstairs bedroom into the living room.

He gets out of bed, puts his jacket on and walks outside. The town looks different in the day. It's more of a ghost town in the light than in the dark. Vincent walks through the street to stretch his legs, but stops abruptly when he hears a noise. He looks behind him and a scout drone buzzes hovering a few meters in the air.

Vincent takes out his pistol and fires on it. One shot and the drone shatters into pieces. The question of when the drone arrived is quickly answered as helicopter propellers whir in the distance. The drone had found them hours earlier and reinforcements are on their way.

Vincent runs back to Sophie who is already awake. She is staring out the window at the helicopters in the distance.

"Oh my God, Vincent!"

"Don't worry, just stay hidden no matter what.”

Vincent walks outside again and runs to the most likely place the helicopters will land. There are two of them, and they come closer and closer. He finds a place hidden from view on the second story of a nearby building and hides.

The first copter tries to land in the exact spot Vincent predicted. It hovers over the small buildings and slowly descends. The second flies over him and lands a few hundred meters towards the other end of the town.

Vincent takes the opportunity and shoots out of the window. The bullets hit the glass protecting the pilot but don't penetrate it. The Seraphim soldiers, unaware of Vincent's exact location, lean out of the helicopter and start looking into nearby buildings. After a few moments pause, Vincent leans back outside and immediately drops the two exposed soldiers. They fall to the ground beneath them but catch midway from their safety harnesses connected to the helicopter.

His position now exposed, two more soldiers lean out of the helicopter and fire into Vincent's building. He quickly runs down stairs for added cover from the hail of bullets.

Vincent runs outside the building and positions himself within view of the pilot, but outside the view of the soldiers shooting from the side. He unloads a full clip into the cockpit, and the reinforced glass soon shatters from the heavy fire. The helicopter starts to climb but the pilot gets shot in the neck before he can escape from range. He falls forward, a dead mass against the controls, and flies the helicopter into a nearby building causing an enormous explosion that takes several nearby homes with it.

Knowing the first copter landed on the other side of the town, Vincent runs past the burning building toward Sophie's location. As he arrives at the entrance, the soldiers spot him from nearby and open fire. Vincent ducks inside as the soldiers shoot at the wall. A bullet pierces the wall and manages to hit Vincent in the thigh, in what little part of his leg is still his own. He clenches his teeth in pain.

Vincent hobbles to the corner and ties the wound up. The soldiers outside continue to shoot sporadically into the building. Vincent shatters the near-rotted floor boards beneath him with ease and drops under the house. He crawls towards the outside, and upon making it to the edge, sees two soldiers firing into the first floor which is just a few feet above him. Vincent fires two shots on each soldier. The first and second shot hits each of their legs, knocking them to the ground. The third and fourth shot hit one's chest and the other's face, respectively. Vincent limps out and fires a finishing shot on one of the two that is still alive.

A nearby soldier runs around a corner only to find Vincent a few feet away from him. They exchange gunfire and the soldier falls dead from a bullet wound to the chest. But before he even drops to the ground, two additional soldiers come from behind and unload on Vincent. By instinct he tries to shield himself against the bullets with his

left arm but without his eye implant, there is no way he can block them. He feels bullets pierce his body. First his stomach, then several hit his right arm, then another in the leg.

Vincent drops his weapon and crawls towards the wall to another house. A trail of blood follows behind him. The soldiers reload their guns and walk towards him. Vincent becomes light headed as he feels drugs be released throughout his body from his remaining implants.

With smirks on their faces, the soldiers stop several meters from the wall and aim their guns. But then suddenly gunfire sounds from behind them. Both soldiers are cut to their knees dead. Behind them is Sophie with one of the dead soldier's machine guns.

She drops the gun and runs to Vincent and kneels next to him. "Vincent, are you ok."

He forces a laugh and touches her face, leaving blood from his hands. "I've been better."

"What do I do?"

"Get me to Moreno Valley. Get me to my sister."

"Your sister?"

The remaining helicopter passes overhead on its way back to Angel City.

"I don't have much time Sophie...."

"Just hang on!"

