

Hexsus

Written by Radn Arcane

Chapter 1

The year was 2036

Dusk loomed over an American, LED lit city. On the horizon, a thunderstorm rumbled and sporadic flashes of violet lightning occurred. This city seemed old, neglected and had large, abandoned neighbourhoods. Traffic lines on the white pavement were lit by tiny LED lights, including the road signs. Many LED lights throughout the city flicker and have segments missing in their patterns.

Regarding traffic, outside lanes on main roads have been dedicated to double sided, train-trucks hauling ten bus lengths at a time. This city only had a few transit skytrains though most of them have been out of service for quite some time, telling from their cracking condition, having plants growing from out of them. About half of the civilian LED lit vehicles were electric, whereas the other half were hybrids of gasoline and diesel. Many of them had decals resembling what tattoos look like. Most were driverless while the drivers did other activities; when they were not supposed to. Riding alongside these civilian vehicles were electric bicycles, scooters, rollerblades and skateboards. Some of whom were going just as fast as the traffic speed limit. Though more tended to travel much slower in order to cross back and forth between the roads, bike lanes, alleyways and sidewalk as to expedite their commutes. On the roadsides, parked vehicles were positioned so close to one another, it would appear impossible to achieve a parallel park. Underneath one of them pulling out, two rubber pivot rollers extended down and elevated it up off the ground by just a couple centimetres. Once jacked-up, the car horizontally moved itself on these pivot rollers, resulting in a smooth exit.

Inside the two, main public transit systems, were where the majority of the working class people were packed together. On the streets, alleyways and everything in between, hundreds of homeless lingered and loitered. Practically everyone was wearing facial accessories, called facial fashion. Accessories like masks, some form of eye shields, wireless headphones and or earmuffs connected with the design of various kinds of hats. Some were even wearing custom, motorcycle-like helmets.

Roving above the street lamps, numerous flying police drone quadcopters called prones, were monitoring the dense population. Signifying they were prones, they had one blue and one red light on each of their sides.

Amongst this city, a rundown, sixty story apartment building had fading and blinking LED coloured lights aligning its edges. Within its packed parking lot, a fancy, white sports car opened its driver door. Exiting it, was a twenty-seven-year-old, 188-centimetre tall, caucasian blonde man, with bright blue eyes, named Shane Chambers.

Next, he hurried to plug in another black sedan, close by his charger. It was into this car he transferred a heavy duffle bag. Once this was done, he walked at a fast pace towards the apartment building.

Abruptly, Shane entered his two bedroom, bare apartment. As soon as the door closed, he called, 'Jade!' Without taking off his jacket nor shoes, he rushed to the bedroom. It was almost as if no one lived here because there was no sign of decorations or furniture, except for a plain, wooden dining table.

Looking up, a twenty-four-year-old, 170-centimetre tall, caucasian brunette woman named Jade Just, lowered the book she was reading. When she did, Shane was already standing in his bedroom doorway, wearing a concerned facial expression.

'Shane, what are you—'

'We need to pack everything,' Shane spoke quickly. 'Today was that day, Jade. It's time. Take care of the hard drives.' In response, she furrowed her eyebrows and looked down at the book she was holding. 'Jade?' Rising to her feet, she stood up and tossed the book down onto the bedside.

'Are we running or sneaking away?' she reluctantly guessed.

'Both. I've taken care of it. The contingency plan...now,' he implored. Before walking through the doorway, he reached for Jade's hand, stopped her and then stepped in for a passionate kiss. When Shane pulled away, he told her, 'I'm sorry.'

'Tell me why you are later,' she replied in an aggravated tone. Once he let go of her, Jade left. Next, Shane quickly opened the closet, took out a suitcase and proceeded to open it.

The second bedroom door of Shane's apartment swung open, revealing his office and Jade entering. The room was full of computers and office equipment. In a hurry, she logged into the main computer. While it activated, Jade plugged in a magnetic thumb drive called a mag-drive, that had a hexagonal, green pattern on it. Using a holographic touch pad, she dragged and dropped a file named, "Hexsus," onto the mag-drive's green hexagon emblem. Within a few seconds, the Hexsus file finished downloading. After Jade deleted the Hexsus file, she carried out a total hard-drive deletion. Finally, from the computer's mag-port, she unplugged the mag-drive.

Outside on the apartment balcony, Jade stroked and lit a single match. As she held the lit match over a metal garbage can, it dimly illuminated her face. Meanwhile, the city streets below buzzed with traffic. In front of the horizon, the thunderstorm crept towards the city and the wind was picking up. Inside the garbage can, hard drives, notebooks and loose papers were piled all over each other. Tearing up, Jade looked down at her tears dripping into the garbage can. Letting go of the match, she dropped it into the can, now watching its contents catch fire. Within seconds Shane's work, including her own, became engulfed in flames.

When Jade entered the bedroom, she found Shane packing a second suitcase to its brim. It was her entrance which caused him to stop and turn around.

'It's done?' he asked. In response, Jade nodded once. Turning back around, Shane continued on packing the suitcase. 'We should be on the road by now.'

'Shane...are we in danger?' For a moment he paused and turned to look at her.

'No, I've bought us time," he assured. 'I'll explain everything once we're on the road. Every second added to our head start. Do you trust me?'

'You know I do.'

'Then help me.'

Joining his side, Jade began packing as well and inquired, 'Where are we going?'

Through a thunderstorm, Shane and Jade travelled in her black sedan, on a crowded highway, out of the city. In the back seat, Jack, their son, resided. Being a blonde haired, two-month-old infant, Jack made subtle noises of whimpering. Turning around, Jade looked at Jack within his car seat. When passing under a street lamp, its light illuminated his bright blue eyes; just like Shane's eyes.

'Don't worry honey, it's going to be okay,' Jade uttered softly. As soon as she gave Jack a milk bottle full of a green liquid, he instantly sucked on its nozzle, in turn causing him to become silent.

'There,' she said with a nod and smile. When Jade faced forward, she then looked at Shane in the driver seat. 'Shane?'

