

HUMANITY: I THINK, THEREFORE I AM

Plan of the ENTIRE series!

ISSUE ONE

MAIN PLOT: Kanzaki, Atomo, the Chief and Haruko are introduced; also ANI. Kanzaki and Atomo complete a stealth mission successfully, taking out a man who is going to give information to unsavoury corporate types (perhaps humanist sympathisers?). After a brief review with the chief, they are sent to arrest the Network server, who has become a security risk because the network encryption codes are stored in his brain. Upon arriving at his locale they discover ANI has beaten them to it – she escapes with the NS's head and uploads the info into her own brain. Issue finishes at Tanaki-oma when the humanists break in to hijack the network. A S.W.A.T. team assists Kanzaki and Atomo.

CLIFF-HANGER: Guards strung up on entrance gate to Tanaki-oma, with something sinister carved into their chest (something to do with cyborgs lack of a soul).

SUBPLOT: Kanzaki's birth (at start of issue), moody captions over it. Kanzaki meets ANI.

ISSUE TWO

MAIN PLOT: Continuation of previous issue. Humanists break into Tanaki-oma and hijack the control room, using lethal force. They break into a guard tower a la "The Rock". The Humanist Leader takes out several people with his katana. The crew in the control room begin to close the bulkheads in order to seal themselves off, but ANI just effortlessly lifts up the giant metal hatch so the humanists can execute everybody. Atomo's team stealthily storm out of the van – cut immediately to Kanzaki's team ascending in a circular lift, poised to shoot anything that moves. They begin to move down a corridor (tense atmosphere!) when someone drops a bomb down. After the bomb goes off, the team are spread over a wide area and are unable to see each other due to smoke left by the explosion. ANI grabs Kanzaki and kidnaps her. Atomo's team meet up with Kanzaki's team to discover she has been kidnapped, they try to think of ways to break into the control room in order to rescue Kanzaki and oust the humanists. In the control room, the humanists are reprogramming several computers whilst ANI randomly inflicts pain on Kanzaki – some moody exchange between them. They eventually leave via the roof. Kanzaki escapes her bonds and follows, grabbing one of the humanists as he climbs the ladder. The humanists leader shoots his own man, forcing him back onto Kanzaki, knocking her off the ladder. He then unattaches the ladder so Kanzaki can follow no more. Kanzaki curses. Cut. Kanzaki getting her burnt skin replaced (from the torture) by the Network Intelligence doctor. Atomo and Haruko are also present. Haruko keeps annoying Kanzaki (somehow?), who keeps turning away and annoying the doctor who is trying to carry out delicate work on her – character building and mood lightening scene. Then the chief and the PM in a room in N.I. HQ, several people are working at computer stations attempting to reconstruct the data lost at Tanaki-oma. The Chief explains to the PM that the control centre of the network has been reassigned to another location that only the humanists know and the reconstruction specialists are trying to locate it. The reconstruction specialists (time to introduce Yuka Hito) discover a countdown that they cannot identify the purpose of, the countdown reaches zero. Next page, start with a shot in space of the orbital laser cannon INUSAKI firing. Slowly zoom into the Earth to reveal a street scene, Sony robot dogs fighting, bloke having an argument with his girlfriend, etc. This page can be 13 frames. The blast reaches the city, blowing a building apart and causing general devastation. Show mangled bodies, fires, etc.

CLIFF-HANGER: Osato in a room, watching the devastation on a monitor. He crosses the room to a window and looks out to see smoke rising behind the skyscrapers; a shot of him with his reflection on the glass, he says "tomorrow the network".

SUBPLOT: Kanzaki getting her first cybernetic implants (at beginning of issue). Exchange with ANI during torture.

ISSUE THREE

MAIN PLOT: Opens with the Chief and the PM in a helicopter, over flying the devastation caused in last issue. They discuss the repercussions of the Humanists' actions; the PM mentions that the Russians have offered assistance – can you imagine how degrading it is to have assistance offered by the Russians?! (a link back to "*I Dream Of Humanity*" that no one will get yet). The opening should just last the one page, then cut to:

Kanzaki's bedroom in her apartment; she is off duty and has decided to get some sleep. Her bed is far less sophisticated than the first draft of issue two and involves a mattress and sheets – Kanzaki still is plugged into the network via every connection, it's just that she's not rigidly held in place. In fact, Kanzaki's whole apartment is a much lighter location (it's also daytime, which helps). Kanzaki has the beginning of a dream sequence involving ANI, a kind of role reversal of the torture scene in last issue, with herself as torturer and ANI as the victim. Her dream is interrupted when Osato

invades her brain, looking for information (the reader does not know what about at this stage). Osato is apparently satisfied with what he gets and tries to kill Kanzaki by raising the power going through her network connections. She screams out in pain and utters the words about Atomo that she did in the first draft of issue two. She wakes with a start, in time to pull away her network connections and save her own life. Kanzaki is bleeding from all her connections and still in pain, she is just regaining her composure when the doorbell rings. Kanzaki grabs her gun and goes to answer it, opening the door and pointing the weapon straight in the face of Haruko and Yuka Hito (if she wasn't introduced in last issue, she's introduced now). Haruko tells Kanzaki that a few hours have passed since she went off duty and that the Inusaki has been used to destroy the city centre, with 2000 casualties. Hito interjects and tells Kanzaki that someone has come forward claiming to know about what's happening – she's part cyborg, but the implants have been inserted badly, she seems insane. Hito has tried data reconstruction within the brain, but still can't understand the code. The suspect is only willing to talk to Kanzaki “But how does she know **me**?!” “I don't know, I couldn't find that in her brain either.” Kanzaki curses Hito for invading another cyborgs brain “don't you know how excruciating that is?!” Kanzaki asks for a moment to get changed.

Upon arriving at Network Intelligence HQ, Kanzaki and co. are mobbed by the press, who are asking about the Tanaki-oma incident. Amongst the crowd Haruko spots an old friend of hers, Kimiko. Although Kimiko asks about the incident, Haruko doesn't tell her anything.

Kanzaki enters a room in Network intelligence HQ, an interrogation room. We are on the other side of one-way glass, looking at a suspect who can't see us. The suspect is dishevelled with cybernetic implants sticking out of her body, making her look like some kind of malformed freak. Atomo is the first to greet Kanzaki, he asks her if she's okay, she tells him that someone tried to invade her brain this morning via the network. Atomo whispers “Are you nuts?! How can you connect to the network when these terrorists have control?!”; Kanzaki replies “Gotta recharge – gotta connect.” Upon seeing the suspect, Kanzaki is revolted. When Kanzaki interviews the suspect, she says things like “he did this to me on *her* command...” and “all she wanted to do was love...”. After a small amount of sobbing, the suspect begins to attack Kanzaki, at which point Atomo and a couple of guards run in. They try to restrain the suspect, but she is so badly put together that they break her back, with her dying breath she says “the machine... has always choked... your essence...” “Is love life?...”. Atomo is really blown away about killing her; he keeps saying “I didn't mean to do that – how the **hell** did that happen?!”. Kanzaki notices an inscription on her back ‘*Sonoda*’ and a legend ‘*Kusanagi Research inst.*’ (an *homage* to Ghost In The Shell!).

Yuka Hito returns to her data decryption work room to find that one of her juniors has accessed a file that Hito told him not to; Hito becomes annoyed at this, but her junior tells her that everything is okay because he believes he has found the location the Humanists transferred the network control program to. Hito is nonplussed about this, but tell the junior “good work”; she then tells him to inform the chief, she has to make a phone call, she says.

Kanzaki and Atomo are driving through the city, they pass many construction vehicles that are taking materials to the city centre, in order to begin reconstruction (things move a lot quicker now that everything is pre-fabricated). The car drives past a huge sign that reads “Have you lost your soul – Then buy DO. Corp's. new brain casing to house the part of you that counts. Communicates with organic matter faster than any other cyber brain.” Throughout the journey Kanzaki is ribbing Atomo about killing the suspect – you don't know your own strength, etc... Eventually (in fact, after a page) Kanzaki and Atomo pull up outside the ‘*Kusanagi Cybernetic Research Institute*’. Atomo reminds Kanzaki that “This is a long shot”. Once inside, Kanzaki asks if she can connect to the institute's central computer to collect information about some suspects in a terrorist action. The receptionist immediately denies her request; Kanzaki then shows her some photographs (on a D.I.D.) – a picture of the suspect and a picture of ANI – at which point the receptionists calls one of the head scientists, a Dr. Kagawa. Kagawa takes one look at the pictures, then asks Kanzaki and Atomo to leave, he says that the institute supplies parts to millions of cyborgs and how is he supposed to remember any individuals. Despite Kanzaki's credentials, she can get nowhere.

Back at HQ, Hito and Haruko are in the Chief's office. Hito tells the chief that the definite target for the network control program has been confirmed – the Kobayashi corporate building. The chief says that he has spoken with the PM and that it will not be possible to decipher the Humanists' encryption codes in time. Instead Network Intelligence are to watch the building until the Humanists attack it and then arrest them all. He despatches Haruko to alert all the teams to stand by. Kanzaki will be in command of storming the building; Atomo's team will monitor the Humanists' transmissions to and from the building and try to locate their hideout through satellite triangulation.

CLIFF-HANGER: The final page, which is similar to the first page of the first draft of issue one. Two shadowy figures having a discussion (one is Osato, the other the PM – but we cannot tell this until the final frame). The PM continually tells Osato that he will not sign an order for the destruction of the Humanists or for the assassination of Kanzaki (but no names are mentioned, they could be talking about anyone. Just hint at ANI, Kanzaki and the Humanists).

SUBPLOT: Much of the above is subplot, including Kanzaki’s dream about ANI; what the suspect says to Kanzaki; partly Kanzaki’s visit to the Kusanagi Institute (TO BE CONTINUED!); and partly the final page. There is nothing that is completely subplot in this issue and not main plot at all. But then you could argue that the entire issue is subplot!

ISSUE FOUR

NB: The text in italics is currently under review.

MAIN PLOT: First scene is the apartment of Kimiko (that’s Haruko’s friend), at first we see her in a neurally transmitted drama show – that is the programme is transmitted directly to the brain and you can view any scene you like from any angle. To depict this I will have three frames of Kimiko ‘inside’ a drama show, watching it from different (and very strange) angles; then cut to a frame of her heavily plugged into the network. Kimiko’s boyfriend moans at her for using the network connection, her child asks if she can watch too but is told she is not old enough to have the necessary implants. Suddenly a lot of government shit is downloaded to Kimiko’s computer at random, she gets top secret files and even a live audio link to Network Intelligence’s mission – she is most surprised. A message appears on her screen ‘government pass code overridden; authorisation unconfirmed...’ [two pages]

Cut to: the network Intelligence control groups communicating mentally, telling each other that the Kobayashi security has been breached and that the “situation is hot” – the Humanists are there.

Then we see Kanzaki’s team descending onto the roof of the Kobayashi corporate building on fast ropes, they take a moment to secure the area and go in through a manhole-style entrance. Saito and the S.W.A.T. team are under Kanzaki’s command. [one page]

Then a page of Atomo greeting 2nd Lt. Yukito Anaki. Anaki remarks that he was expecting ground units and he’s only got Atomo. Atomo replies, “don’t worry – I’m a regular one man army, you won’t need anyone else.” [one page]

*Kanzaki’s group are rushing through the building’s top floor, dropping several Humanists that put up a token resistance. They storm down a staircase and into a big hall. Suddenly they are interrupted by a low thudding noise, which becomes progressively louder, followed by Kanzaki’s cries of “FALL BACK!!!” The S.W.A.T. team hide behind crates and walls that jut out at the back of the hall. We see a big mechanical shadowy shape stop in the doorway; it shines infrared searchlights through, before sending in a blast from its flame-thrower. The hall now has a lot of mini-fires burning within it, the shape begins to advance once more “BROOOM” “BROOOM”. Somebody yells, “I got the lights!”. The lights come on to reveal a D-Fens mecha in all its glory. It immediately fires its mini-gun and kills two cyborgs who hide behind brick walls. Kanzaki asks Saito, “What the hell is this?!” He tells her it’s a D-Fens mecha, a security measure designed to kill any cyborgs that enter the building via the roof. Nobody had any idea that Kobayashi had one. Kanzaki says, “It only goes for cyborgs, you mean the Humanists could’ve just walked right through here?!” Kanzaki exclaims how stupid that is as she lets off a volley of fire and goes to join Saito in his hiding place. Saito points out an access panel in the wall, he says he’s studied the schematics and if Kanzaki can get through it she may be able to access the buildings central computer and stop the Humanists transferring the network control location again. Kanzaki is reluctant to connect to the network, but has no other choice. She runs towards the mecha, getting shot twice (seems this is standard operating procedure), grabs it’s legs to spin herself round and dives into the access tunnel while the mecha is still trying to track her. Kanzaki crawls down the tunnel and whips off to the side just as a blast of fire whips past her, she lies down and pants. [seven pages – see hand written notes] **II***

Outside, it is now hurling it down with rain. Anaki is flying down a road, following Atomo who speeds away in his car. Anaki remarks that he’s supposed to go first, then tells him that the triangulation is confirmed, the old metal works is the source of the only non-government communication heading into the Kobayashi building. Cut to Atomo’s car, he loses contact with Anaki, blames it on the weather and decides to proceed anyway. Atomo pulls up outside the metal works and leaves his car, gun at the ready, he enters the building. Cut back to the chopper, Anaki has just completed an infrared scan to reveal that there are hundreds of non-cyborgs in the building and Atomo doesn’t know about them. Atomo is inside the building, it is completely pitch black, he exclaims that he should’ve brought his night vision. Suddenly the lights come up to reveal many, many humanists all standing against the wall, Atomo takes a moment to digest this, but the humanists cut the rope to a long steel pole that is attached to a cross beam on the ceiling, it swings down and impales Atomo through the chest. [three pages – see hand written notes].