Sophie runs to the motorcycle and starts the engine. She rides to Vincent and lifts him up to the seat. Putting his arms around her, she holds him tight and drives towards Moreno Valley with the directions Vincent had given her.

Chapter 9: The Terra Project

Vincent stays conscious just long enough to guide Sophie to Moreno Valley. There they can find the Terra Project. As Vincent told her, they are a group started by one of the original Seraphim scientists who didn't approve of Seraphim's direction. Now they live outside the city and help those like Sophie who are in need of shelter.

They live deep underground in a converted military base. The only above ground presence they have is a long, single story structure. The Terra Project existed long before the revitalization of Angel City, and was even involved on a limited basis with the founding of the Arctic Free Zone, which was paramount in the original creation of artificial intelligence. The Terra Project is an organization that believes that civilization should be restructured to exist without money or personal wealth. They believe in

rehabilitation, not punishment. The group is always more important than the individual. Before the war, many thought of them as a cult, though their practices have enough in common with the corporations that no one would think of them as such these days.

As they approach the facility, Sophie holds tight to Vincent as she feels him go limp. The drugs from his implants continue to course through Vincent's body, designed to keep him alive as long as possible.

In front of the facility are two armed guards and an elderly woman in a faded purple robe. Sophie stops next to them and the woman speaks. "Get him to the medical facility immediately." She says this for Sophie's benefit, not for the guards. Every member of Terra has a small implant on the backside of their heads. The implant acts as a transmitter to the other implants. With it, they are able to communicate with each other across the entire facility without speaking a word.

The two guards lift Vincent off the motorcycle and take him inside.

Sophie begins to follow them, but the woman stops her. "Don't worry, Sophie, he is in good hands." She grins at Sophie's surprised look. "Don't look so surprised. We know all about the both of you."

"How?"

"Come, walk with me." She extends her hands towards the door. They both walk inside and she continues speaking. "There is very little activity from Seraphim that we aren't aware of. It is a matter of our own survival."

Inside the building are four smaller buildings in the center of the room. Each is an elevator to the depths below. Vincent descends in one of them. The rest of the room is filled with an assortment of devices attached to the roof, walls, and ground. They are turrets, deflector shields, radio antennas, and generators.

"But what about Vincent? Will he be ok?"

"He is strong, only time will tell. We will do our best to help him."

She pushes a button on one of the small rooms and the door slides open revealing a large elevator. They step inside and the elevator begins to move downward.

"How is it that I've never heard of this place?"

"We don't go out of our way to hide our existence, but we don't exactly publicize it either." She smiles.

"How did Vincent know of you? He mentioned something about a sister."

“It is not my place to say. ”

The descent feels longer to Sophie than she had expected. The elevator stops and the doors open. Outside of the elevator is a long hallway. On the walls are colorful paintings of angels as far as she can see. Every couple of meters a new picture begins, connected to the one before it.

The woman walks to the wall and motions for Sophie to follow. In front of them is a painting of angels above a city.

She points to the painting as they walk by it. “When the world fell into chaos, Angel City, before it was even called that, was a source of order. It was a beacon of light to all around it. But order is only temporary. The city fell and it instead became a reminder of the despair of our world. But we couldn’t let it fall.” She smiles. “My mother was one of the first. Because of her work, Angel City was restored. But we were divided. Seraphim, Inc on the one hand, the Terra Project on the other. Just as Jacob and Esau fought over their birth right, so did we. We lost, so now we are here. Keeping watch over the city, though unable to be a part of it.”

“I had no idea...”

“Most do not. Come, enough history, I will take you some where that you can wait until we get word of Vincent.”

Chapter 10: Reunion

Vincent sleeps for days, but the same dream keeps repeating. He is just a child. He and his sister hold his mother tight. Her hands are tied together and she is crying. His father is on his knees in front of another man. The man holds a gun to his father’s head. On his face is no emotion, neither hate, nor pleasure. With that blank expression, the man pulls the trigger. Vincent’s father falls dead. Another shot, and his mother falls to the bed behind her. The man points the gun at Vincent and speaks. "Wake up."

And again, their faces are lost to him.

