Immortal Hunter One-Shot:

Author: James “Dragon Master” Courneya

Genre: Supernatural – Mystery – Sci-fi – Cyberpunk.

Series Length: 1 Volume. [Around 150 pages].

Brief Synopsis:

In a futuristic, grey and neon city, there are people with special powers, called Irregularities. A new investigator, a part of the department who deals with incidents involving Irregularities, is sent out into the field to investigate a case. As they are slowly unraveling a string of connected cases, another mysterious character keeps showing up, claiming to be a P.I. The two are a bit at odds, as the mysterious character becomes more suspicious. Eventually, the mystery character begins piecing the case together.

This leads to a string of mysterious events, where the mysterious character Clay and the new Irregularities Investigator Aina, have to cooperate to take on a corrupt organization.

Characters:

Clay Golem – Clay (Parallels to the Jewish golem story). Power: ~~Censored~~

Design: White hair. Slanted, sharp, Blue eyes. Well built.

Aina (Persian) – Aina.

Design: Really dark, blue hair, almost black. Black dress suit, with a white undershirt beneath. Wide red eyes.

Terms:

Irregularity: Humans with powers.

Augmented: Technologically enhanced people. They would be called “An Augmented.” “He’s Augmented.”

Further Resources:

A quickly pieced together script for chapter 1:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qAlpc0Ya4NSBZYsaZcAvgvk-slOI9aS6/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=109552151493332899871&rtpof=true&sd=true

Art of the characters and start of the story:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L3JbKIkze-5ZLYsrZ0k0CSzqAVIbXbMt?usp=drive_link

[One-Shot Sample]

Immortal Hunter

Chapter 1: Faker

In bold sharp letters on the wall, is the word "**help**!" written in blood. Officers finish setting up the investigation site. A bulky, soft-faced man, has his hand placed over his chin and mouth, while mulling over something.

"The ICD unit is here."

"Send 'em in."

Walking in, is a taller woman. She has a darker skin tone, with a fuller frame. She has on a black dress suit, with a white undershirt beneath. Her long curly hair is draped down the right side of her face, while being cut back on the other side. The hair is such a dark blue, that you would be forgiven for thinking it was black, under the wrong light. Her big red eyes glance over to the writing, calmly taking it in.

"Ah, you're one of those new recruits over at the Irregularity Control Department. What's your name?"

"Aina, sir, ICD investigator at your service."

The woman gives a salute.

"Is this your first case of this type?"

"No sir, this would be my third."

"Good, then I don't need to catch you up. Do you know what the victim's irregularity is, or would that be on a need-to-know basis?"

"Not at all, we are more than happy to work with the police to help solve this case."

"Uh-huh."

She pulls out a thin line of metal from her pocket. Pressing the button, a holographic display beams out of the base.

“They recently discovered they had blood manipulation abilities, and thusly – didn’t have very good control over it yet.”

The man gives an animated expression to the blood.

“Seems they controlled it fine.”

“Yes, well, extreme situations and such. Do you have any more details on the case – that wasn’t in the briefing?”

“We got another witness, confirming the victim entered their apartment after eight A.M.”

Aina looks around the area.

“Meaning, the victim got home from work, as if nothing was wrong.”

“Yeah.”

“They then clearly engaged in a struggle.”

She looks at a wet spot on the floor.

“Said struggle – must have resulted in the assailant, or assailants, to have to clean up something; likely their own blood.”

“Well, that’s what-”

“Meaning, the perpetrator didn’t expect to encounter an Irregular. However, the help message is ominous. They felt it necessary to cover their trail, but not clean that off.”

“They might have felt it would take too long?”

“Perhaps. Or perhaps, they weren’t worried about people knowing this was a kidnapping? Because to me, this looks like a human trafficking case. Especially-”

She points at the door.

“-Since there were no signs of forced entry.”

“Yes, that seems like a fair enough assessment. You know, even with this city getting better, there’s always something terrible – lying right under the surface.”

“…Quite.”

After finishing up at the scene, Aina steps outside, into where bright neon lights blare and drones fly through the sky at high speeds. Getting into her car she lets out a sigh, then notices a message on her dash. It has information on a new assignment. Another missing person’s case.

“Not even giving me a moment’s rest, I see.”

She heads off to the new scene. Arriving she looks around.

“Seems – I made it here first.”

She heads into the run-down office space. An older woman greats her and shows her to the scene. Glancing in through the window she sees a bit of a mess. As the woman begins to walk away, Aina speaks up.

“Thank you. Um, do I need a key, or-?”

“Oh no, I already unlocked it for the other one.”

“Huh?”

She opens the door and heads in. Standing at the desk is a man, seemingly deep in thought. He has a larger incredibly muscular build. His hair is pure white. The sleeves on his white button up are rolled up. The shirt is also neatly tucked into his black pants. Aina takes note of what’s on his feet and the fact they are advanced pairs of combat prepared shoes. Made to sustain heavy damage and absorb tension. Aina begins to take a step.

“Hold it!”

The man turns back to her, pointing down at her feet. She sharply looks down, seeing a single piece of paper, where her foot was about to land.

“That’s all?”

“Do not – mess up the crime scene.”

She steps to the side of it. Now that the man is turned around, Aina gets a better look at him. His hair is buzzed on the sides and naturally wavy on top. A black tie is neatly tied around his neck. Slanted and sharp eyes look out, with an irritated gaze. The color is a deep blue.

“Who might you be?”

Aina asks. With incredible haste the man flashes and puts away a badge.

“Clay Golem, private investigator.”

Aina thinks to herself. “It’s getting really hard to tell what is – and isn’t a real name, anymore.”

“And why would a P.I be here?”

He looks at her as if she’s stupid.

“Why would an investigator – be at a crime scene?”

“I was more so focused on the private part.”

“Obviously, I was hired to check it out.”

“By whom?”

“Employer confidentiality.”

“Of course.”

Clay moves around the scene, picking objects up to observe them, before putting them back exactly where he found them.