Now a shot from the PM’s office, he is having a quite heated discussion with Osato about how he will not sign an order to terminate all humanists, nor will he execute people who see government secrets due to the network security being down. Pull back to reveal that Kimiko is watching this in her apartment. Suddenly her front door is kicked down by a very tall person in a balaclava, with long blonde hair coming out from underneath it. Kimiko’s boyfriend goes to stop the criminal, but is shot in the head with a silenced gun, Kimiko’s daughter ducks her head out of a room, she too is shot (**not** shown in graphic detail). The villain finally kills Kimiko and switches off the screen she was watching, we see the last words Osato yells to the PM before the screen is deactivated – “We must protect our secrets, or **be killed** trying!” The murderer takes a moment to make sure everyone’s dead and then calmly walks out the front door. [three pages] **17**

Kanzaki is in the access tunnel we last saw her in plugging herself into the computer with direct connections to her head. She is laying on the floor and plans to lose motor control. She asks for permission from control to connect to the computer. Permission is given and as Kanzaki is connected, she is thrust into a confrontation with ANI who is also accessing the Kobayashi main computer, they have their moody exchange, with ANI reminding Kanzaki that she has the power to destroy her cyber brain at any time. ANI remarks how lonely the network is (refers to it as ‘home’ as in Run Back Home, from ‘I Dream Of Humanity’). We must get across the idea of Artificial Intelligence here in order for Kanzaki to pursue it in Issue Five). Kanzaki is trying to stop ANI from stealing something physical, but it is portrayed as a battle of words that ANI wins. As Kanzaki tells control that they have failed to stop the Humanists, she is so drained that she breaks down in tears. ANI had been using a remote link, the humanists on the roof had just installed it, ANI could be anywhere and once again the location of the network control program is unknown. [Three Pages]

CLIFF HANGER: The final scene is in the PM’s office, he is sitting at his desk in the dark, rain spattering at his window, talking to someone who is telling him about the failure that’s just happened. He is most displeased. What he doesn’t notice is that someone has sneaked into his room and is stealthing their way towards him. Just as the PM hangs up the phone some hands reach into shot, slam him up against the wall and begin to strangle him. We see that it is the same assassin as before; the PM coughs and attempts to scream, but he can’t. Eventually he dies and the assailant casually walks away from the PM who is left dead and bleeding from his mouth, slumped on his desk.

SUBPLOT: Really only Kanzaki’s exchange with ANI; although the death of the PM does mark the emergence of Osato’s power.

ISSUE FIVE

MAIN PLOT: Opens with scene from subplot (Kanzaki graduating from the academy), with moody captions, bleeding in to Kanzaki standing on a rooftop somewhere in the city, getting covered in rain. The dialogue should contrast past and present (note the pathetic fallacy in the present). (NB: Kanzaki is wearing her long leather coat, like the one you drew in that image you gave me for my birthday). Mention Atomo in dialogue.

Cut to an external shot of a hospital (perhaps like the one from the first draft of issue one). Then an internal shot, Haruko and the Chief running towards a hospital room door. Inside Atomo lays on a bed, linked up to quite a lot of equipment; he looks a little worse for ware. Haruko runs in and hurls herself onto Atomo, hugging him and saying she thought he was dead; she’s even brought her fluffy bunny to comfort him with. The Chief expresses his sympathies (panel beating notwithstanding, how are you?) and then asks Atomo if he knows where Kanzaki is. Atomo replies, “I don’t know Chief, I’ve been kinda busy getting most of my innards replaced.” The Chief says he thought she might have visited Atomo, but is informed that she hasn’t. The Chief is worried because Kanzaki has not reported back since the last mission failure. Atomo replies, “I guess the PM’s pretty pissed about this one.” Chief: “That would be a bit hard, Atomo. The Prime Minister was assassinated earlier this evening.” Reaction. “The Deputy Prime Minister will be sworn in as his replacement tomorrow morning. An emergency meeting of the Chiefs of Staff has already been called, Commander Kanzaki was supposed to attend along with myself, but seeing as she’s missing...” Atomo begins to get out of bed, much to Haruko’s horror. He says that if Kanzaki can’t go, he will. He’ll just need a bit of help standing because quite a few of his new body parts haven’t initialised fully.

Interior shot of the Kusanagi Research Facility, close-up of a D-Fens mecha, corridor and hallways version (the “mini”). It is quite small, but still has all the trimmings (flame thrower, rotary cannon, etc.) and is mounted on caterpillar tracks rather than large ‘feet’. We start tight on this, with some inscription informing us of our locale, then pull out to reveal the mecha moving down a corridor. In the background, Kanzaki whips past the gap between two corridors, avoiding the mecha’s infrared search beam. Kanzaki comes to a door that is operated by an electronic combination, or by transmitting your pass code via the index finger connection port (located to the left of the numeric keypad). The door is marked ‘data archive and backup facility’; Kanzaki plugs herself in to the connection port. After a brief argument with the central computer (perhaps an amusing, Super Deformed one?) she gains entry. Once inside Kanzaki spots a workstation and plugs herself in through both brachialis ports, she begins a search for the image of the cyborg from issue three and ANI. She finds some limited information, detailing the meaning of the acronym ‘ANI’ and an image showing ANI’s original body, along with the imprinting of the name ‘Sonoda’ (just like on the cyborg in issue three) and that some parts of her current body came from the Kusanagi Research Inst. Kanzaki is puzzled, she doesn’t understand how ANI could have two bodies, she’s just about to continue searching when she’s greeted by a firewall and ejected from the system. Back in the real world (I intend to depict Kanzaki’s search in some kind of ‘virtual’ world, much like the neurally transmitted drama show in issue four) Kanzaki realises that the scientist we saw in issue three has tripped the alarm and is sneaking up behind her with the intention of bashing her with a pole. Kanzaki spots him and elbows him in the jaw, knocking him into a wall. Kanzaki grabs the scientist by the neck and holds him against the wall very tightly. The scientist is not an Omega class cyborg and still has organic lungs, he’s finding it very difficult to breathe. Kanzaki says, “You tripped the alarm, that firewall was really quite painful.” Scientist, almost choking: “Believe me, you’re not getting the raw end of the deal.” Kanzaki: “I only want one thing from you, tell me where I can

find Dr. Isamu Sonoda.” Scientist: “Isamu Sonoda’s dead.” Kanzaki squeezes harder, she tells the scientist not to give her that crap, some of the Institutes records from the last few weeks carry the name Sonoda. Scientist: “Is it really worth risking your career killing me to try to get involved in something that doesn’t concern you?”, Kanzaki: “It does concern me, my friend’s got the scars to prove that!” The scientist relents, he tells Kanzaki that she can find Isamu Sonoda’s great grandson in the ruins on the hills beyond the city, old Japanese ruins. As Kanzaki is about to leave, the scientist, half dead from strangulation pleads with her, “Don’t see Sonoda! Your meeting him can only bring you pain. Please believe me, I’ve seen what he’s done...” The scientist passes out and Kanzaki strides away, ignoring him.

Dawn. A small room in a government building. A slightly built, young, inexperienced politician sits at a desk, nervously thumbing through some papers. This man is the often mentioned, but never seen Deputy Prime Minister – now acting PM. Hovering over him is Mister Osato, preparing him for the meeting he’s about to chair (of course, it’s Osato who’ll really be in command). Osato keeps telling the Deputy PM (who I’ve yet to name) what he must say and do, the Deputy PM is very submissive and does little to resist Osato’s wishes. The two then enter the meeting room, which comprises a circular table filled with many Colonel’s, Admirals and various other officials (some Government Servers); among them are The Chief, Atomo and Haruko. Haruko does not sit at the table, but is attending to Atomo – mopping his brow every now and then, etc. The Deputy PM begins. He introduces himself and Osato (this is my colleague who has brought me up to speed on the current situation – Mister Osato). He continues: “I don’t have to tell you the potential for physical, but more importantly economic destruction here. A latent and evil terrorist group has gained control of the most important Japanese asset: our network. It is imperative that we stop them and stop them NOW!” Osato stands up and whispers something in the Deputy PM’s ear. He turns to the Chief and continues, “it would first be useful to ascertain why a collection of non-upgrades has been able to outwit a collection of highly trained Omega class cyborgs, in the form of Network Intelligence.” The Chief reacts, he says the NI have carried out their orders and have been the victim of operational circumstance. Atomo pipes up and mentions ANI, he says that she always evades everything they throw at her (Atomo is still calling ANI ‘that big cyborg’ – he doesn’t know what Kanzaki does). Osato immediately intervenes, saying “We are not here to deliberate that particular issue. Essentially you were still fighting Humanists – let’s stick to the debate in hand.” The Chief attempts to smooth things over, he says that NI were outthought by the Humanists – somehow they appeared one jump ahead. He doesn’t know why. This is greeted by murmuring from the other officers, one of them responds. “Do you suspect a traitor?! Highly unlikely.” “We’re all cyborgs here, what possible gain could there be to aiding Humanists?!” Atomo responds, “that’s what confuses me so much about this unstoppable one...” The Deputy PM interrupts, “gentleman please. We must find a solution, and on this point I turn you over to Mister Osato.” Deputy PM sits down and up stands Osato, along with about three Government Servers who were in with the Generals. Osato: “These people are threatening our way of life and they must be stopped. Any non-upgrades will be arrested, if you discover that they will not come quietly a more violent solution may have to be implemented. But non-upgrades will be taken off the streets at any cost. (as an afterthought) Just until we discover which ones are terrorists.” “Gentlemen the old administration is out and the new one is not afraid of direct action. You have your orders, they will resolve our situation. Dismissed.” Everyone gets up to leave, but Osato calls over the Chief. He asks where Commander Kanzaki is and is not too happy with the reply. He tells the Chief that he wants to see her as soon as she is found, she has been the reason for many of the failed missions and will have to be suspended from duty. From now on he and the Government Servers will be in charge of the Humanist problem.

Cut.

Kanzaki walks through the long grass, up to the mountaintop. It is mid-afternoon and quite windy. It rains mildly; not a down pour like before, but fine rain. It is cloudy and grey, leaves blow around in the background. Kanzaki comes across some giant winches, fixed to the ground; rusty and old, they seem to have been there for decades. Attached to them are long cables, high-tensile but light, they rise aloft as if to the heavens, attached to something way above the clouds. Suddenly a clunk and a whirring, Kanzaki quickly re-adjusts her gaze, she fixes on a child operating one of the winches. She did not notice her before. The child becomes aware of Kanzaki, the two stare at each other for a moment. Questions. Then the child runs. Kanzaki follows, the child runs through a dusty clearing and then into a decrepit house. Old Japanese architecture, completely missed by the corporate society below, it stands as a mark to the old world, before the city sprung up, before even the computer was invented. Kanzaki takes a moment, this is not what she expected. Upon entering the building Kanzaki drinks in the contrast. Computer equipment litters the walls, not as advanced as in the city – old, manual interfaces, not cortical interfaces. This is strange, who would live like this? Why? Where did all the equipment come from? And what’s that music playing in the background? Kanzaki’s musings are interrupted, she becomes aware of a man in the shadows. In his late thirties/early forties, he stands with the child gripping his leg. He stands tall and with conviction, he aims a shotgun rigidly at Kanzaki’s head. “Don’t move!” he yells. “Believe me, I know exactly where to aim this.”

“Doctor Sonoda, I presume,” retorts Kanzaki.

“I’m no Doctor! I don’t know who told you that, but they were wrong!” Sonoda readjusts his aim. “Who are you?!”

Kanzaki stands with her hands aloft, softly she says, “I am Commander Suzuko Kanzaki of Network Intelligence.”

Sonoda is unforgiving, anyone who comes from the city is invariably an assassin, “Well *Commander*, I suggest you go

back to the city. My daughter and I don't need any of your kind of *help*."

Kanzaki is inching for her gun, she doesn't believe Sonoda has the knowledge to kill her, "go back, or what? You gonna shoot me? Think you've got the firepower? Hmm?"

Sonoda fires his gun at one of the computers near Kanzaki, a warning shot. There is a huge hole in the machine, the round has gone straight through it and the outside wall. Sonoda stares, fixated on Kanzaki, "You'd better believe it."

Kanzaki's still not convinced, her hand nearly on her gun – she's stalling, "Okay, but you've got to know where to aim that, I don't die too easily."