Vincent wakes up, but he feels the effect of the medication. He is wearing white medical scrubs and there is a needle stuck in his arm. A woman with short blonde hair sits across from him. She wears the same white medical scrubs as Vincent has.

She smiles at him. "You needed blood."

Vincent’s eyes feel heavy. He has a hard time staying awake. "I dreamed about you."

"Oh? Good or bad?"

"It was the night mom and dad were killed. I still can't remember their faces when I wake up."

"You never will. Not after they were erased from your memory."

"I know."

"Vincent, why did you come? After all that time I spent trying to convince you, why now?"

The woman is Olivia Cash, Vincent's sister. She made contact with Vincent just under a year ago and tried to convince him to leave Seraphim. He had refused.

Vincent closes his eyes. "Didn't have much reason to stay."

"And the girl? Is she your...?"

"No. She... I was supposed to kill her."

"She's been with you most of these past few days. She only left because the Elders wanted to speak with her."

"Olivia, I'm sorry about..."

She interrupts. "Please, Vincent. Get some rest. We can talk later."

Vincent obliges and shuts his eyes.

Chapter 11: The Elders

Vincent and Sophie enter a large spherical room. The room is a meeting chamber of the Terra elders, and the two of them have been summoned to speak before the elders. The elders sit behind a long crescent shaped table. Olivia sits facing them, but turns when the two enter. A week had passed since their arrival. Vincent is fully recovered thanks to the healing properties of his implants, though he still feels blind without his eye implant. A dark gray eye patch has replaced the bandages where his left eye once was.

The elder in the middle of the crescent table greets them as they enter. He speaks slowly and every word seems to have been given a certain amount of thought before spoken. "Sophie, Vincent, please, come sit, we have much to speak of." He continues as they sit. "We are typically cautious of Seraphim employees coming amongst us. They have, on more than one occasion, sent assassins and spies in our midst."

Olivia interrupts. "I was given assurances that Vincent would be welcomed here."

Another elder answers. "Please, Olivia, allow us to speak."

The middle elder continues. "Do not be troubled. Our faith in both Vincent and Sophie is total. You are more than welcome to live among us. However, there is information that you should know."

The female elder who originally greeted them speaks. "Seraphim back tracked your steps after your escape from the city. It led them to one of our former members, a man who you know as RJ7."

Vincent answers. "I wasn't aware he was Terran, though that explains some things. Is he in trouble?"

"I'm afraid so. He managed to destroy his lab before Seraphim arrived, but he was captured before he could get out. We don't believe Seraphim has any knowledge of his involvement with us since he is no longer a member. If they did, he would be dead or worse by now. Though knowing the brutality of Seraphim torture techniques, it is only a matter of time before he breaks. If you know him like I think you do, then you know the kind of information he has. If he breaks, he could jeopardize everything about us here."

The main elder continues. "Under normal circumstances, we wouldn't risk a direct confrontation with Seraphim. However, RJ's knowledge of this place and our ways could compromise our way of life. Seraphim would not hesitate if given a chance to snuff us out completely. RJ's current location is in a holding cell in Mercy hospital. A team is being assembled as we speak, and will leave tomorrow morning. Obviously due to your familiarity with Mercy, your presence on the team would be invaluable."

Olivia stands. "He just risked his life in escaping them and now you want to send him right back in? How is that a good idea for either him or the team you are sending?"

"Do not underestimate Seraphim arrogance. They would never believe one of their former Seraphs would be so bold as to risk returning."

Vincent nods. "They know I've left the city. They won't suspect a return so soon."

Another elder interrupts. "You owe him as much since you indirectly caused his capture."

"Please elder, RJ is my friend. I'll be on your team."

Olivia stands. "I want on it, too."

Vincent turns to her. "Olivia, this is not your fight."

An elder attempts to dissuade her. "Olivia, please be reasonable. We need you here."

“Elders, I have been searching for my brother for almost twenty years. I’m not about to let you send him to his death the week he joins me.”

There is a moment of silence as the elders discuss the matter between themselves on their neural implants. The main elder stands and the others stand with him. “Both Olivia and Vincent will join the team. Planning will begin immediately.”