“Who are you, anyways?”

He continues checking over the scene.

“Aina, ICD investigator.”

Clay pauses for a moment.

“Uh-huh.”

“Sir, if you don’t mind, you should probably leave this scene to the professionals.”

“Meaning, because an Irregular was involved, you should handle it?”

“Well, that’s...”

The two stare at each other for a moment.

“I see that you won’t be of much help, if your useful information is classified.”

“I seriously think – you should leave.”

“Am I under arrest?”

“…No.”

“Then I’m staying.”

He doesn’t stop investigating for even a moment, as this conversation goes on.

“Stop me if I’m wrong.”

“What?”

“You can’t tell me what you know, but you can tell me what you don’t – right?”

Her gaze narrows, as the man begins to speak.

“The victim was staying late at work. When he was the last person still here – the culprit came in. That obviously means, this job was scouted out. The victim was specifically targeted.”

“Was he not a mild-mannered office worker?”

“He was an Irregular. That’s reason enough.”

“You are not incorrect with that assertion. If he really was.”

“Why else would you be here?”

“…”

“This isn’t the work of an irregularity.”

He scans the mess.

“How do you figure?”

“Do I have to explain everything?”

He points to a canister of pop on the ground, with a multitude of holes punched through it from the inside out.

“Someone used a disorientation, BB grenade.”

Aina states.

“One that looks like a regular can.”

“Yes, so you think the culprit used-?”

“No, obviously not. It was the victim.”

“What makes you say that?”

“The mess, along with the weapon. This is good for a quick distraction – and not much else.”

“Kidnappers could use that.”

“Wouldn’t they use something more effective?”

“Perhaps?”

“I think it’s certain.”

“Then – you’re saying the victim knew someone was after them, stayed in their office thinking it was safe, but bought a non-lethal weapon just in case?”

“Yes.”

“However, he didn’t get to use the weapon, since if he did, the perpetrator would have cleaned the place up, to not leave any signs of a struggle. Meaning, it went off after the fact, because he attempted to activate it, but instead it just landed-”

She points to a particular spot on the desk.

“-Right there. The criminals, thinking it was a can, left it. Which allowed it to roll off accidently firing and causing this mess.”

Clay gives the woman a cold stare, as she smiles back.

“Yes, that is about what I was thinking.”

Aina, hearing police sirens, turns her attention towards the entrance of the building.

“That would be back up.”

As she turns back, Clay has vanished.

“He sure did know a lot – about what transpired here…”

Aina eventually wraps up things at this case’s location. After that day, she continues to be assigned to more missing person cases. As she investigates them, the mysterious individual Clay once in a while crosses her path. Things go on like this until a particularly abhorrent case. The scene of the crime was a crater – that used to be where an entire building once stood. Aina looks over the details she has available, but tells the officers at the scene that there’s not enough info to go off of. On her way back to her vehicle, she hears a voice from the alleyway.

“What do you think it was, ICD investigator?”

“Who can say for sure?”

“…Wrong answer.”

She tenses up. Placing her hand behind her back, she proceeds to walk into the alley. Looking around, she doesn’t see anything. The man who was there, has already walked out, over

to the woman's car. He places a small device down on it that sends out an electrical discharge. Picking it back up, Clay slips it into his jacket pocket. He then takes off to a particular destination. Tapping a card onto a door's security system, the lock undoes itself. Stepping into the apartment, he walks past a picture of Aina. Looking around the place, making sure everything is as he found it, he finds her office. Hitting a button, holographic projections light up the room. They are filled with information on each of the missing person cases that Aina has been working on. All of which have red lines leading straight into an image of Clay. It looks as if it was taken when he was walking through a crowd.

"She's too close to an answer, there isn't any way she wouldn't figure it out."

Clay begins swiping through the details. Eventually, he comes to some encrypted information.

"Why would this be encrypted?"

Clay goes about decrypting the data. It takes some time, but he finally is able to do it. As he begins to read it his eyes open wide.

"I don't believe it…"

Bang~

The ringing of a gun echoes out. A bullet is driven through Clay's skull, exiting right between his eyes. His limp body falls forward, causing the holograms to ripple. The lifeless body hits the floor. The gun is placed back into its holster. Aina's red eyes glare down at the man.

"So close – a bit too close – to the truth. I told you, it was best to leave this to the professionals."

Aina glances up, seeing her fake file, with a picture of herself. The difference of the two's facial expressions makes it hard to believe they are the same person.

“Sorry for deceiving you, it’s just far easier to cover things up from the inside, then the outside. I hope you understand, but I’m sure you do, *Mr. investigator*.”

“It’s alright, I’ll forgive you for that.”

“What?!”

The man stands back up. He turns to the woman. His forehead has an empty circle of blood dripping down his face. His wavy hair has been undone, falling down.

“You’re an-?”

“Irregularity. Power; immortality.”

“Hehe, seems luck wasn’t on my side.”

She quickly reaches for her gun, but the man pulls out a gun looking weapon of his own. Electricity shoots out, zapping the woman unconscious.

“Ehhh.”

Sometime later, Aina opens her eyes. She looks around the room, seeing a cell. Going to move her arms, she feels that she is tied to a chair.

“Finally, you’re awake.”

She looks through a sheet of reinforced glass, glaring at Clay.

“Now – you’re going to answer a few questions and give me what I need to know.”

“Oh, is that so?”

He leans in – with an intense stare.

“Tell me everything about the organization you work for.”

Chapter 2: Prisoner

“...”

“...”

The two sit in silence for quite some time. Only a faint white noise was heard between them.

“Unlike you, I can quite literally do this forever.”

“Yeah, you mentioned immortality. Although, I certainly could personally confirm an advanced healing factor, I can’t say I’m convinced you can’t die.”

“You sent a bullet through my brain.”

“I could have done worse.”

Horrors reflect back from her red eyes. Without a smidge of emotion being shown with them, simply just a surgical understanding of ways to try and kill this man — again.

“And with the current situation, I’m sure you can think of a hundred-and-one ways to put me down, with the free time you’ll find yourself with.”