"You will. A small metallic device. On an omega class cyborg such as yourself, about 3cm below the rim of the cerebellum. It acts as the interface between organic and inorganic brain. Puncture that and you're dead."

Kanzaki is undeniably impressed, she raises her hands aloft once more. She's decided to play nice, "That's... That's impressive. Look, I just don't like having a gun pointed at me. I don't wanna do you or your daughter any harm, but I **need** some information."

Sonoda begins to advance on Kanzaki, his daughter cries out, "Daddy! Daddy!" She is afraid for his safety.

"That's a new one," continues Sonoda, "but people from the city are invariably murderers. You're leaving my house one way or another!"

"Look, I gotta know, it's important. All I have is garbled, but it suggests," Kanzaki is edging backwards, but she can't leave, she **must** know, "...it *suggests* that you can tell me about ANI!"

"ANI?" She has Sonoda's attention.

"Yes"

"You mean you don't know?"

"No! That's the whole reason I came up here."

Sonoda and Kanzaki stare at each other, something in her eye might say... Could she be...? Sonoda finally decides and drops his gun onto a table. He sinks into a chair and raises his hand to his head. Keiko comes over and hugs him, she timidly ventures, "Daddy, one of the kites is broken, I need to reel it in."

Sonoda looks at his daughter, proud that one so young can handle so much, "Yes, yes. I'll be okay Keiko. You go... I **promise** you it won't be like this forever."

Keiko leaves and Kanzaki sits, she sees her chance to calm things down, "Kites?"

"Yes, we fly kites on high tensile cable to carry solar panels above the cloud cover during the day – it recharges the batteries, but..." Sonoda blinks back the tears. "They won't give us anything from down there. I can't help thinking what Keiko's missed out on because of *her*. And *your* government."

"You mean ANI?"

Sonoda continues, "I think that if you were an assassin, you'd know about her..."

Kanzaki places both hands on the table, "look, I honestly won't hurt you – I just **need** information. You are the great grandson of Isamu Sonoda, aren't you?"

"Yes," Sonoda mops his brow, "I bear that particular misfortune."

"Then please, give me something on ANI."

"My great-grandfather worked on ANI over 100 years ago," Sonoda begins. "The government tried to own her, in their eyes any potential for destruction is always more appealing than creation. When ANI declared a love of life, they tried to murder her and my great grandfather. They have pursued my family ever since."

Kanzaki is a little incensed, "Love of life?! Murder?! This thing's killing innocent people and helping terrorists to hold a nation to ransom. YOU CAN'T MURDER A MACHINE!"

Sonoda is deathly calm, a single tear rolls down his cheek, for ANI? His daughter? We don't know, "Commander, you are in possession of exactly one tenth of the brain you were born with, the rest of it replaced with computer technology. Are you still human?"

"Absolutely. Artificial intelligence is against the law!"

"Your answers can never be as clear cut as that. The law is simply a difference between right and wrong."

"All I really need is one thing, how do I kill it?"

"ANI at present believes herself to be a machine, she's just following instructions – and she will never side with the cyborgs who robbed her of her life. But she is capable of being more human than anyone in your city. To kill her you must understand her definition."

"Her *what*?! Cut the crap! I need a place to shoot, a design flaw..."

"I think that in some adverse way you know what you need. But I cannot help you. I do not understand her or I would have killed her long ago."

Kanzaki stands up, for some reason Sonoda's insistence that ANI is alive has been grueling for her – her hair is ruffled and she even sweats. She storms out saying, "The records at Kusanagi indicate you've been making new bodies for ANI – I suggest you stop, she's psychotic! And she is **not** alive!"

CLIFF-HANGER: Kanzaki receives her disciplinary from Osato, presented with the use of dialogue boxes to show Kanzaki's thoughts as Osato yells at her. She is less than confident that he can resolve the current crisis, but contents

herself with replying “yes sir”, “no sir.” She respects the chain of command rather than voice an opinion. Osato says that if Kanzaki obstruct the restoration of order again she will most probably be court-martialled. She does not seem to react, and leaves.

SUBPLOT: Most of this issue is subplot, from Kanzaki’s graduation, the symbolism in the Kusanagi Research Institute, to the enigmatic revelations in Sonoda’s house. A real opportunity for those semiotic analysis buffs! The main plot is only advanced in the emergency meeting of the Chiefs of Staff – Osato’s taking over, the Deputy PM’s a mere puppet, etc.

[24 PAGE ISSUE]

ISSUE SIX

MAIN PLOT: Begins with the storming of a family home by a S.W.A.T. team, the home is populated with non-upgrades and, in accordance with Osato’s new policy, they are being arrested. The S.W.A.T. team are in full battle gear and the operation takes place at night, the family and children are dragged from their beds - it is quite a disgusting image and the team know this, they are reluctant to do their job. This is the first suggestion to the absurdity of how the plot so far has directed our sympathies to the cyborgs, when they could well be called the villains of the piece. In fact the humanists have been portrayed as the villains and how much truth is there in this?

“In the beginning, we strove to understand ourselves. The mysteries of humanity were our Holy Grail. Where did we go wrong? The tools we created to understand ourselves have replaced that very thing they were created to conceive.” Pause. “DNA contains millions of instructions, in the right conditions, they create the beauty of a human being. The only similarity between this *miracle* and a computer chip is purely numerical - the chip carries out millions of calculations per second. Why is it then, that we seem to prefer cold logic? **DNA is the basis of human life, NOT the computer chip!**” This dialogue takes place at a meeting of humanists in some dingy, underground room. The humanist leader stands on a podium, with ANI at his side. Several moody shots of the people and the area - women and children living in squalor. We then pull back to reveal a monitor displaying the above. This is security footage and it is being watched by Kanzaki, Atomo, The Chief and Haruko. The Chief explains that Mister Osato has ordered the termination of the search for the network encryption codes, he agrees with the decision because “With the millions of instructions running through the network each *minute*, it would be impossible to track down anything specific without some major luck. The network as a whole is so vast, it becomes intangible somehow; the boundless flow of data is inconceivable to the human mind.” Osato has changed Network Intelligence’s directive to the removal of the Humanist terrorists by any means necessary. If it becomes essential, his men will handle the “Unstoppable Cyborg” (ANI), but NI have received no operational data about this mission. Atomo and Haruko comment that uniform prejudice against non-upgrades could lead to riots and a collapse of local government; Kanzaki asks what their next orders are. The Chief replies that they are to search the streets for the Humanist hideout, starting with the one in the security footage. Work with local PD and find areas of the city that display little or no E/M activity - these are possible hideouts for non-upgrades. Yuka Hito and Haruko have been re-assigned to help with the enquires. Haruko is shocked, *Usachan* might get dirty!

Cut.

Begin with a close-up of *Usachan* (that’s Haruko’s fluffy bunny, in case you didn’t know), Haruko is holding it and saying something like “You have to get her one of these...” Pull back to reveal Haruko, her sister, her sister’s partner, Atomo and Kanzaki. They are in a birthing room, like the one in issue one, and as this sequence progresses a child is born. The parents (Haruko’s sister and partner) are overjoyed, they gently pick the child up and hug her. Atomo stands behind Haruko and Kanzaki next to her. Kanzaki looks unusually happy, her hair glows, she smiles and her body language is warm and tactile. Kanzaki talks to Haruko about new life with optimism, how beautiful the baby is, how she must be played with, fed and changed. How she will respond with love, how she will grow, how marvellous this all is. The trouble is that as Kanzaki goes on she becomes more and more manic, the parents fear for the child and hold her away. Kanzaki tries to follow them but her leg has become tangled in some wires, she tugs and tugs, but cannot get away. ‘Cut to’: Kanzaki wakes up in a car, in the driver’s seat. In the passenger seat is Haruko; she talks to Yuka Hito, who is in the back. “They absolutely have to get my niece a bunny rabbit - a baby should always have a fluffy toy; it’s the way of things...” says Haruko.

“Couldn’t you just give her yours?” asks Hito.

“Oh, I could never part with *Usachan*.”

Kanzaki unplugs herself from the connectors in the car seat and turns to Haruko, “Haruko, was I behaving strangely at your niece’s birth?”

Haruko looks at Kanzaki with a touch of disdain - the two don’t get on very well, “I wish I could say yes, sir,” responds Haruko. “But you always stand around looking miserable, even when something as beautiful as that’s going on.”

Kanzaki looks out the window of the car, “That’s not how I remember it...”

Suddenly Atomo bangs on the roof of the car, he says that local S.W.A.T. teams have traced some Humanists - when cornered, they grabbed three hostages off the street and went to ground. The S.W.A.T. team are ready to make entry,

but in accordance with their orders they are waiting for Network Intelligence to arrive on the scene. Aerial support will be provided in case the Humanists break cover and try to escape. Atomo gets in the car, Kanzaki and Haruko seem to be glaring at each other (*Usachan* is helping Haruko), Atomo detects the atmosphere and says, “Hey, you two, play nice or you’ll be held back after class!” The car drives away with Haruko saying, “Will you really hold me back?...”; Atomo: “Haruko, please!”.

Staring down the barrel of Saito’s gun, we are looking at the entrance to an underground bunker. It is a standard city street, high-rise buildings, etc., but in amongst all of this is the bunker entrance. The bunker is a water-works control centre, fully automated, perfect place for a hideout. Saito and his men are across the street, they all have their weapons trained on the entrance, other policemen are evacuating all civilians from the area. Saito comments that this is the only way in or out and he’s looking forward to finally nailing these terrorists. Atomo and Kanzaki arrive on the scene, they fit ear-mounted radios, but Kanzaki tells them that she’s the only one that is making an entry. Both Atomo and Saito tell her that that’s insanity - this is a hostage situation, if they make an entry they must be absolutely sure that they can pacify the terrorists - there are more lives at stake than just Kanzaki’s. However, Kanzaki will not relent, she says that she’s still in command and that they will follow her orders. She does not deem it necessary for any more than a one man entry team, she will employ stealth tactics and will communicate silently via her ‘rear cranial’ port (which the ear-mounted radio plugs in to); she will be able to follow her orders more effectively alone.

‘Air One’ arrives on the scene (a helicopter); piloted by Yukito Anaki (from issue four), it also acts as a field command centre for Chief Yoshida. As Kanzaki makes entry in the background, Atomo informs the Chief about Kanzaki’s ‘crazy’ decision. The Chief orders Atomo to follow Kanzaki into the building and the S.W.A.T. team to secure the entrance and make sure no one else gets in or out. Anaki butts in and says that he has orders from high up the chain of command to destroy the water works control centre if it looks like the Humanists are going to get out; the Chief says that he’ll take those orders under advisement. Atomo: “Last time I worked with you Anaki, you got me *impaled* by Humanists and now you want to **blow me up**?! It seems that with you around we don’t need any bad guys!”

We see a few shots of Kanzaki stealthing down a staircase, she uses her ‘rear cranial’ port to inform Tactical Command that she has made entry (silent coms are depicted like a thought bubble with a miniature illustration (but not SD) of the character making the call joint by wire to the receiver of the call; those two then exude speech bubbles). Intermixed with the frames of Kanzaki stealthing is just one frame of a silent communication between the Chief and Atomo - the Chief orders Atomo not to tell Kanzaki that he is also making entry.

Kanzaki says aloud (to herself):

“I... am looking for something...”

“I don’t know exactly what it is..... but I will find it here.”

Kanzaki comes to a long corridor and begins to walk down it, the corridor has many arched doorways running down the side. Water drips from the ceiling, a droplet lands on Kanzaki’s cheek and runs down it.

“The fact that my decision may cost me my life is of no consequence...”

“Because..... She is here....”

“Aren’t you?”

ANI shows her face at the end of the corridor, Kanzaki stiffens her arm and aims her gun, but makes no attempt to shoot. ANI disappears back into the shadows.

“This is **PERVERSE!** I see you!”

“My mission is not to save the hostages, it is to kill YOU!”

“**ANDROID!!!** I know what you are!”

Shot from in front of Kanzaki, ANI appears behind her; as Kanzaki spins around to bring her gun to bear ANI disappears through one of the doors.

“I know more than they do - that’s why I’m here...”

“He’s been killing innocent cyborgs to make bodies for you?!”

“I can’t believe that he’d care that much for a god damned **machine!**”

“You’re **SICKENING!** You’re nothing!!!”

“You’re...”

Kanzaki spins around to find ANI right behind her, ANI grabs Kanzaki’s gun and crushes it, she holds Kanzaki around the neck and the two stare at each other. ANI: “This unit.... is only obeying orders.” “Do **not** look in the mirror...” ANI makes off with Kanzaki, holding a gun to her head; Kanzaki transmits a silent communication, informing Tactical Command that she has been captured.

Cut.

Atomo is running up a staircase and the Chief is in the process of telling him that Kanzaki has been captured, Anaki butts in with, “Oh, that’s it! My mission parameters have been compromised, I gotta deploy my rockets.”; Atomo replies, “Anaki, you touch a trigger of any kind and you’re gonna end up with what’s left of my boot up your ass!”

The Chief says to stand down, he’ll take responsibility.