Before answering her, he took in a large breath and revealed, 'For the past few months, I've been holding back our research from entering mass production.'

Reacting with a squint and head shake, Jade then said, 'I thought we could trust Core. You practically founded the corporation yourself. This...this was going to be our one shot.'

'I know,' he acknowledged.

'What about the prototypes?'

'One is in the trunk.'

'Seriously? Where is the other one?' Jade questioned.

'I shipped it.'

Taking a pause, Jade swallowed once and then demanded, 'Where?'

'My roommate I had back in uni, Justin.'

'Justin?' she repeated while widening her eyes.

'He won't even know how to turn it on, let alone use it.'

'Justin...seriously?'

'My parents are dead, I'm an only child and books were my friends. All I really had was my studies. Justin is the only person I really know who has an address.'

'What about my parents? Wait...that's where we're going.' In response, Shane nodded. 'Why did you split them up?'

'Circumstance.'

'What happened?'

'I could only smuggle one out at a time. They are quite heavy and my timing had to be perfect, for both times.'

'Oh...I see.' For a quiet time, Jade thought of her next question. 'Then tell me why this is happening?'

'Recently, I've lost trust in Core and its new executive board.'

'New? This is news to me.'

'I was just informed on the new deal this afternoon. Hence why we are on the road tonight. They want to militarize our work.'

'What?' Jade reacted in a hushed tone.

'For weapons, for...armour,' he informed.

'That happened today?'

Leading with a nod, Shane continued, 'Not a single board member was not onboard with this new deal. They all received raises, promotions and office upgrades. So I...I alone pulled the plug.' Through the passenger window, Jade looked out and developed a worried facial expression.

'Which they don't know yet,' she presumed.

'You and I both know weapons have only one purpose. I will not make us technically responsible for the death of no one, no matter what. So we can turn a profit? No...not us.'

'I thought Core's plan...our plan was to construct construction materials; not weapons.'

'It was, at first. But Richards and the board went behind my back and made another deal with a man he named General Grey.'

'A general?' Jade repeated while raising her eyebrows.

'Point is, Richards saw a means to profit even further. Jade, they want to incorporate it into everything, this includes weapons.'

'Our work will make firearms practically obsolete when one embodies—'

'I know,' Shane replied and shook his head. A brief moment of silence passed as he drove through the pouring rain. 'Everything they own in their arsenal will be virtually impenetrable.'

'Warfare as we know, would change,' Jade added.

'And you know as well as I do that it does not just stop there. Its potential can extend even further. Transcending past what I first sold Richards on.'

'I thought you made him know just enough for his own good, to avoid a problem such as this Shane. We haven't even begun to test our latter theories yet.'

'I'm not the only scientist at Core. I haven't been for some time now. Richards hired more to watch over me. To attain intel on the dumbed down intel I was feeding him.'

'Like a lawyer watching your lawyer,' she compared.

'I did my half, funded by Core. The half they only partially know about. As you did your half, behind closed doors at home. This was our plan, to secure our safety. For the upper-hand, for the sake of secrecy. It's the reason why we didn't get married.'

'All they really had was the prototypes. Now that they don't have them, they will go looking for them...and for us,' Jade assumed.

'I should have known Richards would try to bingo a bigger, better, bountiful bonus.'

First smiling, Jade shook her head and ranted, 'There are those like Richards and his affiliates who could care less of the wonder, of the discoveries, of unearthing fundamental secrets. Answers on whatever this universe really is. They cannot and do not want to comprehend complex data. It makes them feel stupid, makes them feel... confused and afraid; inferior.'

'They fund people like us for one purpose. For that final lifetime paycheque,' he highlighted.

'With it, we would have made them invincible. The world as we know it, would enter a new age. The stone age, the bronze age, the iron age, the silicon age, the digital and now...'

'I won't allow it. Not by my hands,' Shane interrupted.

'Without a handful of individual scientists, humans would still be wondering where the sun and moon go at night. Let alone knowing we are in a galaxy among many. Using electricity at will for the...the...'

'It will be fine Jade. Without your half, my half is useless to them. Manufacturing it is impossible without the prototypes. Knowing what they know, if they tried, it will still be too brittle and too slow of a process.'

Within Jade's jacket pocket, she pulled out her green mag-drive and informed Shane, 'I downloaded my life onto this. I made sure the main hard-drives were destroyed and even took them with us. But won't they...they will come looking for us,' she assumed with worry in her voice.

'Your side of our work was kept completely separate at home, away from Core. You are safe. Our work is safe. Core and their connections have no clue about you. You and Jack have your own last name, a car registered under a friend's name, including having your Canadian citizenship.' Reaching out, Shane placed his hand onto Jade's lap. When doing this, she did the same. 'They have no knowledge that I even live with you. My apartment is on an entirely different floor, as a smokescreen; just like we planned.'

'What about you? When we cross the border...they'll know.'

'I've bought myself enough time. My identity won't be flagged by then.'

'This general may have put out an alert already,' Jade pointed out.

'As far as they know, I am using some of my vacation days. We are a day out from the border. It's the weekend so next Monday will be the day in which I don't show

up. Even then, I can call in sick or use more vacation days. I can make excuses to buy time until they suspect something is up,' Shane reasoned.

'Okay.' For now, Jade could not think of another question. Meanwhile, Shane remained silent and focused on driving. All that could be heard was the heavy rain pouring outside as they drove away from the city and into the dark countryside.

The sun shone as Shane steered off the highway and into a lone, gas station restaurant. The restaurant was nearly full because it was the only stop for a hundred kilometres. Next to the fuel pump, he parked at the charger.

'You guys go in and get a table, I'll plug it in,' he said. In response, Jade nodded and then opened the passenger door. Sound asleep, Jack was resting within his car seat.

When Jade stepped out of the car, she stretched and yawned. Next, she took Jack out of the back seat and held him within her arms, causing Jack to slowly open his eyes.

