

# Dark Angel VS3

## Labyrinth

*By Moonshadow and Star24*



## Episode VS3.01

## Prologue

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### Rooftop, Terminal City

Max and Logan stood side by side, hands clasped.

There was a long, emotional pause as several hundred transgenics stood with them to watch their flag flying from the highest place in Terminal City. Then as if in response to some silent signal, they cheered in unison, a huge roaring shout that shook the roof.

The police and National Guard troops surrounding the area turned, some curious and some fearful, to see what was happening. For thirty seconds or so the roar filled the early-morning air. Then, slowly, it faded. Warily, the soldiers turned their attention back to the streets where they stood, and the smell of breakfast coming from the mess tents.

Above, transgenics embraced, high-fived, laughed as they headed for the two fire stairwells that led back down into the main building. There were so many of them it took nearly twenty minutes for the roof to clear. A Freak Nation.

As the last footsteps faded away, Logan turned to Max. His eyes were shining, but her face was sober. Still holding tightly to her hand, he asked gently, "Second thoughts?"

Without taking her eyes from the flag, Max shook her head. "Nope. You?"

"No." They stood watching the flag for a moment longer. Then Max sighed.

"Um, I'd better get back now," she said, gesturing at the nearest door and trying to walk away. Logan didn't let go of her hand. She stopped. "Hey."

"What?"

Max pointed to their clasped hands. "I need my hand back."

He smiled. "They can wait a minute." With his other hand, gloved in white latex, he stroked the black leather covering her fingers. "We've got a lot to make up for, now that we've finally figured out how to hold hands without me keeling over on you. And without you running away on me." He said the last with a smile in his voice.

Max looked up into his eyes and smiled back. "It's just that I've been so busy ... "

He gave her a mischievous look. "Funny about being busy. What goes around comes around, I guess."

The door to the fire stairs banged open. "Hey, Max!" shouted Dalton, the boy they had brought with them three days ago from the Jam Pony hostage crisis. "Mole wants you for something."

"Be right there," Max called back. After the door banged shut, she released her grip on Logan's hand. "Gotta go," she apologized.

He held her back once more. "Yeah. One more thing?"

"Sure."

"I'm glad you did have second thoughts about Alec. It's none of my business why," he added quickly, seeing an alarmed look in her eyes. "But since the other night, when you told me he wasn't part of your life any more, I've started feeling like maybe anything's possible. A cure for

this virus. Maybe even ... us."

*Max remembered their anniversary. Champagne in the glasses, bubbly in the warm lamplight. Logan's face with the same hopeful, yearning look it had right now. She remembered turning away from him, leaning her face against the cool window glass, telling him her secret. "You have nothing to be sorry for or ashamed of," he told her...*

(SCENE MUSIC: "DON'T SAY GOODBYE" BY PAULINA RUBIO)

On the cold Terminal City roof, Max took a deep breath. "Logan, I need to tell you something."

"What?"

"There ... there was no Alec. We were never together. I let you think that so you would stay away. I couldn't risk hurting you again. Maybe killing you." She looked up at him then, apprehensive. "I'm sorry, I ..."

Now it was Logan's turn to pull away. He released her hand. "You lied to me?"

"It wasn't a lie."

"It wasn't the truth." Logan shook his head, disbelieving. "You let me think ... What else have you been letting me think? That you plan on sticking around? That you've got my back? That if this transfusion wears off, it won't be about me being able to walk?"

"Don't be a jerk. I didn't plan it. When you thought we were together, I let you. To protect you," Max said fiercely.

"No. To protect yourself, Max. Because that's all it's been about ever since you got back. You."

"That's not fair. Manticore gave me this virus ... "

"Oh yeah. Blame Manticore. Blame anyone but yourself."

"Explain something to me. What part of 'If I touch you, you'll die' don't you understand?"

"The part where that gives you the right to walk out on me. Deceive me. Sit there in a junked car and say nothing while I spill my guts. Yeah, Max, you sure know how to look out for me."

"Logan, please. Stop." She reached out, but he stepped back, hands raised in the air, avoiding her touch.

"Don't, Max. It isn't that easy, not this time."

She stared at him, her face pleading. He lowered his hands.

"You'd better go, Max. Manticore, remember? And I'd better find some bleach." He turned and walked to the other fire door. As he opened it, he turned and gave Max a final hard look. Then the door slammed behind him.

She stood for a long time, as the wind snapped the flag and the distant sound of the soldiers' voices carried up from below. The sunrise had long since disappeared behind the gray clouds. And once again, rain threatened.

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## Act One

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### The Rec Center, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)

At first, a buzz of excitement filled Terminal City. But it gradually died away as hours passed and there was no response to the flag raising. One by one, transgenics filtered away from the perimeter and into the recreation center, where Mole and Alec were playing cards. A small pile of bills and change lay on the table.

"Nice to know you guys are on top of things," grumbled an albino from the Polar Division, sitting down on the floor next to another member of her unit.

"Our tax dollars at work," said the second Polar, moving over.

"Put on the news and see what the rent-a-cops out there are doing," shouted someone from the back of the room. Alec reached over and switched on the television, which flickered wildly. Alec pounded the side and the picture jumped into view.

*" ... has been quiet since Washington State Military Governor, Jane Savidge, mobilized the National Guard on Thursday to assist the Seattle police in maintaining order at Terminal City. According to the Governor, the Guard is under strict orders not to act unless provoked. So far, the only sign of the several hundred transgenics is a flag that was raised at daybreak today ... "*

The picture cut to a close-up of Joshua's flag, now hanging limply from the flagpole. Apparently the wind had died

down considerably. A ragged cheer, more derisive than sincere, erupted from the crowd in the rec center.

"Us freaks really know how to get it up, huh?" shouted the same voice from the back of the room. There were a few snorts of laughter. Alec lowered the volume.

"Looks like the soldier girls and boys out there are just as bored as we are," commented Mole, turning back to the card game as the camera panned across the lines of tired-looking troops at the Terminal City perimeter.

### **Seattle City Hall**

"Detective Clemente? This way, please." A young administrative assistant waved at the cop across a room crowded with staff members on phones and computers. Clemente picked his way through the maze of desks, garbage cans and briefcases. The assistant opened a heavy wooden door and waved Clemente inside, where the Mayor and the Chief of Police sat in upholstered leather chairs in front of the mayor's desk.

"Detective, good to see you again," the chief said, rising to shake Clemente's hand.

"Nice to meet you," said the Mayor, extending his hand as well. "Congratulations on your handling of that hostage crisis last week."

"Thank you, sir," responded Clemente.

"In fact, that's why we've asked you here today," continued the Mayor, settling back into his chair. He did not offer Clemente a seat. "While the Terminal City situation has been under control so far, we are under some pressure from Governor Savidge to resolve it. Soon. The federal government wants these ... " The Mayor paused as if

thinking better of what he had been about to say, "these transgenics returned to the Army. You wouldn't believe it to look at them, but they are actually military personnel absent without leave. Not to mention that it's a felony to cross the security fence around Terminal City."