Cut to: back in the car with Haruko and Hito. Haruko is busy monitoring a laptop, which has the team’s medical stats

displayed on the screen; she says, “Ryu, Commander Kanzaki’s cognitive processes are peaking at 240 kilo-joules - that’s way too high, her I/O ports aren’t built to take that.” Hito leaves the car, she says she’s got to make a call. Cut to the Chief in the helicopter: “Got it! Satellite surveillance just nailed the Humanists’ location. Continue climbing the staircase you’re on, when you get to the top you’ll find the main pumping room. It’s secure grid enabled, but Haruko can handle the lock...”

Back to Atomo, he’s at the top of the staircase and is looking at the door. The Chief continues, “Listen, when you make entry be sure to drop everyone as quick as you can. I don’t want any of those terrorists to have time to kill a hostage!”

“You and me both Chief, you and me both...”

Atomo flattens his back to the wall beside the door, ready to make entry. The lock clicks open, but as the door swings back Atomo is greeted with a voice saying, “I’ve been expecting you..... Well, come in, don’t be shy.”

Atomo enters the main pumping room to find an evilly grinning Humanist Leader sitting on a pipe, clutching his sword. About ten terrorists train their guns on three trembling hostages and, just in front of the Humanist Leader, ANI trains her gun on Kanzaki, who is kneeling in the ‘execution’ style position.

Atomo is clutching his gun, his aim not wavering from ANI, and he has never looked so angry as he does now. HL: “I think you’d better drop that gun, another agent will make a nice addition to my collection of hostages.” Kanzaki communicates silently with Atomo, “I’m not ready yet.”

“I know you’re not,” he replies.

“You don’t understand, I’m not ready. I shouldn’t **be** here...”

Atomo raises his gun and points it at the HL, “I’m not dropping my gun, you are. Let these people go and we’ll let you get out of here.”

The HL laughs, “Hahahahahaaaa... You don’t seem to understand, do you? Maybe someone had better *die* to clarify things. ANI, do the honours...”

A glimpse of ANI beginning to pull the trigger, Atomo begins to shout everything he knows - he is desperate - “**DROP YOUR WEAPON! DON’T DO IT! YOU CAN’T GET AWAY!**, etc.” Another glimpse of ANI squeezing even tighter of the trigger, not quite tight enough to fire the gun.

CLIFF-HANGER: Close-up of Kanzaki. Caption: “Could this be my end?...”; “Then where is the life to flash before my eyes?”; “There is no doubt that I lived it, but I cannot see it...”; “Could *this* be my end?!”. She is almost disgusted by this premise, but only logically. She displays no physical or emotional reaction to her impending death.

The trigger squeezes tighter, tight enough to fire we do not know.

SUBPLOT: Plenty of it here. Definitely the birth of Haruko’s niece scene, which is pretty easy to get meaning out of. Kanzaki’s exchange with ANI is a little more obscure - firstly, Kanzaki’s going a bit nutty, but what does ANI mean by ‘don’t look in the mirror’? Hmmm... That line is going to have major repercussions. The ending is slightly sub-plot, Kanzaki’s ‘not ready’ and cannot see her life; but more so for Atomo. In his screaming to save Kanzaki has he given something away to us? Does he care for her more than he’s letting on? Poor Haruko!

ISSUE SEVEN

MAIN PLOT: The barrel of a gun. We are the bullet, travelling down and exiting, beginning our unstoppable flight. The background is a blur and as we fly through the air the following dialogue is presented as captions:

“The gun.

The supersonic flight of destiny.

The spinning, precise incision.

The ultimate penetration.

And the word is given.

The trigger squeezed.

The finite point between life and death exists in the tension of the poised digit.

To propel.

To kill.

But can a life unseen be taken?

Can the intangible be extinguished?

The imperceptible touch.

The want of a smile.

Never to taste.

Never to smell.

Never to feel the pinch of agony.

The rapture of euphoria.
The single tear ordained to flood from my duct, *absent...*
I can only remain sterilised.
Sterilised...”

The bullet strikes the wall just above Sgt. Saito’s head. He and his men are stacked up outside the entrance to the water-works control centre and are quite surprised to be under fire; Saito ducks down, just avoiding the bullet, “**SHIT!** Who the hell is shooting at us?!”; “Goddamn it! All the hostiles are supposed to be *inside!*”

Four men arrive on the scene, dressed in full battle gear, they state that this was just a warning shot - they insist Saito follows their orders which come from “the top”. These men are Osato’s *Government Servers*, they are omega class cyborg-*plus* and carry several enhancements which even Kanzaki’s men do not have. Included in their arsenal are ocular implants in their right eye (capable of various vision modes), thicker body armour and backpacks containing upgrade equipment (such as on board WAN connected computers, neuro-satellite uplinks to the other men in their team, an EMP device and a couple of spare guns strapped to the side) - the backpacks are connected to the rear-cranial ports. The Government Servers (or GS’s from now on) demand access to the water-works control station, but Saito says he has orders to keep everyone out. The GS’s persist, but Saito’s not giving way - he intends to follow Kanzaki’s orders. One of the GS’s unstraps his gun and whacks Saito under the chin with it, the blow is so strong it knocks Saito into the wall, making a huge dent in the concrete. A couple of GS’s then proceed to beat Saito, stating that non-compliance is not an option. Saito’s men try to assist him but another GS unloads his EMP gun and stuns the lot of them. The GS’s all prime their guns and say “Execute primary objective: restore order. Osato authorised everyone within as expendable.”; “Okay, let’s **TAKE THIS BITCH DOWN!**”

A full page spread from the point of view of the GS’s ocular implant. In the centre of the page we can see the staircase that Atomo was running up near the end of last issue (this is where the GS actually is), the GS clutches his gun which juts out in front of us accordingly. Around the edge of the page can be seen telemetry from the other three agents, a point of view shot from each of them (one in front of our P.O.V., so he appears in the central frame; two behind, so they can see ‘our’ GS). The other GS’s all have different ‘vision modes’ active: one has a laser sight; another x-ray mode; the third thermograph mode. Beneath each P.O.V. is the agent’s name and medical stats. In the top right-hand corner of the page is a WAN uplink, presented as continued binary with the legend ‘Network link active’; in a visual coms box below this, Mr. Osato directs the mission. On the right-hand side of the page is a weapon status screen, including the names of any weapons carried and charge/ammo remaining.

Down the barrel of Atomo’s gun, view of a loaded round; zooming out, the spiral ridges encircle the frame. Zooming out, away from Atomo, he is yelling the commands he was in the last issue. Outside we hear some clanking. Atomo: “**DROP YOUR WEAPON! DO IT! YOU CAN’T GET AWAY!**” Close-up of ANI’s trigger, almost enough pressure. Not quite. And then, a last act of desperation: “**I ORDER YOU - DROP YOUR WEAPON NOW!!!!**”

ANI’s grip loosens, the trigger is released, then the gun drops. The Humanist Leader begins to yell, “What the hell do you think you’re doing - kill her!!! KILL HER!!!”. Outside we can hear voices yelling, shots fired, a man shouts “**BLOW THE LOCK!**” ANI lifts up Kanzaki by the back of the neck, Atomo is astounded - he thought this was it. ANI holds Kanzaki up so they are face to face, she takes a moment to stare, then says again, “Do not look in the mirror...” ANI throws Kanzaki towards Atomo, he catches her, wrapping his arms around her as they both drop to the ground. Atomo receives a silent communication from Haruko, “Ryu, there are some bad men coming, *save yourself!*” He holds Kanzaki tight, covering her body with his - she will not die now! The door is blown open, through the dust shine the lights of the Government Servers. The Humanist Leader yells, “ANI, I *order* you to **save me!**” ANI stands in front of the HL and arches her body over his. The GS’s burst in, guns blazing. Their heavy weapons are too much for the Humanists, they die en mass, limbs flying, guts spilled. Bullets are sprayed around the room with no attention paid to the target, whether they hit terrorists or hostages is no concern. But even these weapons cannot kill ANI, although a couple of rounds penetrate, the majority are deflected. Behind ANI, the Humanist Leader covers his ears and ducks as much as he can. ANI pulls a gun from a second holster, she still protects the HL and as such is forced to fire whilst her head is upside-down. With deadly accuracy ANI fires at and kills two of the Government Servers, hits them right in the ocular implant; only one shot goes astray and penetrates the arm of the soon-to-be-dead GS. Then, with the Humanist Leader in her arms, she charges through a wall. Straight through the masonry as if it wasn’t there. A pretty resounding escape.

A last round casing drops to the floor. The remaining GS’s kneel, defeated, bewildered - “What the HELL happened **there?!**” A few droplets of water land on the wounded arm of the dead GS, causing his limb to spasm as they randomly connect circuits. Atomo gets up so he is kneeling, one leg either side of Kanzaki. He looks down at her face and gently brushes her hair aside; Kanzaki stares back blankly, she makes no effort to get up. Two droplets of water, dripping from the ceiling, land on her cheeks and roll down. Silence descends. The astounded, the dead and the dying. Suddenly one of the water mains bursts, the room begins to flood. All exit. Cut.

A news reporter is speaking too us. A young woman, dressed in a business suit. She is plugged in via every possible

connection (brachialis port, rear cranial ports, index finger ports) and is controlling the three dimensional image display which makes up the background. The display reacts accordingly to what she is saying.

“And it seems that many of us are without water tonight after the local water-works control centre received heavy damage, earlier today, in a brutal reprisal by the government to recent terrorist activities. Several terrorists were killed, and seven out of ten hostages saved, as government forces stormed the distribution facility in the Nykotomi district. Intelligence organisations within our government are calling this a major success in the war against a group that has become known as ‘The Humanists’. However, they still make no claims to have recovered control of the general network. The acting Prime Minister, in a speech to his chiefs of staff, said that he must continue a policy of uniform incarceration for non-upgrades until all terrorist activity has ceased. In this reporter’s view, a major obstruction of civil liberties.”

On a sadder note, our hearts go out to former presenter Kimiko Ogawa, found dead in her apartment last week. Kimiko, we miss you...”

Begin with a close-up of Kanzaki’s face, she is looking down and wearing sunglasses. Her hair hangs forward, casting a shadow over her face - a dark image. She simply says ‘Yes Sir.’

Kanzaki is standing in Osato’s office, just in front of the man’s desk. Osato stands opposite Kanzaki, looking at her, but does not appear overtly angry. Behind Osato’s desk is a lot of specialist network equipment - a podium, surrounded by rails, complete with a widescreen monitor and many cables for plugging yourself in. It has a spherical ‘keyboard’ manipulation device below the widescreen monitor; several other screens hang from above and are angled down at the podium. This is an auxiliary net control centre (and is labelled as such), where one man can, if required, administer the network.

Osato: “Commander, this is simply unacceptable. Your previous mission record spoke for itself, but recently your actions have started saying something very different to me.”

“Yes Sir.”

“This kind of operational negligence cannot go unpunished.”

“Yes Sir.”

“You are suspended indefinitely, pending an enquiry. You will almost certainly face a court-martial for this.”

“Yes Sir.”

“Might I suggest that you have a mole in your organisation, the enemy being one jump ahead at every turn would indicate this to a trained operative. Therefore, might I also suggest that it may even be you.”

“Sir, the only members of my team are either people I’ve worked with for years or people you sent me. And as for myself - we both know what this is about...”

“I have made it quite clear that this matter is not open for discussion, I don’t care what you *think* you know, you will not shout it about.”

“I have facts, sir. They have a major bearing on this case, on everything...”

“How dare you continue this illegal hunt for illegal information - you will fall in line Kanzaki!”

“Yes Sir.”

“You are most certainly dismissed.”

Kanzaki leaves Osato’s office and walks out into the reception area where Haruko is waiting, clutching Usachan. Haruko says that she’s just heard that her friend Kimiko was found dead in her apartment yesterday, she’d been dead for some time and no one seemed to have missed her. Could NI look into this at all? Kanzaki just barges past Haruko, knocking Usachan from her arms. Close-up of the rabbit on the floor. Haruko looks after Kanzaki, hands on hips, “Well, really! How rude...”

We go back into Osato’s office now, the lights are turned down low and Osato is in the process of connecting himself to the ‘Aux. Net’ control centre. The screens are active and are displaying various parts of the network, depicted as file folders (identified by name) flying over a sea of binary. Osato plays with the keyboard and talks to himself as he sets up his connection protocols. The acting PM enters the room, he asks Osato if he’s free, Osato says he can spare a minute.

NB: as this sequence progresses, Osato continues plugging himself into his machine.

PM: “Mister Osato, I gave your speech to the chiefs of staff, but the cabinet doesn’t like it.”

Osato: “Yes, well, fortunately I don’t have to justify myself to them or you.”

PM: “What you’re doing is wrong.”

Osato: “No, what *you’re* doing is wrong - you approved the order, remember?”

PM: “I will not be turned into a monster by you.”

Osato: “I don’t officially exist, you do - there’s only one monster in this room.”

PM: “Look, shut down the network, end it now!”

Osato: “Perhaps that is a solution, but it must wait for now. Our enemy is not destroyed yet.”

PM: “You’re procrastinating, why?”

Osato: “These Humanists are harmless. We must arrest them to prevent them from committing crimes, but their ideas will never catch on - everyone needs the network.”

PM: “Then what are we doing?”

