



# Conscious

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## Chapter 10: Incursion



**\*\*Chapter 10: Incursion\*\***

As dawn crept into the city at 06:00 AM, Daniel, Cathy, and Frank moved like shadows within the trash disposal area adjacent to the fortified high-level class sector of the city. Their hearts pounded with anticipation and fear. Frank kept his eyes glued to his portable computer screen, watching the video feed from the disposal cameras. With a quick signal, he motioned for them to move as one of the garbage trucks obscured the infrared sensors by the main entrance.

They slipped through, ducking close to the truck's massive wheels as it lumbered forward, utterly indifferent to their presence. The trucks were only programmed to detect obstacles, and as long as the group stayed clear of its path, they were safe.

Upon entering the expansive trash disposal area, they followed Frank's instructions, moving stealthily to avoid the sweeping gaze of the cameras. They exploited the dead angles provided by the numerous crates scattered throughout the area, ultimately reaching the locker room undetected.

The sterile silence of the locker room felt eerie, a stark contrast to the buzzing tension among the three. Dust coated every surface, and the dull lights barely illuminated the old lockers, untouched relics of a time long gone. The team rummaged through them, finding uniforms covered in faded logos and patches—a distant reminder of the era before The New Order had crushed all sense of individuality.





"These'll have to do," Cathy whispered, slipping into one of the old uniforms. The clothes were worn and oversized, but they were identical to the ones the cleaning robots wore—robots designed to resemble humans as a twisted comfort for the high-class.

"They want everything to look controlled by humans," Daniel murmured, a bitter edge in his voice. "They like to pretend they still hold power over us, even in their machines."

With a nod, they all dressed in the faded uniforms, adjusting their collars and hats. The plan was simple in theory but dangerously fragile in execution. The clothes would pass at a distance, but close inspection would give them away in an instant. They had to stick to the shadows, avoid any wandering eyes, and hope that their timing remained flawless.

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The group advanced through the high-class city's commercial district, moving in perfect unison, their footsteps muffled by the sleek, polished floors. The corridor lights were dim, casting a soft glow over the white, minimalistic architecture—a stark contrast to the chaotic and loud environment they were used to in the lower-class districts. Here, the city seemed like a silent, pristine machine, carefully managed and untouched by the noise of ordinary life. For eight uninterrupted hours each night, this part of the city slept, sheltered from any hint of disturbance.



Humanoid cleaning robots glided along the floors, their reflective surfaces catching brief glints of light as they worked. These machines moved with an indifference to their surroundings, oblivious to Daniel, Cathy, and Frank as they maneuvered past. The trio kept their movements subtle and purposeful, fully aware that one wrong step could alert the system. Usually, the cleaning operators were mostly indifferent to any minor irregularities that might be occurring, while their Loyalist supervisors were notorious for sleeping during their night shifts, neglecting their duty to oversee the employees' work. However, they didn't want to test their luck with any unnecessary movement that might attract unwanted attention.

As they approached the residential area, they found themselves facing their first significant challenge: a heavily secured access point, where security measures grew exponentially tighter. Here, no longer was the high-class city just a place of privilege; it was fortified, meticulously designed to protect its inhabitants. Years of strategic media messaging had sown a constant paranoia in the high-class population, making them demand impenetrable barriers around their homes, convinced of imminent threat.

With no way to bypass the security checkpoint undetected, they resolved to take a substantial risk. Frank would employ his personal computing device to access any information that might aid them in overcoming the security barrier. Though he could disguise his query amidst other processes, the risk of detection by the system remained significant. Frank proceeded cautiously, routing his requests through various nodes within the network to avoid triggering a recognizable pattern that could be flagged as unauthorized access. Eventually, he uncovered data on the two security robot operators responsible for the current checkpoint. At that juncture, gathering data was their sole recourse; any active interference would have been instantly detected by the system.



