

Chapter 1

A man ran away under the moonlight.

He went down a dark alley where the streetlights had been cut down. From time to time the sparks from the fallen wires, still hanging from the shattered lamps, stabbed at the darkness with light blue flashes. The figure of the man ran desperately between fallen debris alternately lit by sparks and covered in shadow that made him seem to float and disappear, as if he were an animation.

The man's head and left arm glinted in the light, their mechanics revealing him as a half-body cyborg. In that robotic arm he carried an old axe, dull with use and spattered with dark blood stains.

This area, far from the red-light district of The Scrapyard, seemed to be inhabited by nobody, and dirty alleys crossed the buildings as if they were the veins of a living being.

The man ran aimlessly through the alleys that widened and narrowed. At a certain point he found himself before a fork in the road that divided the alley in two, a right and a left. After a moment of uncertainty, looking to one side and the other like a dog without an owner, he picked a direction with a heavy look in his eyes.

They will kill me, I will be melted down!

The man was intimidated by his own visions.

From his eyes, the alleys seem to be the intestines of a dark red beast that is thrashing in the ruins of the city, swallowing it block by block.

Tears cascaded down his face, brought on by the fears of his hallucination. But he did not stop; on the contrary, he dove even deeper into the deep alleys. There was no turning back now. He was convinced that if he stops the intestinal alley walls will secrete their acids and digest him without a trace.

If that man's brain could be squeezed at that moment, the alkaloids could be extracted like fruit juice. Those are the symptoms of withdrawal and a bad trip produced by illicit plant compounds.

The man stumbled forward. *They've come to melt me down.*

After crossing countless alleys, the man's adventure ended abruptly.

The alley ended, cut through by a deep, orange river. The man rested his back against the metal net installed on the edge of the caustic river and shuddered at his disturbing vision of the alley.

The end of the alley that the man had been walking through until a moment ago was lost in darkness, as if it were another dimension. Now that he wasn't moving, with morbid peristalsis, the four walls began to envelop and crush the man.

"What the hell? Stop! Damn you!" he shouted.

The man took the axe, which he had been fervently clutching to himself and starting slicing the flesh from his living right arm. First one, then two wide cuts lacerated his skin, exposing its pink innards briefly, before being quickly covered by his gushing blood.

"Arrghh, argh", he screamed.

The man's breathing was altered by the intense pain in his arm, his chest heaved in and out in extreme gasps, as if it were a bellows. However, when the pain invaded him completely, his distorted visions quickly faded, leaving reality exposed bare.

As the hallucinations disappeared and his consciousness awoke, he let out a sore laugh.

And towards limbo with an empty look he repeated to himself "I'm lost, I'm lost."

The hallucinations end.

However, there is a phantasm, mixed with reality, that haunts the man. That phantasm, unfortunately, does not disappear along with the hallucinations, even after the man regained his sanity.

Reality is the reason why the man fled to the world of drug induced illusion, even with the suffering it caused. It is like a bloodhound that corners him.

"What, but you...?" the man said, in exasperation.

"I see", came a voice, quiet and chill, out of the darkness. "I've caught one of the most wanted but least expensive. Hey, don't you know who I am? I have 90,000 tons and 50 chips."

The man's vision came into focus. A moment ago he was seeing double, and even triple, but, along with his sanity, it has recovered. The man fixed his bloodshot eyes on the darkness, where the words come from, and it is there that he saw a shadow deeper than the black of the alley.

"You're not a hallucination, are you? You damned hunter!" he swore at the figure.

The shadow looked like a human shape clipped from the darkness. It slowly came out of the shadows with firm steps that sent tremors through the pavement. It dropped the Most Wanted List it was carrying, letting it unroll in front of the man.

"Don't think it will be so easy to hunt me!" he said defiantly.

The man licked the blood from his right arm and bent down to pick up his axe. He picked it up smoothly, gave it a small twirl, and settled the weapon into his hand, gripping it at the balance point. He was clearly a master at the weapon, having already survived countless battles.

The shadow nodded, somewhat impressed by the man's skill with his weapon. It murmured, "After all, I think a serial killer like you who only attacks women should have a respectable bounty. So for today I'll settle for you."

"What?", said the man, enraged. He kicked the ground aggressively, letting the insult summon up his courage.

With his human legs, made of flesh and bone, he took an almost supernatural leap, high up, and with a powerful vertical movement he brought his axe down to split the skull of the shadow in two. His left mechanical arm exerted great force, the right gave perfect guidance. The edge of his axe cut the air emitting a flute like sound. It was a master technique with which he had sent many to the grave.