“I’m not scared of you, Clay.”

She glances off to the side, slowly examining her right side wall.

“The feeling is mutual.”

“Adducting an ICD investigator in her own home. I hope you clean up blood really good, for your sake.”

“Meaning, you really did pass the background checks and get accepted by the ICD?”

“Did I now?”

With a seeming lack of investment in the conversation she rolls her eyes up to examine the ceiling instead.

“What’s it going to take to get you to talk, I wonder?”

“Aren’t we talking right now?”

Aina flashes a fake smile, her face contorting into that of the innocent ICD investigator for a moment. That face then slowly decays away, as the two maintain firm eye-contact.

“Perhaps, veiled threats and mind games won’t get me far with you?”

“Oh no, but that’s the fun part. I was looking forward to it – in fact.”

“Instead of slipping something into your water. I’ll simply inject you with some truth serum and see you talk.”

“I’ll bite my tongue off.”

Smirking, she gives her head a small playful tilt. As if saying your move.

“Just one very obvious problem with that.”

“Oh?”

“The fact you haven’t already tried, means that you want to survive.”

“Who doesn’t? Am I right?”

“It tells me your loyalty to your organization is lower than your self-preservation.

“...Loyalty is such an icky word. Really not getting to the depths of why people do the things which they do. Or maybe more accurately, it is like a sort of fairy-tale for adults to believe they are better than they actually are.”

She almost gives a scoff with this statement.

“You don’t seem to have much belief in anything.”

“I believe in power.”

“Is that right?”

“Don’t get me wrong, you have power. I am still unclear on the extent of it, but at the very least I am sure you have power over me, right now. The same way I have power over you. Being the one and perhaps only one with the information that you seek.”

“So, you do have information?”

Clay gives a content grin. Aina seems momentarily agitated, but quickly shifts back to neutral.

“Please let’s not pretend that wasn’t obvious from the beginning.”

“Okay, so we have power over each other, what now?”

“Not what now. You’re missing the bigger context.”

“Which is?”

“There's something out there that has far more power than either of us.”

Clay simply keeps glaring at the woman.

“Sure, if I survive you, that’s rather peachy for me, but it doesn’t mean I would live for much longer after.”

“Because there is something out there that has way more power than either of us?”

Excitement spreads across the woman’s face, as her eyes light up.

“Yes, very good, you catch on fast. Well, not fast enough to keep a bullet out of your skull.”

She playfully smirks at the unamused man.

“In fact, if you had a different power or were regular-”

“But I’m not — and if I was, my approach would obviously have been different.”

“...*Obviously*...”

Her nose scrunches up while emphasizing the word.

“Then working under... Whatever twisted sense of how things work that you do, it should be possible for us to-”

“Find common ground?”

“I was going to say manipulate each other to mutually beneficial gains.”

“Ah, and why should I believe you care if something beneficial as you say happens to me?”

“You’re right, I don’t care if you live or die.”

“...Well, don’t you know how to sweet-talk a lady?”

“I also don’t care if you live. That’s your one-and-only opportunity. I would advise you to take it.”

“You’re just looking out for me aren’t you? How kind.”

“Tell me what you know. Everything.”

“...Maybe. First, how about you tell me about yourself?”

“...”

“Ooh, strong and silent now? Does that work for you? I bet it works for some of the others, doesn’t it? *Clay*.”

She drags out the name, while flicking her tongue forward on the last syllable.

“You’ve got a mask, just like me.”

“And?”

“Meaning, you have something to hide. If you were doing this because of some hero fantasy, then you would have no reason to put up a front. Especially not now.”

She shakes her head at him and stares up towards the man.

“And you’re implying?”

“That you have a reason for doing this?”

She motions around the room with her head.

“Something compelling you to take action. What? Did something happen to you?”

Clay remains motionless.

“To someone you care about?”

Still no reaction, but yet Aina’s eyes que in onto something.

“Someone you love? Your lover?”

Her eyes carefully examine the man. By all means, because of his power, or maybe just because of who he is, some could easily mistake him for a statue.

“Oh? No... Family isn’t it? A sister? Who went missing?”

For the briefest of moments something flashes across Clay’s eyes.

“Hehe, oh isn’t that just adorable. Tell me something, Clay, is this a search-and-rescue or retribution mission?”

“...You tell me.”

“...I wouldn’t know. Sorry.”

“But you do know something.”

“Mhh, do I now?”

“You were investigating the missing Irregulars. However, even with all the information and backing you have, not to mention the cunning you have put onto display, you didn’t make as much progress as even I did.”

“But you knew what you were looking for.” Heh, well, you at least had something you had to convince yourself was there. Evidence can be quite malleable under those circumstances.”

“You know what I think?”

“No.”

“I think your organization is abducting Irregulars and have placed you into a position to help cover it up from the inside.”

“Is that what you think?”

“Yes.”

“And do you have any proof?”

“A fake ID is a start.”

“Maybe I just have a shady past? Did some drugs in school and got a couple DUI’s that would have kept me off the force.”

“And to cover up for them you broke the law and forged a new identity.”

“Who knows?”

“I think I do.”

“And?”

“You know you can’t outplay this situation?”

“Can’t I? Because from my perspective, you need me. At least, you couldn’t take a risk and kill me. Because in the off *chance* that I do have the information you need, then I am your best shot. If you lose this trail, the other ones will just become that much colder. That is to say if you even have *anything* else.”

“You don’t need your limbs to help me.”

“Oh, idle threats now?”

“They can stay idle if you want.”

“Want... Interesting choice of words. I guess, it would be a hassle to get augmentations put in. A real time killer.”

“I have time to kill, do you?”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“I take it you would need to report back in, at some point.”

“To the ICD?”

“To your real bosses.”

“Both of which would not be good for you?”

“Does it look like I’m scared of anyone finding you here?”

“No. But you might be stupid, instead of that good.”

“I also take it, at least one of them is responsible for this.”