"I see," said Clemente noncommittally.

"The Feds wanted to send in troops on day one. The Governor held them off by calling in the Guard and releasing your friend Special Agent White and his team."

"Where are they now?" asked Clemente sourly.

"Hauled ass back to DC as far as I know, and good riddance to them. Now we need to get the transgenics out of Seattle and our own people away from that toxic nightmare. God knows what they're being exposed to out there."

Now the Chief of Police spoke. "I've told the Mayor about your excellent handling of the hostage situation. We'd prefer to negotiate those ... people out of there rather than use force, and we think you're our man. Their leader ... what's her name?"

"Max," said Clemente.

"Max, yes. She seems to trust you. Work with that. Do what you have to do to get them out of there. We don't want to lose any soldiers and we don't want to lose any more civilians. And we don't want federal troops in Washington State." The Mayor stood and extended his hand again. "We're counting on you, Detective Clemente."

After a moment, Clemente accepted the handshake. "Thank you, sir."

The Mayor walked Clemente to the door. "Oh, and one

more thing, Detective," called the Chief of Police.

"What's that?"

"Find the transgenic who killed that young girl in the sewers a couple of weeks ago. The people of Seattle want to see justice done."

"So do I," said Clemente, and left the Mayor's office.

### **Living Quarters, Terminal City**

"So is that a kick-ass first person account or what? 'I Was Held Hostage by Mutants!'" Sketchy hung eagerly over Original Cindy's shoulder, waiting for her reaction to his story, which she was reading in the sleeping quarters Sketchy was currently sharing with some of the male transgenics.

Cindy looked up. She was not smiling. "That's 'transgenics,' fool, not 'mutants.' You callin' Max a mutant?"

"I know Max isn't a mutant. But it works better as a headline." Oblivious to her disapproval, Sketchy began to pace. "This is just the beginning, OC! First in a series. 'Escape from Jam Pony ... The Untold Story.' 'A Diary of Life Inside Terminal City.' And maybe if I get lucky one of these days, 'I Married a Mu ... I mean, a Transgenic,'" he amended as OC glared at him.

"You ain't gonna get lucky around here if you keep usin' that word. You at enough of a disadvantage to begin with."

But Sketchy refused to be discouraged. "OC, don't you get it? This is the break I've been waiting for. Max and her friends are the best thing that's ever happened to me." Sketchy grabbed for his notebook. "C'mon, lemme inter-

view you. This is our big chance to ride the Transgenic Express to fame and fortune." Sketchy's eyes glowed.

Cindy handed him the notebook. "I got only one thing to say, fool, and that is, 'Get lost.' And you can quote me on that." She walked away, leaving Sketchy shaking his head.

### Gem's Quarters, Terminal City

Gem gently laid the baby down in her "crib", a blanket folded into an old desk drawer, and leaned wearily back on her own bedroll. The baby had nursed herself to sleep and Gem intended to be right behind her. Even for an X5, childbirth combined with being on the run from the law was an exhausting business. Wearily, she closed her eyes.

Not two seconds later, she heard a footstep and opened her eyes to see Original Cindy, Max's friend, standing next to her with a bottle of spring water and a packet of something wrapped in waxed paper. She sat up.

"Hey, sugah," Cindy told her softly. "I just came by to drop this off. You go ahead and sleep."

But Gem reached eagerly for the food and water. "Mmmmm," she said gratefully. "Thank you so much! Where'd you score this anyway?"

OC frowned. "Caught some guy cuttin' the food line, gettin' himself a second helping. I figured Max don't need nobody jackin' up her C-rations, so I told him I'd smack his ass down if he didn't give it up."

Gem laughed. "He probably thought you were X5. On MP duty."

OC looked proud. "Guess some of it's rubbin' off on me."

Gem held out half the food, but OC shook her head.

"That's for you. You may be revved up, but you need to get your strength back. The ration ain't enough to keep a kid going, let alone a new mother."

Gem sighed. "I feel like I should be with Max and Alec and Mole and the rest, figuring out how we can get some more supplies in here. Doing something to help. Even soldiers can't live in battlefield conditions forever without a supply line."

"You'll get your turn ... after you get back up to speed."

"How are you doing?"

"Me? Don't you worry about me? Original Cindy is enjoying her sabbatical from the package delivery business. And there are some fine transgenic sisters here. Better than lookin' at Normal's sorry ass all day long."

"Want me to introduce you around?"

"I'm all over that," Cindy replied, then sniffed her arm. "On second thought, better let Original Cindy figure out how to get a bath first." She stood up. "Speaking of bathrooms, what I wouldn't give right now for one of those. You used that latrine?"

Gem nodded.

"Yeah, and I thought the ladies' room at Crash smelled bad. Whew. Anyway, get some rest and one of these days I'll take you up on that offer, aiight?"

"No problem," said Gem, lying down again.

### The Rec Center, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)

Max strode into the rec area, glancing around her at the groups of transgenics sitting on the floor. Mole and Alec sat on overturned wooden crates at a battered old table, playing cards. Alec's feet were on the table and Mole chomped on a cigar as he studied his hand.

"Hey," said Alec conversationally when he saw Max. "Where you been all day? Running combat maneuvers? Kicking a little National Guard butt?"

Max glared at him. "No. I've been counting our nonexistent food and medical supplies and trying to move the latrines somewhere that we're not pissing in our nonexistent drinking water." Suddenly she noticed the card game. "What the hell are you two doing?"

"Relax," said Alec cheerfully. "Nothing's happening out there." He gestured at the television. The network had returned to its regular programming, a late-afternoon talk show.

"You're gambling?"

"Nah. Just a little friendly wager," Mole said. Alec rolled his eyes. His pile of money was far smaller than Mole's.

"Game's over. We need that money for supplies."

"Yes, ma'am. I was losing anyway," said Alec agreeably, throwing down his cards and reaching for Mole's money.

"Hands off," growled Mole. Alec threw his hands up in the air.

"Hey, you heard the lady. Game's over."

Mole looked up. Max was already walking away, headed

for the Command Center. "Lady needs to kick some butt, but it ain't gonna be mine," he said, dropping his cards on the table and following Max. Alec gathered up the money, leaving the cards on the table, and trailed after Mole.

"Don't take the money, Max. We've gotta have something to do around here," Mole argued.

"Play strip poker!" returned Max over her shoulder as she grabbed an earpiece. Mole and Alec looked at each other, intrigued.

"You gonna play too?" Alec began, but Max cut him off with a wave of the hand.

"Shut up!" The expression on her face brought Mole and Alec to their feet, the card game forgotten. Max switched to loudspeaker and the staticky sounds of police band radio echoed through the cavernous space. They stood beside Max, listening.