Just when the edge of the axe seemed to impact the skull of the shadow, a sinister glow shone from the eyes of the shape. In a split second a red light burst from the shadow from head to toe. That glow extended to the sky with undulating movements like a snake and was lost in the darkness.

Almost at the same time that the snake like red light faded into the darkness, a sharp crack is heard that made the walls rumble.

"Huh?!" exclaimed the man.

He was stunned, for he did not feel the same pleasure as always when his master stroke smashed the skull of an enemy. The power of his axe, helped by centrifugal force, somehow failed to connect. Instead of impacting the head of the shadow, the man went through it, like a ghost, and his left arm continued the stroke toward the ground. The inertia of the unexpected miss flipped him over, and he ended up flat on his back on the ground.

"Damn, how could I miss?" he swore.

The man drew his left arm back to bring the axe up into guard position. Only then did he finally realize how he had missed, and burst into tears. During the confusing collision with the shadow, his mechanical left arm had been severed at the wrist. All that remained was the sharp surface of the cut, smoking and still warm from the impact.

The shadow still stood in front of the man, as if nothing had happened.

“What, what happened to me?” asked the man, in disbelief.

A second or two later, the man's left hand, still holding the axe, fell spinning and stuck, quivering, into the asphalt of the alley, at his side.

The shadow had not dodged the man's swift blow, but with much greater speed blew his hand off with a kick.

That kick was also a truly artistic move.

It had the elegance of a water bird stretching its wings to take flight and the destructive power of a black eagle preparing to tear its prey apart.

With the edge of the axe above its head, the shadow had raised its knee to almost a vertical position. Then, raising the heel of its supporting foot, and on the tip of its thumb, pivoted its body with great strength almost completing a turn. By making this turn with the point of its toes, the power was transmitted toward his bent knee, and the attack leg was released like a sharp whip cutting inward. At that moment, the blow reached its maximum power by impacting and cutting the left wrist of the man holding the axe.

That huge kick from the shadow took no more than a few seconds. What is even more surprising is that the shadow launched its elegant kick only after confirming that the man was coming at him with his axe. One could say that the skill of his kick and the speed of his reflexes have reached a divine level.

But there is still something inexplicable.

No matter how divine the ability, is it possible not to break, but to cut the wrist of a steel cyborg with one kick?

Yet the mechanical hand of man was indeed lying on the ground. It seemed that there was more to the kick of the shadow than pure skill. The man reacted and tried to move, but the shadow already had one foot on his back and wouldn't let him.

“Damn it!” he swore.

Pinned down, the man turned his neck ferociously to see the face of his stalker. With great effort he managed to see out of the corner of his eye a long silhouette, with silver-rimmed glasses and a pineapple-shaped head.

"A woman?" he asked.

"Ho, ho, well, at least in conscience and in chromosomes, we would say yes", his stalker said, smiling with twisted red lips.

Indeed, her features and silhouette were those of a woman. But that body she was hiding under a misaligned brown coat was a totally artificial body made of steel and ceramic. She was a cyborg from head to toe, entirely machine made, except for the skin on her face and her brain, which was all that was left of her original flesh.

The 100% cyborg woman rested her elbow on the knee of the foot that was pinning the man down, and smiled sarcastically, watching the man in his awkward position.

"So who kicked me in the wrist? Was it none other than a 100% cyborg manic girl?"

The man spoke to her in a defiant tone as he turned his neck fiercely, trying to get a better look. In the face of such impudence, the woman did not hesitate to lean more weight on the man's back. There was an unpleasant cracking noise, as if the woman had a bundle of dry branches under her foot. The man thrashed his arms and legs, like an insect about to be crushed, and shouted in desperation.

The woman ejected a cartridge into the palm of her hand. It was approximately 10 cm long. She considered it for a moment and then placed it in her coat pocket.

"I bet you cut my wrist with that thing too, didn't you?" growled the man.

This was the trick in the woman's mysterious kick. An electric heat blade fired from the attack foot violently cuts enemies through the heat and impact of the blade. It has the disadvantage that the blade needs to be preheated and that the battery, being a cartridge type, has a limited number of uses, but is feared by its enemies because of its effectiveness as a secret weapon and its destructive power once hot. It also offers the advantage of increasing its attack range when not in close combat where there is a lot of fighting.

"Well, tomorrow I also have a lot to do so I can't play with you anymore, I'd better kill you right now", said the woman with total coldness, smiling with those red and sensual lips. The man suddenly trembled at the woman's sinister smile.

"No, help me!" he pleaded.

As he pleaded with the woman, his face was drenched in sweat and tears. But the woman responded by turning her face to the side. In this way she expresses her refusal.