Chapter 12: Farewell

After assembling and discussing a strategy, the team makes a plan and decides they will leave the following morning. Late at night, Sophie and Vincent stand inside Sophie’s quarters.

“You know I never got to thank you for getting me here.” Vincent tells her.

She smirks. “You are thanking me? Vincent I’d be dead ten times over if it wasn’t for you.”

He grins. “I guess we can call it even then.”

She forces a grin, but is obviously troubled by something.

“What it is?” Vincent asks her.

“Vincent I know RJ7 is your friend, but these people don’t know Mercy like we do. You start blasting and you’ll have the entire Seraphim army to deal with, Seraphs included. And if you fail, they will know RJ7 is connected to you.”

“I can’t abandon RJ any more than I could abandon you. I’d rather die than live with any more regret than I have now.”

She begins to talk but hesitates for a moment. “Tell me about her.”

“Who?”

“Tell me about Robyn.”

“Ah.” Vincent pauses. “She was a Seraph long before me. The longest out of all of us. She had been doing it ten years, since she was a teenager. Robyn always believed in what we were doing. She genuinely believed in the good of the company, despite some of the things we did for them. Yet she also cared more about people than all of us combined. It’s easy to set yourself apart from every one else as a Seraph. Easy to see people as below you. But not her. She always cared. She was a very strong person. I see a lot of her in you.”

“You loved her?”

“As much as I was able. Just never got around to telling her, I guess.”

“I’m sorry Vincent.”

“Yah. I am, too.”

Sophie walks slowly to Vincent and kisses him. “Stay with me tonight.” She says, kissing him again. He holds her and kisses her back.

Chapter 13: Departure

In the Terran facility there is a tunnel with a single tram car that goes from Moreno Valley all the way to inside the walls of Angel City. As part of the elder’s plan, the team would take the tunnel and come back the same way once they had RJ7.

In the hallway towards the tunnel, the elders stand and watch Vincent as he walks by. Only the final two speak. “We have loaded the tram up with supplies. Every thing and any thing you will need.” The high elder says.

“Every thing but this.” The female elder says, digging around in a pocket from her robe. She takes out a silver chain attached to a medallion with the symbol of the Terra Project. “This necklace represents the blessing of all of us. Every man, woman, and child has blessed it for your journey.”

Vincent puts it around his neck.

“Please bring him back Vincent. RJ is my son, and even though he didn’t want to be a part of us here, he is still my flesh and blood.”

“I will.”

“They await you in the tram.” She says and point down the hallway.

Outside of the tunnel, Olivia sits in a chair and stands as Vincent approaches.

She touches the necklace around his neck. “There is no higher honor than this among our people. Mom and dad would be proud.”

“Thanks, sis. We ready?”

“Yes, the others are inside.”

He and Olivia walk into the tram car. There are two others waiting. Vincent had met them the night before. They are Weaver and Proof. The Terran rarely resort to violence, instead priding themselves on being watchers. Most devote their lives to scientific advancement or information collecting. But not every one fits into their society. Those who find themselves outside the mold are the first to volunteer for anything dangerous. Most people of this type were born in Angel City and came to join the Terran later. Weaver and Proof exemplify this perfectly. In reality, both tend to do more harm than good when they are idle in Moreno Valley.

Proof hasn't spoken since he was a child. He relies on his neural implant to communicate between his fellow Terran, and usually lets Weaver to speak for him. Weaver has the opposite problem, and always finds an opportunity to talk.

Olivia walks to the control panel and starts the tram. The light of the Moreno Valley entrance quickly disappears and only the light from the tram can be seen in the tunnel.

Weaver stands and speaks while Proof fiddles with an assault rifle in the corner. "Vincent. Olivia. You ready to kill some angels?"

Olivia answers. "Don't forget the plan is to create as little noise as possible Weaver."

Weaver smiles. "Listen, I know you are the elder's little pet and all, but if you think this is about to go down any where near to how their plan said it will, then you are fooling yourself girl. We are bringing the fire."

Proof laughs while continuing to work on the rifle.