*" ... ten or more, exact number unknown. Repeat, exact number unknown. Transgenic fugitives last seen on North Street heading southwest. They are being pursued by at least one group of civilians. The transgenics are armed. Possibly also the civilians. Proceed with caution. Repeat, proceed with caution."*

"Roger, we copy," responded a second voice. Then the transmission cut off.

Max, Mole, and Alec exchanged glances. "We've got to get them here," Max said urgently. "Where's Joshua? He can bring them in through the sewers."

"I'm on it." Mole strode away, all business, cigar lying forgotten on the floor.

Max turned to a computer monitor, frowning. "Where's

the map?" she muttered, almost to herself. Alec watched for a moment.

"Hey, Max," he added sharply, which made her look up. "Why don't you just call Logan?" When she didn't answer, he went on, "You know ... Logan, your boyfriend the hacker? Couldn't keep your hands off him this morning?"

"I can get it." Max insisted. Alec watched as she hit a few more keys. Nothing.

Max sighed. "All right. Send someone to find him while you go round up some techs to run this stuff down here," she said reluctantly.

"Yes, ma'am," Alec replied smartly, staring thoughtfully at Max for a moment before walking away.

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## Act Two

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### Command Center, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)

Logan strode down the ramp leading into the Command Center the transgenics had set up. He glanced around quickly, noting that the room was in a state of chaos. Transgenics were gathered around banks of monitors, yelling out questions and commands to each other.

"Get the monitors for Sector 6 section V243Q up and running ... "

"Picture won't come in."

"Damn it, get it in."

"Anyone know where the earpieces we scavenged went to? Whoever goes after them is gonna need one."

"Where the hell is Logan? I asked someone to get him down here **now**. We need his GPS system and sewer maps." Max's voice cut through the babble and Logan turned and headed in her direction. As he neared, the crowd of transgenics who had hidden her from his view parted, and he saw her seated in front of a monitor, which was displaying nothing more than a screen full of fuzz. Next to her, a voice came through a speaker, speaking in what sounded like a controlled panic.

"What's happening up there? We need help stat. We're lost down in this maze and they're on our tail. If you guys don't figure something out, we're done."

Max grabbed a mike and spoke reassuringly into it. Logan

hadn't seen her turn around, but it was clear from her words that she knew he was there.

"We've got your back. The guy we needed just got here and he's going to bring you in. What's your name?" As she spoke, she motioned to Logan to sit next to her. He slid into the chair and one of the transgenics handed him a headset.

Logan looked at him questioningly and the transgenic whispered to him, "Group in the sewers trying to come home. They've got some sector cops, maybe state troopers, on their tail and they took a wrong turn. Hooked up with us via a cell number we put out on the streets a while back in case of emergencies. Max said you had some GPS stuff and sewer maps." The last in a voice that indicated he thought no ordinary could be of much help. Logan had the headset on and his laptop open in front of him. His fingers were flying as he pulled up schematics of the Seattle sewer system.

Max turned to him and said, "The leaders name is Lat. We're getting ready to send Joshua down after them to bring them in. He knows the sewers better than anyone here. We don't want to depend on Lat's cell phone. We could lose reception at any time. Joshua'll have a GPS signaler and an earpiece. We need you to get them to Joshua and help them avoid the pursuit." Logan glanced at Max, his face impassive, and nodded. Max brought the mike back to her mouth.

"I'm handing you over to Logan, Lat. He's going to find you and hook you up with a guide. Just follow his instructions." Max indicated to Logan that the group was now in his hands and put down the mike she had been speaking into.

"Lat, Logan here. Hang tight while I get setup. Soon as I figure out where you are, we're going to send someone to bring you in." He turned to Max, his voice all business. "I need the frequency link for Joshua's GPS. I've got the cops data already stored from last time. I just have to pull it up and hack into it. If the cops are right behind them, it will give us an idea of where they are." Max looked like she wanted to say something to Logan, but then she shrugged and moved away, motioning to a couple of transgenics to come forward.

"Logan, this is Ren and Virgil. They'll get you what you need." Logan nodded, already absorbed in his screen, and she sighed and turned away. She was quickly surrounded by transgenics clamoring for her attention, but she pushed them aside and headed over to where Joshua was being outfitted to go down into the sewers.

\* \* \*

Alec returned to the Command Center, satisfied he had located and sent everyone there who could be of help in the current situation. When he arrived, he saw that Max was in one corner with a group that included Joshua. Not wanting to get drafted to go into the sewers with him, he detoured away from her and headed towards the command console. When he reached there, he saw Virgil and Ren talking to Logan, who was intent on some computer hack.

"So what can I do to help you gentlemen?" he asked, ready to get into the action. Logan turned at his voice and sent him a look that would have frozen pizza solid in two seconds flat.

"Nothing, Alec." Logan's words were as cold as the look. At that, he turned, effectively dismissing Alec. The two

transgenics watched open mouthed at the evident hostility in Logan's voice, but remained quiet.

"Sure thing. Not like you need all the help you can get or anything." Alec snapped back, caught off guard by Logan's attitude.

"I've had quite enough of your help already, Alec, thank you." Logan answered coldly. "This isn't an undercover job, no lying required. Ren, I need that GPS signal from the state troopers amplified. Got anything to do it with?"

Alec waited a moment, but when it was clear Logan had nothing more to say to him, he shrugged and headed off.

### Seattle Sewer System

*(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)*

The ragged group of transgenics paused and took a breather as the one who had taken charge motioned to them to stop. He was speaking softly into a cell phone, but the keen hearing of the X5s and 6s in the group caught every word.

"Okay, the coding on the wall here next to the pipe junction reads 453X2EZK89. Tell me that helps because we're almost out of time. I have fourteen people here including a couple of X8s, and two of us are injured. We shook them for a minute, but it isn't going to take them long to pick us up again. They must be using sensors tuned to our body heat." He listened for a minute, then nodded. "You want us to go to next junction, turn left and go up the ladder there? Got it."

Turning to his group, he motioned to them to rise and using Manticore hand signals, he singled out three of the X5s and sent them to the rear. He gave the others the di-

rections and waited until they until they were on their way, then motioned to the rearguard to follow, all the while keeping an eye out for their pursuit.

### **Command Center, Terminal City**

*(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)*

"Okay, big fella, you ready for this?" Max asked Joshua. Her eyes swept over him, checking to see that he had the equipment he would need.

"I'm ready, little fella," he answered and then jumped as his earpiece crackled and Logan's voice sounded in his ear.

"Ready, big guy?"

"Ready, Logan." Joshua nodded at Max as he turned to head for the sewer entrance that Logan had calculated would be closest to the group.

"Joshua, wait." He turned back to Max, who gave him a fierce hug. "Be careful, okay?" Joshua hugged Max back.

"Logan's got our back," he stated. Max looked at him and then nodded.

"Yeah, Logan's got your back." At that, Joshua left and Max turned to gaze across the room to where Logan sat at the command console. Logan was looking in her direction, and for a moment their eyes met, but then he turned back to his computers, deliberately dismissing her. Max sighed as she headed over to see what else needed to be done in the current crisis.

