

# *ENHANCED*

*by*

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## *ENHANCED*

Hein Sorenson ran and people looked at him in bewilderment. He did not care. Finally he saw, he was enhanced. It was like looking through spectacles providing him with unlimited focus. The enhancement had begun while he was making his way through the crowded streets. His mind drifted and he mused what it must have been like to live in the days before the bomb, what it would be like to have a picnic in the countryside, tasting apples ripened by sun. His generation had the luxury of the spheres, protecting all major cities around the globe. His parents were born before the spheres and had spent most of their lives underground. Man finally had reclaimed the face of the earth - at a very high price. Travel between the spheres had remained impossible for decades until the invention of anti-gravitation transportation platforms. Even though the transportation network interconnected all major cities many would not risk lengthy exposure to the massive ultra violet radiation and rather use the *NET* highways for risk free virtual travelling. It was safe and even faster and hence many did not bother about physical transportation at all. He paused and closed his eyes. Darkness ... Today was the last day of the Sun Cycle. *The sun won't rise tomorrow*, he thought. Each sphere featured its own artificial sun or simulation of thereof; nuclear-powered artificial spheres with artificial suns, even artificial parks with artificial birds and artificial apples. In spite of having mastered all this, humankind still had to face extinction.

He had reached the park that lay on his way home. A slight breeze coming in from the city carried a scent of dust and artificiality. It started to rain. For a brief moment a frown crossed his forehead. He never understood why they had to create bad weather. He shrugged. Today

was *Sun's Eve* and the rain was at least warm. Much to his surprise it felt soft on his face and he smiled as he savoured the soothing raindrops on his dry skin. He did not like rain but he smiled all the same. Everything felt fresh and new. He absorbed the sounds and sensations of the night down to the tiniest detail with such keenness that he almost seemed to grasp the very secret of life itself. Almost. A sudden eagerness came over him, he was ready for more.

When Hein joined project "Whiteroom" he knew little of what would come but he knew he could do what he was hired for. They were all experts in biochemistry and neurology and they were the best when it came to combining technology with living tissue. As the project progressed some of them began getting increasingly uncomfortable, many clones died during their tests but they did their job all the same. If they didn't, somebody else would, and they knew it. The Federal Bureau of *AI* was eager to see results and was not in the least interested in their constant quibbling about details. The clones were a necessity they all had to accept, after all, these clones had been specially designed for their project.

Back in the 22nd century scientists believed that the only way to fight the plague that was endangering the existence of mankind was to clone healthy DNA. No one did like the idea of cloning oneself in order to survive. Despite all reservations and opposition from church and public the government went ahead and started cloning human DNA. When within two years all clones showed the very same immune deficiency as their creators, the plague was at its peak. It was then that the National Health Act legalized the use of clones in scientific research serving to find an antidote. With the increased cloning activities the authorities soon began to employ clones and the military was among the first. These first clones, however, had a tendency to develop a mental defect, as it was called: over time they thought of themselves as individuals rather than carbon copies, demanding rights and full citizenship. The government dealt with them in a rather harsh manner, putting all defective clones into recuperation camps

where they either recuperated or disappeared. Soon mass riots rose which finally escalated into a civil war, now known as the *Clone War* in 2345. Eventually all clones of this period were deactivated and dumped into pits where they were burned. After the war cloning was condemned and forbidden by law. Research, however, carried on in secrecy under the protective wings of the government. Cloning, the scientists argued, was not the solution. The genetic material had become increasingly deficient by re-cloning and the pool of new and unspoiled genetic material was very limited. This project, this chip - his chip - would perhaps be the solution to all their problems. A breakthrough in neurobionics: Life beyond life, the greatest achievement of his century. He had created an *AI* that could anticipate the unknown, it was able to learn and develop its own information processing patterns and replicate them but the highest achievement was its ability to unveil the unused resources of the human brain. Unfortunately, after numerous failed tests with disastrous effects for hybrid and equipment the government decided that the project was to be stopped. He could not let that happen.