He pokes his temple a couple times. Aina’s eyes narrow.

“What?”

“You know what.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I take it you have a question?”

“It would be pointless to ask.”

“Try me.”

“I was going to ask just how much information you are holding back, but as I said, that would be pointless.”

“...”

“Alright then, Clay Golem, let us strike a deal.”

“...I’m listening.”

“I will lead the way to the next drop off location.”

“Drop off?”

“Of Irregulars.”

“...”

“Once there, I will get you in and you can handle things from there I take it.”

“Why would I take you there in person?”

“Because it requires an eye scanner ID.”

“What if I only took your eye with me.”

“I won’t tell you where it is then.”

“...”

“Please, we both know we can do this until at least one of us dies of natural causes.”

Clay leans back in his chair.

“Before that. Why do you know about the chip in my head?”

“Because I put my own one in there.”

“Is that so? And what does this chip of yours do?”

“If I activate it your head will explode.”

Clay shrugs while saying this.

“Oh, okay then.”

“You don’t seem all that shaken up by this information.”

“I just simply had my detonation holder change hands is all.”

“...”

“Do we have a deal? Clay Golem?”

“If you stop calling me by my full name.”

“Yours?”

She gives a discerning stare, practically jabbing at the man to stop the act.

“I’ll tell you mine, if you tell me yours?”

“...Touché.”

“...You have yourself a deal.”

“Wonderful.”

“When do we leave?”

“What day is it?”

“Thursday.”

“We should leave earlier Friday morning then. That is, assuming we are still in the city, or at least close?”

“...We are.”

Clay gets up to leave.

“Hey. Wait, aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Nope.”

Clay leaves the room.

“...My, someone has attitude problems.”

She continues to look around.

“I know you can still hear me. You obviously aren’t the type to leave me unattended for long.”

Silence hangs in the air.

“And clearly not much of a conversationalist either.”

The time passes until the due-date. Clay then roughly gets Aina onto her feet, after taking her jacket, and then has her slip it back on.

“Slide your hands into your pockets.”

She does so.

“Ah, thanks, I didn’t like those pockets anyways.”

Clay uses thin, long roped handcuffs and cuffs Aina from behind, keeping her hands in an almost natural position. Natural enough to pass by the observant eye. He then walks her to the car and opens the back door for her.

“What? No booster seat?”

He raises his hand to help shove her in, but she slides by before he can. Clay begins driving to the destination with directions.

“You know, we don’t have to be all on edge. At least when it’s just me you’re dealing with. We both can mutually benefit from this transaction.”

Clay shoots a look back at her from the rear view mirror.

“And what if you find yourself thinking that a better transaction has suddenly appeared?”

Soon enough the two arrive at a towering hotel.

“Here we are.”

Clay gives the woman a displeased, cutting look.

“You really have no idea who you’re dealing with, if you think a semi-public location like this would even prove to be a way to break a sweat.”

“But to traffic Irregulars?”

She just gives a smirk back. Clay scouts the area out for a bit, then parks a large distance away from the building. He then opens Aina’s door.

“We're really going to walk all this way?”

“Get out.”

“I’m just saying, you're not the one walking with bound wrists.”

Clay places his hand onto the roof of the car and leans down into the doorway.

“Fine, I’ll make do.”

She gets out.

“The things women have to do in order to please some man.”

“...”

“Maybe, I wasn’t quite clear enough on my parallel. It has been harder to think clearly lately.”

“I got it. You were comparing your incarceration to wearing heels. I just didn’t find the comment worth acknowledging.”

“You’re calling this an incarceration? Not exactly a police officer, unlike me. Not that being one would suddenly legalize what you’re doing.”

“...”

“Above the law are we?”

“...”

“So, if something bad happens to someone you care about and you have sufficient power you can do whatever you want?”

Clay shoots a look down at the woman.

“Mum’s the word.”

The two enter into the wide open large bottom floor.

“Where now?”

“Let’s see.”

A red flashing light and blaring alarm goes off.

“What’s-?”

The two examine the area, but Clay quickly tries gauging Aina. “She’s as confused as I am.”

Suddenly metal plating slides down the windows and doors. Clay grabs Aina's arm and uses the confusion to shuffle away out of anyone elses notice.

"Any idea what's going on?"

"No, actually."

A cool gravelly voice plays out across the loudspeaker system.

"Everyone inside of Saint Marines Hotel you are now currently my captives. I will be randomly killing one person every half-hour. Every time someone dies from someone other than myself the timer will be reset. Get your affairs in order and pray to whatever Gods you believe in. That is all, have a nice day."

The speaker clicks off. Clay finds his back falling back against the wall.

"Well, are we just unlucky or are they after you?"

Aina asks.

"Why the hell would they be after me?"

"You seem like a dangerous man."

Clay stares the woman in the eyes, then steadily raises his hand into gun shape and fake shoots his temple.

"I never claimed I was less dangerous. In fact, I wouldn't do that."

"What does this mean for our meeting?"

"Assuming this isn't attached to the people we are meeting, probably not much, but that is unlikely."

"You're people are behind this?"

"If I had to take a guess."

"Tsk!"

“So, what now? Got a plan to sneak us around this place?”

“...I have one question. If your people are behind this — does that mean they are going to go through with it?”

“Don’t be stupid – of course.”

“...”

“Hm?”

“Damnit.”

“What?”

Clay starts moving.

“Hey, this is the wrong way to get to our-”

Aina catches the determined clear look in the man’s eyes.

“But it is probably the right way to find whoever is behind this.”

“You can’t be serious?”

Chapter 3: Saint Marines Hotel

A panicked crowd worries on if this announcement is real or not. That is up until an individual walks up to a ground floor pillar, where they proceed to slam their skull into it instantly drawing blood. This catches everyone's attention, including Clay and his unenthused companion.

"Come on."

Clay begins descending back down into range of the gathering crowd, with Aina a short step ahead of him. He gets close enough to see the body. "That head wound isn't very deep?"

Clay's nose twitches a couple times.