## Supply Depot, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC: "TOMORROW COMES TODAY" BY GORILLAZ)

Sketchy was petrified. He was being held by a mob of angry transgenics, many of them looking anything but human. On the ground next to them was an upended box surrounded by shattered glass and a spreading puddle of clear liquid.

"I'm telling you, man, it was an accident. I didn't mean to drop the box. I was only trying to be useful and help with the unloading. Believe me." Sketchy protested to the crowd around him. One of them, who looked like he had some canine DNA, growled and the others crowded even more menacingly around. Unnoticed on the outskirts of the crowd, Dalton stood quietly and watched.

"So who asked you to help anyway?" demanded an albino transhuman.

"I think he's an ordinary spy," declared one of the transgenics. The others muttered in agreement.

"Yeah, he's been going around asking all kinds of questions for the last three days. Probably going to sneak out and hand over all the information on our setup to the ordinary cops."

"No, man," Sketchy protested. "I'm a reporter for the New World Weekly. I'm on your side. I was gonna do a story telling all the folks out there that you guys aren't any different from us."

"Right. And I'm the sugar plum fairy." Laughter sounded as the speaker, who looked more wolf than human, derided Sketchy's words.

"No, really. I'm a friend of Max's. I helped out in the Jam

Pony attack. Really, man." Sketchy declared frantically. He looked around and saw a familiar figure approaching, cigar in mouth. "Mole can tell you." The crowd turned as Mole walked to where they were holding Sketchy.

"Tell them what, ordinary?" he demanded. "What the hell's going on here?"

"This ordinary dropped a box of morphine and smashed all the vials. We're almost down to nothing in medical supplies. Don't know when or if we can replace it."

"He's been going around asking all kinds of questions as well"

"We think he's a spy." Voices chimed in, accusing Sketchy of various crimes. Mole regarded him impassively.

"C'mon, man. You know I'm Max's friend. I wouldn't do that." Sketchy appealed to him. Unnoticed in the commotion, Dalton turned and left the area, heading towards the Command Center. Mole walked over to Sketchy and grabbed the front of his shirt.

"I don't know much of anything about you except that you're an ordinary, you ask too many questions, and you just trashed some vital medical supplies," he growled. "Seems to me that doesn't speak too highly of you. Max was out in the world too long. Who knows what kind of scum she picked up as friends."

"Yeah. I say we string him up, Mole" a voice called from the crowd.

"String him up."

"Show the ordinary we don't tolerate spies here." The crowd pressed closer and Mole looked around the room, then strode towards an exposed overhead beam, dragging

Sketchy with him.

### Command Center, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)

Logan was deep in conversation with Lat, pausing occasionally to give low-voiced orders to the two transgenics assigned to help him. The initial chaos in the room had settled into a state of controlled tension. People moved quietly and efficiently about their tasks. Max was bent over a monitor to Logan's right. Another transgenic tech type had managed to hack into the sector police communication system and they were listening in on the pursuit.

"Sensor readings indicate a group radiating the correct heat signature is ahead and above us, sir."

"They must have gone up a level. Find me a way up."

"Yes, sir."

"Sir, ahead and to the left, there appears to be a ladder."

"Head in that direction. How far are they in front of us?"

"They've widened the distance some, sir. About one klick I'd say."

"Move it. We don't want to lose this group. Hold your weapons ready and shoot to kill if necessary. None of them are to get away."

Max drew in her breath at the last and glanced over to Logan, concentrating her hearing so as to hear what he was saying into his headset.

"Lat, continue moving in the direction I gave you. Joshua is coming to meet you. I have an idea of how to shake your pursuit, but I need you to get to Joshua. How are

your people holding up?" Logan nodded at what he heard in reply and sat back for a minute, running a hand through his already messy hair and making it stand up even more. He hadn't shaven since they had come into Terminal City three days earlier. His overall scruff combined with the intensity of his concentration gave him an air of ruthlessness and danger. The transgenics around him seemed to have picked up on it and were quickly obeying his every request. Suddenly, Logan turned his head in Max's direction and their eyes briefly met. She found herself starting to smile at him, but he had already turned back to his laptop.

Max started to go back to the task at hand, but was stopped by a hand pulling on her arm. She looked down to see Dalton, the X6 who had come to Jam Pony with Gem, standing there.

"Max, you better come. Sketchy's in trouble."

"Dalton, I don't have time for Sketchy. Find Alec."

"I tried but I can't, and they're going to string him up." His voice was urgent and Max realized the situation must be serious.

"Virgil, I have a situation to handle. Keep it under control here." She called out as she followed Dalton from the center.

### **Supply Depot, Terminal City**

*(SCENE MUSIC: "TOMORROW COMES TODAY" BY GORILLAZ)*

"This should do just fine. Hand me that rope." Mole demanded as he positioned a cowering Sketchy under the overhead beams in the corner of the room.

"You mean this rope, Mole?" Max's voice rang out in the

room. There was a sudden silence as they all turned to look at her, and then at Mole. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Your ordinary buddy here has been asking an awful lot of questions. Not to mention destroying the last of the morphine supply we managed to scrounge up." Mole answered. "We're in a state of war here. Spies and saboteurs can't be tolerated."

"Give me a break, Mole. You think he's a spy or saboteur?" Max gestured at Sketchy, who was literally shaking where he stood. "He couldn't spy his way out of a paper bag if his life depended on it. And as for saboteur, he's been a klutz since I've known him." She stopped a moment, then looked around. "And even if he was, we aren't about mob rule and lynching here. Didn't you all have enough of that on the outside? We're better than that. Let him go, Mole." The last words were spoken in a tone that made it clear she was prepared to enforce her words if need be.

Mole stood for a minute and their gazes locked in a staring contest. The rest of the transgenics stood watching, waiting to see what would happen. Finally Mole dropped his hand from Sketchy and laughed.

"You didn't really think I was going to do it, did you, Max? Just trying to teach this idiot a lesson. Get lost, ordinary." Sketchy didn't wait and quickly hurried from the room. Max gave Mole one last look.

"Just remember what I said, Mole."

She turned and left as Mole gave her a mocking salute and muttered, "Yes, ma'am."

Max caught up with Sketchy and pulled him to a halt. Backing him up against a wall, she hissed at him.

"I don't know what the hell you were thinking, but I don't have time for this. There are people whose lives are in danger as we speak. Next time, I'm going to leave you to Mole and his buddies. Got that?" Sketchy nodded.

"Answer me, you idiot."

"Got it, Max," he stuttered.

"Don't forget it." She let him go and turned and headed back to command, leaving him standing there wiping his brow.

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## Act Three

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### Hallway outside of the Command Center, Terminal City

Cindy was looking for Max. Instead she ran into Alec, heading toward the perimeter. "You seen Max?" she asked.