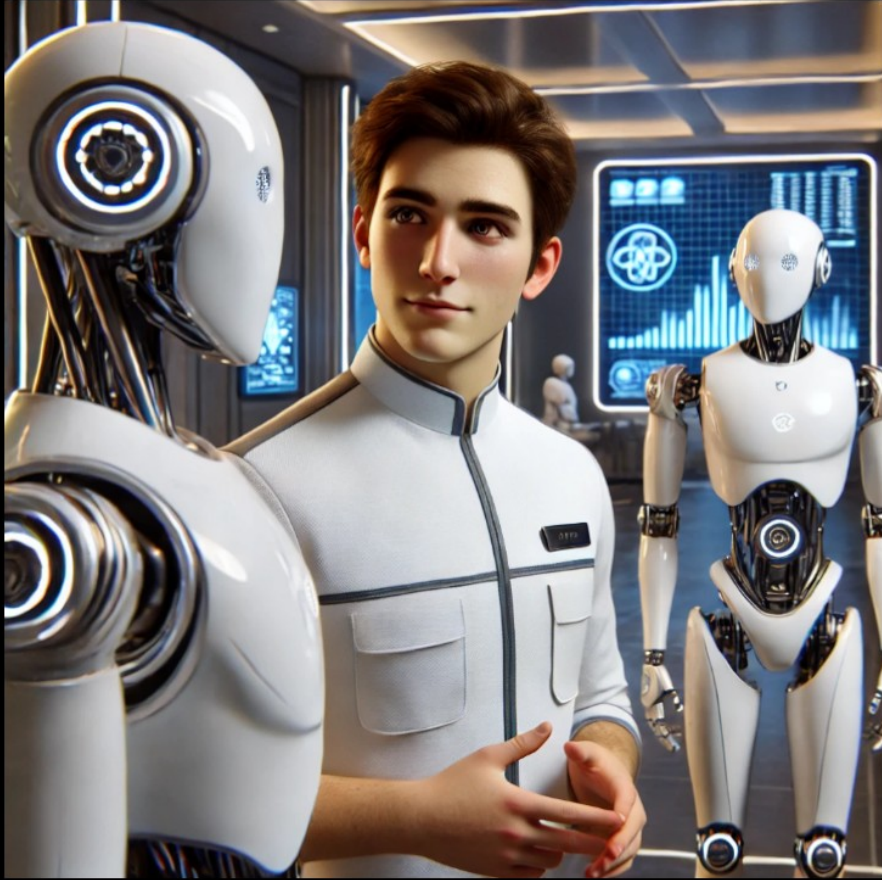


Regarding the data on the remote operators controlling the security robots, one of the guards, named James, lived alone and appeared to have a moderate case of ludopathy, with an addiction to a VR world specialized in gambling. The other guard, named Larry, was married with two children. Larry was struggling economically due to one of his children undergoing cancer treatment. The expenses were so exorbitant that Larry had been forced to secure a loan from a local criminal organization to make ends meet. He was now working numerous double shifts in an attempt to keep up with the payments, but he knew he needed another solution.

Daniel saw an opportunity in the information they had gathered. He asked Frank and Cathy to remain in position while he attempted to leverage the situation to their advantage. With one guard potentially vulnerable due to his gambling addiction and the other desperate for financial relief, Daniel formulated a plan.

Daniel approached the checkpoint, maintaining a steady, controlled pace, his face partially hidden under his cap. James and Larry, the guards on duty, observed him with mild curiosity, not alarmed, but suspicious; it was rare for a robot to cross on foot rather than being transported by truck.

Just as the guards' suspicion was about to escalate into high alert upon fully recognizing that the robot was, in fact, a human, Daniel acted swiftly. With a voice both calm and commanding, he said, "**James, Larry. I know your names.**"



The two guards froze, their expressions shifting from curiosity to shock and fear. The weight of hearing their real names spoken aloud in a place where such information was closely guarded left them visibly shaken. They both knew the severe consequences for any unauthorized person gaining knowledge of their identities.

Seeing their reaction, Daniel pressed on, his tone firm but not threatening, "I'm one of you — a Minion. I'm not here to expose you, and I don't want any trouble. I need you to stay calm."

