

_CHAPTER_01_

Nowhere Indiana

10:32 AM

Katie was a good quarter of a mile out, hiding amongst the cornfield, her dark clothing allowing her to blend into the shadow of the tall cornstalks. Her ocular ring was digitally zoomed-in to the grossly expansive Thurid Tech campus. It was a beautiful sight, the parking lot large enough to hold two hundred and fifty cars (side note: the nanites had quickly done the math for Katie). But that was only thirty percent of the visible campus. The rest consisted of an immaculately manicured grass lawn surrounding a domed building the width and height of a professional football stadium.

The entire facility was protected by two-story high metal fencing, with turret mounted, manned watchtowers at each of the fences adjoining sections.

She took a brief moment to think about what a one-eighty her life had taken since Professor White willfully deceived her into ingesting a nanite, wrongly turning her into his test subject. How prior to that she was not only legally required to wear glasses when driving, but was also soft-spoken, gentle, and overly concerned about other's feelings - all to a fault. All attributes that she thought made her a valuable friend, and one day a valuable partner. But those were ideas she now believed to be false. Ideas she

discarded once Professor White and his employer, Thurid Technologies, began treating her like a pin-cushion for bullets. Ideas she discarded once she took up the personal agenda of destroying all of Thurid Tech's research and development facilities.

-Can we get in?- Katie's thoughts silently asked the nanites.

-Trying to shut down their systems now without setting off any alarms- they replied. *-But they seem to have increased their firewall security since the destruction of the other facility. It is as if they were anticipating our inevitable attempt. Oops.-*

-Oops? What do you mean, oops?- asked Katie, concerned. Thurid Tech's alarms began ringing, audible even at Katie's distance.

-Oh, come on!- she whined.

-We sincerely apologize. We do not understand what happened, but rest assured we have already begun performing a post-mortem in an effort to retrace our steps and determine where the flaw originated.-

-Do that later. For now, let's get inside.-

She was out of her kneeling position and in a dead sprint in the blink of an eye. Her black cargo pants allowed extensive mobility with her long strides, and her dark green tank-top with black contrast stitching kept her arm movements free.

She bee-lined for the nearest of the four guard towers,

increasing her speed to make sure she reached it before the guard shifted his attention her way.

The guard had his grip tighter on the grip of the mounted machinegun than he was aware. He saw movement out of the corner of his eye, swinging the .50 cal. fast to his right and fluidly sliding it along the circular rail mounted inside the tower, allowing for a true 360 degree gun turret. He slid back the bolt, making sure the gun was ready to fire. He had never actually fired it on a living thing before, only having used it for practice. He tightened his body around it for added support against the inevitable recoil. He shifted his focus to the grassy hill rolling down toward the facilities electric fencing.

Nothing.

His muscles relaxed a second, constricting again when a figure leapt high up in front of his gun and down into the tower's nest, with him. It was a woman. It was Katie. He recognized her from the footage the entire security team was required to watch, showing the destruction she had sowed upon the other Thurid Technologies facility. Not only did she murder Sergeant Vigon and kidnap Professor White, but she also brought pieces of a satellite down onto the multi-billion dollar laboratory. The footage demonized her, as did the news - especially once the government evacuated a ten-mile radius for fear of possible contagions and chemical leaks that Thurid Tech may have been working on at that location. Classified, of course.

And now, that same demon was standing before him.

He let out a brief scream as she grabbed him in a bear hug, the nanites in her body emitting just enough electricity - from her body, through his black, tactical, bullet-proof vest, and into his body - to render him unconscious.

Katie dropped the guard, yanking the .50 cal. out of its mount and throwing it to the ground below, outside of the fence. She then looked to the next guard tower, its guard looking back.

He let his rounds fire, slamming into Katie's guard tower as she jumped down and started toward him.

Grass and dirt launched several feet into the air as Katie stayed ahead of the rain of bullets. She stayed close to the fence, letting her left-hand fingers dance along it while she tried to cover the gap between towers as quickly as she could.

The electricity from the fence surged through her body, something that in the past would have been agonizing, so much power going through her small frame, but the nanites had learned to temporarily shutdown her pain receptors when entering combat.

-Don't hit him too hard-, she ordered the nanites.

-Of course not-.

Electricity traveled through her body and up her right arm. It arced from her finger tips, traveling through the air and into the distant guard tower, hitting the .50 cal. and zapping the guard enough to launch him back and to the

tower's floor. He was unconscious, his hair toasty and his bladder instantly empty, but he was alive.

Inside the secure facility, their head of security - Charles Watson - was observing the outside action through the abundance of security camera feeds coming to his command hub. His men were around him, loading up with rifles and ammo, preparing for war.