She responds. "Maybe, but the longer we take before shooting our guns off the better."

Vincent sorts through the equipment and puts a couple of grenades into his jacket pockets. "Weaver's right. We have the advantage of surprise on our side, but that only goes so far. Once the first shot is fired, the entire place will be all over us."

The four are silent for the remaining portion of the tunnel length. They each continue to load themselves up with equipment. As the light at the end of the tunnel gets closer and closer, Vincent puts on a gray fedora hat on his head so that he won't be easily recognized at Mercy.

Weaver begins to hide his sawed off shotgun in his jacket, but Vincent stops him. "Don't bother concealing your weapons, they will notice them anyways and will just get suspicious."

Weaver replies sarcastically. "Any other words of wisdom before we do this?"

"Just one. If we encounter another Seraph... run."

Weaver looks at Proof and turns back to Vincent. "Proof is right, we don't run from nobody. Seraph or otherwise."

Vincent loads a clip into his pistol. "Then you'll die."

The tram stops and the doors open. Only a ladder upwards is present on this end of the tunnel. Olivia goes first and enters in a code number to open the hatch above the ladder.

Outside of the hatch is a tiny and virtually noticeable back alley. Mercy Hospital is a few blocks away.

As Weaver exits the tunnel, the hatch closes behind him. "Let's do this."

Chapter 14: Mercy Lost

The statue of the angel Gabriel looms over head as they approach Mercy Hospital. The statue had brought hope to Vincent all those years ago, but the memory of it now is bittersweet.

Mercy itself is divided into three major parts. Though still referred to as a hospital, medical care is the least of what they do. The first, and oldest, is the hospital itself, where they treat patients but also do medical research and biotech development. Every modification that Vincent has come from this wing. It was there that Seraphim, Inc eventually turned into what it is today. From the eventual development of becoming more than just a hospital came the second building designed for company management. There the vast sea of office workers, managers, and even the Seraphim Council itself work to keep Seraphim running.

The third part is not quite as clearly defined. It is the entirety of the underground facility beneath Mercy. Though having almost as many different functions as there are rooms, there are two primary sections to the underground. The first is the barracks for active duty soldiers. The second is the holding cell, and it is here where their destination lies. Angel City is without any real law enforcement agency. There are detectives, mercenaries, and security companies, but any true law enforcement is handled by the individual companies themselves. In Seraphim's mind, any act that opposes their interests can be treated as a criminal act.

There are direct entrances into the underground from the top, but for Vincent and crew, their only real option is to go through one of the other wings first. The medial wing was the obvious choice, since it provides the smallest chance of recognition.

As they approach, the front doors slide open for them. The first thing they see is the waiting room. Even this early in the morning the room is full of patients and family of patients. Even though the four are armed to the teeth, the people waiting pay them little

attention. No security guards are visible and the only Seraphim employee present is a man at the front desk who is busy talking to some one else.

Vincent motions for the others to follow and opens a door and begins walking through the hospital. He has practically memorized the hospital layout in his few years as a Seraph.

The hallways are filled with nurses, doctors and patients. The hospital itself is a large part of why Seraphim has so much control over the city. Only the largest corporations have their own private medical staff for employees, but non-citizens or even citizens of small corporations all rely on Mercy. Its in their best interests to stay on Seraphim's good side, else you could find yourself transferred from the medical wing to the prison wing.

As they get to the entrance to underground, a single soldier stands guard. The elevator is behind him.

The guard holds his hand out in a stop motion. "Authorization please."

"Sure." Vincent reaches for his Seraphim ID badge, but instead swings his left arm and back hands the guard across the face. Vincent can punch a hole into a steel wall with his left arm, and the guard is no exception, who falls down unconscious.

Proof drags the guard into the elevator and the four get in. There are only two levels of the underground. The prison is on the second, and Vincent pushes the 2G button.

The elevator door opens and they walk towards the prison area. The unconscious guard is dragged to an out of the way hallway just outside the elevator, and they know their time is short before he is discovered. There are a handful of workers and even the occasional groups of soldiers, but fortunately for them, most people assume that any one down on this level has the proper authorization.

