

2107: Heretics

Chapter 1

Rain. *It's always raining.* The beads of water hit my face. Over and over. *Over and over.* My robotic eyes studied the view on top of the rooftop, darting from one bright thing to another. Billboards, hovercrafts, holographic displays. All of it was blinding. Overwhelming. *Ugly.* I looked down at the blaster I held in my right hand as it all rushed back to me. I was standing on the roof of Artemis Kane's penthouse, the richest woman in New Astoria. And I had just killed her.

Chapter 2

"I'll notify you when your services are needed again," said Apollo Kane, head of the Company. His gray and black hair was neatly combed back. His face was square and bearded, his olive skin slightly wrinkled. His thin but intimidating figure wore a jet black suit that irradiated wealth. I stood in his office, on the top floor of the Company's building, the highest point in New Astoria. The office was dark and unlit, the single cylindrical chandelier turned off. The entire far side of the room was glass, opening the room to a view of the forever cloudy city. The floors were black and glossy, soiled with the dirt and water I had tracked in. Just as I turned towards the door to leave, a question that had been sitting in the back of my mind made its way to my mouth, and without turning, I asked, "Why?". *Why your own sister?* I stood still, waiting for a response. I could hear him taking a deep breath, preparing for an answer, but no words left his mouth. I wasn't expecting a response, but I had to ask. I completed my walk into the mirrored interior of the elevator. The door closed behind me, and I was left staring at the glass. At the thing inside. It wore a gray cargo jacket with a solid black shirt underneath, and black tactical cargo pants that holstered a single handheld blaster on its belt along with other gear. Scuffed black boots suited its feet. Robotic blue eyes stared back at me from a pale stubbled face that bore buzzed light brown hair. Its hands were wrapped in bandages, but I knew the things they'd done. The lives they stole. It was taken in by the Company, picked off the streets and given a purpose. It kept staring at me, and I stared back. Uncontrollably, I punched the

mirror, then looked into it. The creature inside was still staring, now with even more eyes. All judging. I punched again. And again. Over and over. *Over and over*. I kept punching. *I hate you*. Shards of glass fell to the floor. My hands hurt. But I kept going. *I hate you*.

Chapter 3

The room was cold and bright. I couldn't see. People were talking. I couldn't make out what exactly they were saying. It was all...muffled... I woke up in my dark, silent room. Alone. I had the same dream every night. Every single time. The same voices, the same bright lights, the same confusion. I didn't know where I was, or who was talking, all I knew was that every time I shut my mechanical eyes, that dream would be waiting for me. Every time. The Company gave me my apartment. One room, one bathroom I didn't need to the left of my bed and a counter with a shelf above it in front. One light directly above me that was always out. One window to my right side. I looked over, studying the raindrops that had collected on the glass, and the blurred lights that shined through. The light it cast painted images onto the ceiling, obscured shapes and colors, all fading into one another. I sat up and walked over to the window as I felt my systems regain their strength with each step I took, my memories coming back to me. I walked home, through the crowded markets and hagglers, through the clubs and restaurants, through the rain. *It's always raining*. It always had been since the collapse. Everyday and every night. I stumbled back here, into the apartment, and into a gray t-shirt and sweats. I looked out the window, trying to find anything through the drenched glass. A supply hovercraft flew by, delivering food to different parts of the city. Flown by an android. A *real* android. Not one who stopped to question what he was. Or who made him. Not one who's lost count of how much blood is on his hands. Or one who's washed it off himself too many times. Not one who thinks. Not one who *feels*.

Chapter 4

"Your assignment file is in the next room," said Kane. I hesitated for a second. Apollo always handed me my file. Every. Single. Time. But I still followed my instructions. I didn't have a choice. As I exited the door to the left of the elevator, the dim orange lights of the hallway took a moment for my optics to process. On both ends of the narrow hall was a window, showcasing the cloudy skies of the city. The

motion sensor door slid open to reveal a small and square room, solely by one cylindrical light hanging from the ceiling. The file was laid on a steel table in the center of the room, waiting to be opened. Something wasn't right. *This has never happened. Not once.* I grabbed a magazine from my belt and emptied a blaster cartridge into my hand. Carefully, I tossed it onto the floor of the room. The door locked immediately, and all I could hear was the sound of blasters shooting rapidly. *Over and over.*