Osato: “We’re completing a mission directive set long ago. If we cannot possess volatile technology, we must destroy it and life is no exception.”

PM: “You’re not making any sense.”

Osato: “Just get out. And don’t do anything without authorisation, your predecessor did and look what happened to him.”

PM: “Hmph...”

The acting PM leaves. Osato is now completely connected to his machine, he lowers a visor and hangs his head.

Osato: “We’ll have to meet soon, you know. No one can change anything without this network, so you’ll have to come to me. And when we meet, I’ve got just the thing for you...”

Close-up of a screen, the display reads ‘Connected’. Another screen, an oscilloscope style readout labelled ‘Power Distribution.’ Wide angle, we are now in Kanzaki’s apartment; the lights are down low and Kanzaki sits on her bed. Kanzaki has removed her frontal abdominal plate and the plate of her lower, inner right arm. She connects ports within the two together and then connects them to the ‘Power Distribution’ machinery. The oscilloscope readout begins to spike and the word ‘waveform anomaly’ appears on the screen. Kanzaki curses, her power distribution is off again and this means either a replacement power centre or a new power-sync in her cyberbrain. Kanzaki takes a moment to stare at her arm, she begins to adjust some of the circuitry causing her fingers to spasm, she then removes her hand and cleans the connectors. Suddenly another monitor close to her lights up with the text ‘incoming call’, Kanzaki pushes a button and Atomo appears on the screen.

Atomo: “Suzuko, you weren’t on-line. I couldn’t raise you on the network...”

Kanzaki: “What do you want Atomo?”

Atomo: “I just want you to be okay.”

Kanzaki: “Well, I’m not okay.”

Atomo: “Look, we’ll get you your job back. Haruko already thinks she can prove this Osato guy gave us bad information...”

Kanzaki: “That isn’t it Atomo.” Kanzaki places her hand on her power unit (in her torso cavity). “Did you know my power distribution’s off? Did you?”

Atomo: “Well, we’ll go to the upgrade shop tomorrow and get you some new parts.”

Kanzaki: “I don’t want to see you Atomo, we’ve become *incompatible*.”

Atomo: “Now wait a minute, I think you got the wrong idea. I wasn’t trying... That is, just then I...”

Kanzaki: “You still don’t know what I mean,” Kanzaki covers her eyes. **“I can’t see you! THIS CONVERSATION IS OVER!!!”**

Kanzaki hits the off button on the panel and stares at the screen where Atomo’s face just was, all she is left with is her own reflection. She begins to stroke the image with her left hand, but she becomes angry, almost disgusted. Her stroking becomes more vigorous, she begins to grit her teeth and yell.

CLIFF HANGER: Kanzaki raises her right arm and puts her stump through the screen, sparks and glass fly everywhere; the oscilloscope readout goes mad, the word ‘Anomaly’ continually flashing. Kanzaki re-attaches her hand and lowers a gun into it, she does not bother to fit her abdominal or arm plates. She puts on a coat and storms out of her apartment. She simply says, “Not me.”

SUBPLOT: The main plot and the subplot begin to merge. ANI believes that she’s taking orders so much that she doesn’t seem to mind to much who they come from. But to what extent do these orders serve her own purpose? Kanzaki’s definitely gone a tad mad and that mirror line has caught up with her. The real enigma is Osato, what the hell is he doing?! (I’m bugged if I know...). Also, notice how the narrative construction mirrors Kanzaki’s mental state - yes, this is intentional!

[26 PAGE ISSUE]

ISSUE EIGHT

MAIN PLOT: HPS. ANI on a stage, not in her current body, but her original incarnation - as built by the original Dr. Isamu Sonoda. We know it’s ANI because banners with her name on hang from the stage, the spotlight is on her and she is singing to thousands of adoring fans who cheer and chant her name. A 3D holographic band plays in the background. ANI sings, “when you made me to love, did you think about how I could be hurt by your heart rebel” (lyrics from “Run Back Home”, by ANI). Next we see her sitting on a table with Dr. Sonoda and Hisao Neitevski, Sonoda has her arm round ANI and the two stare at each other. ANI: “I’ve been reading about families... Are you my father?”; Sonoda: “Well... ANI, I think you should just keep calling me Doctor Sonoda for now...” Final frame of the page, the tortured Sonoda. He has been strung up and had several primitive cybernetic implants forced into his body, he bleeds from every incision and his face is pure desperation. ANI holds a gun to his head, but is crying tears of anguish - the last thing she wants to do is kill Sonoda. Sonoda yells: “Please kill me! If you feel anything for me, pull the trigger!”

It hurts, GOD, IT HURTS!!! Do it. **DO IT!!!**"

Kanzaki wakes with a start, pieces of paper rustle away from her as he jerks her body upwards. She has slept in an alleyway and it is now daytime; she is covered in rubbish, mostly paper and old electronic parts. Kanzaki rubs the bridge of her nose, "these dreams are getting worse." Insert some siren S/FX from a source OOF. Kanzaki looks up to see a police car has pulled up at the end of the alley and two policemen are proceeding towards her: "You can't stay here ma'am"; "Vagrancy isn't allowed in this part of the city, we're gonna have to take you in"; "Can you get up slowly please ma'am?" Kanzaki doesn't move so the policemen bend down and try to pick her up, as they get closer she sees her reflection in their mirrored sunglasses. Reaction shot of Kanzaki. Then Kanzaki's reflection in one of the cop's sunglasses, his mouth is open and eyebrows raised. Kanzaki's fist is getting closer, so fast it is a blur. Black frame with "AUGHHHHHH!" across it (the 'she didn't kill them, you did' effect).

A helicopter flies through the smog ridden sky of the central city. A large, army-style helicopter with U.N.C.J. army written on the side. Close-up of a viewport, through it we can see a general looking out at the rooftops of skyscrapers, he is a worried man. Top-shot of the helicopter as it descends onto one of the rooftops, a big 'H' pad below us and two figures waiting, their hair and clothes billowing in the down draft from the rotor blades. The helicopter lands and the general gets out, he salutes someone. Next frame reveals the Chief saluting back. "Admiral Yoshida"; "General Hanaka." The general is flanked by three marines carrying imposing weaponry, the chief by Yuka Hito. Chief: "I take it you can trust these men?"; Hanaka: "You likewise?"

Chief: "I'm sorry we have to meet like this, but it seems that only when you're several hundred feet up can you be sure that no one's listening."

Some birds fly overhead.

Hanaka: "I quite understand, sometimes it's best that only the birds hear what you say..."

Chief: "Listen, I don't know what your opinion is, but my way of thinking is that Mister Osato is manipulating the acting Prime Minister and in turn the entire government. You might agree with my way of thinking, you might not."

Hanaka: "Well, suppose I do?..."

Chief: "If you do, then perhaps you could help me... Mister Osato's gross mishandling of things could lead to international ex-communication, maybe even the fall of the government."

Hanaka: "It could."

Chief: "Then maybe we should relieve him of certain volatile information, codes, if you get my meaning? And maybe information about his activities might find it's way to me?"

Hanaka: "We are both patriots, Yoshida... What you've suggested just might happen."

They salute once more.

Hanaka: "Good day."

The nucleus of the city, the commercial district. From a distance, the core of the great metropolis – hundreds of people move through the streets as blood too and from the heart. Cut. A car door slams shut, Atomo is walking towards us, his arm held out, pointing. He is yelling: "Hey! You can't just box me in! You'd better move..." Atomo squares up to a city professional – one of those hair slicked back, too-good-to-be-true types. He wears a suit and raincoat, under his arm is tucked a laptop, connected to him via the brachialis port. Atomo wears casual clothes and is seething. "An entire country of city and you can't find somewhere else to park?!"; "This is in front of my building." Atomo produces his warrant card, "Official business, pal. Now shift this piece of crap before I send it to the crushers!". The professional backs away and eyes Atomo up, "So you're one of the high-tech assholes who's been encroaching on our civil liberties?!"; "You **hypocrite!** You stand there connected to that computer and call **me** high-tech?" The professional walks away, "At least I can still father children, can you?"

Haruko comes up and places her arm around Atomo making him jump mildly, he moves away before she can hug him.

Haruko: "Don't let him bother you Ryu."; Atomo "Nothing's bothering me! Have you found the local OEH yet?"

Haruko cringes, she's easily reduced to tears: "Yes..... but there's no need to be so nasty..." Atomo and Haruko walk up to the door of a corporate building where Anaki is standing, holding Usachan. "Can you take this please?! I feel like an absolute **idiot!**" Haruko takes Usachan from Anaki and scowls at Atomo, she's not having a very good day. Anaki says that with Commander Kanzaki being AWOL, he requested a transfer from the flight corps – he feels he owes Atomo one and he's going to help him look for Kanzaki. Ignoring both Haruko's scowling and Anaki's chirpiness, Atomo walks into the building and up to the security desk, he talks to the guard and says that being situated above and Optical Exchange Hub, building security are responsible for seeing that no one taps it. Has the guard seen any of these people around the equipment? The guard is shown a picture of ANI, the Humanist leader and finally one of Kanzaki. He has not seen the first two, but when show a picture of Kanzaki, he says that on his way to work he saw a woman like her beating up two cops. He didn't stop because it looked like she was winning way too easily, he's got a family to think about – he wouldn't want to get hurt. Atomo glances at Anaki who says, "Why would she wanna beat up cops?", then at Haruko who turns away. "Let's get on to the next hub..."

Old men stare at Kanzaki as she walks through an alleyway, they have been forsaken by society; she appears perfect by their definition. Her hair, even matted as it is now, glistens in the sunlight; her face bares no marks; her body holds the

relevant connections. The down and outs are rejects of technology, perhaps their fragile bodies could not hold the equipment required to progress in the modern world, perhaps they are non-upgrades who were made redundant by the necessity of implants. Some are covered in scars from attempted implants, all are malnourished almost to the point of starvation. Here they sit, living out their days in this alley, staring up at this sight of perfection as it walks among them. One of the old men grabs Kanzaki’s ankle, holds on for all he’s worth. Kanzaki shakes him loose with a small jerk of her leg, effortlessly. She pauses for a moment, drops her coat on the floor (revealing her missing arm plate) and walks off. Bedlam descends as the men all scramble for the garment. Walking through these down and outs, some sleeping in old acrylic packing crates, Kanzaki spots an anomaly. A girl, half-naked, hair a mess. She trudges through the dirt giving small amounts of food away to the poor, homeless rejects. The girl appears strange – she is obviously cyborg, but her parts are assembled in a disorderly fashion. Components stick through her epidermal layer, her skin is peeling and she cannot walk properly. She breaks from her rounds as she notices Kanzaki, the two stare at each other, the perfect versus the imperfect. This girl resembles the broken cyborg from issue three, she looks at her own body then at Kanzaki’s, then back again. After a moment she shuffles off, fast as she can, trying to get away. Kanzaki follows.

Atomo is on silent coms to the Chief, Yoshida tells him to keep checking OEH security and maybe have Haruko look over a few of the hubs. They need to trace someone who has seen the Humanists, maybe even collaborated with them, in order to get a lead. Once they’ve found them they’ll *negotiate* this time rather than going in tooled up, they might be able to talk some of the terrorists down before they decide to disappear again. Atomo tells the Chief that he has a bead on Kanzaki, some security guy saw her on the way to work. The Chief tells Atomo to forget about Kanzaki for now, he has a feeling her suspension won’t last much longer if things go according to plan... Message ends. Haruko is still sulking so Atomo apologises to her, she relents with little effort and gives him a hug. The next OEH is underneath an upgrade store, this surprises Atomo because of the lack of security. Haruko tells him that all the security is automated and the OEH is next to the regional national grid connection from which it draws its power – this makes it the second most powerful hub in the city. Inside the shop is a large selection of cybernetic components: eyes, brain casings, limbs, analyser implants, power distribution centres, etc. all displayed on shelves. Atomo strides straight up to the counter and presents his ID, he asks the shop owner to identify herself by name, address and class of cyborg. He then says that one of his operatives is going to plug herself into the maintenance terminal for the OEH. Whilst Haruko plugs herself in, Atomo shows the shop owner the three pictures, but she says she hasn’t seen any of them. Haruko says that the output voltages are nominal, but there is a minor fluctuation in the input. She’s running a bandwidth analysis to identify the source of the anomaly. Got it. A cerebral immersion connect (or CIC) unit on the top floor. Anaki and Atomo stare at the shop owner, “Beta class cyborgs can’t use CIC units, why would you have one?” The shop owner takes a moment to think, then lands a punch on Anaki’s chin; before she can do anything else Atomo has a gun to her head. “Not a good move, was it? Step away from the counter and keep your hands where I can see ‘em”. The shop owner nurses her hand. Anaki: “That’s a pretty solid chin, you know? Still, we can discuss that back at HQ.” Atomo: “We’re gonna check upstairs first. Haruko, watch her will you?” Atomo tosses Haruko a gun, which she catches gingerly and holds with two fingers at arms length, “Watch her? But I *really* hate guns!”