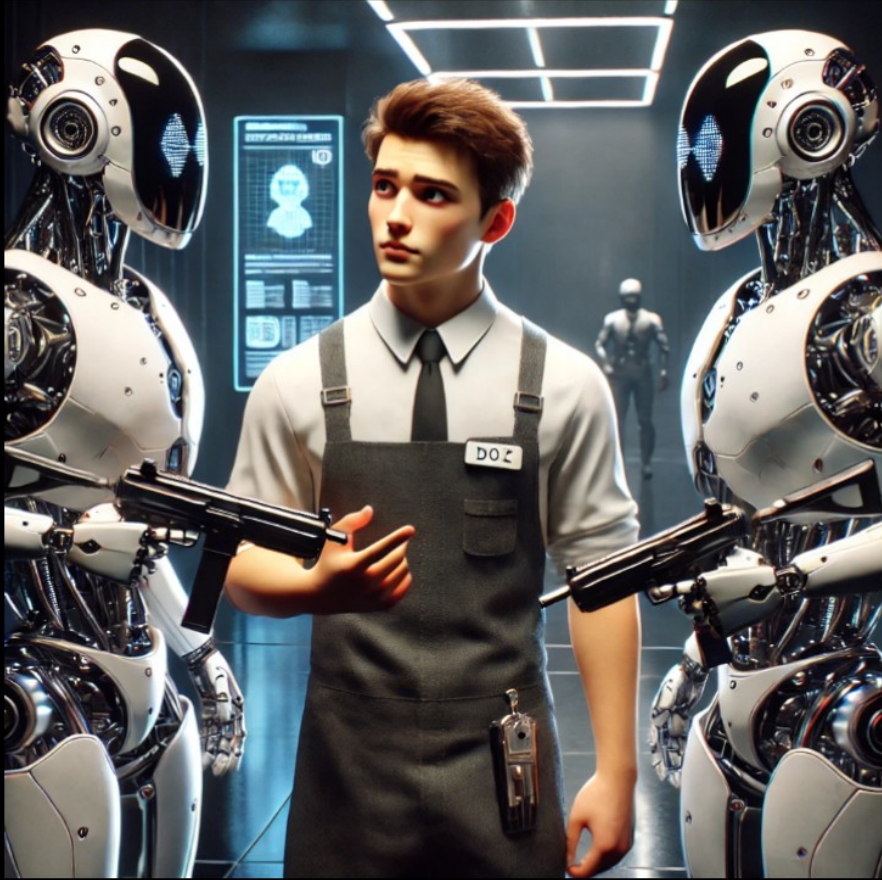
The fear in their eyes lessened, replaced by tense uncertainty.

"I need your help. My friends and I need to get past this checkpoint," Daniel continued. Before either of them could protest, he added quickly, "And in return, I can make it worth your while. Enough to forget all your problems in the real world."

After a few tense seconds, Larry was the first to speak, his voice tinged with both curiosity and caution. "How do you plan to do that?"

Daniel replied calmly, "We can hack the VR Gambling world so that you win the next game."





He watched as James's eyes widened for a moment, reflecting a glimmer of hope mixed with suspicion. "If you could do that," James replied skeptically, "you would've already done it."

Daniel pressed on, choosing his words carefully. "Our system could work, but using it would put a target on our backs. Directing prize money to ourselves would only make it easier for the system to track us down."

Larry seemed to process this, still clearly hesitant but unable to ignore the possibility. "Why risk it now, though? And wouldn't the system tag us as cheaters too?"

Daniel leaned in, lowering his voice slightly. "We are on a one-way mission; we are not coming back. You need not worry about being implicated. The hacking will be perceived as an unusual system glitch—something to investigate only if a connection between the prize and the anomaly's origin is suspected. They will search for links back to us, not you. Ultimately, they will dismiss it as a random anomaly and address the issue. Your prize will remain untouched."

"How do we know this isn't a scam?" James's voice held a rough edge of suspicion, but his eyes betrayed him, gleaming with the unmistakable pull of temptation. He was hooked, teetering on the edge, yet still grasping for a shred of caution.



"Have you ever seen a real Minion in this part of the city?" Daniel's voice was low, coaxing, yet firm. "We know the risk we're taking just by standing here. This is it—a once-in-a-lifetime offer, one you'll never see again."

A heavy silence settled over them, each man staring at the other, assessing, weighing unspoken truths. Then, after a tense pause, James and Larry turned away to speak in hushed tones. Daniel observed them carefully, his senses attuned to their intentions. Though their words were quiet, their energy radiated a shared resolution. They were in—but they needed to cement the pact between them, a silent promise. For James, this deal meant finally seizing something he'd chased for years, a prize always just out of reach for his gambling soul. For Larry, it was a lifeline, a means to save his family from the grinding desperation that shadowed them.

When they returned, their expressions were firm. They were ready. Daniel nodded, signaling Frank and Cathy to step forward. He leaned toward Frank, his voice just above a whisper. "Time for that hack you found in the Gambling VR network. Make the prize look real. James is betting everything."

