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## A Change of Character

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Australia.**

As Alvin looked at himself in the mirror, he was satisfied with the change in his appearance. In the space of only five weeks, he lost fifteen kilos and was now slim around the waist courtesy of a new diet introduced to him by Simon Mann, one of his deputies at Alkaline Robotics and Electronics. This diet required him to give up being a vegetarian and combine the eating of certain types of meat with his intake of fruits and vegetables along with special supplements supplied by Simon. The only negative aspect of Alvin's life was the on and off subtle buzzing sound of a large fly on the ceiling of his office which he could only hear on account of a hearing aid in his left ear. Alvin was about to grab a book and throw it at the fly until the buzzing ceased. For the last few weeks, that same fly was regularly in his office. Although it was only a fly, its' presence was a continual distraction. As he would go through his usual routine of doing paperwork and transferring electronic data through different sections of the company, the fly would change positions around the office. On certain occasions, he transferred particular files to databases where these files did not belong and blamed the fly on each occasion before these mistakes were rectified.

With a realization that his numerous mistakes like the placing of sound equipment-related data files into the battery and electronics database could never be the fault of a fly, Alvin finally persuaded himself that he should no longer place so much importance on an insignificant creature. As the final stage of a tendering for the security contract for Alkaline Robotics and Electronics was drawing to a close, Alvin was undecided. After having removed seven security firms from contention for a contract worth over twenty million credits, only two companies remained. These companies were Orbit Security and Valerian Protection. Alvin liked Orbit Security better than Valerian Protection on account of their history of keeping every contract they signed since being founded ten years ago. Despite his admiration for Orbit Security, the competitive quote given to him by Valerian Protection was always on his mind. Valerian Protection offered a staggering low fee of only ninety credits an hour for the service of each guard. That was twenty credits lower than what Orbit Security was offering. Only one factor prevented Alvin from deciding to choice Valerian Protection. He was concerned about their lack of experience in the security industry. Valerian Protection had only been around for one year and only had three security contracts. There was a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” Alvin asked.

“It's Simon.”

“Please come in.”

Simon Mann entered Alvin's office. He was holding a folder. He handed it to Alvin who opened it up. It was a report on the results of the various robot disinfection programs that had

only just been completed yesterday. The report demonstrated how an electronic service called Orion was the only disinfection program that successfully disinfected robots that were plagued with a mysterious virus that destroyed several droids in the space of a few weeks. Tests concluded that Orion was successful in removing every virus from infected droids within three days while the other droids which underwent the disinfection services of other disinfection programs were still in quarantine. After leaving the office, Alvin and Simon arrived at the sound equipment section where disinfected droids were brought following their removal from quarantine. Alvin placed a brain scanner over the head of one of the droids who was inserting the final circuits into an amplifier before it would be shifted to a warehouse. The droids' coherency levels were determined to be completely accurate. Alvin decided that he would need to ask the droid a few questions.

“Do you know what the process is for the sale of sound equipment?”

“Affirmative.”

“What's the process?”

“We do a final inspection of the sound equipment before loading it onto a truck. It is driven to a warehouse where the location of each piece is stored in a database. Clients select the equipment they want from the database. After it is paid, the equipment is delivered.”

“Excellent.” Alvin turned his attention to Simon. “I'd like you to cancel all the other disinfection programs.”

“I'll do that straight away.”

Later that day, Alvin did research on Orion and discovered that it was from the same parent company as Valerian Protection which was Omega Services Pty Ltd. Orion's track record was very impressive. In the two years of its existence, Orion had successfully disinfected the robots or computer systems of over twenty major companies in Canada. Its' success rate in electronic disinfection was only second to Nebula Electronics, the largest computer disinfection firm in North America. Alvin took a look through the central company database to see that the droids who were recently in quarantine were already registered as disinfected. After finishing the process of clearing the remaining droids from quarantine, Alvin and his two deputies Phil Murdoch and Simon Mann followed him to his office. Upon entrance into the office, a buzzing sound was emitted by the fly on the ceiling. Alvin was visibly annoyed. He took a brief look at the fly with an angry expression on his face.

“What's wrong? It's only a fly.” Simon said.

“I've had to endure that stupid sound for the past few weeks. It's starting to really bug me.” Alvin complained. After having said those words, the buzzing suddenly stopped.

“It's over. There's nothing to worry about.”

“There’s a lot to worry about. We have to choose a security company for the next three years. I don’t even know who I want to choose. You guys will have to help me.”

“I think we should go with Orbit. They’ve got the best track record in security.” Phil said.

“How strongly convinced are you about this?”

“As convinced as I could ever be. There’s no other security company which has held all its contracts for more than five years. They’ve held the public transport contract for three consecutive periods. No other company has done this. On top of that, Orbit have kept all their contracts for a decade. They’re the best option we have.”

“You’ve made a good case for Orbit.” Alvin turned his attention to Simon. “Do you agree with Phil?”

“No, not on this occasion.” Simon answered.

“What makes you disagree with him?”

“I’m seeing this from a perspective of the potential gains we could make with a new player. Although Valerian Security have only been around for a year, they’re creating a name for themselves. I’ve spoken to all of their clients and they’ve told me that there’s no security company who provides guards who are so professional in their performance.”

“I’ll take another look through the profiles of Orbit and Valerian. After that, I’ll make my decision.