Hein was standing in the pouring rain that had turned into a cold shower when the chip switched to *enhanced mode*. The Med-Robots had done a perfect job on him. His clothes were soaking and raindrops were solemnly dripping from his nose. Feeling the cold he suddenly realised that there was no need to feel cold. Probing his new *muscle* he filtered out the information coming from the thermal receptors before they reached their destination, replaced it with normal temperature values and immediately stopped shivering. Now he was *real*. He grinned triumphantly. Slowly he started to move as if he had to learn anew how to walk. Soon he was pacing along the park, running through the dark, shouting and grunting like some wild animal.

Back in his apartment there was this nagging feeling that something was terribly wrong. It had started right with his first hallucination, when he suddenly saw himself back in the lab on the

med-chair. Perhaps some side effect of the treatment. *Give it time*, he thought, *you're almost there*. He grinned weakly and packed what he needed. Since he had initiated the *Enhancer* thirty-three percent of previously inactive regions of his brain had been activated. He turned to the door and it vanished and the room started to dissolve. *It'll pass*, he thought, *focus!* Slowly the room faded back to normal and he headed for the hideout.

The hideout was an old atomic blast-proof bunker in the outskirts, deep down below the surface, which the team had prepared as a secret base of operations in case something should happen to the project. Only the team knew about it but he was sure the government would find out very soon.

He entered the control room, activated the machines and initiated the sealing process. The outer door set in motion with a humming sound and started to close slowly. It would take days to get through that door by force. *Safe*, he thought. Taking a deep breath he sat down in front of the interface. Excitement grew strong in him as he was about to discover his true destination. Dimming the lights he put on the Iris Scanner and linked up.

The room faded away and all around him was eternal blueness and the ground beneath his feet gave way to a pitch black chasm. He hastily tore down the Scanner with a gasp. The chasm was gone but the blueness would not fade. He tried all exit commands and routines he knew and his fingers flew across the keyboard but the program would not shut down. He was trapped, his eyes all filled with a blur of blue. He felt dizzy.

'Wait a minute,' he said, and the loudness of his own voice startled him. 'If the program is still active then the virtual control panels should still be accessible,' he continued in a lower voice. Trying one of the general commands indeed a virtual control panel popped up, floating within the reach of his hands. The panel showed nothing he had expected or even programmed. Cursing, he tried another command and another panel appeared showing the

same odd symbols. Finally he gave up and stood silently before the last remaining control panel, which was patiently waiting to be used. Something told him that he had no choice. Without spending any further thought on it he pressed the symbol. With a bright flash the world around him faded and he was sucked into that blue void and lost consciousness.

‘Cha’d uvlien! Ca niel che’l licaiy?’

A face came in sight above him and looked at him with big eyes.

‘Ca niel che’l licaiy?’

The boy was now offering something to drink for he held a flask in his hand which he opened and presented to him with an encouraging gesture. He hesitated.

‘Le’gand ta’lendja,’ the boy said in a soft voice and held the flask near his lips. Hein took a sip and felt the cool water in his dry mouth. Eagerly Hein took the flask and drank. The water was fresh and tasted - he tried to figure out how it tasted - natural, real, pure, vitalising, he couldn’t name it, but he was sure that this was *real* water.

The stranger sat down opposite to him and stared at him smiling. He had no idea where he was or what language his young host was speaking. The boy’s clothing reminded him somehow of pictures he once saw in a very old book about ancient civilisations. He had the strange feeling that the boy wouldn’t know what computers were, but he had to ask him anyway. Inquiring about the local network and the location of the nearest interface only resulted in more staring and smiling, tough. After a considerable period of silence and staring and smiling and talking in two different languages without any significant sign of progress, Sorensen felt that it was time to move on. The dizziness that had kept him from standing up was gone and now the urge to explore his whereabouts was stronger than anything else. The boy was obviously overjoyed by that idea and tried to make clear that he wanted to lead the

way. The boy, whose name was Elian, brought him to the nearby village Ulen, shouting one word over and over again: Licaiy.