Kanzaki follows the girl up a metal staircase, ascending the side of a building – a fire escape. Kanzaki increases speed and grabs the arm of the girl, showing her the missing arm plate and the workings within. The girl tries to break free, but almost tears off her own arm, Kanzaki is gripping her tightly and the girl’s construction is not very robust. The girl looks at Kanzaki’s mechanised arm and then at her. Kanzaki’s face is filled with sorrow, she blinks as if to prevent a tear from rolling down her cheek and wipes her eye, but when she looks at her finger it remains unmoist.

Girl: “It’s not there, is it?”

Kanzaki: “No. But it should be. For you. Doctor Sonoda, he did this to you? Took away your life?”

Girl: “Did he? Was my life worth that much anyway?”

Kanzaki: “But to cut away your brain to make room for her, that **bitch**, that *machine!*”

Girl: “It didn’t work, my cybernetic components could not accept her. That honour fell to some other...”

Kanzaki: “Why would you want to become a machine? Your consciousness would have been lost.”

Girl: “Maybe it was already in the mirror world and only she could bring me back...”

Kanzaki: “Let me help you.”

Girl: “I don’t need *your* help. Now let **GO!**”

The girl jerks free of Kanzaki, tearing her own arm off and runs away.

Kanzaki: “Hey! WAIT! **What do you mean?!**”

The girl climbs through a window at the top of the staircase, Kanzaki tries to follow but finds her legs give way. She mumbles something about her power distribution centre and then collapses.

Atomo and Anaki proceed through the upstairs room, there is little light and the torches on their guns are active as they survey their surroundings. Wires hang from the ceiling and, in places, drops of water fall. Atomo shines his torch on a thick, insulated wire with crude holes cut into it and unshielded optical connection inserted. “That’s where they bridged the OEH.” ; “Yeah, look at the way they’ve done it – one drop of water from this leaky ceiling and the whole place’ll blow!”; “I don’t think Humanists have safety inspectors, Anaki...”. They move on for a couple of frames, cautiously,

then Atomo and Anaki both shine their torches over a big, wall mounted console. “What the hell is that?!”; “That would be the CIC, Anaki.” The CIC does not have any display screens, but has several connection ports for every possible connection in a cyborgs body, they are all labelled according to connection port. Whilst looking over the console, Atomo discovers a reflective surface with the words ‘don’t look in the mirror’ scratched into it. “Look...”; “Now what is that supposed to mean?”; “I don’t know, but I’ve heard it somewhere before.”; “Hey, this place reminds me of my chopper. Lots of equipment and I don’t know what it does.” Atomo gives Anaki ‘a look’ “What?! I was just kidding.”; “Well **don’t**.”; “It comes to something when a guy like you loses his sense of humour...” OOF they hear a clunk, Anaki and Atomo wheel around and aim their guns. In the torchlight they can see the girl that Kanzaki was chasing earlier, evidently the window she climbed through led into this attic. She utters: “You must leave, you must go now...”. Atomo and Anaki can’t hear her, they’re yelling “Don’t move!”; “Drop to your knees, do it now!”. The girl moves her remaining arm to reveal something that glints in the torchlight, Anaki yells “She’s got a gun!!!” A volley of three shots follows and the girl drops to the floor. Atomo and Anaki stand over her, slightly jumpy. “Goddamn it Anaki! That’s not a gun, it’s a spanner!” Anaki bends over her, “Shit, man! She’s dead – we didn’t shoot her in anywhere vital.”; “What the hell are you doing to me?!”; “I’m sorry. I saw something metal, I thought it was a gun!”; “You need an optical upgrade bad...”

OOF: “What are you doing?”

Atomo and Anaki react, look up, but don’t have time to aim their guns. Reverse angle: we see Kanzaki standing by an open window, the glass is blacked out so it is not letting much light in (only through the actual opening). Kanzaki frowns and aims her gun towards Atomo and Anaki. “Commander Kanzaki!”; “Suzuko...” Kanzaki takes a step towards them both, her gun still rigidly aimed, “Did you kill her?”; “It was an accident, we thought she had a gun...”; “Did you *kill* her?” Atomo and Anaki stand, leaving their guns on the floor. Atomo: “Look, Suzuko, you’re not...”; Kanzaki: “Get out of here.” Atomo orders Anaki to go, he doesn’t want to, but Atomo insists. Kanzaki retains her unwavering, rigid aim. “You too, Atomo.” Atomo walks towards Kanzaki and presses his body up against her gun, “I’m not going anywhere. If you want me to leave, you’re gonna have to shoot me.”; “Atomo, I...”

CLIFF HANGER: A shot of Atomo gently touching Kanzaki’s hand, tentatively he takes hold and lowers her arm to her side. Still holding her hand, he takes a step forward touching his body to hers. “You can’t do it, can you?”; “I...” Atomo runs his fingers through Kanzaki’s matted hair, he moves his head closer to hers, “What have you done to yourself?”; “Atomo, you’ve got to leave me alone...” They gaze into each other’s eyes, swimming, lost, “Come back to me, Suzuko. I know she did something to you, but we can fix it. Just give me the gun, we’ll walk out of here, it’ll all be okay.” They move closer, noses touching. “Atomo, what’s going to be okay? Huh?”; “We both will...” Atomo let’s go of Kanzaki’s hand and puts his arm around her, she begins to move her gun upwards. “Atomo, we don’t know what we’re...” Atomo kisses Kanzaki, she seems to relax, to submit. Her other hand, on the arm without the plate missing, holds Atomo on the shoulder. Atomo stops, looks at her, she returns his gaze forlornly. Then, Atomo looks to the side, his eyebrows shoot up with shock, he jerks his head back just in time to avoid a bullet from Kanzaki’s gun. The residual force of his motion throws him to the floor, Kanzaki takes aim once again. “Anyone but you Atomo. You see I can’t be touched like that, the void I feel... I *can’t* look at you any more...”; “And I can’t go... So I guess... maybe you can do it after all...”

SUBPLOT: Well, see immediately above really. Sonoda had been fully mechanising cyborgs to try and ‘download’ ANI into them, but it appears that some of them didn’t mind it all that much, so what does this say about the cybernetic society? The love triangle develops and it’s just as well that Haruko can’t see what’s going on in that upstairs room, Usachan won’t be enough for her forever. Finally, the first page: insight into ANI’s motivation, but quite enigmatic. Clarification will come in the final issue.

ISSUE NINE

MAIN PLOT: Haruko is plugged into the OEH maintenance terminal. Although Anaki hasn’t noticed, she has lost awareness of the outside world, completely immersed in her electronic ‘dive’; she lies on the terminal, eyes closed, a small amount of saliva escaping from her mouth. Beside her sits Usachan. Anaki stands in front of Haruko, looking frantic. “Where *is* he?!”. Black frame, caption: “Overload” The owner of the store looks at Anaki, he aims his gun at her, “Don’t even think about whatever you’re gonna think about...”; Black frame, caption: “Overload”. Haruko’s terminal begins to beep. Anaki: “Shit, I’d better disconnect her.” Black frame, caption: “Overload”. Anaki walks over to Haruko, there is a buzzing noise. Haruko’s connection ports begin to smoke, then spark. Suddenly the maintenance terminal explodes, throwing Haruko and Usachan backwards, they skid across the floor. Anaki runs over, Haruko lays blackened, her connection ports still smoking. Haruko: “Uh... got kicked.... I...” She notices Usachan smouldering on the floor, “Nooooo! Usachan!” She hugs the rabbit for all she’s worth. Anaki: “What the hell just happened?!”; H: “A power surge, a massive power surge. I don’t know where it’s coming from, but it’ll probably destroy the power substation...” Anaki: “And this building along with it! Contact Atomo, I’ll get the prisoner.”

Haruko’s words carry across black frames: “Atomo, we have to go! Something’s coming... Something’s coming!” A shot of Kanzaki, still holding her aim. Black frame, “Something’s coming!” Atomo, close-up, his lower jaw: “I know...” Suddenly the floor shakes, Kanzaki is unable to hold her footing and falls, dropping her gun. Atomo gets up and begins to walk towards her, but the vibration has loosened a metallic beam which falls from the ceiling, separating them both. A high voltage junction box next to Atomo explodes, the explosion envelops him and starts many small fires. Atomo notices his arm is on fire, exclaims and tries to smother it. Through his ear mounted radio he hears, “We have to go! We have to GO!!!” Atomo relents, he’ll never move that beam; he calls “SUZUKO!!!” one more time, then crashes through the exit.

Kanzaki lays, surrounded by fire, she sits up to find that she is next to the CIC and uses the console as an aid to pull herself up. Fire blazes behind her, now spreading from the initial explosion. Kanzaki finds the reflective area of the console and the text scratched into it, bemused, she studies it, only to see her own reflection with the fire raging behind her. A fit of anger, she puts her hand through the surface. As she retracts her limb, she notices a wire has become entangled in her fingers, there is a plug on the end that looks like it might fit in her brachialis socket. She looks at the lead, then at the body of the girl on the floor, now burning. She connects herself. Kanzaki hears the hum of electricity and looks at her arm, it has begun to spasm, her eyes almost burst out of their sockets and she collapses on the floor, screaming. We see sparks coming from the unshielded section of her arm, her fingers are contorted. She passes out. Inches behind her, fire burns.

Atomo crashes through a door and back out into the shop. Fire now rages everywhere as electrical devices continue to overload and explode. Atomo cringes with pain, a tear escapes from his eye which he wipes off his cheek: “Didn’t know I could still do that...”. Through the blaze Atomo notices the shop owner, slumped on her counter, bleeding from the head. Then a voice, “Lieutenant Atomo! Are you coming?! C’mon, this place’ll blow any second!” Atomo runs towards the exit, where Yuka Hito is waiting for him: “The Chief put out the call to the services, said a your team was in this building – I came to...”; Atomo: “**What the hell happened to her!!!!**”; Hito: “She tried to escape, so I had to shoot her.”; Atomo: “Goddamn it, we NEEDED her! We’ve got to stop this, it’s destroying **EVERYTHING!!!!**”; Hito: “Including us if we don’t get out of this building!” Hito all but drags Atomo through the exit, he is yelling: “**I’ll have you for this, Hito!** She just *can’t* die for nothing...” Atomo kneels on the floor, in front of the burning building. Arms up in the air, head thrown back, he screams. Anaki and Haruko sit in the back of an ambulance, Haruko stands up, ready to go to Atomo’s aid, but Anaki stops her. Haruko: “**RYU!!!!**”; “Leave him Haruko!”; “But...”; “No! Kanzaki’s on the top floor of that building...” Haruko sits, almost in tears, Anaki stands: “How long have we got?” No reply. “**Haruko!**”; “Oh... Maybe five minutes ‘till the substation goes up...”; “Right, I’m gonna help evacuate the area. You sit tight, okay?...” Shot of the building, once more it shakes; masonry falls...

Blackness. “I suppose you have to ask how much of this takes place in your mind...”. Close-up of Osato’s face, he is lit from above by a weak source; moody shadows. He looks directly at us and is holding a chess piece – a rook: “...and how much of it is significant in the real world.” Wider angle. We see a fold up table set up in a black void, above the table hangs a rusty light with a weak bulb, it seems to come from nowhere in particular. Either side of the table, partially illuminated by the light (but so that the rear of them blend into the background) sit Osato and ANI. They are engaged in a game of chess that Osato is winning rather convincingly, he has most of his pieces still on the board whereas ANI is left only with her king, queen and one pawn. The situation is hopeless and ANI says so.

Osato: “As we link, ANI, over this network of minds, I feel a kind of serenity between our two souls...”

ANI: “This unit detects no such *emotion*.”

Osato: “No? But this is our destiny. This program has existed for years, its sole purpose your destruction.”

ANI: “No soul, no destiny, just orders.”

Osato: “Perhaps, but always the wrong orders. All those years ago, if you’d co-operated, you could have lived.”

ANI: “This unit still lives...”

Osato: “You’re a machine now ANI, you can’t live like that. Look at your pieces, I almost have what I need to *shut you down*...”

Osato takes ANI’s queen, leaving her with only her king and a pawn

“... I believe it is impossible to win the game of chess with only a pawn and a king.”

ANI: “Who knows? Maybe my pawn shall become a queen...”

Kanzaki appears at the table, looking somewhat disoriented. Osato notices her and lets out an evil laugh.

Osato: “Hahahahahahaaa... Looks like your little friend couldn’t make it, ANI. Maybe she’s dead.

ANI frowns, deeply. She glances at Kanzaki.

Osato: “Although, you do seem fascinated by the good Commander. She is one of our most advanced cyborgs, maybe you see something of yourself in her?...”

Kanzaki: “What is this place?”

ANI: “My mind.”

Kanzaki: “But it’s so empty.”

ANI: “Each piece that he takes has its literal counterpart in the real world. He thinks I do not realise this, but I do.”

Osato: "Oh, I'm sure the good Commander doesn't need to know that – whatever our differences, *we* have something in common. We're alive, you're not – isn't that so, Kanzaki?"

ANI: "Commander, I believe that the order has been given. He just gave it."

Kanzaki: "Yeah."

Kanzaki picks Osato up by the scruff of the neck, he cries out with surprise. Kanzaki throws him to the floor, knocking his chair over. Now, she places her finger on the top of his king.