Chapter 5

I have to get out of here. Now. I could hear the elevator rapidly climbing up to our floor. They couldn't risk any loose ends. I snapped my head to the right. *The window.* Without thinking I darted toward it. The distance was closing, the window coming closer and closer. My robotic brain calculated the distance as I ran, adjusting with each step. Five feet...four...three...two...one-I burst through the glass, into the darkness of the night, the shards cutting up my false skin. *Falling.* I was falling. Fast. I couldn't see. Couldn't think. My hand fought the current of air to reach my belt and pull out my grappling gun. *Almost...there.* The river was getting dangerously close. *Got it!* As soon as I felt the cold grip of the handle in my hand, I pulled the gun to my front, gripped it with both hands, and shot blindly towards the building.

Chapter 6

Though it lasted less than a second, crashing into the water felt like hours. Every inch of my body was dragged into the water by invisible hands. I could see each individual pixel of my vision go black, one by one, until there was nothing left but darkness. Every part of my body slowly becoming numb, starting at my feet and making its way to my artificial brain. For the first time ever, I *couldn't* feel. I was a husk, a hollow carcass plummeting into the river.

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Sand. I could feel it on my face, throughout my clothes. Slowly, I sat up, my vision slowly coming back to me. *Dark. It was dark.* I felt the ground around me, patting it. I was washed up on the shore. In the distance, across the river, I saw the city, its countless neon lights

and advertisements blinding from the outskirts. I stood up and surveyed my surroundings. The sand stretched opposite of the city into a wasteland, littered with the occasional rubble or abandoned building. Into the unknown. *Into freedom.* I glanced back at the city, my mind racing with questions. *Why did Apollo want me dead? Why did he send a team after me? What am I?* The last question I never asked, but always thought. I never asked questions - not until yesterday. *There's something bigger here. Something they don't want me to know. Something about me.* I turned, looking at the vast expanse of the wasteland, at its endless possibilities, then began to walk towards New Astoria.

Chapter 7

The river divided me from the city. The only way across was the single bridge to the city, connecting the wastelands to the New Astoria. I could see it in the distance as I walked along the crackly pavement, but as I got closer I realized it wasn't as barren as it usually was. Lined with guards on either side, employees of the Company, each armed with heavy artillery blasters. A few well placed shots and I was gone. As I continued to walk towards the bridge, my hand instinctively moved to my holster, moving its fingers towards the handle of the blaster. One of the guards noticed me and tried to alert the others, but there was a hole through his head before he could get a word out. I began to pick up the pace to a sprint, the guards now becoming aware of my presence and opening fire. I reached the start of the bridge, dodging constant fire as I sprinted to take cover behind one of the roadblock they had set up. This wouldn't last for long. I had to think of something. Quick. I looked at my hands. The bandages. A few drops of blood stained them. From the first guard. *They're human.* The barricade was chipping away. *This is it.* I leapt out from my cover, ready to return fire. I blew the guard's closest to me's arm off, then grabbed his body as he screamed, using him as cover as he screamed out in pain. There were 6 guards left. I threw the guard into another and pulled out my switchblade, skidding down to the left to stab another at the leg, pulling the blade out and grabbing another guard who was coming up behind me, pulling him in and stabbing him in the abdomen and accidentally dropping the knife. Two down, one half-gone, 3 left. I aimed my blaster and finished off the stabbed soldier, pistol whipping another on my right, sending him down. I turned around. The last two guards were aiming at me. *Damn it, "Give it up!"* one of them

yelled, gesturing for me to throw my blaster on the ground over to them. I tossed it to their feet, and raised up my hands, my right closed into a fist, "Open it!" He barked. I did, dropping an EMP charge onto the ground. I heard a buzz from their blasters and ran towards one of them, scooping up my blaster and whipping him, the blood spilling through the air and onto the ground. The other pulled me into a chokehold from behind and threw both of us to the ground. *The knife.* It was by my foot. *Just...out of reach...* I tried to grab it and kick it towards me with the heel of my boot. *Almost...almost...got it!* I kicked it over to my side and reached towards it. I gripped it with my left hand and drove it backwards, into the guard's left eye, exerting a scream from him as he let go of me. I turned over and drove it into his forehead as he covered his bleeding eye. I managed to stumble up to my feet and looked down at my hands again, the bandages soaking wet, dripping with blood among the carnage. Like always. So much blood. I walked away from the bridge, my clothes painted red, and towards the river. I stumbled towards the water, squinting from the bright lights of the city loudly announcing themselves. The blood left a trail behind me, dripping off my fingertips. I dropped to my knees and began to unwrap the dressing from my tired robotic hands. I tossed them onto the sand beside me and plunged my hands into the cold water, scrubbing. Over and over. *Over and over.*