The village elder, a *reialoi* woman called Chen'Aelia, already knew of his coming. Not that it was generally believed that the *reialoi* knew such things simply because they were the *reialoi*, although there always were a few who did believe so, but there were, in fact, books which told you these things if you cared enough to read them. The old woman knew of the coming of the Licaiy because it was written and if something was written one must not doubt it, sometimes you just have to wait ages for it to become true. And sometimes a lifetime is just not long enough. Many a *reialoi* had hoped to see the day but this honour was now all hers. Once again the prophets were right. The Licaiy had finally come. Now the Dark One could be driven back into the dark pits of Ghôrasktoom. The Licaiy brought a new hope with him and with this new hope came life. All this was written in the book of prophecy and the prophets never erred. Almost never.

Chen'Aelia taught him their ways of meditation hoping to overcome the language barrier through mindspeak, as the *reialoi* called it. It had been one week since his arrival and he had already forgotten about the chip, until this day. They were silently sitting in the meditation room, the air was heavy with the scent of incense, when all of a sudden his head was filled with a hubbub of voices. He jumped to his feet, his hands on his ears but the next instance the voices were gone. He stood there silently and listened but he heard nothing. Aelia gestured that he should sit down again. He sighed and sat down. Meditation was supposed to help them to find a way of communicating with each other without words, without voices. He concentrated again and the voices came back. This time he was able to distinguish some of them. He almost seemed to understand what those voices were saying. Suddenly there was only one voice and he could perfectly hear it. It was Aelia.

‘Do not fight it, Licai. I know that you can hear me. Now listen and learn, I cannot speak long like this, my powers are weak. And whatever happens, you must not fight it. Let it happen.’

He was far from doing anything than listening; the chip had now taken over and was interpreting the language, but not only the language. He was able to literally read the old woman’s mind and he was fascinated to learn about their village, their culture, their lives, their hopes and their fears. The Dark One. He pushed a little further. The face of the old woman was no longer relaxed. He wanted to know more. Who was the Dark One? The old woman began to wince. He needed to know.

‘N-No. Stop. Don’t ...,’ Aelia screamed and blood was dripping from her nose. The link was broken. He sat there, his mind full of images that did not belong to him. He looked at Aelia and for some reason felt ashamed. He felt like a child that was caught doing something very naughty.

‘Your nose ...,’ he said a bit helpless.

‘I know!’ came the muffled answer, ‘staring womfttopdebleedin. Go get me a towel from overthea.’

He jumped to his feet and brought her a towel. The bleeding had already stopped and both were now looking at each other in complete bewilderment.

‘You, you ... understand me?’ he asked excitedly.

‘Yes,’ she nodded, ‘but I can’t take credit for it. You did it all yourself.’

Aelia paused and looked at him sternly, a fact Sorensen failed to notice due to the towel in her face.

‘You should have told me that you were a wizard,’ she continued, ‘reading one’s mind like that!’

‘A wizard? But I’m no wizard! I am Hein Sorensen. I work for the government or used to anyway. I am a scientist!’

‘And what would that be, ey? We have none of your scheientists around ‘ere and those who say that they are something we don’t know are bloody, cheeky wizards. So don’t you gimme that posh talk! You may be Hein Soandso but you are a wizard.’

‘No, I’m not. I wouldn't even know what a wizard is, anyway.’

‘Ha! Now I’ve got you. Wizards always pretend that they don’t know what that or this is! They always do, those sneaky, old lechers.’

‘You got me all wrong. I am not old, see? And I am no lecher!’

‘Old you are not but only of minor consequence it is. A wizard you are anyway.’

‘Oh, come on. I told you I am NOT a wizard. A scientist I am. And computer research I do. Artificial Intelligence and such like. It’s all technology and not magic.’

‘Ahhhh, I see. Not only the Liciay you are but also the wizard of teggology!’