'All right honey, time to fuel up,' Jade told Jack, kissing him on his head.

'I'll be right in,' Shane notified, right before plugging the charger jack into Jade's car. While carrying Jack, Jade made her way to the restaurant's entrance. As they do, Shane appeared sad while watching them.

The busy restaurant buzzed with many people chit chatting. At a booth table, Jade set Jack down into a booster seat, then took a seat beside him. Almost right after, a Waitress approached their table and greeted, 'Gooooood afternoon.'

'Good afternoon,' Jade replied and smiled.

'What can I start you two off with this morning? Coffee, water? Juice for the little man? Aw, isn't he just a perfect plump peach on a sunny summer Saturday.'

'I'll have a water, a black coffee for my partner and an orange juice for the perfect plump peach.'

'We have peach juice actually,' The Waitress offered.

'Sure, why not.'

With a smile, the Waitress reported, 'Okay, I'll be back soon.'

'Thank you.'

'You're welcome.' As the Waitress left, Shane entered the restaurant and walked towards where Jade and Jack were seated.

'Why can't we all just get along and work together,' Shane said, taking a seat from across Jade. 'Things would be so much easier. But no, we would rather work alone and profit over the destruction of earth. Cut each others' heads off in the middle east and develop weapons of mass destruction in *developed* countries. Yeah...yeah that sounds like a superb plan to me.' After finishing his rant, Shane took in a large breath, followed by sighing.

Reaching from across the table, Jade placed her hand on his forearm and told

him, 'Shane, I'm sure this will all blow over and you'll get another job elsewhere. You're putting too much weight onto your shoulders.'

'Jade, you and I were and still are the tip of the Core's spear. Without us they're lost, they are finished as a company. And whatever that general invested, will be lost as well.'

'What do you think is going to happen then?'

'Richards and his political connections will be looking for the one who is liable. Richards is but a puppet.' In order to signal Shane, Jade let go of his arm due to the approaching waitress walking towards them. When the Waitress returned, she set the drinks down onto the table.

After the Waitress placed the coffee down, Shane picked it up immediately and held it up to his nose. 'Thank you.'

'You're welcome. Long night?'

'It's still going,' Jade admitted to the Waitress.

'Aw, well at least the peach got in some rest I'm sure. But that was a wicked lightning storm last night.'

'It was,' Shane confirmed.

An awkward pause ensued so the Waitress asked, 'So...any of you know what you'll like this morning?'

With just a couple second glances, Shane answered, 'Yeah...I'll uhhhhh, I'll take the number 7 please. Brown bread, over easy and bacon.'

'Allllll right, and yourself ma'am?'

'And I will take the number 6 thanks, brown toast, scrambled. We have food prepped already for our little one,' Jade informed.

'Okay, I'll be back as soon as it's ready.'

'Thanks,' Jade said with a smile.

'Thank you,' Shane added. Splitting a smile and giving a nod, the Waitress picked up the menus, turned around and headed back towards the kitchen.

Springing back on point, Jade spoke, 'My parents' home is the safest place. My father was a supreme judge. Maybe he can do something for us.'

Letting out a sigh, Shane stretched his eyes with both hands. 'What is it?' she asked in a concerned tone.

'I'm so sorry Jade.'

Responding with furrowed eyebrows, Jade told him, 'Don't be.'

'This way you and Jack are protected. This way there will be no collateral damage, no innocent blood on our hands. We have our head start but soon, they will expect something is up.'

'What if we take our work to someone else? Someone we could trust,' Jade proposed.

'I thought I could trust Richards. Someone, as in one country though? Or

another corporation? Yeah hopefully, Jade, eventually. For I don't know of any billionaires, let alone any millionaires. Ones who are scientifically literate enough to be able to even understand us.'

'Might as well be speaking a different language to them. Science...it is its own language,' Jade stated. 'But forget all of that, we'll show them.'

'This is exactly what they're afraid of. Me taking their investment and patenting it myself, for myself. Or signing another contract with another corporation.'

'Nations and corporations have their own agendas. With their own personal politicians within their own pockets.'

'And these pretentious, presumptuous, pompous puppet politicians are laughing to the bank,' Shane alliterated.

'Nice.'

'Instead, every nation is on their own. Within their own borders, pursuing their own down to earth short term, lifespan restricted goals.'

'Every country, everyone for themselves,' Jade included.

'Trying to become king of the hill on this rock orbiting a bigger rock, orbiting an even bigger one that's adrift in whatever this universe really is; it's pathetic. So, we must compromise and do the same for now. Until an opportunity presents itself. If exploring space provided an instant paycheque, we would physically be beyond our solar system by now.'

While making an eye roll, Jade said, 'It always ends up ending in space with you.'

'The unknown answers to all of our known questions are out there, Jade, just waiting. What's really sad is why we continue to wait, continue to waste our one and only time getting laid, eating, waiting to punch out. Waiting for the weekend so we can get laid and eat some more. More and more we spend the future of our children's children.'

'Let's just get to my parents' home for now. We have no choice but to wait, so solving the future can come later. My parents live just outside of Calgary. We'll think up of something there, Shane. We always do.' Neither spoke for a moment while he thought deeply. Jade watched him in anticipation for she knew his deep thinking look.

'We...will wrought what we wondered,' Shane said at a low volume.

'What?'

'Never mind. For now, we have to make sure we put distance in between us and them. We can build what we need bit by bit, day by day until one day, we can make a difference, for our children.' While he looked at Jack smiling, Jade let out a large sigh and shook her head.

'Building another prototype without funding would be impossible. With just one prototype, producing material could take ages.'

'Capitalism, where money and a good idea have to go hand in hand. It's sad

because if you have a potential notion, you need money to make it into a reality. Without money, your notion is but a notion in a notebook.'

'Money talks,' Jade summarized.

'It's why most of us are voiceless,' he claimed.

'That's why we will never give up, no matter what. There are people out there a lot like us that are...simply stuck. Financially frozen because of this, king of the hill, every-man-for-their-self system, everyone stepping on each other to obtain as much as he or she possibly can before their one time is up.'