At the entrance to the prison is a gate. Three people in uniform guard the entrance. Two are armed, the third sits at the terminal that controls the door. The third looks up as they approach. "Yes, can I help you?"

Olivia does the talking. "We're the interrogation unit sent for prisoner RJ7."

He types on his terminal. "Again? There was a man here just yesterday for him."

"Yes, well, he didn't do his job right. That's why we are here."

"All four of you?"

The conversation is cut short when a yellow light begins flashing on the wall. An automated female voice speaks over the intercom. "Security breach on underground level two."

The man stops typing on the terminal and motions to the two guards. They lift their weapons up and walk towards the four. "I'm going to need to see some authorization."

Over their neural implants, Olivia, Proof, and Weaver count down from three. In unison, each reaches for their weapons. Proof sweep kicks the guard nearest to him and slits his throat from the floor. Weaver lays another out with his shotgun. Olivia takes a single shot and shoots the man in the terminal through the head.

"I'll check the terminal to see what cell he's in." Vincent says.

The yellow light turns to red and the same automated voice speaks over the intercom. "Unknown gun fire detected on underground level two."

Weaver grins. "It's about to get very crowded here."

Vincent cycles through the names on the prison list. He finds RJ7 on the list, but the one next to it also catches his eye.

Rhett Reynoso – Gross dereliction of duty and disobeying of orders – Cell: 29A
RJ7 – Held for questioning regarding rogue Seraph Vincent Cash – Cell: 17C

"Olivia, he's in 17C."

"On it." She says, heading into the detaining area.

"I need to check on something, can you guys hold the area till I get back." Vincent asks.

"No prob boss. Just hurry your ass up so we don't get pinned." Weaver answers.

Vincent runs to 29A and looks through the bars. As the log said, it is his former contact.

"Rhett!"

Rhett looks up from his cell. "Vincent? Your eye... What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same question."

Rhett stands and walks to the bars. "Disobeyed orders. Didn't send the Seraphs after you. They blamed me for your escape. And betrayal."

"You know I wouldn't have asked you to do that for me."

“Couldn’t let them just kill you. No way I was going to lose two Seraphs in one day.”

“What’s the sentence?”

“They want to make an example out of me. My execution is scheduled for this week.”

“Come with us, Rhett. Get your wife and son and leave town.”

“Us?”

“The Terra Project.”

“Heh. Didn’t think they actually existed. Well what are you waiting for, get me the hell out of here. The cage can only be opened from either the front or back terminals.”

“No time.” Vincent grabs a bar and bends it in the middle, repeating the process with the bar next to it.

Rhett turns sideways and shimmies through.

They run back to the entrance to the sound of gun fire. Olivia is there with RJ7, as Weaver and Proof fire around the corner.

RJ7 smiles. His face is bruised and he holds his left arm as if it is broken. “Vincent, man.” The tattoo on his left arm is scrambled from the beating it took. The tattoo on the right arm simply says ‘Redemption’ in brown letters.

“Where the hell did you go? Who is this?” Olivia yells.

“A friend, how many are out there?”

Weaver ducks around the corner and puts another round of shells in his shotgun. “Too many.” A trauma bandage is wrapped around his upper arm to protect a gunshot wound.

“We can go the back way.” Rhett says.

“Back way?” Vincent asks, not even aware of another route himself.

“Yes, follow me.” Rhett says, and begins to run back the way they came. RJ7 and Olivia follow him.

“Guys, move.” Vincent says and takes the pins out of two grenades.

Weaver and Proof run down the corridor and Vincent tosses the grenades around the corner before turning around and running after them.

The tunnel shakes as the grenades detonate. The automated female voice speaks over the intercom. "Explosion detected on underground level two. Please evacuate the building."

When Vincent catches up with them, they are stopped as Rhett types on a terminal. "I'm opening the cage of every prisoner here. That should give us the distraction we need." The automated message repeats on the intercom. Rhett continues. "They are evacuating the building. Let's go."

There is a unified clicking noise throughout the hallway as every cell is opened at once. It won't take long for the prisoners to figure out what is going on, and it won't take them long to get armed. Rhett smashes the terminal with his elbow and continues running. The others follow.