At that moment the door burst open and in came Zel, Trengel and Voratch. Zel saw the towel and the blood.

‘What happened?’ asked Zel.

‘We heard you scream!’ stated Trengel.

‘Did he hit you?!’ inquired Voratch.

‘No, no,’ Aelia grinned, ‘We have ’, pointing towards Hein, ‘a wizard here.’

They all looked with big eyes at Sorensen, who just shook his head and sighed.

‘I told her already. I am NOT a wizard. Not even a small one. No magic, no spells, no staff, nothing. I don’t even wear a cloak. Do you get it? I am a scientist! I do research in cybernetics, artificial intelligence, programming virtual interfaces ...’

He did not mention that his government was after him and that all this probably was a result of his invention in one way or another. They listened to his words and were all the more convinced that he must be a wizard. Only wizards could know so many strange words others never had heard of. He realised that there was no way out.

‘All right, all right. I AM a wizard. And now, can we please drop the subject? Just don’t tell anybody else, will you!’

But Zel was already out of the door and announcing cheerfully to the whole village that the Licaiy was not only the Licaiy but also a real mighty wizard.

Now that the language problem was solved, Sorensen began to grasp the whole situation he was in. No matter how much he tried to explain that he was not the one whose coming was foretold, it just brought him more and more followers. He had no choice but to accept it.

They had done over the old house of the former village magician, who had passed away years ago, up the hillside and that was where he lived now. He had soon given up trying to convince them of who he really was. It did not matter, they wouldn’t understand anyway. After having read the minds of the people in the village without them noticing it, he knew that it was for the best to accept the situation. It wasn’t bad after all, and the people were very kind, too.

As the years passed Zel and he fell in love, married and soon thereafter had a lovely daughter.

Life was good. Still they were living on borrowed time and they all knew it, Aelia in particular.

She had sent for the *Chendrâh Fa’l Gidhâ*, the wisest among those who were called *Xendrâh*,

living far off in the valley of Earthenwood, where the most beautiful city lay: *Çin di’l Shrè*,

hidden by magic and only visible to those who knew how to play the *Sçe mi’l Drâh*, the tune of

Earthenwood magic, the most powerful magic on earth. Chendrâh would know what to do

and how to prepare the Licaiy so that he could fulfil the prophecy. Hein was more interested

to learn about the Earthenwood people than he was in that prophecy. Maybe he could reason with them that he was not the one.

Weeks had passed and there was no sign of the wise man. Aelia was getting restless. She was about to organise a search party when Hein discovered his visitor sitting in his rocking chair by the fire. He didn't notice his guest at first, only when Chendrâh spoke to him did he see the old man and he couldn't say that he wasn't scared then.

'Calm yourself. I do not mean to harm you. You have nothing to fear from me.'

The old man's voice crackled like the wood in the fire and much to his surprise it calmed him.

'Sit.'

He obeyed.

'You know who I am?'

'I ... I guess so. You are the wise man Aelia had sent for.'

'I am *Chendrâh Fa'l Gidhà*, arch mage of *Çin di'l Shrè* and keeper of the secret tunes of *Sçe mi'l Drâh*, the founder of the arcane order of the *Xendrâh* and I am here to prepare you for your death.'

Hein looked at the old man and the meaning of the words slowly dawned on him.

'You ... what? Death? Nobody said anything about death! Wait a minute, do I get it right? You want me to die?'

'Not necessarily. But you need to be prepared.'

'So you're saying that I might die?'

'Such are the chances.'

'What sort of a wise man are you? You sound more like a hangman!'

'I've been that to many of our enemies.'

'Oh, splendid! So, am I your enemy?'

‘No, you are the Licaiy. And unless you are prepared you are neither our enemy nor our ally.’

‘Well, let me tell you one thing: I am not the one you think I am and I am not going to die for you or anybody else. Do I make myself clear?’

‘Quite.’

‘Good.’