In a whisper Clay speaks.

"A bitter smell."

"Like almonds."

Aina replies with a smile and side-eye. Clay examines the reddish tint to the skin's post mortem discoloration. He then begins backing away from the scene.

"Well, I know what it is, how about you?"

"...Cyanide poisoning."

"Bingo."

Clay thinks on the options.

"Do you want to talk to me here? Two heads and all that?"

"Why should I?"

"Because – I was going to say if you die, but that's wrong isn't it? If you get caught up in this situation, so do I. And if you go down, so do I. At least for now, if I can't convince you to leave."

“Which you can’t.”

“I figured as much.”

“Then if you want to help, figure out why our first victim bashed their head against a pillar?”

Aina almost comments on the pessimistic use of – *first victim*, but thinks against it.

“They could have had multiple poisons at play?”

“Perhaps. But most toxins that cause outbursts like that are airborne. Very hard to use in controlled spurts at specified intervals and varying locals.”

“Familiar with poisons and toxins are we?”

“...You’ve got to be able to play to your strengths.”

“Ah, I see. Not like I was hopeful that poison would work on you.”

He shoots a glare at her.

“Please – would you think about anything different in my situation?”

“Yes.”

“That’s because you aren’t any fun.”

“Poisoning isn’t exactly my idea of fun.”

“See what I mean?”

The two seem to have an implicit understanding without stating it, that they are searching the hotel for the one behind the murder. An investigation that they seem fully capable of performing, even while going back-and-forth. However, with the size of the location and lack of information to work off of, they don’t manage to find their target before discovering the next body. Leaning up against a wall is a woman wearing a scarf. Immediately, the redish eyes have Clay check their neck. Pulling the scarf down, they find bruising around the neck. They then pop

open her mouth, viewing a swollen tongue. Clay uses their phone to shine a light inside, seeing signs of blood in the throat.

“Could it possibly be a strangulation?”

Aina says in a testy way.

“That appears to be the case.”

Clay focuses in on the sharp scratches under the victim’s chin. He moves their hand and views their fingers.

“Blood under the fingernails.”

“Likely the victims, but even if it wasn’t it wouldn’t do us much good.”

“The blood spatter… The lacerations on the neck have already started clotting. However, the up and down abrasions from the scarf happened premortem, smearing it further.”

“Meaning the body likely died before the other one and was moved postmortem.”

“At least adjusted.”

“And why would they adjust it if it wasn’t moved?”

“I’m not sure.”

Clay stands up.

“However, given that we now have multiple causes of death-”

“We aren't dealing with a regular.”

“Correct, at least an Augmented, or an Irregular. Perhaps both?”

“And how do you plan to stop an Irregular and their power?”

“I’ll figure that out, once I know what power they have.”

“It could be just about anything.”

“I’ll narrow it down.”

As Clay begins to walk, he notices something. Quickly he heads over to investigate. On the floor is a walkie talkie. Picking it up he uses it.

“Hello.”

“...Finally. Took you long enough? I take it you’re the white-haired man I saw earlier?”

“...Who are you?”

“A friend. I left this here by the body in case you were what I thought.”

“And what would that be?”

“Someone beneficial. You examined both the bodies thus far? I also ran a scan on the woman with you, seeing they are ICD. I’m currently trying to figure out where the one doing this is.”

“...And who might you be?”

“A concerned citizen who doesn’t want to die. Listen up, some of the others have already started killing each other.”

“It’s been half-an-hour?”

“Yep.”

“...Then you think you can find the person behind this?”

“Maybe… They are on the move. It seems like they have to get close to kill their victims. Definitely some augmentations in place. That’s how they took control over this place. I’m trying to counter hack the system, but I’m only able to get into some things for a moment before I get kicked back out.”

“What do you want from us?”

“To deal with them once they're found. Oh, and some confidentiality with my acquired skills would be good.”

“Got it.”

“Good, I’m going to see what I can do on my end.”

“...”

“They seem nice.”

“Is this a set up?”

“Listen, whoever I am meeting here isn’t going to get involved with this. Assuming they aren’t behind it in the first place.”

“For now let’s assume they are. How does that change how we deal with things?”

“We?”

“We both have something on the line, right?”

“...Very well. Under that notion, then the best course of action would be to meet the recruiter and have a chat with them.”

“Recruiter? Is that the trafficker?”

“Of sorts.”

“Hm.”

“What?”

“Our new informant is about to get themselves killed, we deal with that first.”

“Because if the killer is on the move and still countering their attempts to break into the system they must be Augmented.”

“Yeah.”

“And how do you plan to find our informant?”

“They can’t be far from the first body. They wouldn’t risk it.”

“This floor then?”

Clay thinks while looking up and down the hallway.

“No. Probably not.”

“Then what are we going to do? Search room-to-room on the floors above-and-below this one?”

“That’s exactly what we are going to do.”

Aina rolls her eyes while giving an annoyed look.

“Really – how did you become an investigator?”

“I have lots of willpower. To do things I don’t want to do. Doesn’t mean I have to be happy about it.”

The two start searching for the informant. Clay, allowing Aina to stray slightly further in order to cover ground faster. Eventually, Aina stops at a particular door.

“Wait.”

“What?”

“The heat here is different.”

Clay steps closer and feels that it is notably warmer.

“And there are slight singes on the carpet along the bottom of the door. Not to mention an imprint.”

“You’re right.”

Clay checks the door, then knocks on it. Finally, he buzzes his walkie talkie pall. He does so again, his ear pressed against the door.

“I hear it, but it’s locked tight.”

“So break the door down.”

Clay stoically stares at the woman, who just flashes a quick baiting smile back.

Bash!

Clay kicks the door in.

“Wow, you sure are strong.”

Clay’s senses narrow as he steps in.

“Wait!”

His arm shoots out stopping Aina.

“Yeah, I see the dead body. Blah, blah, I won’t mess up the crime scene.”

“Not that. There is an airborne toxin in the room.”

“Oh...”