'At the expense of earth,' Shane included.

'Our children.' A brief moment of silence passed as Jade and Shane took a look at Jack.

'Man, I wish we could just take off to another planet and start fresh. Leaving the selfish others to breed themselves to death, to fight over the oil and gas, the trees and eventually what's left of the food and clean drinking water.'

'I feel so sorry for the innocent animals caught in our crossfire, caught in our futile, self destructive economic growth mandate. We...we're going to try and stop it, right Shane?'

'If someone knows something, something that could change anything for the better, then it's their obligation, their responsibility to use their ability for humanity's future. Anything but is wasted, squandered, lost. Of course we're going to try, Jade. I'll die trying,' Shane professed. A long pause occurred while he stared off into space.

'What is it, Shane?'

'This is where and when you and I have to separate,' Shane announced. Jade could tell he was serious and her heart sank into her stomach.

'Wait...what? *No*,' she objected.

'You know our work is bigger than us. Putting us before everyone else would be wrong; I know you know this because I love you.'

'Shane...there must be another way,' she suggested, now breathing heavily.

'Jade, breathe.' He advised. 'This is the only way until we may see each other someday again. Our hands are tied.'

Placing her hands onto the table, Jade snarked, '*May*? I don't care about our work. Not unless it worked out with you. Without you...there is no point to our work.'

'Without our children, without Jack, there is no point,' Shane implored.

'You know what I speak of.'

'I will return. I'll die trying Jade. You know I will.'

'If you don't, I'll assume so,' she uttered.

'If I don't, you'll know so.'

'You knew you were going to do this prior. This was our plan yet you took it upon yourself to change it. Withholding information, vital knowledge such as this is a lie to me and you don't lie to someone if you love them.'

'I did because my love does not compare to the demise of others.' The reasoning behind Shane's remark sparked admiration within Jade. Deep down, the realization was clear to her; she was being selfish.

'You're right,' she confessed. In turn, Shane raised his chin and waited for Jade to tell him why he was right. 'I wouldn't have listened to you back in the city. Getting us this far was enough momentum before what was once our plan began moving. Given your circumstances I...I would have done the same thing.'

'I love you Jade.'

'I love you Shane,' she mirrored as the tears began gushing out. Next, he stood up and stepped next to Jade. Looking up at Shane with a devastated facial expression, she questioned, 'Now? What are you going to do? How can I reach out to you?'

'For our safety, it's best if we don't communicate nor is it a good idea to know where I am going. I'll be using my credit card to lead them away. After which, I'll change directions again and go off grid.'

'Then tell me at least...what you're going to do, Shane...to fix this?'

'I'm going to fix this, I promise,' he answered, followed by placing his hand upon Jack's head. Next, Shane commanded, 'You watch over your mother while I'm gone.' Leaning over, he moved in and kissed Jade on her forehead. At the same time, Shane took out a mag-drive from within his jacket pocket. It was the exact same as Jade's mag-drive, however his was white. Once she received Shane's mag-drive, she immediately concealed it in her jacket. Right after, Jade pulled him down into a long kiss.

Once they pulled away from one another, Shane said, 'An idea is only half of the puzzle. You have to put it together now. I know you will and...I know you will give Jack what we all deserve; a fair, free future.'

First turning around, Shane walked away and towards the restaurant's exit. Just before leaving, he looked over his shoulder to find Jade staring back at him. In due course, his exit broke their sight of one another.

Carrying Jack on the way to the car, Jade looked around with tear filled eyes, seeing no sign of Shane. By Jade, Jack was placed into his car seat. After closing its back door, she proceeded to enter herself.

In a moment of silence, Jade inhaled a large breath. Breaking her stillness, she looked down to her right and noticed a folded piece of paper lying on the passenger seat. Without blinking, Jade stared at the piece of paper.

Across Canadian farmland highways, Jade drove on a beautiful, warm day. When she opened the back windows, it caused Jack to giggle. On the passenger seat, Shane's note was laid open. He apologized, 'I'm so sorry Jade. I had no choice but to leave. Staying would put you and Jack at risk. It would have put everyone in danger. It

had to be like this.'

Through a small town, Jade drove among sparse traffic. Shane's note continued on as written, 'Once I have cleared my name. I will find you Jade. I left you, Jack and everything we made.'

Through the Canadian mid-countryside, Jade drove due west on a highway, following behind the setting sun. Shane's note continued, 'I wouldn't leave that. I wouldn't leave you knowing I did not have a chance to have what we had back. What we had, what we shared, it was the defining moment of my life.'

In the back seat, Jack sucked on his milk bottle containing the green liquid. Meanwhile, Jade was outside of the car, parked on the side of a highway, next to a seemingly limitless wheat field. A slight breeze passed as she watched the wheat sway with it. Shane noted, "I have to try and fix this. But first and foremost you have to understand that you and Jack must be in a safe place.' Using a cellphone, Jade scrolled down on her contact list and selected, 'Judge Just.' Up to her ear, she placed the cellphone.

At the entrance of a hundred-metre long driveway, Jade slowed down in her car and stopped in front of a black, rod iron gate. It was already dusk and Jade appeared exhausted. In the middle of the gate, a metal letter, 'J,' sat in between its bars. Before the driveway's asphalt dried, a tamper-like device called a concrete cookie cutter imprinted a hexagonal pattern into its entirety. On each side of the gate, two, four-metre, fake, concrete columns stand attached. Mounted on one of the columns, a security camera was oriented down on the entrance. The note written by Shane concluded, 'A safe place far from here. Your parents' home like we talked about. From all of this, something great will arise, I know it, Jade. I love you.' The gate slowly opened for Jade to start driving towards the large, three-story Just home. On each side of the driveway, small deciduous trees aligned the sides. Furthermore, scattered all over the land in random patches were various kinds of flowers, ferns and numerous sizes of fake, concrete rocks.