The old man looked at him with oaken eyes and said nothing. Hein started to feel uneasy. Chendrâh turned towards another man who was standing behind the chair and whom Hein hadn’t noticed until now. The young *Xendrâh* nodded and left. The filigree appearance had something enchanting and the way the man silently moved was of the purest elegance. They were of humanoid shape but one could guess their link to earth and wood by one single glimpse. The scent of wood was all around and it was sweet. The old man turned to Hein again and spoke.

‘You will sleep now and when you wake your preparation will begin.’

‘Sleep? But I am not tired.’ Hein fell asleep on the spot and the old man sighed.

The other Xendrâh came back, he brought Aelia with him.

‘Thank goodness, you’re here. Ah, I see you’ve already met. What do you say?’, Aelia asked expectantly.

‘It seems he is not quite ready to cooperate.’

‘Cooperate? He is the most stubborn person I’ve ever met, but - he has a good heart.’

‘That might be so. But he does not believe. And if he does not learn to believe he cannot be prepared.’

‘He will learn. You will teach him.’

The old man sighed again, ‘Aye, I will’, he looked thoughtfully at the snoring Licaiy, ‘You said he is a wizard?’

‘Yes, he read my mind like an open book!’

‘Hm, strange. I cannot sense any magic in him. If he really is a wizard then he might be more dangerous than I’ve thought.’

‘So ... you say you can’t tell if he’s a wizard?’

‘At least there is no magic in him I know of and – there is something else ...’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I am not sure what it is, but he seems to be ... lacking.’

‘Lacking? Lacking what?’

‘A soul.’

‘Impossible. This cannot be ... can it? What does this mean? He ain’t the Licaiy then?’

‘I wish I knew.’

‘Oh’, Aelia raised one eyebrow to signal her puzzlement and Chendrâh did likewise and then both looked upon Hein, who was sleeping the magic sleep of preparation that should make him cooperate.

‘Hein. Hein! Wake up. Listen to me. This is important. Please. Wake up. Hein!’

Hein stirred. The voice sounded familiar. He knew the woman he just did not want to wake up, not yet.

‘Wake up now. You have to wake up. Please, Hein. They are coming.’ There was a slight hint of panic in the voice. Hein was trying to remember the face that belonged to that voice, a name and he wondered who was coming and for what. It sounded bad and he did not like the way this dream turned out.

‘Try to remember, Hein. Focus! End it now before it’s too late! Please, do it for me.’, the voice sounded very emotional. He tried to remember, tossing in his sleep.

‘They are coming’, echoed the voice and he startled up from his chair, sweating and breathing hard.

‘Who is there?’, he gasped in the dark of the room.

‘Shht. Do not speak. Keep your eyes closed. We haven’t got much time.’ It was the female voice from his dream. He knew that voice.

‘Felice?’ he said unbelievably. The woman remained silent.

‘Is that you?’ Hein was trying hard to see in the dark but all he could make out was a moving shadow in front of him. He tried to move and could not. He was tied to the chair.

‘Yes Hein. It is me. Please do not speak any more. They are coming and we must not draw any more attention to me.’ She sounded scared. It was her. Felice. The woman he loved and thought dead.

‘How...?’ he whispered trying to understand. She moved closer and touched his lips with her hand.

‘Shhht. If they find out I was here, they’ll kill me again,’ she whispered into his ear. He was confused. Felice. She was here. Where was here? Why was he tied up? Was this the bunker? What happened to the village? He felt something cold entering his left ear. Before he could make a noise, Felice pressed her hand hard on his mouth.

‘Can you hear me?’ her voice sounded faint and muffled. He thought about the day she disappeared so many years ago.

‘Focus Hein, I need you to listen. I established a neural link between us and I don’t know how long it will last, do you understand?’ Felice was holding his head with both hands, she was standing behind him. He could smell her perfume. *Focus!*

‘Yes, I can hear you.’ The words formed slowly in his head, ‘Felice, am I dead?’

‘No, but you will soon be if you don’t shut up. I had to disappear, Hein, believe me I had no other choice, if we survive this I’ll explain everything to you but for now I need you to trust me.’

