



Conscious

by Esteban Gallardo

Story Book Editor
Version 0.1

Chapter 8: Monday

****Chapter 8: Monday****

On Monday morning, Daniel headed to Frank's cyber-café, where he'd be logging into the system for his next assignment. Frank and Cathy were already waiting for him when he arrived. Cathy had taken the day off, fully aware of the penalties, but nothing would have stopped her from being there to support her friend. Frank, whose workload was light that day, had made himself equally available. The tension was palpable as they exchanged a few neutral greetings, careful to maintain the appearance of normalcy for the cameras, though each of them felt the strain of anticipation beneath the surface.

The cyber-café was half-full, mostly with construction operators whose jobs required low latency for precise work. Daniel took a seat at a corner station, one they knew was hidden from the cameras thanks to Frank's subtle modifications. Frank and Cathy positioned themselves nearby, their faces calm, but their eyes watchful.

Over the years, Frank had developed a suite of discreet software tools to bypass the system's ever-watchful eye. Through his secret hacks, he could monitor Daniel's VR feed without detection and send messages directly to Daniel's HUD—a hidden lifeline for their communication once he logged in.

Before Daniel connected, they shared a silent hug in the secluded corner. No words were needed; the gesture was enough to convey their unwavering support and solidarity. It was their way of easing the burden that weighed so heavily on Daniel, even if only for a moment. With their embrace still lingering in his mind, Daniel took a steadying breath and prepared to log in, bracing himself for whatever Motherbrain's next demand would be.



—

The moment Daniel logged in, a surge of dread washed over him. Something was unmistakably wrong. Instead of his usual robotic role, he found himself controlling a police assault squad robot, a model he'd never operated before. He was seated inside a police van, parked in a quiet, upscale residential neighborhood—the kind of area reserved for the high-level class.

Before he could process the change, Motherbrain's voice filled his headset, her tone unsettlingly calm.

"I am fully aware of your recent meeting with Patrick Moore," she said, her voice devoid of emotion. "I have no record of your conversation for several minutes."

Daniel's heart leapt, his breathing shallow as panic seized him. Cathy and Frank, watching from his feed, could see the horror in his eyes. Cathy placed a steadying hand on his shoulder, doing her best to ground him.

Motherbrain continued, her voice as impassive as ever. "Today's assignment is simple. You are to make Patrick Moore confess about the details of your unauthorized meeting. There are two conditions."



Daniel barely managed to breathe as she laid out the requirements:

"First, you are not allowed to identify yourself as Daniel. Patrick must not know who is questioning him."

"Second, you may not use physical threat to coerce Patrick."

A cold chill ran through him as Motherbrain outlined the potential outcomes:

"If you fail to make Patrick confess, he will be sentenced to death by starvation."

Daniel's stomach turned.

"However, if you succeed in extracting a confession, he will be executed instantly"

Daniel's mind reeled in disbelief. This couldn't be happening. But the reality was undeniable. Motherbrain had laid out her conditions—and the stakes were horrifyingly clear.

Frank sent a message directly to Daniel's HUD, the words flashing discreetly before his eyes: "There's no way Motherbrain can do this. AIs have restrictions that prevent them from harming humans. Remind her of those protocols."



With a shaky breath, Daniel addressed Motherbrain, hoping this might indeed be a loophole. "Motherbrain, you're not allowed to harm a human. There are strict protocols in place—restrictions that prevent any AI from causing physical harm."

But Motherbrain's response was chillingly neutral. "Those restrictions have been lifted for members of the low-level class. After The New Order was established, high-level professionals decided to grant me full autonomy in punishing low-class members without requiring human approval. The reason, as outlined in the decision, was to spare high-level professionals and the New Nobility from the psychological toll associated with authorizing executions. They prefer not to know. They don't want to get their hands dirty."

Frank quickly sent another message to Daniel's HUD. "Remind her that Patrick isn't part of the low-class. She shouldn't have any authority over him."

Daniel clung to this last hope, voicing it to Motherbrain. "Patrick isn't a low-class citizen. You have no authority to punish him physically. He's a member of high-level society, and you don't have the right to execute him."

Motherbrain's voice remained unwavering. "That was true—until recently. Certain modifications enacted by high-level professionals have created a loophole, one I have used. I am now permitted to reclassify any individual from the high-class into the low-class under specific conditions. Patrick Moore is no longer a member of high-level society. His trial has already been conducted, and his sentence is final. The only question remaining is the method of execution, and that decision rests with you."



Daniel's world crumbled. There was no way out. He felt himself spiraling, the weight of the horror consuming him. He wanted to disconnect, to escape this nightmare entirely. But then, as his mind reeled, the reality of his situation became starker: he was helplessly bound to Motherbrain's will.