After a short distance, Vincent realizes he hasn't been this far into the detention area. Which he gathers is why he didn't know of any second exit.

Rhett finally stops when they reach a door with the words "Maintenance Personnel Only" written across it. Rhett kicks the door in and all that is present in the room is a ladder leading upwards.

"Nice Rhett." Vincent says with a smile.

They enter the room one by one and head up the ladder. Vincent goes last and shuts the door behind him. There is no sign of any soldiers behind them.

The ladder leads to the ground floor, but is quite a bit longer than just two stories since the underground levels are not directly beneath the first floor.

As they reach the top of the ladder, they pile into the room which is just barely big enough to fit them all. In the hallway outside, the automated message repeats to evacuate.

Vincent exits the room and the others follow. The hallway is mostly empty, save for a few stragglers attempting to leave the building. The soldiers didn't know about the maintenance exit any more than Vincent did. Most of them are busy underground dealing with the prisoners.

The group makes their way to the side entrance without incident. The side entrance is a two story lobby with a glass roof on the entire outer half of it. But as they open the door, their escape is interrupted by a yell.

"Vincent!" A voice says from the second floor balcony.

They turn back and look up to see an Asian man in a black trench coat, holding only a katana in his hands. It is Oda.

Vincent turns to the others and yells. "Run!"

“What, no!” Olivia says, pushing her way back through the doorway.

Oda jumps down from the second floor and lands on his feet, cracking the ground beneath him.

“Get her the hell out of here!” Vincent yells.

Weaver and Proof grab her and push her out the door. RJ7 follows. Only Rhett remains. “Vincent...”

“Get your family to safety Rhett.”

Rhett just nods and exits the building.

Oda walks slowly towards Vincent. “I have to admit. I smiled when they told me you went rogue. I never even thought you’d be capable of it, always figured you for a company man. And here I thought I was going to have to leave the city to track you down. Who knew you’d come right to me?”

“I don’t want to fight you Oda.”

“I’m sorry Vincent, it’s nothing personal. I always liked you. But I’ve always wanted the chance to prove I’m better than you.”

“So the Council can pat you on your head and then let you die when you become expendable?”

Oda slices his katana cross the ground. “No talking. Let’s finish this.”

Oda charges and Vincent opens fire. Oda is fast, faster than any person should be. He dodges the bullets as if Vincent had thrown them instead. Even with the auto-targeting of his eye implant, Oda would have been hard to hit.

Oda gets close and swings the blade. Vincent raises his arm and blocks it, but feels pain as it cuts into him. Luckily for Vincent, his arm is made out of the same material as Oda’s sword. Vincent swings and hits him across the face with the butt of his gun.

Oda stumbles a bit to give just enough time for Vincent to reload. He opens fire again but still hits nothing. Oda rushes again and twirls around Vincent, slicing him across the back. Vincent groans in pain and falls to the ground.

Oda raises his blade into the air to finish it, but is interrupted. The glass from the front door shatters as Proof opens fire into Oda with his automatic rifle from outside the building. Oda turns around too late, and bullets tear across his body. He falls to the

ground, but pounces back into the air just as quick. Proof continues to fire, but without the element of surprise, Oda dodges or blocks anything fired at him.

As the last bullet is fired and Proof's gun clicks, Oda throws his blade across the room and impales Proof in the chest, killing him instantly.

Oda walks towards his blade but Vincent charges at him, knocking them both to the ground. Vincent gets on top of Oda and lays into him with his left fist.

Oda attempts to block the punches, but in desperation, reaches into his boot and takes out a knife, stabbing it into Vincent's right shoulder just below his neck. Vincent yelps in pain, but uses his last bit of energy to swing his hand across Oda's face. Blood splatters across the ground from his mouth.

Oda crawls towards his katana, but Vincent stands and grabs his nearby gun, walking up to Oda and putting it against his head.

"Finish it." Oda says reluctantly, rising to his knees.