Alec jerked his head back in the direction he'd come from. "Command Center. Sector cops chased a bunch of trans-genics into the sewer. Joshua to the rescue!"

"Where you going? Why ain't you back there helping out?"

"Logan's got it all under control," Alec assured her. "I'm headed down to the local manhole to help out once our trusty Saint Bernard leads them to safety."

"Go easy on doggy dog," she warned him. "He's had a bad time lately."

Alec's face immediately grew serious. "Yeah. You don't have to tell me. Hey," he added as Cindy turned away. "What's up with Logan anyway?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I was back there at the Command Center with him and got kind of a weird vibe. You know, sort of like he was hoping I'd drop dead or something. Any idea what I did this time?"

Cindy folded her arms and fixed Alec with a stare. "Ain't what you already done enough?"

"Yeah, blame Alec for everything." He walked away in disgust.

**Police Headquarters, Sector 4**

When Matt Sung came back from a late lunch, looking forward to a slow afternoon and an early departure, the squad room buzzed with excitement. Detectives who would normally be at their desks attending to paperwork were standing around talking animatedly.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You didn't hear? Guys down in Sector 6 got a pack of trannies on the run."

"At least ten of 'em. Freaks too."

"This is it!" added a third cop excitedly. "A few more blocks and they'll be caught between the sector cops and the National Guard like a rock and a hard place. They're cornered, they attack ... bam! Perfect excuse to tear down that chain-link fence and clean out Terminal City for good."

Sung frowned.

"Hey, Matt," said the second cop, "didn't you take out one of those freaks a few months ago?"

Sung stiffened. "I thought he was hurting a child."

"Probably was," said the first cop.

"Who's heading up the force down there?" Sung asked abruptly.

The second cop said, "I heard the city put Ramon Clemente in charge of the whole tranny thing today. Beats me why. He's the one who let 'em hole up in there to begin with. Shoulda taken 'em out when he had the chance."

Clemente, huh? Sung turned back to his desk and dialed the number of his old precinct chief. The chief had been a

good friend of Clemente's, back in the day.

### Command Center, Terminal City

After Sketchy's ignominious departure, Max headed straight for the Command Center. "What's happening?" she asked quietly, sliding into a seat next to Logan.

Logan didn't look away from the tracking screen. "We're just about to ... Joshua?" he interrupted himself, speaking into his headset. "You're almost there. Turn right at the junction ... that's it ... go on about 100 feet and then left." He watched the screen intently as a flashing yellow spot, Joshua, turned at a right angle and slowly advanced along a straight line marked V-323. A blob of blue spots, the transgenics, remained stationary. Four red spots, at the top and left of the screen, moved gradually closer to the blue blob. The sector cops were closing in on the fleeing transgenics.

"That's it, Joshua. Now just around that corner to the left ... bingo!" Logan let a small note of triumph break through the calm, steady tone he'd been using. Over the loudspeaker came a quiet, ragged cheer as the transgenic group saw Joshua. There were smiles and high-fives in the Command Center. Max tried to catch Logan's eye to give him a congratulatory smile too, but he stared steadily at the tracking screen.

"Good work, Joshua, but we're not out of the woods yet," Logan said into the mouthpiece.

"Not out of the sewers yet," came Joshua's rough voice over the loudspeaker. That did make Logan smile.

"You're right. Not out of the sewers yet. How's the group? How fast can you travel?"

There was a momentary silence, and then Joshua replied, "Two hurt, but we can carry them."

"Okay. Start heading back the way you came. Move as quickly as you can. They're still after you."

"Right," said Joshua.

Without taking his eyes from the screen, Logan said to Max, "Looks like we've got this under control here for the moment. I've still got a diversion in mind if those cops get too close. Maybe you should go see about a med team to meet them when they get here."

"Yeah, sure," said Max coldly, turning her back and walking away. But even that didn't make Logan look up.

\* \* \*

*(SCENE MUSIC: "FOOLISH" BY ASHANTI)*

Max was stalking away from the Command Center when Cindy found her.

"You got a second, boo?"

"Yeah, sure. Logan's got everything under control in there. What's up?" But she kept looking over her shoulder at Logan.

"Thought you said he's got everything under control."

"He does," said Max, reluctantly turning her attention back to Cindy.

"He does, but you don't," said Cindy. She took Max by the shoulders and firmly steered her around a corner where she couldn't see Logan. "Come on, tell Original Cindy what happened. And make it quick, 'cause I'm looking to get a shower. I got plans for tonight."

Max leaned back against the wall and sighed. "I wanted everything to have a fresh start. So I told him about Alec. I mean, I told him there wasn't anything between me and Alec."

"And?"

"And I don't get it! Last year I tell him I slept with another guy and he's cool with it, now I tell him I didn't sleep with another guy and he's mad at me!"

Cindy sighed. "Max. You're tellin' the man everything except what he wants to hear."

"What's that?"

"Three words. Four, maximum. I love you. I love you, Logan."

"I can't!" Max protested. "He won't even speak to me."

"Fine. Have it your way. But I told you a long time ago ... one of these days, you're gonna have to step to the real with Logan. And that don't mean tellin' him all about you and the pizza guy, or how you and Pretty Boy just sat up all night talkin' bout how it was back at Manticore. It means tellin' him how it is with you and him. Straight up."

"I can't deal with this now. I have to go find Mole," Max interrupted, plainly exasperated.

"Three words, Max," Cindy called after her retreating back.

#### **Police Headquarters, Sector 4**

"Lieutenant Sung." Clemente did not rise from behind his desk as Matt Sung entered his small, cluttered office. "Have a seat," he offered, settling back into his chair. Sung sat in a battered plastic chair in front of the desk and

waited.

"I'll get right to the point, Lieutenant. Most of our fine folks in blue can't get far enough away from the transgenic menace, and you want to be assigned to my team? You got an explanation?"

"I had an encounter with a transgenic in Chinatown back in the fall. Shot him. Turns out he wasn't hurting anyone," Sung began cautiously.

"You looking to ease your conscience? Earn a little good karma?" Clemente seemed almost scornful. "I'm warning you up front, Lieutenant, I'm not on their side." He stared steadily at Sung.

Sung returned the stare. "So are you saying you're against them?"

Clemente smiled grimly. "No. Not yet, anyway. But that depends on the transgenics themselves. And Max."

"Max!" In spite of himself, Sung couldn't keep the astonishment out of his voice. Which of course did not escape Clemente's notice.

"Oh, so you know her," he said, pushing a hoverdrone surveillance photograph across the desk. Logan's friend. That was her, all right.

"She was briefly involved with the Chinatown transgenic. I had no idea she was transgenic herself, though."

Clemente picked up the photograph and stared thoughtfully at it. "Involved how?"

"Maybe 'involved' isn't the right word. I saw her at the ME's office," Sung replied, trying to keep it vague. "No idea what she was doing there."