The Just home was situated on a seventy-acre piece of land, with a four-metre tall chicken wire fence spanning its entire perimeter. Throughout the property, fields and large patches of forest resided. Beyond the Just property, other signs of homes or buildings were nowhere to be seen, except for the faint glow that the nearest city provided, just over the horizon. Along the driveway and beside the trees, more large, fake rocks have been installed. At the middle point and on each side of the driveway, two, life sized, concrete statues of a woman and man face one another. The robed woman was blind folded and holding up a scale. Whereas the man was wearing a damaged, knight-like armour, clutching a chipped and cracked sword, pointing down between his legs.

The Just home's entire roof was covered with solar panels and a complete wraparound deck. The deck's railing and pillars were also made of concrete, resembling Romanesque style columns. Additionally, mounted on the sides of the home, have a

couple small, spinning windmills. In front of the garage, Jade parked and lost herself staring at her childhood house.

It was early, on a cool spring day. Fifteen-year-old Jade sat alone on the Just home's front porch steps, dressed in torn coveralls, with her hair in a neat ponytail. Looking mad, her eyebrows were furrowed and her eyes were a bit red. Wearing a formidable, clean, three-piece suit, her father, John, had his car keys and suitcase already in hand when he stepped through the front door. Nearly half of John's hair was grey including his clean shaven beard. Beside Jade, John took a seat.

Looking to Jade, John spoke, 'You know, in all my years, I have never seen someone as young as yourself, pay so much attention to global affairs. You're better off worrying about yourself first and foremost. What *you* are going to do with *your* life. You're even better off spending a little more time with your friends. Or, perhaps being out here like you are, outside enjoying the fresh air.'

'It is why I am here.'

'Oh I know why you're out here, Jade. Trust me, I heard the door slam.'

'I'm sorry,' Jade apologized.

'I've heard it far too many times.'

Looking down, Jade stared at her feet and uttered, 'Sorry.'

'Jade...you shouldn't let the world's negative affairs get to you so much. You have nothing to be sorry about.'

Looking to John, she rallied, 'If it didn't get to me then what would that say, Judge? What would that say, about me?'

'Most people do care, they really do. But most people don't have enough control in order to cause a big change. To affect the world on a global scale, a national level, state, provincial or even within their own county, their own municipality. Let alone affecting their own lives for a better change, a greater cause.'

'If that's correct, then that is all we need; in order to change.'

'What's that?' John asked.

'Most of the people.' In response John smiled, nodded and chuckled.

'You are right. However sometimes, one can make all the differences. But Jade, one such as yourself, for someone so young, who inherited this world, you shouldn't feel sorry.'

'My hands are tied while I watch.' The statement made by Jade caused John to raise his chin and silence what he was going to say. 'I feel guilty that I can't untie myself. If one doesn't feel guilt, then that someone doesn't care deep down because it... for it doesn't bother them; deep down.'

'I concur.'

'I can't help it when I'm here at home, helpless. On the sidelines, benched because I don't have the credibility, the control, the power, the money, the freedom. All I'm doing is watching and...waiting.'

'Your time will come, Jade. Like everyone, you will get the chance to make a choice. Whether that choice will make a change for the better is entirely up to you. It always has been, it still is and always will be.'

'Why can't we all just get along, Judge? Why even bother spending money on war and weapons?'

'Fear,' John claimed.

'We should be working together,' she proposed.

'I know.'

'Using our money for our societies infrastructure and renewable energies, taking care of our own poor people.'

'I don't disagree.'

'Why don't we use our own military, at home?'

'What do you mean?' John inquired.

'We are already feeding and housing our soldiers. Why don't they help keep our communities safe from crime and mass shooters?'

'That sounds like a win-win to me.'

'Such a waste...despite a couple global conflicts, there is no war going on. In the meantime, militaries should supplement their own country, at home where we need them. The police, fire fighters, health care workers, our teachers...hell our *children* need their help now!' The emotional conclusion to Jade's idea gave pause to John, for he could feel the pain in his daughter's voice.

'To be honest, I'm surprised countries across the world aren't already doing this,' he admitted.

'And at least spend twenty five cents of every tax dollar on a better space program. Half a cent is a joke!'

'It's even less for Canada,' John added.

'The real punchline is what America has done on half a penny. Other countries lag much further behind America's halved penny.'

'While we're at it, why not make it twenty six cents,' he suggested.

'Why not make fifty, why not seventy five cents! Could you imagine?' Jade proposed with a grin.

'Jade, you know I agree with you a hundred percent. How many times are we going to discuss this before you understand?'

'I know. I've been a broken record lately. I'm sorry.' Shaking his head, John then placed his arm around Jade's shoulders.

'I'm sorry you feel so sorry. I don't blame you for getting frustrated. Jade, I've experienced a lot in my life all right. Things happened that I had no control over. Things I'd rather not mention let alone witness. But the path I chose gave me some control. And in those years of control, you want to know what I have learned as a judge?'

'Do tell.'

'I have come to believe in theory until proven fact.'

'Just like innocent until proven guilty,' she compared.

Affirming Jade's comparison with a nod, John continued, 'No one is above nor below the law. Law is our tool to maintain the line between good and evil. The law is dependent on truth. The truth is in facts. Differentiating the facts from the theories reveals the innocent from the guilty.'

'An axiom,' Jade clarified.

'An unanimous, axiomatic consensus as to not blur the line which separates sanity from insanity.'

'Peace and chaos,' she revised.

'Any ideas as to what we can all agree upon?'

'That there should be enough food, clean water, clean air and simply a better quality of life for not just us humans but for all of the ecosystems. Everything else is irrelevant until these necessities are sustained and taken care of. Not just maintained for us but for those like us, living eons from now as well.'

'Otherwise everything we do now will be without purpose. Everything we have done will have been done in vain.' Leaning over, John kissed Jade on the top of her head and then took his arm from off her shoulders. 'I have to go now. We'll talk later this evening. But you are right, Jade.' After standing up, John carried on down the porch steps. Halfway to his car, he turned around and looked at Jade staring back. 'People prefer bringing up the problems with no verbs to solve them themselves. Almost as if they take pride in calling out for what or who is to blame. Try to focus on the solution, Jade. Time is better spent that way. Yes the two are intrinsic, however this way your broken record won't sound so broken anymore.'