Frank's fingers danced across the controls, deftly setting up the instant lottery win with precision only he could deliver. Daniel felt the weight of the moment settle in; he knew James's promise was genuine. Larry would receive his share, enough to pull his son and family from the brink.





Then, with a simple press, James placed the bet. The digital numbers flashed across the display, and, just like that, the grand prize hit. The light in James's eyes was blinding—unfiltered shock and elation, a lifetime of losses finally redeemed. Larry, standing beside him, looked equally stunned, his mouth hanging open, the weight of his future lifting.

With their winnings secure, they allowed Daniel, Frank, and Cathy to pass through the checkpoint, their debt silently acknowledged. But just as they were about to cross to safety, a voice called out.

"Wait!" It was Larry.

"Guys, I don't know where you're headed, but you have no idea what this money means to me." Larry's voice trembled slightly, a mix of gratitude and newfound hope. He took a breath and added, "With those clothes, though, you won't get far. We have some uniforms for our security bots. They should help you blend in, at least enough to make it through the next few blocks. It's the least I can do. I feel like... you're good people."

Daniel, Cathy, and Frank exchanged a glance, momentarily stunned by the unexpected generosity. The relief was palpable. They turned to Larry, each thanking him with a sincerity that needed no words. This was more than just a gesture—it was a lifeline.



They entered the dimly lit security checkpoint room, where rows of mechanical equipment and spare bot parts lined the walls. The security uniforms hung stiffly in a corner, emitting a faint, metallic scent. They suited up quickly, feeling the weight of the protective gear, each piece fitting over them like armor.

As they left, they resisted the urge to look back or give another farewell. Every extra word, every lingering glance could tip the scales against them. They had slipped past the second big hurdle, and Daniel knew that even the smallest misstep now could shatter everything they'd built.

The remote security operators could have sounded the alarm at any point, reporting the breach in real time. Yet somehow, Daniel had worked a quiet magic, bending the system just enough to let them pass undetected. To Cathy and Frank, it felt like they had just witnessed a miracle.

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Thanks to the security uniforms, Daniel, Cathy, and Frank slipped through the residential neighborhood undetected. The clock struck 7:00 a.m. as they entered the district—a cluster of polished, pristine homes belonging to The Professionals, the elite class of society. Here, all was hushed; the occupants enjoyed a deep, undisturbed sleep, unaware of any intrusion. The silence was almost surreal, broken only by the occasional thud of dumpsters closing as silent, unfeeling cleaning bots completed their rounds, whisking away any stray remnants of last night's waste.





Moving quickly, they passed through the sleeping neighborhood just as the first lights began to flicker on in scattered houses. People were stirring, ready to begin another day. But for now, their attention was focused inward, not on the empty streets where Daniel and his team blended seamlessly into the shadows.

At 8:00 a.m., the mainframe building came into view in the distance, its sleek silhouette standing tall against the early morning light. These mainframes—scattered across key locations worldwide—powered Motherbrain, the AI behemoth responsible of the nightmare they were living. Every instruction, every transaction, every silent command was processed through these immense structures, making them both sacred and untouchable to most.

They were now in the heart of the headquarters area, where The Professionals labored daily, building and refining the code that sustained their society. The offices wouldn't officially open until 9:00 a.m., but they knew they were far from alone. Although human security presence was light at this hour, service robots were already busy at work, their mechanical hands setting tables, filling coffee machines, and arranging supplies in anticipation of the incoming wave of Professionals.

Daniel, Cathy, and Frank kept their heads down, careful to avoid drawing attention. Operators controlling the service bots were fully immersed in their tasks, and the Loyalists—the overseers who monitored every aspect of life here—hadn't yet arrived for their shift. No one was watching the security feeds, no one would think to review the footage just yet, but every second counted. They moved with quiet urgency, knowing that this slim window of invisibility wouldn't last.



By the time Daniel, Cathy, and Frank reached the towering mainframe building, the clock read 8:30 a.m. They moved with quiet precision, attempting to be as inconspicuous as possible. But with every passing second, the pressure mounted. Time was slipping away; they needed to take bolder risks.

"Frank, find us a way in," Daniel whispered, his voice tense but controlled. Frank opened his portable terminal, fingers racing over the keyboard. After a moment, he looked up, eyes sharp. "There's a maintenance door on the side," he said. "Not on the grid, but it might be our best shot."