"That's her, huh?" Watson asked to no one in particular, his eyes transfixed on the screen, on every action Katie was taking. "Listen up, men!" he barked into the small, circular room. He was a tall, good-looking, physically-fit man, barely thirty years of age. He made good money doing mercenary work in the Middle-East, before joining the ranks of Thurid. He had an issue with authority which is why he never joined the military and had many a verbal altercations with Sergeant Vigon. He hated that man. And that was why his team loved him. He balked at protocol. It was all about getting the job done by any means necessary. And the idea of taking down the rogue Thurid project that took down Vigon was exciting. "Don't step out that door cautiously. Have intent. She will not hesitate to harm you, therefore you should not hesitate to do the same. Hit her with everything. If you knock her down, keep firing. I want her arms and legs severed, head chopped off. There is no Geneva Convention here, gentlemen. We get it done by any means necessary."

"Sir!" they all chanted back in unison. They were all without families, Watson wanted his *soldiers* unattached. He didn't want them worrying about dying and leaving any wife or kids behind.

"Let's go!" Watson led his men out of the command hub, a long barreled, bulky, custom rifle in hand.

As soon as they entered the hallway they were swept up in the chaos of Thurid employees running for the designated safe-rooms of the facility. But his men stayed cool and calm, shoving anyone out of their way as they steam-rolled ahead.

Watson split from his men, heading up flight after flight of stairs into the bright outdoors. His hair whipped around from the tumult of a helicopter's propellers. He shielded his eyes for a quick second before darting toward it.

"Mr. Watson!" a recognizable voice came from behind him, stopping him in his tracks.

"Ma'am!" he turned to find Professor Green, the only authority he did respect.

Her days of science were behind her, having accomplished what many believed to be the impossible: the isolation and suppression of the Optimum gene.

She was intimidating well beyond her short stature and thick glasses. "Do you have clearance to use that Scalpel Rifle?" she gestured to the weapon in his hands.

"Of course, Ma'am," he respectfully replied as she finished her approach, neither letting the wash from the helicopter

affect their stoic posture.

"Keep the setting on low, Mr. Watson. I don't want you slicing through our underground and harming our staff."

"Of course, Ma'am." Watson stood, back straight, not flinching. Waiting for permission to continue.

"Okay, go on," she waved her hand at him to leave.

"Ma'am. And please proceed to one of the safe-rooms, Ma'am."

"Yes, yes," she nonchalantly replied as she watched him board the helicopter.

Katie was sprinting the three hundred yards to the actual domed facility. The nanites were keeping her breathing smooth and consistent, her heart rate strong, her muscles loose. All allowing her legs to move at a consistent speed. From the back of the building, from the tall outcropping that supported the helipad, Katie's eyes spied a helicopter circling as it rose high into the air.

Her eyes zoomed in, data scrolling across her frontal lobe at the speed of consciousness:

Make: Bell Helicopter, Boeing Rotorcraft Systems

Model: V-22 Osprey

Manufacture Date: June 19th, 2009

Purchase Date: Redacted

Maximum Weapons Payload: Redacted

Katie's eyes zoomed in tighter, locking on Charles Watson - strapped into the back of the Osprey's tail loading ramp.

Identification: Charles Watson

Current Employer: Thurid Industries

Previous Employers: Redacted

Date of Birth: August 23rd, 1981

Criminal Record: Redacted

Education: Redacted

Psychological Evaluation: Redacted

Then her eyes rested on the rifle in his hands.

Weapons Classification: Unknown

-Unknown?- Katie thought of the info the nanites fed her. -

Is it not a Thurid design?-

-We have no data.-

Katie felt the rounds hit her torso before she heard the crack of the bullets breaking the sound barrier.

They reversed her progress, sending her backward several feet, landing on her back.

She went with the momentum, rolling backward onto her feet, stopping in a kneeling position.

The nanites went to work, healing the wound and expelling the bullets, all while scanning the battlefield.

Driving hard toward her were three dark grey, armored Humvees, two with a top mounted gun turret.

That's what hit Katie, she surmised: the lead Humvee's long nosed NSW-B 12.7 mm heavy machine gun.

But it was the third Humvee - the one angling out from the right, keeping the other Humvees out of its range - that the nanites were screaming about in her head.

-What's an Active Denial System- Katie asked in response to the panicked nanites.

Then she felt it. Her skin heating up.

"What's happening?!" she uncontrollably shouted as her skin began to blister.

The Humvees were still far out but closing the gap rapidly.

-THAT is an Active Denial System. It is meant to subdue you.-

She was down on both knees now. It was working.

-Their setting is too high. We think the intend is to kill you.-

-You think? Do something!-

-Recommendations?- they asked.

-Throw something at it!-

They knew just what to do.

More rounds flew from the lead Humvee, pounding around Katie, one hitting her in the shoulder, nearly taking it off.

The Humvees were upon her, lionesses about to run-down their prey.

BOOM!

They were silent - the electric cars that the nanites hacked, hijacked, and high-tailed into the fray. Silent attackers doing as Katie had requested: being thrown at the Humvees (driven into, to be fair).