With a nod, Jade answered, 'Thanks Dad, I'll try.'

'I know you will,' he encouraged with a smile. 'I love you.'

'I love you too,' she replied, watching him turn around and walk towards his car.

Both in their elderly years now, John and his wife, Ali Just, were just joining Jade in front of their garage. Passing them, their four, large dogs barked and ran towards Jade with Jack in her arms. Ali was almost identical to her daughter, except having grey hair and looking much older. As Jade walked and carried Jack, the dogs curiously circled around them. Alongside John, Ali stepped into a quadruple hug with Jade and Jack. Seconds later, Jade began whimpering.

'It's okay, Jade. You're here now and you're safe,' Ali told her. After they all let go of one another, she presumed, 'You must be exhausted. Here, let me lighten the load.' Letting go of Jack, Jade placed him into Ali's arms. With both hands, Jade wiped tears from her cheeks as she watched John and Ali take a moment to gaze upon Jack.

Trembling, Jade uttered, 'I'm sorry, I wanted to visit earlier but...but I...'

Shaking his head, John said, 'Jade, don't.'

'It's my fault,' she admitted. 'I never made time to go out of my way to make time. We...we were going to but Shane and I were just about...just about to...' Taking a deep breath, Jade looked down and shook her head.

Placing both hands upon Jade's shoulders, John assured, 'There's time. We're here for you. We always were and will be. Go on inside with your mother. I'll get your things out of the car, okay?'

'Thanks Dad.' Alongside Jade and the four dogs, Ali carried Jack to the Just home's front entrance. At the same time, John walked towards Jade's car.

Chapter 2

Six months later, it was a sunny, summer day shining down upon the Just home.

Within one of the Just home washrooms, Jade was naked and looking at herself in the mirror. Hair down, it extended to her elbows. Picking up a pair of scissors, Jade began cutting her own hair. Chunk by chunk, she snipped off large portions, dropping them into the sink.

First exiting the shower, Jade moved on to wipe the thick condensation from off the mirror. In turn, revealing her new, short hair.

Setting down the blow dryer, Jade started shaping her hair into a side parted style haircut. For a moment of silence, she stared at herself in the mirror. Despite the touch of sadness looming within Jade's facial expression, she tried putting on a small smile.

About a hundred metres from the Just home, a large circular pond with reeds and fake concrete rocks surrounded its perimeter. An eye-catching concrete sculpture was of a realistic human hand, just reaching through the pond's surface. The fake rocks also subtly resided throughout the backyard, here and there. Just behind the pond, was a life-sized, concrete statue of a stag. Perched on a low lying tree branch, a concrete grey horned owl stood guard. Also sticking out, a lengthy, concrete dragon appeared to be hiding between some trees. Throughout the property, more life-sized, concrete statues lurked in discrete positions. Connecting the whole property, cookie cut concrete sidewalks fractal through it. In some areas, small, concrete staircases had to be built into the land.

Near the back of the property, hidden behind a large patch of trees was a thirty-metre silo. At its top appeared to be a glass room with a large telescope pointing through its roof. On top of its roof, a large rotatable mirror reflected light downwards across the backyard and onto a small boiler unit. Throughout the backyard, the four dogs, two cats and five bunnies played and snooped around. On a blanket laid out on the lawn, Ali used action figures to play with Jack. All the while, John was busy feeding the few horses in their stables. Walking towards Ali and Jack, Jade made her way across the backyard, down a miniature stairwell and then along a cookie cut concrete sidewalk. This particular sidewalk had leaf imprints scattered across it. Trying to hold back a smile, Jade could not seem to, due to her new appearance and her mother's eye widening reaction.

'I know I know,' Jade said while looking at her feet.

'Jade...*your hair*. Wow you...you look different...great different of course, sorry. I don't think I've seen your hair that short since, since you were just a little Just.' In response, Jade smiled as Ali placed her hand on top of Jack's head, causing him to smile.

'It's been a while and I felt like a change. You know, I found your snake statue

the other day. It freaked me out.'

'Oh you found my cobra hey? Yeah, I put her there because I like the way she intertwines with the tree roots.'

'You have really outdone yourself mother. The fake rocks, the columns, the statues they...they are all so beautiful; lifelike.'

'Oh thank you. It keeps me busy. The silo your father upgraded with a mirror, has been keeping him busy just before you returned.'

'Yeah, it's amazing how it amplifies the light shining down onto the boiler over there, pretty cool. Steam to power the generators, right?'

With a nod, Ali Answers Jade and informed, 'We're entirely off the grid now. We even had a geothermal electrode installed. Did your father mention that?'

'Really? No, how deep?' Jade asked.

'Well, we just so happen to be in a zone that has a lot of geothermal activity beneath us. We only had to drill down a few-hundred-metres. The aug was massive and required a lot of yard repair as you could imagine. Despite the planks they laid down.'

'I bet.'

'Hey your father was wondering, as am I...'

'What's that?'

'What's with all the empty boxes in the garage? John told me you're...you built something for Jack? Something new?'

'Yeah, a crib. Bought a few different things from a few different sources and I put them together in a new way. I would have built it sooner but the parts took quite long to arrive.'

'I see, so...so this thing...it's not on the market?' Ali guessed.

'There are similar hyperbaric units out there. But I'm building mine differently.'

'Always pushing the boundaries.'

Last night in Jack's room, wearing a face shield, Jade pressed the trigger on a heavy duty hand drill. Leaning over, she drilled a hole into the top of a hyperbaric bed's plexiglass ceiling. Next, Jade plugged a black pipe into the hole. Finally she drilled in screws to secure a seal between the black pipe and the bed's ceiling. Stepping back, Jade viewed her creation. It now had three completed black pipes, all sprouting out from the bed's ceiling. Pipes that were connected to a vaporizer reservoir unit, mounted on the backside of the bed. When crossing her arms, Jade smiled.