Hein felt like crying, her hands on his face, she was alive.

‘Do you trust me?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then do exactly as I say. When our link breaks up you will find yourself in a strange place. All that you experience there is part of an alternate reality created by your mind as a result of the Enhancer chip looking for a way to save itself from government seizure. As long as you maintain that alternate reality they cannot remove the chip without destroying it. You need to shut down the chip. Hein, shut the chip down. Please. Come back. Come back to me. Hein... I love you.’ Her voice faded and he no longer felt her touch. She was gone.

He woke up in his rocking chair and stared into Aelia’s wrinkled old face emerging from the shadows like a demon. He screamed.

‘Nightmares?’ Aelia’s raspy voice broke the spell and he sat up, rubbing his face.

‘I dreamt of... Felice,’ he uttered uncertain.

‘Felice? Never heard of such a place.’ Aelia was rummaging around the fire place, putting more wood into the dying fire.

‘No. No place. A woman I once loved,’ he reached for his ear where Felice had inserted the interface. There was no interface there now.

‘Ahh women, you’ll get over it.’, Aelia grinned at him, ‘Don’t worry I won’t tell Zel.’ Aelia disappeared into the kitchen.

Then it hit him. He was married. He had a daughter and soon Zel would give birth again. *Shut down the chip.* There was a war coming and these people were counting on him to put things right. *It isn't real!*

'Shut up!' Hein pressed his hands on his ears. 'She is dead,' he whispered, 'Dead. It couldn't been her.'

'Now, now. It was just a bad dream. It's ok now. Here, have some tea. Zel will be back any minute now. It'll be alright.'

He fell back into his chair and took a sip of the tea. *It won't be alright,* he thought. He couldn't just switch off the chip and wipe out all this just like that, besides he wasn't even sure what would happen if he did switch it off let alone if he could even if he wanted to. He took another sip of the tea. *I have to find a better way,* he thought and he felt that he was almost there. With that he fell asleep and Aelia took the cup before he could drop it.

'Sleep now and dream of nothing,' she whispered into his ear. Chendrâh stood behind her a worried frown on his face. Aelia turned to him and asked in a low voice.

'What did you see?'

Chendrâh took her aside and looked at Hein and then back at her.

'I saw...,' his voice crackled like the new lit fire, 'I saw... Ghôrasktoom. I saw... him.'

The lights went out in the warden's room and on the whole floor. The very next instant the emergency light was spreading its gloomy red across the room.

'What the hell ...,' began one of the wardens.

'Easy Mike,' said Cyme. 'It's either the fuse or this wretched No. 101 again,' he frowned in disgust but remained calm. Mike was a newbie and a clone in the third generation, free of the plague virus. He didn't know the story of No. 101 yet.

‘What the hell you mean? What’s No. 101?’ Mike asked sourly. They were playing patience and he was more than annoyed by this unexpected disturbance.

‘Well, if we’re lucky it’s just the fuse this time,’ Cyme replied gravely.

‘And if not?’

‘Then the whole place will be swarming with *Enhanced* within the next hour,’ the older warden spat out.

‘The *Enhanced*? You mean those cyber-hybrid elite smart asses will come *here*? What’d they do here?’

The old warden just looked at him a bit amused and shrugged.

‘Tell you what! Why don’t you go down and check?’

‘Down? To the cellar?’

Cyme tossed him the keys and smiled. The newbie looked at the keys and gulped.

‘All right, all right. It’s your first night, ey?’ The younger one nodded, ‘We’ll go down together, all right?’ Cyme said sympathetically. Again Mike nodded, greatly relieved.

On their way down, the old warden kept telling him a story about a guy, a scientist who once worked for the *VTR*, now known to the institution as No. 101, and how this guy was found at a nuclear plant, inside a bunker. He was a mere shadow, barely alive and babbling gibberish no one could understand. When he saw one of *them*, a short glimmer of recognition came across his face and he crawled up to the figure and pointed at it.