"Oh," Clemente said casually, as if he'd lost interest in Max. Then he looked sharply at Sung. "Cops who were in on that Chinatown terrorist arrest think she might have been on the scene there too. And if I'm not mistaken, you took that guy down. Ring a bell?"

Sung shrugged, trying not to rush his answer. "Maybe. I don't know. It was pretty chaotic."

"Hmmm." Abruptly Clemente changed the subject. "Eyes Only. Know anything about him?"

"What does Eyes Only have to do with the transgenics?"

"He's broadcast in support of them."

"He's always been on the side of the good guys."

"Has he?" Clemente seemed amused. He dropped the photograph on the desk, stared at Sung for a few more moments, and then nodded. "Well, Lieutenant, if the transgenics are the good guys, that might just make me the bad guy." He stood and Sung did the same. "Sure you want to join my team? You might end up wearing one of the black hats before this is all over."

Sung looked him straight in the eye. "I prefer to think of it as good cop/bad cop, Detective."

At that, Clemente laughed out loud. Then he nodded. "All right. Eyes Only's been quiet for the last couple of weeks. See what you can find out about that and about this girl, Max." He turned back to his work, but Sung didn't move. Clemente glanced up. "Is there a problem, Detective?" he asked with an edge in his voice.

"Just wondering what you plan to do about the transgenic chase in Sector 6."

"The what?"

"Sector cops in 6 are in pursuit of transgenics. It's all over the squad room."

Clemente sighed. "You'd think someone would let me know. Me being the guy in charge and all."

"I just did."

Clemente stood and grabbed his coat. "Come on then, Mr. Good Cop. Let's head out to Sector 6 and see if we can keep a transgenic from getting killed today."

### **Outdoors, Terminal City**

*(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)*

Max found Mole on a rooftop overlooking a lot between two dilapidated buildings, where the blacktop had long ago buckled and weeds pushed up through the cracks. He'd been easy to find. She had followed the sound of smashing glass and metal, heart in her throat, thinking that troops had broken through the perimeter.

They hadn't. Mole stood next to a heap of old, rusted, cast-off lab and industrial equipment and was dropping it, one item at a time, over the edge of the roof to watch it smash into bits below.

"Stop that! Are you out of your freaking mind?" Max demanded, pulling him back from the edge. Mole jerked away from her angrily. For a moment they faced each other, furious.

"What's wrong with you? You want the National Guard to pick you off up here? And why the hell were you trying to lynch Sketchy?" Max was almost shouting.

"Awww, get over it, Max. The National Guard couldn't find its way into here if Logan drew them a map. And I

was just goofing on your pal Sketchy."

"That's not the point ... "

"Cripes, Max, the guy's an idiot. He had it coming to him. Lighten up, huh?"

"I can't," said Max.

Mole aimed a vicious kick at the remaining pile of junk. "No, 'cause you've got the weight of the world on your shoulders."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're still thinking this is gonna be a war, aren't you?"

"What do you mean? There are transgenics in danger right now, trying to make their way in here! What are you doing to help?"

Mole pulled a cigar out of his pocket, lit it, and took a deep drag, exhaling the smoke and watching it rise lazily up until it vanished in the gray sky. Then he pulled a small receiver from his belt and showed it to Max. "If those guys in the Command Center need me, I'm right here. But my guess is Joshua and Logan will do just fine. Which leaves you to baby-sit."

"Baby-sit who?"

"Idiots like your pal. Assholes like me. And this." Mole grandly waved an arm at the dilapidated brick buildings and cracked blacktop. "We're not commanding an army, Max. This ain't a war. They'll just keep us penned up in here, forever if they have to. No, we're running a city here. A city with no clean water, not enough electricity, not enough food, and not enough medical supplies. You wanna be a bureaucrat, Max? Knock yourself out. But you said it yourself. Me, I'm a soldier."

"Are you saying you want to fight your way out of here?"

"Dunno," said Mole thoughtfully, watching his smoke spiral upwards. "Maybe so, Max. Maybe so."

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## Act Four

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### Seattle Sewer System

(SCENE MUSIC: "DARK JUNGLE" BY DILLINJA)

Joshua listened intently to Logan's voice in his ear, which was directing him through the Seattle sewers. Lat's group followed close behind him.

"Big fella, you're almost there. I need you to go up the ladder to your right. You should be in an area that is a junction for some large pipes. When you get there, I need you to locate the relief valves. They should be marked in red."

"Okay, going up the ladder." Joshua scrambled up the ladder that was exactly where Logan said it would be. Lat's group waited behind. "The pipes are here, Logan." Joshua confirmed.

"Look for those valves. I need to talk to Lat. Shouldn't be long."

"Okay, Logan."

\* \* \*

"Lat? You still there?" Logan's voice crackled in the transgenic's ear.

"We're here but they're getting closer. We need to get out of here now."

"Gotcha. Head up that ladder and follow Joshua's directions when you get to the top," Logan instructed.

"10-4," Lat replied. He signaled his troops to move out just

as a shout sounded from the tunnel behind them. "Logan, they've got visual on us. I hope you've got something up your sleeve or we're sitting ducks!" He and his group abandoned all pretense of stealth as they raced up the ladder.

### **Command Center, Terminal City**

"Joshua, have you located those valves?" Logan asked urgently.

"Found them, Logan."

"Lat and his group are coming up the ladder. How many valves did you locate?"

"Three."

"I was hoping for more, but that'll have to be enough. As soon as they come up, get two of them to go to a valve each, and you take the third. Send the rest of them up the ladder over in the far right corner. When I give the word, open the valves and then get the hell out of there."

"Right, Logan."

The transgenics in the Command Center had gathered around Logan at this last exchange. The tension was palpable as they all waited for events to unfold. Logan reached over and switched on the audible mike so they could all listen. There was silence for a moment and then a crackle of static followed by Lat's voice.

"Move it, move it, move it ... Damn ... " There was a sharp crack that sounded like gunfire.

"Prepare to return fire," Lat's voice sounded out.

"Lat, get your people up and let Joshua handle it." Logan instructed and then he quickly turned to Virgil, "Get me

Max on a comm. Now."

"Can't. We're short on units so she didn't take one. Mole has one, though."

"Fine. Get Mole on the line."

### **Rooftop, Terminal City**

Max opened her mouth to answer Mole, but never got the words out. Mole's receiver crackled to life. "Find Max! Get back here now!" Logan's voice was urgent.

Max snatched the radio out of Mole's hand. "What is it?"

"Shots fired in the sewer."

"Anyone hurt?"

"Unknown," crackled Logan's voice.

Over the receiver, Max and Mole heard the sound of more shots firing. Without another word, they sprinted back towards the Command Center.

### **A Manhole in Sector 6**

The unmarked black sedan came to a halt at the police barricade. Sung and Clemente climbed out. A nearby sector cop had her radio on full volume. The sound of shouting and gunfire carried clearly. Groaning, Clemente grabbed the radio from her hand and switched to transmit.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire!"