'And what's wrong with that Mother?' Jade questioned Ali.

'Nothing. What's the difference between a crib and this hyper...what is it again?'

'A hyperbaric sleep chamber. It induces vapor vitamins and—'

Interrupting Jade, Ali repeated, '*Vapor vitamins*...I didn't know they existed.'

'They don't.'

'Oh...'

'Anyways, it also reduces the oxygen for it is a controlled atmosphere within it.'

'Reduced oxygen?'

'Don't worry, for the first year it will be slightly reduced to the surrounding oxygen. Only zero point one percent to be exact.'

'So long as you know what you're doing.'

'When I don't, I do not carry on. And when I do, I follow through. Jack is my priority and I'm going to do my best by him.'

'Of course.'

'Any mother should.'

'Of course,' Ali said again. 'I didn't insinuate anything.'

'Anyways, where's the Judge?'

'Your father's over there, feeding the horses. You should go help him. I can handle this little one.'

'Thanks.'

'Oh it's my pleasure,' Ali replied while joining in on Jack's action figure battle.

'Play nice honey,' Jade told Jack.

Across the backyard, Jade walked over to where John was feeding the horses. On her way, she stepped over a careless bunny, munching on grass.

Placing a hand onto one of the horses, Jade offered, 'Need help?' When John turned to face her, he was stunned still.

'Whoa! What did you do with *my* daughter?'

Making a grin, Jade responded, 'Cut her hair.'

After a chuckle, he replied, 'Evidently. It suits you.'

'Thanks. Well?' Jade insisted. Leaning over, John picked up a pail, followed by tossing Jade a horse brush.

'Yeah, okay. You know, it's great to have you home again Jade. It's been too long. I don't think you have ever stayed this long since going off to university.'

'It's great to be back,' Jade affirmed when brushing one of the horses.

Beside the pond, Jade helps John feed protein pellets to their many rainbow trout. When they do, the fish rise to the surface to feed. Some even jump out of the water. Along the pond, Jade chucks pellets of food next to three, small turtles as well.

Later in the evening, Jade was by John's side, assisting him to fill up one of the dozen, tall standing bird feeders.

Speaking up, John recalled, 'You know, I want to say for the record, during your upbringing, I wish I was around, a lot more.'

'Uh...I understand, it was your job. No it was your duty.'

'I could have retired sooner, given my pension. Your mother was clearing more than enough with her sculpting clients.'

'I wish for a lot of things but thanks for your record statement, I appreciate it. I honestly wish we had visited you two more these past few years.'

'You had a dream to do, I understand,' John acknowledged and nodded.

After an eye roll, Jade shook her head and said, 'Yeah well, we failed and now, I don't know what's going to happen.'

'It's been quite some time now. Has he...reached out yet?' John asked.

'No. If he doesn't then, I can only assume the worst,' she dreaded.

'If I may, what was the lesson learned from all of this?'

'Trust no one,' she answered.

'Trust me, don't just trust anyone,' he stated.

'Not even you?'

'Am I *just*, anyone to you?'

'No, no you're not just anyone to me, Dad.'

'What are you going to do? Given your new set of circumstances.'

'I'll figure it out.'

'How's that going?'

'Still figuring it out,' Jade updated.

'Job?'

'I have money saved but yeah, perhaps sometime soon.'

'You're more than welcome to stay as long as you want, until you figure things out; you know this. I hate the idea of you, on your own, raising a man by yourself.'

'Thank you. I'm confident because a good man raised me. He showed me how it's done,' Jade asserted.

'Aw, thanks Jade.'

'I'm just taking it day by day until I see a bridge worth crossing. Haven't came across one, yet.'

'Don't rush it, take your time. You will know when it is time,' John assured.

'Time for what, exactly?'

'Time to try again,' he answered.

'I don't know if I want to...without him.'

'Well if not back down the last path, what about Jack?'

'He is now my primary priority. I know if I help him be the best man he can be, he could be special.'

'I feel like sometimes I didn't try hard enough, with you.'

'Nah, don't say that. I had it so good, I'd be spoiled to say otherwise.'

'But despite my lack of presence—'

'Dad...'

'It seemed not to hinder you.'

'If Shane and I did what we intended to do, we could have changed the world.'

'I know Jade.'

'You were a pivotal pinnacle piece to that, for me and Jack,' Jade determined, then turned to give John a long hug.

During their hug, John told her, 'Often...it is still the case, your mother and I speak of how profoundly proud we are of you.' Letting go of each other, John and Jade step away and trade smiles. 'You were a physics professor by the time you were twenty two. Let alone the project you shared...with him.'

Developing a sad facial expression, Jade uttered at a rushed rate, 'Thank you, that means especially a lot coming from you, truly. But I think...I'm going to go inside now.'

'Oh okay, yeah sure, Do what you gotta do.'

'It's getting late and I have to tuck Jack in.'

'I understand, Jack comes first...hey Jade,' John summoned.

'Just before stepping away, Jade turned and faced John once again and said, 'Judge?'

'I love you,' John told her.

Caught off guard, Jade smiled and reciprocated, 'I love you too Dad.' Even though she put on a smile, John can tell she still appeared sad. Turning around again, Jade walked to the Just home's back porch. At the same time, John picked up the bag of bird seed and then made his way to the shed.