Aina steps back from the door. Clay’s face twitches as he steps deeper into the room. “Yeah, this is enough to quickly kill someone.”

Looking around the room, the man sees a desk with a computer and gear on it, including the walkie talkie. The bed also has an open laptop. Leaning against the wall is the slumped over body of the victim. Stabbed into his stomach is a knife. Clay continues to examine the room.

“Well – was it suicide?”

Aina asks, leaning against the outside door wall.

“No.”

“Other ways into the room then?”

“No.”

“Then how did the dagger get there?”

“The blood was already clotting premortem.”

“Oh... Then something strange did in fact occur, an Irregular style of strange.”

Clay steps out of the room.

“It has to be something that has control over people.”

“Are you thinking mind control?”

“I’m thinking they want us to think mind control.”

“Is that right?”

“Unless, you know of someone with such a power who works with you?”

“Not to my knowledge, no.”

“The fact that we know the corpse itself was moving, tells me it is a more direct, hands on ability. Especially, since it seems they aren’t using the power itself to kill. Most likely, it has some form of limitations. Minimally, it is likely a single target, even if it was mind control. Otherwise they would be able to set up everyone exactly how they want them, at least in a few groups at a time.”

“You sure are fast at this.”

“You say that as if you already thought all this through?”

“Only about as fast as you did. But it is my job to be able to do so.”

“...It is more than just a job to me.”

“We should work on that hero complex of yours.”

“Maybe later.”

“How about first, you take these cuffs off so we can speed up the investigation?”

“Not happening.”

“And why not?”

“I don’t trust you and I never will.”

“But if a contact of mine sees me like this, doesn’t your plan fall apart?”

“A risk we are just going to have to take for now.”

“Of course, you and my chipped brain.”

“...”

Clay thinks on if he should say something reassuring to her.

“Don’t. Your sympathy is unwanted.”

“...Okay. I’ll check over the information they might have and then...”

“Do your thing detective.”

Clay steps back in and investigates the equipment. The main computer is entirely set up for breaking into the hotel's security system. The laptop however has information taken from the hotel’s database. Including a list of everyone currently checked in. Clay delivers this information to Aina.

“Let me see that list.”

Clay takes a picture of the list and shows it to Aina.

“This one.”

She points at a picture of a bald, thirty-something man.

“That’s the recruiter.”

“Why are they here?”

She taps another image.

“I recognize this one as an Irregular.”

Clay shoots a serious look.

“Not our killer, the power doesn’t line up.”

“Then what?”

“I will investigate the carpet further. I think the Irregular has to discharge energy to do whatever they are doing. And it sure does seem like they are trying to make it appear as if it is

mind-control. However, I don't think it takes long for them to do their thing. Since we didn't cross paths with them."

"That obviously includes the poisoning, clearly confirming an Augmentation."

"Whoever it is they are dangerous, but given that they are leaving signs means they are sloppy."

"Meaning?"

"If my people are behind it they aren't expecting to extract this individual."

"And that means-?"

Clay's eyes shift down the hall, catching Aina's attention. She turns and looks, seeing a large man in a full length black leather overcoat. His arms are metallic, with the right one having transformed into a mini-gun.

"Well, well, hiding out are we? If so, you're doing a bad job?"

"You know him?"

"No."

Aina nonchalantly says.

"But you're about to."

He points his gun arm at them. Prompting Clay to unhesitatingly use his arm to push Aina behind him further. "He's one of the ones checked into the hotel."

"Are you looking for the person responsible for this as well?"

"In a way."

The man has a thick slums accent, which matches his stubbly facial hair. However, it doesn't match the demeanor of someone able to check into a hotel like this. "Someone who does special, likely illegal work."

Clay thinks on the dead informant. “How many of them were checked in here?”

“Either of you Irregulars?”

“No.”

Clay answers.

“Augmented?”

“No.”

“Not much of a reason to keep you around then.”

“What do you mean-?”

“Sorry, not much time left to explain.”

The man raises his gun-arm again.

“Plus I just don’t care to.”

Clay goes to push Aina out of the way, but notices she has already stepped away herself. For a brief moment they lock eyes. Clay sees a pleased smirk on her face.

Bang-Bang-Bang!

Bullets shoot out and plaster Clay’s torso. He begins to fall back, but catches himself on the doorway, before stumbling and falling back first into the open room. Aina’s expression quickly morphs to that of shock and horror.

“Hey, you? Why is it you’ve still got your hands in your pockets? Got something in there for me?”

“Oh, please no, nothing like that! This man had taken me captive and handcuffed me.”

She makes a show of her bindings.

“Huh? We both must have had similar ideas.”

“w-What?”

“Killing people to extend the timer. In fact he saved me some trouble. You’ll be a lot easier to keep in place until the time is about to be up again.”

The man begins walking towards her.

“w-w-Why are you d-doing this?”

“Ain’t personal. I just know better than to deal with a crazy Irregular.”

He steps up to Aina, extending his robotic hand to grab her arm.

“Gah!?”

Clay leaps onto his back putting the man into a chokehold, while pinning his gun-arm down towards the ground.

“Then you shouldn’t have messed with me.”

The assailant raises his robotic hand and begins punching Clay in the side of the head.

Bash-Bash!

Both blows drawing blood and sending fractures across his skull. Suddenly the gun fires off sharply into the floor, but then stops. Clay steadily lowers the unconscious man down.

“Really strong.”

Clay glares up at the woman.

“What’s that look for? Oh – did my performance gross you out? Because your dead body one wasn’t exactly appealing.”

“...You played to your strengths, I played to mine.”

“Yeah and do those strengths include those holes in your head. Wow, that’s a lot of blood. Do I have to worry about, or perhaps hope for you bleeding out?”

“...”

“Uh-huh. Can I at least get these cuffs off now?”

“Why should I?”

“I think it’s best I meet the recruiter. I can make up a story as to why it took me a little while to meet up with them, but not that good of a story.”

“...”

“You’re actually thinking about sending me in to talk with them with these cuffs still on?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“You can’t be for real?”