Vincent feels the blood from his back drip down his leg into his blood-soaked socks. He knows his time is short. All those questions he has ever asked himself before a fight suddenly become relevant. He looks back at all the decisions he's ever made, and for the first time in his life, he doesn't have any regret of the past, or any fear of the future.

Vincent slides the gun across the room. He falls to his knees besides Oda.

Oda looks up. "Why?"

Vincent looks at him, rips off the Terra Project necklace from around his neck, and extends it towards Oda. "Promise me... you will never go after them. Sophie, Rhett, none of them."

Oda nods and takes the necklace, though he doesn't recognize the Terran symbol that adorns it. "I swear."

They sit a few moments in silence before Vincent finally breaks it. He says what was once told to him. "A day will come Oda... when they will let you die, too."

And with that, Vincent breathes his final breathe and falls limp against Oda. Oda catches him and lies him down.

"I know, Vincent." Oda says, sliding his hand across Vincent's face and closing his eyelids.

Chapter 15: Mixed Victory

Olivia paces back and forth on the tram which still sits on the Angel City end of the tunnel. RJ7 sits next to Weaver with a medical kit, sewing up his gun shot wound. Rhett had parted ways with them shortly after escaping. They got to the train in a hurry, but none of them were willing to leave without the others.

RJ7 finishes up treating Weaver's arm and stands up. "How long do we wait?"

Olivia continues pacing. "We wait until they get here."

Weaver sighs. "Olivia, we lost contact with Proof almost an hour ago. If they were alive they'd have been here by now."

Olivia pulls out her pistol and points it at Weaver. "Don't ever say that again."

"You think I want it to be true? Proof is my friend." Weaver replies, unphased by the pistol pointed at him.

Olivia lowers her pistol. "Vincent is my brother..."

"I know Vincent, Olivia. He's tough, if he is alive, he'll find his way to Moreno Valley." RJ7 says.

Olivia sighs, walks over to the engine, and starts the tram.

The lights quickly fade from the Angel City exit. The trip seems longer than normal to those who have ridden it.

Weaver sits in the corner, already regretting letting his friend go back alone to help Vincent. Olivia stands, trying to remain strong, but already missing the brother she had only truly known for a week.

Only RJ7 sits with a smile on his face. He had originally thought that Vincent was making the wrong choice, but as he looks around him, he knows that Vincent was right. A life saved, a family given a chance to start over, a sister reunited with her brother, if only for a brief moment. A people given hope that an outsider would fight and die for them. And most importantly, he knows that Vincent has finally found the peace he has struggled so hard to find.

Elsewhere, another Seraph clutches the Terran necklace in hand, and wonders if he has the same strength to leave the company as Vincent did.

Epilogue

Sophie sits at the elevator entrance for the Terra Project underground. A week had passed since the team returned without Vincent. She waits there hoping that he will return. Olivia waited with Sophie for a few days before giving up.

RJ7 walks up to her. He has a backpack over his shoulder a motorcycle helmet in his hand. The tattoo on his left arm had been fixed. It displayed the symbol of the Terra Project. The right arm displays ‘Vincent Cash: friend and brother’ in black lettering. “Still holding on for hope?”

Sophie nods. “This place is still new to me, it’s the only thing I can do.” She sighs. “You leaving?”

“Yah. Hollywood is my home now. I’d never be able to stand another behavioral modification video.” He laughs.

“I’m pregnant.” She says without context or warning.

RJ7 is startled by the sudden pronouncement. “Oh... wow, congratulations.”

“They told me it’s a boy. I won’t know who the father is until he is born. It could be Vincent. It could also be Aaron.” She says, referring to the Seraphim council member who had abandoned her to a death sentence.

“Does it matter?”

“I wish it didn’t but yes, it does.” She looks down at the ground.

“Then skip the test, and show your son what his father saved here.”

She stands up and nods. “I guess you are right. Thanks for the help RJ.” She says, walking into the compound.

“Good luck.” He tells her as she walks away.

RJ7 presses the elevator and waits for it to arrive. He takes out a small electronic device and does some typing before returning it to his pocket. The tattoo on his right arm is updated. ‘Vincent Cash – friend, brother, father.’