Chapter 8

The streets of the city were filthy. And bright. Neon signs hung on the sides of tin roofs of restaurants and shops. People grouped around soup kitchens, huddled around like moths to a light. All around me, the sounds of the bustling marketplace flooded my senses. But I still knew I was being followed. She wore a black leather trench coat that reached to her calves. Tall black boots splashed in a puddle behind me. Her dark black hair was pulled into a tight bun, while her deep brown face was pulled into a stern expression. I couldn't run from her forever, and there weren't enough people to disappear into a crowd. I stopped, turned around and looked at her. There wasn't a soul around us, everyone had gathered on the other side of the square at the soup kitchen, unaware of what was happening. We both reached into our jackets, keeping our hands there. Frozen. I looked at her, and her at me. Suddenly, I heard a click come from her direction, and whipped out my blaster. In a fraction of a second, my index finger had pulled back

and there was a hole in her left shoulder. She fell to the ground, clutching the wound. The rain mixed with the blood and ran towards the gutter, gurgling down into the sewers. *It's always raining.* I walked over to her and crouched. Between heavy and ragged breaths she managed to choke out "Go to hell." She began coughing violently, gurgling up blood, "I'll meet you there." I said as I stood up, pointing my gun at her head.

Chapter 9

On the way to the Company's looming building, more of their agents tried to stop me. *Tried.* There wasn't any point in washing my hands anymore. This night was a bloody and endless one. Suddenly, I realized I had reached my destination. The doors were tinted black. I'd entered and exited through them hundreds of times. *Hundreds of lives.* I unholstered my weapon and examined it. A silver rectangular barrel connected to a black grip, its metal trigger still warm. A button on the side triggered the scope to pop out from its concealed slot, something I used. *How many lives has this hunk of metal and plastic collected?* I'd lost count. All I knew is that it was about to collect a lot more.

Chapter 10

Strangely, the lobby was empty. The shiny black floors reflected the lights from the cylindrical chandeliers low overhead. The usually busy area was now deserted. *Apollo.* He knew I would reach here. *He was trying to slow me down.* I walked through the eerily quiet hallway area to the elevators, pressing the button and waiting. *Ding, ding, ding.* The doors slid open, inviting me. I grabbed a magazine from my belt and emptied a cartridge into my hand, tossing it into the elevator once more. To my surprise, nothing happened. I cautiously stepped inside. I pressed the button for the top floor, it being the only black button out of the white ones. The mirror was still fractured. The shards were on the ground. They hadn't cared to clean it up. I was the priority. The elevator continued to climb. I continued to grip my blaster. Finally, the doors clicked open. There it was. The door to Apollo's office. The door to the answers to questions I had for my entire artificial life. I walked forward, the door clicking open as it sensed my presence. The room was lit now. The cylindrical chandelier from the ceiling had been turned on, dim but still glowing, giving the

entire room an yellow tint. Apollo stood on the far side of the room, overlooking New Astoria, "I never doubted you would show up here again," he said, not turning away from the view, "Apollo you better tell me what the hell is going on or in a couple of seconds you'll be through that damn window!" I said, raising my blaster, "You never did have any control over those emotions of yours, did you? You failed your first hits because you couldn't handle taking them out. Now you're here. Yelling at the one person who picked you off of the streets. Gave you a life. Gave you-", he started, but I cut him short, " Damn it, what's your point?", "Your whole life you followed orders. My orders. You hated me but you did. Because you knew you could've been back at the same street with a wave of my hand. Except- were you ever on that street? Do you think one of my agents just came along one day and decided to take you back here, to me?" he said, finally turning towards me, giving me a smug stare. Suddenly it all fell into place. An android that could feel, chosen by the Company and given a chance. A miracle. A lie. My robotic mind began to crumble as Kane looked me in my eyes and said, "We made you."