“Yeah, *I am*.”

Aina gives an exasperated look down the hall and then turns back to Clay.

“At least — different placement. Something less obvious.”

“The only other option is behind the back with the jacket worn over top.”

“Fine.”

“...”

Clay motions her to step forward. He reaches towards the cuffs from around her waist. He stops at the moment of release and stares her in the eyes. She simply stares back without a change in expression.

Click-

Chapter 4:

The first cuff comes off and Clay has Aina slide her hands out of her pockets.

“The jacket.”

“Got it.”

Click-

Aina is recuffed.

“Did we work through any of our trust issues there?”

“No.”

“Thought as much.”

“How do we find the recruiter?”

“By finding the Irregular they are after, come on.”

She gives the man a wink and starts walking towards their destination. Clay follows close after.

“Knowing what room their in, I can approximate how close by the recruiter would be, then from there we just have to figure out any changes in procedure that might have occurred because of the whole murder kidnapping thing.”

“Yeah, just that small thing.”

“Oh sarcasm is not a great look for you. Color me surprised.”

“Wouldn’t they just be in their room?”

“Probably.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“Trust me, neither of us want me walking in as a deal is going down. Although, given the time, we most likely are already good. It would be best if I could slip in while they’re out. You wouldn’t happen to have something for that – would you?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Oh well.”

The two step up to the target hallway. Aina glances around the corner a couple times.

“Now how do we tell if they’re in?”

Aina questions.

“Simple.”

Aina raises a brow at the man. A few moments later Clay is knocking on the door from the side, with Aina standing in front of it.

“This is kind of a lowbrow idea.”

“Just say your line.”

“It’s me!”

Aina shakes her head around while giving an animated expresion. No response.

“We’re clear.”

“Sure. I would say I could get us in, but-”

The woman shakes her cuffs.

“It’s fine.”

Clay steps up and shocks the door’s locks.

“How many tricks do you have exactly?”

Clay simply holds the door open for the woman to walk in.

“Aren’t you going to place a bug on me or...?”

“Please... I already bugged you.”

“Of course you did.”

Aina walks inside, the door being closed and locked behind her. Clay finds a place to stay that’s out of the way to listen in. A short time later the recruiter arrives. The bald man gives a surprised and almost worried look as he steps in, but quickly lets out a breath clocking who it is standing in his room.

“A bit late aren’t we?”

“Oh yeah, sorry, I thought the whole lockdown terrorist attack situation was a good time to take a stroll.”

“I take it you got caught off guard somewhere?”

“You could say that.”

“It’s fine, I’ve finished up my side of things here.”

Aina carefully analyzes the man’s tone.

“I do have a question for you – on this whole showing going on out there.”

“Yeah?”

“Did the general approve this operation?”

“I’m sure it hit his desk.”

“Did it hit it a little late?”

“Come on don’t-”

As the man steps further into the room, he shoots the woman a confused look while tilting his bald head.

“Do you have something behind your back?”

“Do I?”

“...Heh-mh.”

The man lightly bites his lower lip while giving a curt nod.

“You wouldn’t mind showing me your hands then?”

The man takes a step forward.

“...”

“...”

Clay hearing this starts to get up. Then a sudden jolt of noise coming through his speaker prompts him to leap out of the room and rush over. Slamming into the doorframe to stop his momentum, Clay tries to quickly take in what he is seeing. Standing there is Aina, with a completely vacant look. her arms forward and cuffs’ rope wrapped around the neck of the recruiter. The sight catches him off guard. Enough to prompt him to hesitate. That is until the man’s desperate eyes meet his own. Clay leaps forward.

“You’re going to stop me? What about your sister? This is the group that took her away.”

The man stops, a conflicted heart weighing heavily. A second later the recruiter’s eyes roll up into his head and he stops struggling. Aina unwraps her cuffs and looks back at the stunned silent Clay.

“...You killed him.”

“Uh-huh.”

“...”

“You can’t be for real?”

Aina almost lets out a laugh.

“You threatened to blow my head off, remember that?”

“...You already did the same to me.”

“And not a single person you're up against would have done any differently.”

“...”

Clay takes a couple breaths, with his eyes closed. When they reopen, they once again have that same unflinching focus in them. “Someone is dead because I hesitated, I can’t take that back, but I have to push forward.”

“I’ve already figured out that this hotel is dirty.”

“You did?”

“Having multiple underground workers and also your people set up here, it was fairly evident.”

“Alright then.”

“You also confirmed that this is both an operation done by your people and they are after multiple Irregulars, covering it up with a terrorist attack.”

“Did I now?”

“You also confirmed that there is another one of your group here. Otherwise you wouldn’t have dealt with this situation the way you did.”

“...You’re a sly one, aren’t you?”

“I could question if you killed them because you wanted to and saw an opportunity, or because of our situation, but I suppose it doesn’t make much of a difference.”

“Did I also confirm that these cuffs are going to have to come off?”

“...Why did you want them out of your jacket?”

“I didn’t want to further ruin a nice jacket.”

“It would also have taken a moment longer to reposition them and also had greatly reduced the strangulation capabilities that they have. And given you know that wouldn’t have mattered for me. Well, that probably answers that unimportant question from earlier.”

“Uh-huh, can we go now? Just pop these off and we can meet with the transporter and get out of here.”

“Not happening.”

“What now?”

“We still have a killer on the loose.”

“And a ticking timer. If the recruiter is done, then we only have so long now until the operation will come to a close. Not to mention we probably have a few loose ends to tie up prior to moving onto the next stage of whatever plan you’re cooking up.”

“I’ll stop the person doing this, no matter what it takes.”

“Even if that means losing the chance to go after this lead?”

“I’ll stop them and then I’ll stop the people targeting Irregulars.”

“Wow, you’re really going to have it all aren’t you?”

“...”

“...Fine whatever. You have a maximum of an hour if you want it all.”

“It’ll have to do.”

“Then what next?”

“We find a corpse that’s still moving… We find a zombie.”