"Who the hell is this?" crackled a voice over the radio.

"This is Detective Clemente and I am ordering you to hold your fire!"

More shouts. Then the cop on the radio yelled, "There's a monster down here!"

"No such thing as monsters," Clemente shouted back. "Hold your fire!"

### **Seattle Sewer System**

"Joshua, as soon as Lat is clear open those valves and get out of there." Joshua nodded, forgetting Logan couldn't see him. Lat was at the foot of the other ladder and Joshua signaled his helpers to open the valves. Sector police were coming up the ladder now and taking position behind some of the pipes, guns at the ready.

There was an ear splitting screech as the transgenics forced open the rusty valves and then a momentary silence. Suddenly, clouds of hot steam spewed into the area with a loud hiss. Joshua and the X5s darted to the far ladder just before the steam became impassible. Behind them the cries of the sector cops could be heard.

### **Outdoors, Terminal City**

Alec and Mole waited by the entrance to the sewers. It wasn't long before their enhanced hearing picked up voices heading their way. The sight of Joshua leading a rag tag group of x-series transgenics, seven males and seven females, followed the voices.

"Hey, big guy! Great job." Alec strode forward and slapped Joshua on the back. The sound of clapping and cheering erupted behind him and he turned to see that a crowd of transgenics had gathered behind him and Mole.

"Right on, Joshua."

"Great going, dog boy."

"Nice work." Mole reached into his pocket and handed Joshua a cigar. Joshua looked around, bewildered by the commotion, and then turned the cigar over in his hands, not quite sure what to do with it. He brought it up to his nose and sniffed and then licked it tentatively.

"No, man." Mole exclaimed. "That's no way to treat a primo Cubano cigar. Come with me and I'll show you what to do with it." Joshua smiled and headed off with Mole and Alec, both of them continuing to congratulate him. Lat and his group were taken away by the medical team to the infirmary, where they could rest and recover from their close call.

### Command Center, Terminal City

*(SCENE MUSIC: "MAKE UP YOUR MIND" BY TYRESE)*

The Command Center was deserted now that the transgenics were safely in. A lone tech was on duty and he was in the far corner working on a monitor. Max had headed off to the makeshift infirmary to check on the wounded, and Logan had just finished shutting down his laptop when a familiar voice accosted him.

"Yo. You and me need to talk." He turned to see Original Cindy standing there, hands on her hips and a militant look in her eyes. He raised his brows quizzically. "You got one good reason why I shouldn't give you the smack down you deserve?"

"I'm sorry. You've lost me here," Logan answered.

"You know what I mean. What you thinkin' treatin' my boo like you done? My girl has done nothing but cry over you ever since she got herself out of black hat central. She don' need no more of that. 'Specially not now."

"And I do?" Logan snapped back at her, eyes blazing. "I thought she was dead. When she came back, she refused to even see me because of the virus. But despite that, I put my life on hold to help her with her 'family' for months on end. She found a temporary cure, but then threw away our one chance to be together. And now I find out that she lied to me. To 'protect' me she says. It was never her protection I needed or wanted." He closed his laptop with a sharp snap and turned to leave.

"She been dealin' the best she can. Not like you was no saint to her after that whole Gossamer dealio went down." Cindy protested.

Logan turned back to her at that, his tone hard as he responded. "Yeah? Well, let me tell you something. It isn't about dealing. It's about opening yourself up to someone, about having enough trust to take risks together. I thought I had that with Max, that she was different. I may have walked away, but I never lied to her about why I was doing it. And I came back. When I thought she was with Alec, I told myself it was the best thing for her, that I loved her enough to let her go. Do you have any idea what that was like?" He paused and said so softly that she almost didn't hear, "She ripped my heart out and now I find out it was nothing but a lie ... "

Cindy was silent for a moment.

"My boo, she never grew up with no one lovin' her. She don't know the whole 411 about it. She jus' be thinkin' that lovin' you means keepin' you safe from that virus bitch any way she can. You think on that when you be thinkin' 'bout how you gonna treat her." With that she turned and left, leaving Logan alone in the now empty Command Center.

### Infirmery, Terminal City

Max entered the makeshift infirmery. She watched in silence as a tall, attractive, x-series female leaned over one of the two injured Xs. The woman wore gloves, which she stripped off and laid aside, revealing long slender fingers. She gently ran them over the patient's left leg, stopping to ask questions in a low voice as she pressed on various places and watched for a reaction.

"Oww!" The patient jerked as the medic's fingers touched a sensitive spot. The woman placed a hand on his brow and he settled back down as she stepped back. Turning to a tech standing behind her, she gave swift instructions.

"Fractured tibia. Splint it and wrap. That'll have to do until we can locate the casting plaster someone said is around here." Done with her instructions, she moved to the other patient and quickly handled her case as well.

When she was finished, she picked up her gloves and pulled them back on. Max stepped forward as the woman turned to go over to the desk in the corner.

"I'm Max." She stated holding out her hand. "Nice work, doc."

"Aveta." The medic responded. "I'm not a doctor, though, just a field medic."

"I'm glad you're here. We're going to need you." The medic took Max's hand and held it for a moment, regarding her solemnly. Max felt a wave of calm washing over her, soothing the hurt she had been ruthlessly suppressing since her encounter with Logan that morning. She frowned in puzzlement and started to open her mouth, but the medic had already dropped her hand and turned back to where the tech was calling for her assistance. Max

watched a moment, then shrugged and left the room, confident that the injured Xs were in good hands.

### **Hallway, Terminal City**

Original Cindy left the Command Center and was deep in thought as she walked the hallways of Terminal City.

"Cindy. Hey, what's up?" Gem's familiar voice called out to her.

"Oh, hey, boo. Gotta problem I'm thinkin' on here."

"Tell me. Maybe I can help."

"It's to do with my boo and her hot boy. Hetero drama." She rolled her eyes to emphasize her point.

"You mean Max and Logan?" Gem asked curiously. "What's wrong? Those two are all about each other, even this Manticore alum can see it from a mile away."

"Your old bosses screwed them big time and now he's doubtin' on my boo. Don' know how to get into his thick head neither to make him see the real of things."

Gem thought for a minute and then smiled. "Maybe I can help. They saved me and Elf, it's the least I can do." Original Cindy looked at her and nodded.

"Aiiight, but it's gotta be all casual like. He can't know you got the 411 on them."

Gem winked at her. "You're looking at straight A's in undercover ops standing in front of you. Piece a cake."

### **The Rec Center, Terminal City**

Groups of transgenics sat around discussing the recent events and watching the continued television news foot-

age of the National Guard troops, who now surrounded all of Terminal City.

The picture switched to a Channel 3 reporter.

*"I'm speaking with Detective Ramon Clemente, who was named today to head up the city's Transgenic Task Force. Detective, what's the latest on the rumors of a transgenic pursuit in Sector 6 today?"*

The transgenics in the rec center recognized the cop who had chased Max and the others into Terminal City a few days ago.