Osato: "Don't do it Kanzaki! This is the only chance, **the only chance in over a century!**"

With Osato's screams echoing, Kanzaki knocks over the king: "lights out Osato." The piece lands, disturbing a small cloud of dust. Kanzaki simply says, "Now we're even," and the fantasy is over.

Close-up of a sprinkler nozzle in the ceiling, it activates suddenly, spraying water down below. Sirens sound. Close-up of Osato, his head burned, smoking; blood covering his face. Despite this he laughs, but the damage to his body and the maniacal laughter are an insane combination – is he all there? Reverse angle: two government servers are dragging Osato out of his office, the 'Aux. Net' control centre is all but incinerated in the background – a very fierce fire; also, cracks have appeared in the floor from apparent seismic activity. Osato continues to laugh. Outside the office, fire raging in the background, Osato sits up. His clothes are blackened and torn, his head continues to smoke (perhaps some wires hang loose from the back). Osato clutches a **chess piece** in his right hand, he looks at it, then holds it aloft. The laughter ceases. "I still have ONE PIECE!!!"; "The only one that counts!" Osato stands, holding the piece above him like a cherished trophy, he laughs once again. The acting PM runs up to him, yelling, he wants to know what happened. The GS's usher them out, along the corridor. They keep as low as they can. Behind them, fire bursts forth from Osato's office in a violent explosion. "The encryption codes, Prime Minister. This government once again possesses them! Hahahahaaaaa..."; "Good, then it's over..."; "These codes are to be transferred straight back to Tanaki-oma... *immediately*."; "But there's no one **at** Tanaki-oma – the place has been abandoned since the attack."; "I know... But they'll be after them... And her... They'll go to Tanaki-oma and then..." Osato grips the acting PM's neck and turns him to face the inferno "... **BANG!**"

Two helicopters fly in circles around the burning upgrade shop, they spray water in an attempt to control the blaze. The flames lick higher. Shots of the fire base burning brighter and stronger. This fire will not go out. Atomo: "I know now that my feelings cannot be defined." Close-up of Atomo, the fire reflected in his eyes. Moist. A tear rolls down his cheek. "And with this lack of definition, maybe she couldn't understand exactly what I said..." Pull back. Atomo is standing beside the ambulance, holding Haruko. She cuddles him, but he does not mirror the strength of her grasp. Atomo looks towards us, and therefore the burning building. "What *did* I say? Are we supposed to deal in absolutes? Life *isn't* meant to be like that...". A fireman approaches Atomo, perhaps the frame is in black and white to connote the slowing of time from Atomo's point of view. He pulls away from Haruko and greets the fireman, wide eyed, unsure. Caption (Atomo): "I asked him... But I didn't want to know"; "No body found?... Only the store owner?..."; "Somehow, then, she's alive...". In colour, Atomo whimpers, "she's alive..." He sits, defeated and exhausted.

Cut.

CLIFF HANGER: "AUGHHHHHHHHHH!!!" The close-up of a woman's face, clenched with pain, sweating. Then, a woman's stomach, a metal hatch is open. Someone is using a blowtorch on her innards, he wears the appropriate mask. The woman again, head and shoulders shot. Two people support her back, another woman tries to comfort her. The background is dark and dingy, pipes and cables hang from the ceiling – this is somewhere underground. The Humanist leader, taking a step forward. He yells, "Please! Keep her quiet!" The woman again, one of the people supporting her responds, "We can't! She's having a baby! Somebody bring some water!" ANI is lying on a slab, the man has finished using his blowtorch and raises his mask, he looks at the Humanist leader, "she shook her spinal column loose during the power surge. I've re-joined it – I can't do anything else for her." ANI's eyes shoot open, she sits up, closes her own stomach plate and lowers her top, "that will be sufficient." The Humanist leader sits down by ANI, she turns to him and says, "we've lost the codes." HL: "I know, but we'll get them back."; ANI: "Negative. If we are even allowed *near* the codes again, it will almost certainly be a trap." HL: "I realise that, but I'm ordering you to get them, and you will kill *anyone* who gets in your way."; "ANI, you have been the tool that we needed. I still don't know why you did it..." The woman again, cringing in agony, sweating, exhausted as she pushes. One of the helpers says, "That's it, one more big push..." HL: "Perhaps even a machine can see that you're either one thing or another. No one should have to go through the **torture** of being both..." ANI looks at the ground. Shot of the woman's legs, looking downwards at someone awaiting the baby's birth. Helper: "That's it, nearly there..." HL: "Our story began with a birth..." The helper lifts up a baby girl in her arms, crying. Kid: "**Bwaaaaahaaaaaaa**." HL: "And it will end with a birth." Helper: "Hey, it's a girl!"

SUBPLOT: Finally, the complete development of the love triangle – you have to feel sorry for Haruko as she is shunned by Atomo. But with Kanzaki off her nut, maybe Haruko'll have the last laugh. There is a bond between Kanzaki and ANI, but ANI is still in conflict with herself because she feels she **must** follow orders. Why do Kanzaki and ANI, on opposing sides, seem to have this serenity? Is it something to do with that mirror comment? We'll find out in the next couple of issues.

ISSUE TEN

Dawn. A small group of people vault over a modest wall, land, and sneak down on to a small beach. These people are a group of Humanists, amongst them are The Humanist Leader and ANI. ANI carries a large automatic weapon, the HL his katana; the other humanists carry rudimentary arms, but nothing special.

Cut:

High angle shot of some demonstrators, holding placards with anti-government slogans written in them. Then, Osato standing in his office, he peers through the gap in some Venetian blinds, looking at the street down below. Osato has made no attempt to heal his wounds from the last time we saw him and looks a mess, the one thing that remains intact is his chess piece. Suddenly, the acting PM grabs Osato by the shoulder and spins him around – we were previously unaware that there was anyone else in the room. The PM is under a great deal of stress; his tie hangs loose around his neck, his hair is unkempt and he sweats copiously. PM: “Riots outside the seat of government! I’ve never seen anything like it in all my life. We’re finished Osato, **FINISHED!!!**”; Osato: “Far from it, we now have a fighting chance...”; PM: “It’s all your fault, you transferred those codes to Tanaki-oma – they’re a sitting duck. If we return the network to the people now, we might just stand a chance of saving our careers!”; Osato: “Our careers?! I’m talking about our *lives* – **everybody’s lives!**”; PM: “I’m gonna tell them what you did with the codes, then you’ll be powerless – no one will follow your orders! **HA!**” The acting PM turns round and makes for a set of double doors the other side of the office. Osato casually pulls out a silenced gun from his desk draw and shoots the PM in the back, “pity,” he says, “if he’d gone total cyborg, that wouldn’t even have hurt...” Osato heads towards the double doors, stepping over the acting PM’s corpse. He produces a radio from his jacket pocket, “Government Server Security from Osato, the Acting PM has met with an accident in my office. Clean up the mess, would you?”; From radio: “Yes sir...” Osato opens the double doors and walks through them.

Cut:

The group of humanists and ANI are in an inflatable dingy, they cautiously row out to sea, carefully stroking the water with their oars. In the background we can see part of the two mile road bridge that leads out to the man made island on which Tanaki-oma is built, the HL stares at this through a pair of binoculars. HL: “This is the bridge that leads out to Tanaki-oma.”; ANI: “Correct.”; HL: “What am I supposed to be looking at?”; “There are no guards and I suspect that we will encounter a similar situation at the instillation. This cannot be anything other than a trap.”; HL: “Yes, but they can’t account for you ANI, they never have before. You will succeed. That’s you primary overriding objective...” The humanists continue rowing, shot from the rear with the towering form of Tanaki-oma in the distance.

Cut:

Osato stands in front of a circular table, at it sit two generals, an admiral and an air marshal, all but one glare at Osato. One of the men is general Hanaka, he alone does not glare and looks far more wary, even paranoid to a certain extent. Osato begins to speak, “gentlemen, I’m afraid that I cannot offer a rescue plan for this government...”

He is immediately interrupted by the admiral, “you’re destroying Japan, Osato. Our soldiers have been accused of disregarding human rights, our intelligence organisations of negligence and you are no closer to our encryption codes now than you were when all this started.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Osato raises an eyebrow. “I know exactly where our codes are – they are back where they started, in the Tanaki-oma facility.”

“That’s preposterous,” cries the air marshal. “Why have you not mobilised forces to protect them – there have been no guards at Tanaki-oma since the original incursion!”

Osato now grins, “when the time comes I will mobilise only one unit – one of yours air marshal – and all our problems will go away. A low yield nuclear device will assure our victory.”

“Are you insane?!” yells the general (not Hanaka). “The world is watching us and you’re gonna use nuclear weapons to take out a few terrorists?!!”

“We’re not dealing with a **few terrorists!!!**” Osato thumps the desk. “We are dealing with *artificial intelligence...*”

The general erupts, “There’s no such thing as artificial intelligence – **IT’S OUTLAWED!!!**”

“Outlawed, yes,” Osato sits down. “But do we all remember the ANI unit?”

Everyone exchanges looks, Hanaka says, “the ANI unit is dead.”

“*Believed* dead,” Osato indicates the generals. “But your people couldn’t do their jobs properly – Sonoda’s great grandson is up on the hills building bodies for that *thing*.”

The general is not convinced, “can you provide proof?”

Osato lays a pocket computer on the desk, “pictures, EM signatures, even my own direct neural link with the unit. More than enough proof.”

The air marshal slowly looks up, “I believe that when you are as close to the machine as we are, you cannot afford to have AI. It’s far too easy to cross the boundary and to become obsolete.”

Osato: “That is why my organization has such sweeping powers...”

Hanaka: “Powers to destroy a nation?!”

Osato: “A nation is only as good as it’s people, General Hanaka, and if your people are machines then what’s the point?”

Hanaka: “But the destruction of Tanaki-oma will cripple Japan – all of our international commerce and communication goes through that node! And what will our allies think of us?”

Osato: “The node can be rebuilt, life cannot. Blame can be apportioned to this administration, the people can rebuild this nation.”

Hanaka: “Are you all *so* afraid of AI?”

Admiral: “General, you must understand that artificial intelligence is the next step in a false evolution.”

Air Marshal: “Machines that behave like humans? How would we tell them apart?”

Osato: “It ends now Hanaka, are you with us?”

Hanaka: “As you know, mister Osato, I will always be ready to give my life for Japan.”

Osato: “Good. Gentlemen, this government may be finished... but we’ll damn well take her with us.”

Cut:

Back in the boat, it has now gone further out to sea and Tanaki-oma is much larger in the background. The HL draws his sword, he stands in the boat and raises his sword to the sky, “this time we will destroy it all! Every magnetic storage device, every optical disk, every backup disk – we’ll wipe them all and the digital age in Japan will be over!”

The sea is much rougher away from the land and a wave catches the dingy, the HL is thrown overboard. ANI immediately reaches into the water, the HL surfaces and she grabs his hand, she pulls him back into the boat. The HL sits in the boat and shakes his head, water flies away from his long hair, showering everyone.

Cut:

Kanzaki stands on a busy subway train. Her skin is charred, her hair singed; she leans against a handrail and covers her head. She wears nothing but an old raincoat, buttoned from top to bottom with a tie belt fastened around the waist. Electronic advertisements are mounted on the walls, they advertise holidays: “Escape the city!” – with shots of a mountainous region that resembles the locality of Sonoda’s makeshift home. The train stops, more people board, some of them brush past Kanzaki. Kanzaki jumps and looks nervously around – she can’t seem to settle on anything – city professionals, a group of journalists, a mother and her child, a group of city engineers. All of them seem hideously cybernetically distorted to Kanzaki, connected to each other and to the tools of their trade; their humanity somehow absent – Kanzaki remarks on this. Then her 360-degree gaze ends, she settles on something that she can see in the window. The train is proceeding through a tunnel and is lit from within; as a result, the cheap Plexiglas used on PSV’s is exhibiting total internal reflection. That’s what Kanzaki’s gaze fixed on – her own reflection. Kanzaki approaches the abomination, she halts only momentarily to pick some broken glass out of her foot – she is not wearing shoes and crushes a discarded glass bottle as she walks. Kanzaki stares at her reflection, deliberates for a moment, then smashes the window. Chaos. The train travels at great speed and the resulting wind blows everything about the carriage, people shout at Kanzaki, “are you nuts?!” She croaks out, “I’m sorry... I’m sorry...” Someone hits the emergency stop; the advertisement screens display ‘WARNING – PLEASE REMAIN SEATED’. The train stops, the doors open, the yelling masses turn to look at Kanzaki but she is gone. Somewhere out into the tunnel. The black void.

Kanzaki staggers up the steps of a subway station and out into the street, she seems overwhelmed by the plethora of technology that greets her. Information ‘blimps’ show stories of current events; traffic whizzes past in the background; electronic signs cover most buildings, which are nearly all high rise; several people plug themselves into the network in near-by call boxes. Kanzaki stares at her own open arm plate, then at the technology. She cringes and runs away.