"I'm sorry, but I have to exchange your head for money at the factory in order to recharge my cartridge. If I don't do that, my legs will just be miserable pins, don't you think?"

The woman changed sides, still holding the man to the ground, but freeing her right foot to bring it to the neck of the quivering man. From his angle, the man could see right up the woman's matte steel legs. His eyes popped out of their sockets.

"It must be a special moment for you, so I will allow you to see my legs of fire up close. Look, they're still warm, aren't they?"

The woman's steel fingers opened, and there was the quiet sound of small motor. From the inside of her calf a blade with the edge of a lance and the thickness of an axe slowly unfolded from the shaft in her knee. The blade looked burned and seemed to be covered by a soot-like substance.

The central part was slightly reddened, and the man felt the radiant heat on his face.

"Agh, that's enough!" he cried, totally dominated.

"Are these your last words? Come on, you are about to die, say something more interesting so that you can rest in peace, come on!" the woman said, contemptuously.

Sensing death, man struggled desperately to free himself, but he can do nothing in the face of the strength and weight of the woman who had subdued him. The power of a 100% cyborg is admirable, even in female models.

The heat of the blade coming out of the woman's leg burned the man's cheek, and he screamed again. "Arghh!, Dad!, Mom... !"

The woman, as if she wanted to drown out the man's words, began to move the blade in a very carefree manner. There was the sound of wires snapping and the smell of burned flesh floated in the air. The man's head was easily severed from the rest of his body.

Still pinned down under the foot of the woman, the body of the man spasmed two or three times, as if refusing the sudden loss.

The woman sighed, and reclined against the wall and looked inside her coat pocket. She took out her hand, holding between her fingers a few cigarettes made of paper.

The woman light a cigarette, holding it between her lips, and smokes calmly as if she were breathing deeply.

The woman, 100% cyborg, could neither smell or taste the cigarette. Her artificial heart and lungs can filter out the nicotine, but do not have the ability to absorb it. In addition to not being able to benefit from the soothing effect of nicotine, tar greatly reduces the life of the filters in her artificial lungs, so cigarettes are even worse for a cyborg than for a human.

However, even though it makes no sense for her mechanism, this "deceptive act" helped her to calm down her human side. Her brain remembers the past when her body was made of living flesh and enjoyed smoking cigarettes. And now, her human part still calms down by repeating the same ritual.

"Hey, don't look at me with such contempt!" murmured the woman, giving the man's severed head a gentle kick. The man's head rolled over on the floor, leaving the streaks of his sweat on the surface. Rigor mortis had left him only with his left eye open, a bitter expression and an empty look.

The woman blew her cigarette smoke over the man's face.

"It's your fault that I killed you. Because you're a fool, for fancying that mescaline that's so old-fashioned and going around murdering the working class, right?"

Mescaline is a narcotic plant alkaloid extracted from cactus that has the effect of producing hallucinations. Unlike stimulants such as LSD that are prepared with chemicals, mescaline can be easily refined in large quantities from simple crops, if quality is not too important.

Because of the advantages it offers, mescaline is certainly a popular narcotic in the desert areas around The Scrapyard where the cactus grows abundantly. But within The Scrapyard, where synthetic drugs with much stronger addictive effects and properties are preferred, it is a product that is hardly even given to the followers of mysterious obsolete religions to try.

Because its effect is simple and short-lived and it must be consumed in large quantities, the only regular users of this primitive drug within the Scrapyard are the inhabitants of the slums in the suburbs or the children of peasants on factory-run farms.

Perhaps the man entered some of these mysterious religions for some reason and it was there where he first experienced the aroma of these cactuses. From then on, he became more and more attached to this smell that brought him longing for his native land and started to consume it more and more, until hallucinations became part of his daily life. And surely during some bad trip he started killing people and ended up on the most wanted list.

A boy who came out of the countryside, who suffered frustrations in The Scrapyard, who

resorted to drugs, and who ended up going crazy. These are not isolated cases in The Scrapyard.

“Dad, Mom...”

Leaning against the wall and looking into the void, the man's last words echo again in the woman's ears.

In his last cry, the man remembered his family.

“Asshh, too bad! This work is full of remorse”, the woman lamented. She blew the dark purple smoke from her cigarette into the sky and watched it disappear. The low clouds moved with the wind across the night sky, obscuring the moonlight from time to time.

She tossed her cigarette butt on to the man's discarded body, and walked back into the darkness of the alley with the man's head in one of her hands.

The night breeze swayed her old coat and slipped below the hem.

After the clouds moved on, the blue moonlight light illuminated the alley again. All that remained was the man's decapitated body and his axe stuck into the floor, like a tombstone symbolizing his death.

The woman's name was Calico.