Chapter 11

"No," I said, my hand becoming shaky as I continued to point the gun towards Kane, "You were the prototype for what was supposed to be a new generation of androids. Ones that could act like humans. Think like them. *Feel* like them. You were a success, after a long series of failures. But we were investigated, and shut down. 'Unethical', they said. In the face of the future they spat and turned their backs," he said, staring me in my eyes, "So you put me in the field instead. Put a gun and my hands and names to scratch off. Lied to me." I finished, "We gave you a life!" he refuted, his collected demeanor cracking, "One I never asked for!", I said as I finally pulled back on the trigger, preparing for the room to be painted red. Nothing happened. I stood there, still staring at him, as he opened his hand to reveal a clicker, "EMP. You didn't think I would just let you walk in here and shoot me, did you?", and as he stood there, smirking, I asked my final question: "Why try to take me out now?", he stood, still smirking, and said , "You've served your purpose." At that moment I was overcome with rage. An ugly, uncontrollable rage. At the truth. At the lies. At him. At myself. I sprinted toward him, my anger blinding me. I threw my gun to the side and tackled him. All I remember was punching him.

Blood. *Everywhere*. My knuckles. Clothes. Face. Floor. *Punching*. *Over and over*. *Over and over*. *Over and over*.

Chapter 12

I hobbled up to my feet, my vision blurry. I looked down at what remained of Apollo. What I had done. I couldn't stop. *I didn't stop*. I took a few steps back and looked down at my hands. *Bloody*. *So. Bloody*. *Focus*. I had to focus. I needed answers. *What about Artemis?* I bumped into Apollo's desk. *His computer*. There had to be something there. Something to make this all worth it. All this bloodshed. I turned on the computer, preparing to be blocked with a login screen, but the computer opened directly, no password needed. *He wanted me to see whatever's on here*. The only folder was labeled "Project: Heresy", begging to be opened. I clicked on it. I clicked on one of the first files. I stumbled back. Onto the floor. *Onto the blood*. The image was of a human brain. Being inserted into a robotic skull.

Chapter 13

No.

Chapter 14

"No. No. No. No!", I screamed, moving my hands to my head. *All this time*. *All this time!* I clawed at my head, smacking it until it burned. *What am I? What am I? What am I?*, "AHHHHHHHHH!", couldn't muster anything reasonable. Just a raw, primal scream. I stood up and threw the desk chair across the room. *Why did I ever come back?* Through my rage, it came back to me. Answers. *Answers...I need them*. I stood back up and leaned over the computer, clicking the next file. The picture was of my face, half complete with exposed wiring, my eyelids shut. The next was my robotic hand, skinless and exposed, hooked up to wiring. There was only one file left. I clicked. It was an overhead view, a camera tape, of the same bleach white lab. There I was, sitting alone and fully developed, hooked up to multiple devices while my eyes remained shut. A woman walked in, dressed in a white pencil dress and jacket overtop, with flowing black hair and olive skin. *Artemis*. The doors closed quietly behind her. She pulled up a chair and sat in front of me, unhooking the wires. My eyes began to flicker open as she put a hand to my face, caressing it "You deserve a real childhood. Not this." She said, as she pulled something out of her jacket's inside. A

book. She opened it and sang: "In the city it's always raining, always raining, always raining. In the city it's always raining, over and over again." She stood up as I watched her plug me back in, leaving the room practically untouched as the video ended, cutting to another security tape. Artemis was reading to me. Again. Then it cut to another tape. Again and again. *Over and over*. Then the screen sharply cut to black. I looked at it. At the abomination inside. That was it. *I'm a human who killed the closest thing I ever had to a mother*. That was it. *All there was to find out*. Tears began to leak from my eyes. For the first time. *Human tears*. They dripped off my face as I looked down to see they had landed on my gun, right in front of my feet. I bent over and picked it up. It was stained with Apollo's blood. The same blood that was all over my hands. But there wasn't a point in washing them anymore. I had more life to take that night.

Chapter 15

The roof of the building was flat and square, its black surface overlooking New Astoria in its entirety. All of its lights. All of its buildings. *All of it*. I held my blaster in my right hand as the rain pelted me. *It's always raining*. There were still things I wondered about. Things about Artemis. About Apollo. About me. Things I could probably find the answer to if I delved deeper into all of this. But I didn't care to find out. None of it mattered to me anymore. It would only cause me more pain. More and more pain. *Over and over*. I raised the barrel of the blaster to the side of my head, but something stopped me. I held out my left hand, keeping the barrel pressed to my skull. *The rain*. I didn't feel anything on my hand. Or face. Or body. The rain had stopped. I couldn't help but let out a chuckle. *It's not raining anymore*.