‘You are – not – REAL!’ He would shout and start to cackle in a way that sent cold chills down your spine. He would then stand silent as if he was listening before he started anew mumbling in a foreign tongue that made no sense to them. He just grinned at them and did not resist when they pushed him into the anti-gravitation cab.

The older warden looked at the newbie who was listening with wide and questioning eyes.

‘Every once in a while No. 101 manages to escape from his cell and makes it all the way past the security barriers down to the cellar where he hides crawled up under some tossed over furniture. Somehow he even manages to switch off all the lights in the entire building. Just as he did today, this son of a bitch, either he did or the fuse blew. You can imagine how much trouble we’d gone through because of this freak? Go and try explain how somebody could come so far without even being noticed? The guy could have been up and away whenever he wanted to, but all he ever does is break out of his cell once a year and hide in the cellar! Now, why would he do that? You tell me?’

‘I ... ahhm ... Huh! Dunno?’ Mike said bluntly and Cyme nodded, neither did he. In the basement they found a hunched up figure cowering behind a wooden trunk. The older warden shook his head and stepped towards the Communication-Panel on the wall and called the *Enhanced*.

Mike did not understand what was going on but when the *Enhanced* came and started to work on this pitiful mingled shadow, he was more than sure that he didn’t even want to know what was going on. After less than ten minutes they managed to break the code that was blocking the light control systems and the lights went back on. After another twenty minutes all the security programs were reactivated. But they weren’t done yet. After four more hours they emerged from the basement carrying a pale and almost lifeless body between them. Mike stared at the figure in disgust and pity. As they came past him he heard it whisper.

‘You are – not – *real*’, followed by a faint, mad chuckle.

Later on that evening when the old warden came back from his rounds he sat down opposite of the newbie, lit a cigarette and asked in a low voice.

‘You heard him?’

‘Yeah,’ came the quiet answer.

They both remained silent for quite a while when finally the younger one broke the silence.

‘Who is this guy? I mean, did you see his eyes?’

There was a faint shaking in his voice and the old warden just nodded. Everything pretty soon got back to normal right after the *Enhanced* had left. The *Enhanced*. Nobody really liked those arrogant elite human hybrids.

‘He’s one of *them*,’ the old warden said in a bitter tone, tapping his head where the *enhanced* usually had their implants.

Mike looked at him puzzled. One of *them*? He didn’t quite understand.

‘You mean ...,’ he started.

‘Yes. In a way, you could say he’s their father.’

‘But ... but why is he here then? He .. he ... I mean ...’

‘He is here, because the government doesn’t want him. For them he’s dead already and if you ask me that would be the best for him anyway. He’ll never find his way back,’ Cyme shook his head.

‘Find back? What do you mean?’ Mike looked at him with big eyes.

‘Trapped in his mind! The chip has taken over! You remember? He spends most of his life there, except those rare moments when he is self-aware and goes down into the cellar. He’ll never recover, never find back to himself, you know?’

The young man just nodded understandingly and remained silent. He thought of poor No. 101, the almost *enhanced*, who had abused his kind, and he didn’t feel any anger or hate, only pity. None of them spoke for a while and they both startled as the security gate bell rang.

‘Who could that be?’, asked Mike.

‘No clue. Whoever it is better have a damn good reason to come here at this hour!’, Cyme didn’t like surprises and he had had his share today already. He went to the interface and bellowed into the speaker.

‘Identify yourself and state your business.’, he was already preparing for his favourite part when the reply came.

‘I am here to see Hein Sorenson. Iris scan will confirm my identity and access codes.’ The woman was one of the Enhanced.

Mike looked at Cyme. They both looked at the Iris Scan results and Cyme let her in.

‘Holy smokes, look at that scan! She’s one of the Elite Corps.’, Mike couldn’t believe his eyes.

‘Yeah. This means trouble.’ Cyme had a bad feeling.

Back in cell No. 101 a thin voice kept repeating the same words incessantly.

*Almost there.*