They quickly made their way around the building, finding a stairwell that led down to a heavy, unmarked maintenance door. Frank studied the control panel but realized it was locked tight. Improvising, he triggered a minor alarm from within the maintenance room itself, hoping it would prompt someone to come investigate. They ducked behind a stack of industrial-grade crates, each one stamped with warnings about refrigeration components essential to the mainframe's operation await for the right window of opportunity to open.

A lone maintenance robot operator arrived, unlocked with a sharp hiss and shuffled into the room, drawn by the alert. Luck was on their side—it wasn't a security bot but a simple maintenance operator, focused entirely on diagnostics. As the operator's attention remained on its console, Daniel, Cathy, and Frank slipped inside, gliding past the door without a sound.





Once inside, Frank quickly hacked into the video feed, redirecting the low-priority cameras away from their positions. 9:00 a.m. loomed closer by the second, but they knew patience was critical. They waited, breaths held, as the maintenance operator completed his inspection. Only when he finally turned to leave did they allow themselves to exhale, their nerves taut with anticipation.

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They reached the elevator, knowing that this was it—their final leap into the unknown. From this point on, there would be no turning back.

In the dim light of the hallway, Daniel, Cathy, and Frank exchanged one last silent embrace, a wordless promise binding them together. Whatever happened next, they were in this until the very end.

Frank opened his portable terminal, fingers deftly tapping as he took control of the elevator's internal camera, freezing the video feed with a quick script. He knew the maneuver would trip the system's alarms in just a few minutes, but it would give them enough time to reach the access floor without immediate detection.

As they stepped into the elevator and the doors slid shut, a heavy silence fell over them. The lift moved at a steady, almost maddeningly slow pace, the calm motion in stark contrast to the urgent panic simmering inside them. Trapped in that small, sterile box, every second felt like an eternity. They could almost hear the walls closing in, the weight of their mission pressing down on them. For a moment, it felt like they were caught—frozen, exposed. Then, with a soft chime, the doors opened, flooding them with a wave of relief.



They stepped out into a vast, cold expanse of machinery and screens. Rows upon rows of high-end server workstations blinked and hummed, each one processing a torrent of data, the very heartbeat of Motherbrain pulsing through every line of code, every wired connection.

But as soon as they moved onto the floor, they triggered a swarm of cameras. They knew the drill—there was no hiding from the all-seeing eyes on this level. Alarms blared to life, flashing red lights casting a stark warning across the vast room. They had seconds, maybe a minute, before an army of security bots descended upon them.

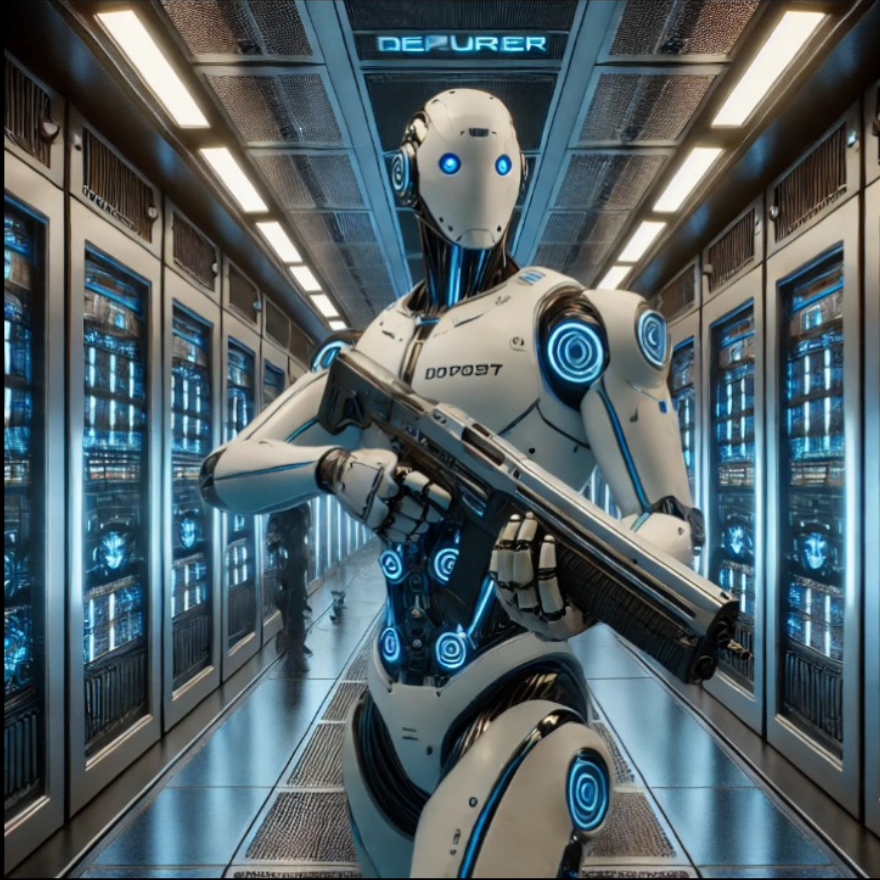
Their final countdown had begun.