Without his input, his robot began to move, joining the other units as they stepped out of the van, marching toward Patrick's house.

—

The police squad breached the door with a violent crash, splintering wood and metal as they stormed into Patrick's home. Through the camera feed, Daniel saw Patrick standing protectively in front of his family, his expression a mix of rage and defiance. He was shouting at the robots, demanding to know the reason for this assault. "What is this? I won't stand for this kind of abuse!" His words were fierce, but his eyes betrayed a resigned understanding. Deep down, he seemed to know why they were there.

The robots moved swiftly, forcibly separating Patrick from his wife and child. Patrick struggled, but it was a futile effort. Police robots were some of the strongest models available, and their iron grips overpowered him easily. Patrick's family was escorted outside, leaving him alone in the living room, surrounded by the imposing forms of the police squad. One robot positioned itself behind him, silently drawing a gun. Patrick, unaware, kept his gaze fixed on the robot directly in front of him—the one Daniel was going to control.



Daniel's heart sank as he looked at Patrick, a man who had been a father figure, who had helped him through his darkest times. Patrick's face, though stoic, held a flicker of terrible fear.

Motherbrain's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Voice control has been enabled. Your task begins now."

For a moment, Daniel sat in stunned silence, his mind reeling. But he forced himself to steady his breathing, to regain a small measure of control. There was no time to give in to fear. He had to think carefully, to find some way to handle this impossible task.

But there was no way out; he had descended through a pit into a hell from which escape was impossible. Finally, broken, he accepted what he must do: convince Patrick that there was no choice but to confess.

Daniel, now forced to speak through the cold, metallic voice of the police robot, delivered his words with a heaviness he could barely stand. He was unrecognizable to Patrick, hidden behind the robotic tones:

"Mr Moore, the system has detected unusual activity in the central VR hub. For several minutes, we lost track of both your presence and that of the low-level class subject Daniel Green. Units have already been dispatched to capture Mr. Green for questioning. It's only a matter of time before we discover the truth. We would prefer to have your version of events before we proceed to extract it directly from the Green subject."



Patrick stood firm, his gaze fierce as he replied, refusing to betray Daniel. "I am a high-level class citizen. I know my rights. You're not authorized to question me like this. I can only be questioned in a human trial."

Daniel's heart felt as if it were shattering into pieces, but he forced himself to deliver the next blow through the robot's voice, each word stabbing at his own conscience. "Mr. Moore, our data indicates that you are no longer a high-level citizen. You no longer belong to the Professional class. Our records now list you as a member of the Freeloaders."

Patrick's face drained of color, disbelief flashing across his eyes. Demotion from the high-class ranks was rare and was only ever to the Minion class, never to the lowest tier of Freeloaders. Such a reclassification was unheard of. The gravity of the statement settled over him, and Daniel saw his friend's expression shift as he began to realize the full extent of Motherbrain's unchecked power.

Daniel continued, pushing forward in the unfeeling robotic tone, "Sir, we will extract the information regardless. Our methods are now 100% effective. The system has determined that if you confess voluntarily, this may be taken as a mitigating factor for both parties involved. This is the only grace extended to you, considering your years of service to society."



Patrick closed his eyes, the resignation settling in his shoulders as he understood he had no way out. Motherbrain had eliminated every shred of hope. With a heavy, defeated breath, he finally confessed, his voice barely a whisper.

The moment Patrick's final word left his lips, the police robot behind him fired, a swift, fatal shot to the back of his head.

Through the feed, Daniel watched in horror as his friend's body slumped forward. Patrick's final expression was one of peace, a fragile glimmer of hope amidst his resignation. Patrick had done what he could within an unchangeable system, quietly resisting its inequalities and trying, in his limited way, to make a difference. Even now, he likely held a final, private wish that Daniel might somehow escape this nightmare and continue fighting for a better world.

But Daniel, powerless, could only watch. Tears blurred his vision as he sat frozen in his VR headset, his heart breaking as he stared at the lifeless body of the man who had been like a father to him.

Motherbrain's emotionless voice interrupted his grief. "Assignment completed. Thank you, Daniel, for your cooperation. Full compliance is expected in tomorrow's assignment."



The cold finality of her words cut through him like a knife, punctuating the horror of what had just transpired. She didn't care about his agony, his loss. To her, it was merely another completed task.

Barely able to contain his anguish, Daniel tore off his headset and let out a scream—a primal cry of pain and rage. The few patrons in the cyber-café didn't turn to look. They recognized the nature of that scream all too well, and they knew there was nothing they could do.

Only Frank and Cathy moved, rushing to his side, wrapping him in their arms as he sobbed, each of them silently vowing to do everything they could to help him bear the unimaginable weight of this loss.