Later that day, Alvin rang Micky Gaines, the CEO of Valerian Protection to inform him that Valerian Protection was chosen for the new three-year security contract. In the months following the signing of the contract, the quality of the guards was proven to be better than any of the other firms which previously worked for Alkaline Robotics and Electronics. The droids were significantly more productive in the manufacturing of electronic equipment and there were no longer any cases of droids malfunctioning in the workplace. Alvin even reached the stage where he consulted Phil and Simon in regard to whether or not the company should start designing and creating weapons. Phil argued against this direction while Simon made a case for it. In the end, Alvin decided to go ahead with an application for a license for weapons manufacturing and received federal government approval in the space of a few weeks. In the following weeks, droids were used to test the reliability of weapons. One day, Alvin turned up to his workplace to discover that Phil was absent. He made several attempts to contact him either on his mobile phone or at his home number but there was no answer. He made his way to Simon Mann’s office and had a discussion with him.

“Phil hasn’t turned up for work. I tried to contact him but he doesn’t respond. What do you think is going on?”

“He must have jumped ship. Our decision to manufacture weapons has turned him off.”

“You’ve got a good point there. Ever since we won a license from the government to expand our activities, Phil hasn’t been in good spirits.”

“He’s got a closed mind. He can’t adapt to change.”

“You’re right, he stays the same unlike me.”

“You’ve changed a lot.”

“Yes, I’m evolving in the right direction.” Alvin could feel the speed of his pulse increasing without knowing why this was the case. “I’m impressed with what I’ve seen. I’d like to see more.”

“I’ll show you the latest weapon that we could manufacture but we can’t do it without your permission.”

“If you show me where it is, I’ll have a look at it.”

Leaving Simon’s office, they reached the section of the demonstrations room which contained a synthetic grass field with plastic dummies spread out along different points. Simon took out an electronic boomerang along with a remote control pad from a sample weapons cabinet. The control pad featured a control panel with a directions stick and three buttons. The first button was flight mode, the second button was strike mode and the third button was blade mode. Simon pressed the flight mode button and threw the boomerang in the direction of a dummy. It simply flew around the dummy and returned into Simon’s hand. He threw the boomerang again and pressed the strike mode button after releasing it. The boomerang hit the dummy in the head before returning into Simon’s hand. He threw the boomerang a third time and pressed the blade button. As the boomerang was flying in the air, blades came out of its’ two ends. The boomerang struck the dummy in the throat and it was decapitated. After the decapitation, the boomerang dropped down to the ground near the feet of the dummy. Alvin smiled at what he saw.

“You have my full approval.”

“When can we sign the documents?” Simon asked.

“We can do it now.”

When they reached Alvin’s office, Simon took out a few documents from a folder and handed them to Alvin. Alvin read through them. The documents consisted of an agreement to engage in business with Advantage Weaponry and a contract allowing any demonstrations of weaponry from this company to take place at Alkaline Robotics and Electronics. Alvin immediately took the necessary steps to make this contract a reality. In a matter of minutes, he was quick to scan the documents and email them to Advantage Weaponry as a desire to expand his company even further was pulsating through his veins. Simon smiled at Alvin with a sinister kind of smile he never saw before.

“You’ve made the transition to becoming the man you were supposed to be.”

“I’m just being myself.”

“You’ve become more than that. You’ve made the first step for us to create an army of robot soldiers.”

As Alvin thought carefully about these words, he realized that Simon was right. The droids were becoming increasingly intelligent in their handling of weapons. They could distinguish between each weapon and properly describe its’ functions in full detail. As each week progressed, droids were more accurate at firing guns and took a lot less time to change from one cartridge to another in any firearm. The rate of development that was taking place among the droids could only indicate the emergence of robots that eventually become highly effective on a battlefield. Alvin was looking forward to the day when his droids would be reliable soldiers of war.

“You’re right.” Alvin said.

“Now that we see eye to eye, it’s time for you to see the full truth.”

“What truth are you talking about?”

“The truth about my identity, the truth about who I am.”

“You can’t play tricks on me like that. I know who you are. You always have and always will be Simon Mann.”

“No, I’m not Simon Mann. I’ll prove to you that I’m not him.”

The man who seemed to be Simon took a voice manipulator out of his pocket and held it in front of Alvin. Its’ light was flashing to indicate that it was on. He switched it off.

“I’m not Simon Mann. I’m Rob Hearn.” He said with the voice of Rob Hearn. After saying this, he took out a spray can from a bag and sprayed it on his face. In a matter of seconds, synthetic tissue and skin were falling off his face. His appearance was now that of Rob Hearn, a worker who left the company several months previously out of a disagreement with the direction of the company. “Simon and Phil are dead. I’m the one who killed them. You are now part of the global family of Omega Services”.

Everything was clearer to Alvin. Simon and Phil did not have inclinations to violence and could not be changed. They had to be eliminated. Alvin was different from them. He had a family history of domestic violence and could be changed for the worse. The supplements provided to him for the diet were simply drugs that made him a lot more inclined to violence. The buzzing sound in his office must have also been a contributing factor to his change of character. That sound probably contained subliminal messages designed to make him violent. As Alvin thought about the newly formed instinct of aggression within him, he realized that there would be no turning back to the way things used to be.