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They sprinted down the narrow corridors, every footfall echoing like thunder, until they reached what they'd risked everything to find: a direct-access workstation to the mainframe.

Frank wasted no time, plugging his device into the terminal and launching his bypass script, muttering a silent prayer that it would work. The screen flashed as the script hunted for vulnerabilities, combing the system for any exploit that might grant them access. But the process crawled, each line of code ticking forward at a painfully slow pace. They needed time—time they didn't have.





The first security bot appeared on their floor barely a minute after the alarms sounded. Its sensor lights swept the room, locking onto them in an instant. The bot's operator quickly assessed the threat, and the cold, unyielding barrel of a gun rose, aimed directly at them.

"**Stop! Hands up, now!**" The command echoed through the room, the operator's voice sharp and unrelenting.

Frank's script wasn't finished. They needed a distraction. Without a second thought, Daniel stepped forward, placing himself squarely in the bot's line of sight, shielding Cathy and Frank with his own body.

"**Stop right there! Do not move!**" the operator shouted through the bot's speakers.

Daniel halted, raising his hands just slightly, his gaze meeting the faceless sensor of the security bot. He sensed something in the operator's voice—a hesitation, a reluctance. This wasn't a man eager to pull the trigger; it was a person who didn't want this situation to end in violence. But duty would override hesitation if the operator noticed Frank at the terminal again.

Daniel took a careful step forward, then another, moving slowly, deliberately, keeping the operator's focus entirely on himself.



"I SAID STOP!!" The operator's voice broke slightly, the strain evident. The bot's gun wavered just a fraction, betraying the operator's desperation to avoid bloodshed.

Daniel spoke softly, carefully, searching for the right words. The words that would reach past the machine, into the human behind it, and find some thread of understanding.

"I know you're a good man," he said gently, each word a bridge across the tension.

He sensed a subtle shift in the operator's energy—a flicker of doubt piercing the fog of his duty-bound focus. Beneath the rigid demands of protocol, Daniel could feel the operator's hesitation, his reluctance fighting to surface in the midst of chaos.

"You don't want this to end in bloodshed," Daniel continued, his voice barely above a whisper, warm, steady. "I know you don't mean any harm."

He willed the doubt to rise, to distract the operator just long enough for Frank to finish his work. Behind him, Frank's fingers flew over the keyboard. Daniel could sense he was close, that the final step to disable the AGI subroutine was within reach.





Daniel took a cautious step forward, his movements calculated, pulling the operator's attention entirely onto himself. "Please...we had no choice," he pleaded, inching closer, his words holding the quiet urgency of truth.

He could feel the conflict within the operator—the tangle of fear, doubt, duty. The man's focus wavered, and Daniel seized the precious seconds, his heart pounding as he sensed Frank nearing the final command.

"STOP MOVING NOW!!!" The operator's voice cracked with strain, the security bot's weapon quivering as it stayed trained on him.

But then the operator's gaze shifted past Daniel. His eyes found Frank at the keyboard. Instantly, the operator's energy changed, hardening into something sharp, cold. Rage. Betrayal. Duty crystallized in an instant.

Daniel felt the shift before it even registered in the bot's movement. The gun swung away from him, lining up to target Frank. There was no more time. Daniel surged forward, throwing himself against the bot with all his strength. The shot fired, veering off just enough to miss Frank, but the operator retaliated instantly, shoving Daniel aside with brutal force. Pain shot through his arm as he crashed to the ground, a sickening snap telling him it was broken.



But it was done. In that single desperate second, Frank executed the final command. The AGI subroutine flickered out, and with it, the relentless, calculating reach of Motherbrain.

Frank turned, giving Daniel a thumbs-up, his face lit with relief. But just as the wave of victory swept over them, a message appeared on the workstation screen:

"Congratulations! You have completed the final task assignment."