Katie's pain continued to worsen as the sounds of electric car after electric car slammed into the three Humvees, focusing mostly on the lead one and the one with the ADS (Active Denial System). The nanites aimed for the wheels. It worked. The lead Humvee stopped inches from Katie. She opened her eyes to see dozens of cars careened up against the now immobile military vehicles. It looked like a junkyard.

The only problem was, *-It still hurts!*- she was on all four now, the nanites allowing her to hold out longer than any living thing could have.

-Wait for it,- they replied.

With the nanites' help the electric cars sparked into flames, small at first - small enough to warn the soldiers of fortune manning and driving the Humvees. They climbed out and ran for it only seconds before the flames became explosions.

The ADS Humvee was the first to go up, destroying the machine and instantly allowing Katie to regain her bearings.

The nanites tended to the blisters on Katie's skin, but she was waiting around, attacking the Watson's men before they

could regroup. She launched twelve feet into the air, the soldiers in awe as she cartwheeled above them.

Her left heel glowed with energy as she came down in the middle of the nine men, bringing the heel down on one of their heads, sending electricity through his body as soon as contact was made.

The first of the soldiers was now unconscious, face down in the grass.

Katie landed with both feet together, bending her knees and immediately flipping backward, her right foot coming down on the top of the next soldier's head as he leveled his rifle on her.

And another soldier lay motionless on the ground, just enough electricity coursing through him to temporarily shut down his brain.

Again she was only touching the ground for a split second as she leapt back up, perfectly executing a back-kick to the third soldier's chest, shooting electricity down her leg and out of her foot.

-Running low on electrical charge, Katie. Permission to break bones?-

-Okay. Permission to break bones granted.-

The remaining 6 soldiers haphazardly opened fire, no regard for each other's safety. But remember, that was what they liked about working for Watson - no rules in combat. No forced teamwork. Every man for himself.

Katie stayed low, stepping in fast on the man to her right,

grabbing the muzzle of his rifle as he fired. She kept control of the gun as she swept his legs with enough brute force to brake them on contact.

Katie yanked the rifle from her victim's grip as he fell onto his shoulder. She spun with the rifle, using it as a bat, cracking it across the face of the next soldier.

The other four soldiers began backing away as they unloaded.

Katie crossed her arms in front of her face as she charged them, going straight into the middle of their line. Their rounds weren't doing enough damage to truly harm Katie, the nanites too efficient for small caliber bullets.

As she reached the first soldier she swung her arms apart, her fists slamming into the soldier's head. He was unconscious before he hit the ground. And he was quickly followed by the next soldier as Katie began tearing through them, disarming them, breaking their arms or their trigger fingers - anything to make them non-threatening.

She hadn't even broken a sweat, standing over the defeated men.

One of the soldiers near her screamed out in pain, his leg being severed at the knee, clean through. But there was no blood, the wound being cauterized instantly.

-What just happened?- Katie asked.

-Laser. Above.- The nanites were short in there answer.

Short and to the point.

Katie preferred it that way.

A line of singed grass on each side of the severed limb proved the little robot bugs' laser statement to be accurate.

Katie put her eyes to the sky. High above was that damned Osprey, with that damned Watson latched into the open back loading ramp, the unidentifiable laser rifle in his hand. The nanites adjusted Katie's vision to infrared, allowing her to see the laser in daylight. And just in time as the laser cuts along the ground to Katie's right, dissecting another of Watson's unconscious men, killing him.

Katie ran a few steps to the nearest burning Humvee, spreading her fingers and jamming them down into its hood. She yanked the burning hood off, using it as a shield as she spun and aimed it up to the sky.

Watson fired again, cutting the hood-shield in half, barely missing Katie as she intuitively side-stepped it.

"He's out of reach," she mumbled.

-Bring him closer.- The nanites highlighted, in Katie's internal HUD, the tow cable on the front of one of the Humvees.

She understood instantly, reaching down and grabbing the cable, pulling it, giving it slack.

The laser fired again, cutting the Humvee in half.

Katie pulled faster. *-How much of this do I need?-*

The laser cut the cable before she could pull its full length.

-That'll have to do.-

Katie stood, leering at Watson above, foolishly thinking he was safe. She was ready for his next effort as she dragged the one-hundred foot tow cable around her, slowly getting enough speed and strength to get it spiraling over her head. The weighty hook at the end requiring more effort on her part.

Katie side-stepped the next laser shot, keeping not only her body out of the way but also the tow cable, shifting its position to different sides of her body, doing it over and over as Watson continued circling above, taking shots. When the moment presented itself she hurled the cable upward.

Watson saw it coming, aiming the Scalpel Rifle. He got off two bursts, missing with both. He looked back down the cargo hold to the cockpit of the Osprey. "Higher!" he yelled to the pilot. But the metal clanging sound and slight jostle told him it was too late.

Katie grinned. *-I hooked a big one.-* She was proud as she watched the tow hook finish wrapping another final loop around the left wing of the Osprey, miraculously missing the upwardly directed propeller.