*"The rumors were unfounded," Clemente told the reporter, smiling. "Some citizens followed a suspicious-looking group into Sector 6, but our investigations turned up nothing. Probably just some transients."*

*"So everything is calm?" the reporter asked.*

*"Yes. The situation is unchanged," Clemente assured her.*

"I'll be damned," said one of the transgenics on the floor.

"So now what?" asked one of them. "Doesn't look like they plan on attacking anytime soon."

"Yeah, I have a feeling we're in for a long siege here. Probably think they can starve us out."

"Man, we're expensive military hardware," interjected a third. "Ain't no way they want to damage the merchandise by coming in here guns blazing."

"Too bad we don't have one of the brain units here." The first speaker mused. "Could use some good high probability projections right about now."

"Maybe one will turn up. New soldiers arriving every day."

"Yeah, maybe. Hope that Max chick knows what she's doing. I'm starting to wonder if Mole was right and we should've left while we had the chance."

The group trailed off into silence, contemplating their uncertain future as the news continued to drone on.

### **Hallway, Terminal City**

*(SCENE MUSIC: "MAKE UP YOUR MIND" BY TYRESE)*

Logan had left his laptop back in his makeshift quarters and was heading to the commissary to see if he could find Dix. Dix had promised to find him some microchips he needed for a video link and he wanted to get to work on it. He had to figure out a way to get Eyes Only up and running. They needed to get their side of the story out there and they needed to do it quickly.

"Logan." A female voice stopped him and he looked up to see Gem standing there holding her baby.

"Hey, Gem. How's the little one holding up?" he asked. She smiled and held the baby up for his inspection. Logan extended a finger to her and the baby grasped it in a surprisingly strong grip.

"She's perfect, Logan." Logan smiled at her obvious pride in her child. Then her face dropped and a small frown appeared.

"But what, Gem?" Logan asked gently.

"I wish I could have had a real relationship with her father, not just the breeding partner thing." She sighed and went on. "Something like you and Max have." Logan started to speak, but then thought better of it. Neither one of them noticed Joshua standing nearby, listening intently.

Gem continued, "You two are special. I hope you don't mind, but I've been watching you the last couple of days, and it's obvious how much you care about each other. I want Elf to grow up seeing the same thing. We never saw that at Manticore." She paused, "Max is lucky she found you. I hope that someday I can find someone who will accept me and love me for what I am, someone who will always have my back when the chips are down."

"That's what you see when you watch us?" Logan questioned her.

"That's what everyone sees, Logan." Gem answered firmly. The baby started to squirm in Gem's arms and she looked down. "I think she needs a diaper change. I better run. Say hi to Max for me, and come and visit us when you aren't too busy." With that, she turned and left, leaving Logan standing there staring after her thoughtfully.

### **Rooftop, Terminal City**

*(SCENE MUSIC: "THE ONE" BY NIKI HARIS)*

Darkness had fallen and the wind had died. Clouds still stretched across the sky, but it wasn't raining. Max stood at the low wall that circled the edge of the roof. She was staring out over Seattle and at the islands of light marking the guard posts that had been set up around the perimeter of Terminal City.

"Hey."

She turned at the sound of Logan's voice. "What are you doing here? I thought you didn't want to see me." Her tone was brittle, an attempt to disguise her hurt.

"I was looking at my calendar and I realized that it's our anniversary," he responded quietly. "Tried to find some

cheap champagne, but all I could come up with was this." He set a bottle of sparkling water and two plastic cups on the wall next to her.

"So? Does it matter?" Max responded with a shrug. "Thought you decided I was all about me, that there was no us."

Logan came to stand next to her and there was silence as they both looked out over the city. After a moment, he began speaking in a soft conversational tone. "When you came back from the dead, I was the happiest man in the world. When the virus hit, I told myself we'd get through it. But then you started refusing to even see me. It was never all about touching for me, but it started to seem like that was all it was for you."

"Logan, it was never that," Max protested.

Logan turned to look down at her as he continued. "I tried to walk away, but I couldn't do it. I still believed in us. Until you let me think you were with Alec. Even then, I still believed in you. But today, when I found out you had lied to me, it really hit me hard." He hesitated then went on, "it reminded me of how Daphne dropped me flat and how Val played me, and how both times I never saw it coming. It reminded me that women don't stay with me once they get to know me. So why would you be any different? I'm not what you need, no genetically engineered perfection here." His voice was hoarse and he stopped abruptly, turning away from Max and staring blindly out over the city.

"Logan." Max's voice was soft and he turned back to see her looking steadily up at him, eyes glistening with unshed tears. "I know who you are, and who you are is exactly what I need."

For a long moment, they looked into each other's eyes and then Logan said to her softly, "I'm sorry I blew up at you this morning."

"I'm sorry I let you think I was with Alec," Max said. She hesitated, then went on. "But the reality is that I can kill you with one touch. I'm poison to you. I start thinking about that and it makes me do stupid things because I'm so afraid that one day it's going to happen. Hurting you seemed like a better choice than taking that risk. Safer."

"Max, it's never been about you being a safe girlfriend." Logan paused and smiled down at her. "Not for me." There was another silence as they continued to look at each other.

"Logan, there's one more thing. It's something I should have told you a long time ago. I hope it isn't too late." Max squared her shoulders and took a deep breath.

"Logan ... I love you."

She held her breath, waiting for his response. For a moment, he just stood there frozen. Then he reached out and gently brushed her hair back from her face with his gloved hands, ending with them framing her face as she looked up at him. His eyes were shining as he softly responded, "I love you too, Max."

Gloved hands intertwined as the two of them stood looking out over the city. The clouds parted and a single star twinkled in the sky above.

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## Epilogue

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### A state of the art lab somewhere outside of Seattle, WA

Ames White strode into the lab and headed for the technician, who was standing near a spinning centrifuge. "What's the status?" he demanded, wasting no time on a greeting.

"The toxin is isolated and we're ready to begin production. We only need to determine the best means of distribution."

"Why wasn't that already worked out?" White demanded.

"It was. But with the new schedule for the Coming and the desire of the Conclave for the fastest possible distribution, we have to rethink it. Airborne transmission is the quickest way to get it out there, but we aren't set up for that. The plan was for a slower, phased release." The technician's tone was one of annoyance at the ignorance of laymen.

White thought for a moment. "I may be able to get you something on that. I had a tech who was working on that very problem not too long ago. Let me see what I can do to get his information to you. I have a lead on where his equipment and notes are. On another matter, do you have anything ready for us to use against the transgenic scum?"

The technician nodded. "We have a gas you can use. It won't kill them, but it will temporarily incapacitate them and make it easy for our Phalanx troops to go in and wipe them out. But there is one problem."

"What?" White demanded in a harsh tone.

"We don't have much. We can only cover a small area. Say 20 city blocks.

White smiled. "That's not a problem. Not at all."

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