“But first.”

Aina shakes her shackles while giving an expecting look. Clay steps up and unbinds her.

“No final push back?”

Aina asks while rubbing her wrists. Clay steps right into her face.

“One misstep and you’re done.”

She glances up to his steely gaze.

“I take it you don’t mean I’ll be bound again.”

“...”

“Got it, got it. Jeez, you’re serious.”

Aina walks over to the corpse and takes a couple things off of it, before searching the room for other items.

“Alright, we’re done here.”

“What is it you took?”

“Worry about that if and when we take care of the killer.”

“...Alright.”

Clay starts to leave, stealing a final glance at the dead man. Once back in the hallway with the door shut, Clay speaks.

“We have to figure out where the killer is going to strike. We only have three confirmed kills by them and one seemed outside of the game they are doing.”

“So, we have to find the similarities and figure out the pattern of the two victims?”

“Two doesn’t make a pattern, but it does make a line. When you add a third one-”

“You think they are working their way up? Makes sense. If they were jumping around we would have probably found them while searching for our short lived informant.”

“We also know they have to be keeping a consistent eye out on the cameras in order to know when people have died. Also probably where the most vulnerable individuals are located.”

“And with the stakes of being killed by your fellow captives, there is always bound to be a few on their own. Since we know they are an Augmented, that doesn’t really help with the camera thing. They’ll likely be jacked straight into the system. Maybe even just looking at vital signs?”

“Let’s say vital signs and scanning for individuals.”

“Meaning a zombie would narrow the location down and then we can think like a scared captive to narrow it further.”

“Since the timer just reset, we have to figure out where the next zombie will be within half-an-hour.”

“The first one was a show. The next one wasn’t exactly hidden and the final one with strange circumstances was hidden away. That’s why you think we can find a zombie.”

“Exactly. The next one will probably be another showing. Something to entice another person like the mini-gun guy to take action.”

“So, we draw a line at the last corpse and check for a zombie on the stairs and elevators above there?”

“We can do one better. Block off the stairwells at certain points within our half-hour. Narrow the search location further.”

“I don’t know, blocking a stairwell is a crime you know?”

“Just get to work if you don’t have anything else to add.”

“Yes boss.”

The two get to work on initiating the plan.

“If you see something just say so.”

Clay states.

“And if you find something?”

“I’ll take care of it myself and find you later.”

“Sure thing.”

Some time passes, with both investigators diligently watching their spots. That is until Clay hears the message.

“Found them.”

He rushes to Aina’s location, finding her standing in the entry to a stairwell.

“Walking corpse, ten o’clock.”

She motions to the zombie walking down the steps. Clay takes a single glance at their face. Clay places the zombies’ face to a room number and then takes off. Aina gives an exasperated sigh and then walks after the sprinting man. “They were likely in this general area. The zombie is likely being sent to the biggest group. The killer will want to find a vacant area to check over things and probably watch the zombie as it moves. Someplace close and isolated from others. The building map would indicate that-”

Clay ques in onto something. “There!”

The immortal throws open a door and enters into a small open lounge with a stage. Standing below the stage is a lanky shirtless man. He has long black metallic arms with sharp dagger like fingers. Stringy black hair lays over circuits running back from his eyes. Over his jaw is a gas mask.

“You must be the killer.”

“...And you’re the other one looking into me.”

“...”

Clay eyes are firmly locked onto the man's own. "What does he know of my irregularity? Anything? He couldn't have been watching the cameras the whole time. Let alone keep an eye on everything and be watching me."

"You're going to try and stop me, right investigator?"

The man's posture hasn't changed at all in this time. He is still leaning forward with his arms hanging down in front of himself.

"You're under arrest."

Clay starts slowly approaching the man with his guard up.

"Come quietly and this can all be resolved without any further trouble."

"Yeah, I don't think so."

The killer's arms shoot forward, the fingers slotting back out of place revealing barrels. A poison mist sprays out covering Clay. The man feels a sharp pain all over his body and crumples over to the ground.

"Heh."

The killer then starts charging energy to get dispersed off of himself, that travels across the carpet and zaps Clay.

"I'll have you walk out in time for the next kill cycle."

Clay rises up from the ground. The killer then blinks to check in on its zombie.

Bang!

Right in the instant he does, Clay twists around delivering a punch into the man's nose. Both his nose and the top of his mask are crushed from the strike. The man twists through the air and slams into a table taking it out with him. Clay staggers forward, examining the man.

"Out cold."

Clay's ears perk up at a clapping noise from behind. He turns to see Aina in the doorway.

"Are we done now?"

"Not yet. I've got to somehow deactivate the security and let people know about his location."

Aina rolls her eyes.

"I'll handle that, just focus on not getting us caught when we meet up with the transporter."

"...Okay."

Clay flinches.

"First, I need to get this toxen off of me and my clothes."

"Why is that? Hurts doesn't it?"

"Dying repeatedly is uncomfortable, yes."

"We don't have a ton of time. Just hop into the nearest empty room's shower."

Clay immediately walks to an empty room.

"How did you know?"

Aina asks, keeping her distance.

"This room wasn't one of the ones given to those on the checked in list."

"Huh."

"Come here."

Clay motions her over.

"I don't want to be poisoned."

"Grab some gloves from a cleaners cart and come back."

"Fine."

Aina does so. When she comes back she finds the man already mostly undressed.

“Here.”

“What?”

“Your hand.”

Aina extends her hand. Clay cuffs it to the sink.

“Clean those.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me?”

“...”

“You know – I think I dislike you.”

“Oh no, whatever shall I do?”

While Clay gets the toxen off himself, Aina talks on their next move. Clay flips through the list of checked in people in his head. Stopping by a room which, as assumed, has a shirt that can replace the one destroyed by bullet holes and blood. Once ready, they quickly make their way to the underground parking lot. Aina makes contact with the transporter.

“I’ve got one more for us.”

“What’s this one’s power?”

Before Aina could even think of answering, Clay replies.

“Telepathy.”