After locking Jack's bedroom door, Jade circled around to face a big mess of unpacked boxes and styrofoam. In one corner, an old, wooden desk with something triangular was on it, about a half-metre in height and width. Whatever it was, it was covered in a bed sheet. Among the boxes, a dolly and various tools were scattered. Laying within a tiny crib crate, Jade watched Jack sound asleep. Looking to her right, she viewed the completed hyperbaric bed, situated against the wall. At the desk, Jade took a seat, put on safety glasses and latex gloves. One after the other, she unpacks jars containing pure elements labeled, "Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen," and more. When she pulled on the bed sheet, it revealed the Hexsus machine. It was matte grey, shaped like a rectangular pyramid and had hundreds of layers to it. Where the top triangular prism piece was, Jade opened it by pushing on its top and as a result, its hopper became exposed. A funnel-like drain called the Hexsus hopper, contains twelve holes, meant for twelve different kinds of elemental ingredients. Into the side of the machine's bottom, Jade inserted a shot glass sized vial. One by one, she used a syringe-like device that extracted the pure elements from their jars and transferred them directly into the Hexsus hopper. Once the pure elements were carefully added, Jade pressed the only hexagonal button on the Hexsus machine, which autonomously closed its hopper to energize. The sound it made was a low, quiet hum. Sitting back, Jade watched a laptop connected to the Hexsus machine, telling her its current activity readouts. From what it was showing her, the Hexsus machine was making custom molecules, designed to interlink with Jack's DNA. The small vial plugged into the Hexsus machine began receiving green

liquid, drip by drip. Slowly but surely, the liquid fills the vial.

Fifteen minutes later, Jade held a full vial up for inspection. Into a mini-fridge, she placed the vial next to five other sets of six vials. Stepping beside the opened hyperbaric bed, she took in a deep breath. Thereafter Jade turned around and looked upon Jack sleeping silently within his crib crate. Kneeling, she gently picked Jack up, waking him to open his blue eyes.

While brushing Jack's blonde bangs to the side, she said softly, 'It's that time Jack.' Leaned over the opened hyperbaric bed, Jade gently set Jack onto it. Additionally, she leaned over further, kissing Jack on his forehead. Next, Jade attached electrode pads by sticking them onto his chest, neck and two on each temple. Beside the bed, Jade walked to the mini-fridge. Using one hand, she took out a single vial, to then close the fridge's door. With a vial in hand, Jade heads back to the hyperbaric bed. Looking down at Jack looking back up at her, she pulled down on the bed's main lever. In turn, causing it to fully move Jack into the bed's interior. By pushing back up on the main lever, Jade closed its hatch door. On its backside, where the vaporizer reservoir unit was located, Jade now took her position. With one green vial, she plugged it into the vaporizer reservoir's centre socket. Subsequently, an air intake sound occurred as the vaporizer sucked on the vial's contents. Where the vaporizer's two levers were, Jade placed her hands on both and then simultaneously pulled them down. This action activates the vaporizer unit. Resulting in the green solution within the vial to be slowly drained into the vaporizer unit's reservoir. Around the bed's side, Jade proceeded viewing Jack laying inside. Both of them stare at one another in silence as a single tear drop rolled down her cheek. Green gas slowly began filling up the hyperbaric bed more and more. Soon, Jack visually faded due to the gas gradually becoming more dense. Turning around, Jade walked to the desk and took a seat. On the laptop screen, software uploads data recordings of Jack's respiratory system intake. Using the cursor, Jade turned down the oxygen within the hyperbaric bed by 0.1%, now sitting at, "15.9% oxygen."

At the kitchen dining table, Jade was in front of bottles containing vitamins ranging from A to Z. Along with containers of minerals that span much of the periodic table. All of them were carefully aligned that cover most of the tabletop space. On it, Jade carefully scale measures all of the mineral and vitamin powders. Whereas some were in a liquid form. After each measurement, Jade poured the measured powders and liquids into a blender. Followed by checking vitamins and minerals off a large ingredient list. At the top of the list reads, "Vit-min solution." Using a measuring cup, she carefully poured exactly one cup of water. Next, she transferred it into the blender. Thereafter Jade closed the blender's lid and turned it on. Twelve vials within their vial holders were open. One by one, Jade steadily poured the vit-min solution from the blender and into the twelve vials. Taking one vial, she plugged it into the vial mixer

already connected to her laptop. By flipping the vial mixer's on switch, it began vibrating. On the laptop, software showed concentration readout recordings from the vit-min solution.

Leaning in towards the laptop screen, Jade focused her eyes and spoke in a hushed tone, 'A little more calcium. And...zinc.'

On a cutting board, Jade chopped up many different kinds of fruits and vegetables. Afterwards she piles all of the chopped chunks into the blender. Moreover, she added nuts and flax seeds too. Taking just one vit-min vial, Jade pores it into the blender. Once she closed the blender's lid, she turned it on. Due to the blender's noise, Ali's entrance went unheard.

'Hey, what are you up too? Ali asked loudly. Resulting in Jade to flinch and roll her eyes, followed by shutting off the blender. 'So late? Or early?'

'Sorry, just making Jack some baby formula. Too early?'

First glancing at the dining table covered in ingredients, Ali said, 'It's okay, don't worry about...I don't...I do not remember using the whole spectrum of vitamins and minerals to feed you.'

'That's because you didn't.' In response, Ali expressed a guilty look.

'What's wrong with the store bought formula?'

'Compared to what I am making, it's garbage,' Jade stated.

'Don't...you think you're pullin a little overkill here? Isn't breast milk enough?'

'I would *kill over* more if I could.'

'I see.'

'Everybody should if they could, in my opinion. I'm doing the best I can for Jack. Better than what my body can produce, let alone shitty baby formula. Anything less would be to go against my actual capability.'

'And what is that you're using?' Ali inquired.

'A contraption.'

Sighing, Ali requested to know, 'And what does your contraption do Jade?'

At a quick pace, Jade explained, 'It mixes a solute with a solvent in order to make the desired uniform solution. All while measuring the exact concentration of ingredients. So I don't make the mistake of saturating the solution or making it too dilute; given Jack's weight, metabolism and age.' Blinking a couple times, Ali slightly tilted her head. 'Begun brewing big bountiful batches because preparation is paramount in producing any purposed prospect a person plans.'

'So is sleep. I'm...I am going back to bed for a couple more hours. Goodnight or...good morning, I dunno.' As Ali exited, Jade took a seat back at the dining table and immediately started typing on the laptop.