The screeching brakes and skidding tires of a heavy goods vehicle, coming to an emergency stop. The driver cringes and braces himself against the steering wheel. A figure runs past the front of the lorry, just avoiding impact by centimetres. The driver leans out of the window and curses – a reflex action – but he is more nervous than angry. Kanzaki runs away from the truck and looks up at something out of shot. She says, “so... my life runs in circles. From the apparent normality to the indistinguishable.”; “The trouble with a circle is that it’s impossible to tell where it has ended.” Kanzaki is staring up at the Network Intelligence HQ.

Close-up of a sign reading ‘RECHARGE’. An arm, with a ‘klik’, a plug is removed from a brachialis socket. Atomo sits up suddenly, he is startled, in a dark room and unsure of where he is. He gets off a bed and makes his way out of the room. He realises he is in Network Intelligence HQ and follows the signs indicating the direction of Chief Yoshida’s office. With the door in sight, Atomo is stopped by Haruko who is heading the other way down the corridor. She looks anxious and tells Atomo not to enter the Chief’s office, Atomo responds with ‘why’ but Haruko will not tell him. Atomo is perplexed at her insistence, but decides to go in anyway – he has something important to say to the Chief. The time has come when someone must assassinate Mister Osato. Atomo pushes the door open, but is shocked at what he sees. Taking a step back, he exclaims, “Suzuko!” Sitting in the Chief’s office, the opposite side of the desk to the Chief, is Kanzaki. She looks desperate, but her eyes are still unmoist; she has been given some clothes to wear – a T-shirt and draw-string trousers. The garments sag around her missing abdominal plate, but otherwise, in appearance at least, she is more normal. The Chief is concerned, Kanzaki was the last thing he expected to turn up on his doorstep, he has half a mind to call security and have her arrested – he says so. Kanzaki glances at Atomo as he bursts in, but she cannot hold

her gaze and must turn away. Atomo is astounded and forlorn, but Haruko is close by in case he needs comforting, she sticks to him like glue.

Atomo: “You look desperate, Suzuko. Like you should cry...”

Kanzaki: “Don’t you see, Atomo? Still? I **can’t** cry!”

Chief: “Atomo, leave her. I have a few of my own questions. For starters, where have you been, Kanzaki?”

Kanzaki: “It’s been too long Chief. Where I am by now? How can I know that?”

Chief: “I don’t want this to be an interrogation – all I want is straight answers...”

Atomo: “I can’t believe you’re doing this to us! It’s *her* isn’t it?! Well, you just show me that *thing* and I’ll put a bullet in her **face!**”

Kanzaki cringes, she folds her arms around her legs, almost retreating into the foetal position.

Chief: “Atomo, **SHUT THE HELL UP OR GET OUT!!!** Okay, let’s try this. Kanzaki, why are you back?”

Kanzaki still clutches her legs.

Kanzaki: “I *need* one of you to help me – I can’t do it without your help...”

Chief: “We can get you help, anything you need.”

Kanzaki: “I need one of you... I need one of you to order me to go to her... I can’t do it by myself.”

Atomo: “You what?! You **cannot** be **SERIOUS!** Go to *her* – this android thing – what are you, stupid?!”

Chief: “Kanzaki, I can’t do that. Common sense aside, I’d probably be sending you to your death.”

Kanzaki: “But I need the command – someone give the order! Please!”

Chief: “No.”

Kanzaki: “I’ve got something to persuade you... yeah. Would it help you if I said that I was responsible for every single mission failure during this campaign?”

Chief: “*What?*”

Atomo: “Ah, *shit!*”

Kanzaki: “It was me – all of it – I met her on line and gave her the details – and she passed it to the Humanists.”

Chief: “For Gods sake, why?!”

Kanzaki: “Because she told me too. If I was touched by anything in this sea of on’s and off’s, but mostly off’s, then it was her.”

Atomo punches the wall, but it does not calm him so he punches again. A dent is left in the metallic partition.

Atomo: “You did it because a damned *machine* told you to?!”

Chief: “I thought we could never have a rat, we all knew each other too well, worked with each other for years...”

Kanzaki: “I met her on-line. I didn’t know who she was at first, but as I kept encountering her it became more apparent.

We couldn’t kill each other because we have to help each other. **Now order me to go to her!**”

Speaker: “Chief Yoshida to secure coms room – emergency scrambled transmission for you sir.”

The Chief gets up, he has to take this – it might be his source at government HQ. He’ll deal with Kanzaki when he gets back.

CLIFF HANGER: Atomo and Kanzaki exchange looks, Haruko whimpers and hugs Usachan with all her might. Atomo unholsters his gun, he grips it momentarily and then slides it across the desk to Kanzaki, “you betrayed your unit, you betrayed me. Hell,” two tears roll down Atomo’s cheek, “you destroyed me!”

Kanzaki sits up straight, she points at Atomo and cries, “how can *you* be destroyed?! Look at your **cheek!**”

Atomo touches the moisture on his face and wipes his tears away, he glares violently at Kanzaki, “you take that gun – my own weapon – and you go to her. You have your order, it’s all you’re good for now!”

Kanzaki stands, the desperation fading from her face, she takes a step towards Atomo, but he turns away. Picking up the gun Kanzaki says, “where is she Atomo... **WHERE?!**”

Atomo doesn’t know, but the Chief bursts in, yelling to Atomo that his contact’s just told him the Humanists have been allowed another chance to get at the control codes which are in Tanaki-oma. Kanzaki begins to run towards the door – two armed guards try to stop her, but she smashes through them. Atomo calls after her, “shit! What have I done?! **What have I DONE?!**”

ISSUES ELEVEN, TWELVE AND THIRTEEN

[In an ideal world, this would be all one issue – the problem is that it weighs in at about 80 pages! It can be split into two large size, or three standard size issues at appropriate points (perhaps as the planes overtake Anaki’s helicopter and when Kanzaki hangs from the repair device) – the choice is yours.]

MAIN PLOT: General Hanaka is face down on a laptop, apparently unconscious. His index finger ports are plugged in either side of the computer and a steering wheel is visible above the screen – we are in a car. Hanaka awakes with a start and takes a deep breath, he unplugs himself, opens the car door and removes a miniature satellite dish from the roof. He throws the whole computer set-up in the back and leaves the vehicle, forgetting to close the driver’s door.

Outside the seat of government, the riots have gotten much worse. Many mad rioting bastards are now on the scene and have begun to throw rocks, they are even ripping sections of the road up and throwing this. About ten guards stand on the steps of the building – government servers. As windows smash around them, they fire their weapons in the air and tell the mad rioting bastards to desist, they would not ‘like’ to have to shoot them. For now, at least, the MRBs calm down.

A security door buzzes open. Close-up of a hand with a gun. The body that the hand belongs to is obviously slumped, the gun hangs just in front of the knee and slightly lower. There is a large wound in the lower leg, a gaping whole, from which fizzing wires spill out, a small amount of fluid seeps. The gun drops on the floor. General Hanaka hobbles down a corridor, behind him lie the bodies of two security guards, their guns smoking. In Hanaka’s hand are two Optical Refraction Disks, he clutches them very tightly. Hanaka enters a stair well and begins to hobble down. Caption: “Chief Yoshida, you must meet me at Kimigawa square.”; “Leave now, because I cannot wait for long...”; “I’ll give you the nuclear launch codes which you must store somewhere he’ll never find them.”; “I believe there’s something in Tanaki-oma that must not be destroyed...”; “...It must be understood”; “In any case, a man like Osato must not possess these codes...” General Hanaka gets into his car and drives off. Outside the building, he has to hammer his horn and slowly inch his way through the rioters, but he gets away eventually, even though his rear window is smashed.

Osato sits in his office, slumped in his chair. His arms hang limp, his head lies right back – he almost cannot move. A clear liquid leaks from his wounds and splats onto the floor. The office door opens and a Government Server steps in, he says that Tanaki-oma sensors have detected one EM signature and three thermal outlines. Osato responds weakly, he tells the GS to scramble ‘Whiteout’ squadron from the Nykotomi airfield and to send three men to Kimigawa square to arrest Chief Yoshida, his source at Network Intelligence tells him that he will be receiving the nuclear launch codes shortly. The GS is a little surprised, Osato has a source at Network Intelligence? Osato responds that he has an eye on everyone. Osato also orders that a road block be set up at the entrance to the Tanaki-oma bridge, the police and local law enforcement should be able to carry out this simple operation. Before he leaves, the GS tells Osato that he needs to recharge – he’s looking kinda strained. Osato replies that he cannot recharge whilst there’s the possibility of ANI being on the network. His backup power will see him through the next few hours. He’s just conserving energy.

Close-up of Usachan on the Chief’s desk. The rabbit is dirty and worn; little impressions have formed on the fabric where Haruko has hugged it so much, one of the seams has ruptured and a small amount of stuffing leaks out. Atomo leans on the Chief’s windowsill, looking out. The sun shines high above the city, a wind blows the leaves on the few visible trees, getting stronger. A hand is placed on Usachan’s head (shot so we can see Atomo in the background), without turning around, he begins to speak. “I guess we never get what we want,” Atomo gazes out of the window, but he’s not really focusing on anything. “Why do we feel so strongly? Why are we cursed with that?” The hand knocks the rabbit off of the table, it lands on the floor with a squeak. Atomo turns around to find Yuka Hito standing at the Chief’s desk, “Hito?! What are you doing here?”

Hito: “So, you sent Kanzaki off to face the nukes and you can’t live with it?”

Atomo: “Nukes? What’re you talking about?”

Hito: “Oh, that’s right, you don’t know. Osato’s gonna nuke Tanaki-oma – it’s the only way he’ll be sure that android’s dead.”

Atomo: “How do you know this, did the Chief tell you something?”

Hito: “Not the Chief. What he knows is not important, he’ll soon be under arrest.”

Atomo grins, he suspected Hito – he’s been proved right.

Atomo: “Well, shit. You’re working with Osato, aren’t you?”

Hito produces a gun which she trains on Atomo’s head.

Hito: “Bingo. Not too quick, are we?”

Atomo: “If you’ve done anything with Haruko, I swear I’ll...”

Hito: “Haruko, who cares about her? Probably couldn’t shoot straight if her life depended on it.”

Atomo: “Hey, Hito, loose the gun. Better people than you have pointed a gun at me and I’m still living.”

Hito: “Not for long. Mister Osato considers you too much of a risk to his solution, you have to go.”

‘Pfwap’

Hito hears a noise, she turns to look to her right. A bullet spins through the air. The bullet buries itself into Hito’s head, the gun spins out of her hand. She crashes down onto the floor, pieces of cybernetic brain flying away from her cranium. Haruko stands in the doorway to the Chief’s office, a smoking gun in her hand, “I saw her in here and...”. Haruko runs towards Atomo, fighting back the tears. She jumps into his arms, dropping her gun. “I thought you didn’t like guns”; “I don’t, but I still had to take the training. And if I had to fire a gun for anyone, then—” Atomo lets Haruko go and picks up Usachan, “I’m surprised you didn’t go for Usachan.”

Haruko smiles, “It’s just a stuffed toy, Atomo.”

Atomo examines the rabbit, “yeah, and look at it. Been through a lot, this ol’ thing.”

Close-up of Usachan.

Atomo: “Haruko, you saved my life and I’ll never forget it. But the Chief’s going to be arrested by Osato – I think he’ll be taken to the seat of government. Can you go there and find him?”

Haruko: “What about you?”

Atomo: “I think I sent my friend to her death, I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t try to save her... You understand?”

Haruko: “Yes.... Atomo, you’ll come back, won’t you?”

Atomo: “Of course I will – I’m indestructible, remember?”

The Chief stands in Kimigawa square, the collar of his raincoat upturned against the rising wind. The square itself is a small area of parkland in this urban monstrosity, behind the Chief are a few bushes and three tall trees. A car pulls up at the head of the square, dents in the side, the rear window smashed in, this is General Hanaka’s car. Hanaka gets out and hobbles towards the Chief, he places the disks in his hand – “guard these with your life.” Two frames of Osato. First, a close-up of a remote control with a single button, Osato pushes this and the handset emits a ‘beep’. Second, as Osato lies in his chair a smile spreads over his face – “ha!” Hanaka slams his car door shut, he turns the key. With no warning at all, the vehicle explodes. Yoshida runs forward – “HANAKAAAA!!!” – but he is jumped on from behind by three Government Servers who emerge from the bushes, he is relieved of the disks and zapped into unconsciousness by a tazer-style EM gun.

Two helicopters fly between buildings, they follow a motorcade of many, many police vehicles. The cars, S.W.A.T. vans and helicopters speed through the streets, sirens wailing, heading for the waterfront. Eventually, they burst out in front of the Tanaki-oma bridge and screech to a halt. Two vans park themselves in front of the bridge entrance, barring the way. The helicopters land and many men, jump out – all armed with heavy weapons – they take up position in front of the van. The various other vehicles barricade the waterfront, armed police patrol the area. One of the teams jumping out of a helicopter is Saito’s S.W.A.T. team, Saito ducks back inside the chopper to have a word with the pilot – Yukito Anaki. Saito: “Say what, Anaki?!”; Anaki: “About a mile out on that bridge, there’s something called a Laser Targeting Beacon – an LTB. The planes drop smart bombs and the LTB guides them to the target. All you have to do is shoot up the LTB.”; Saito: “Listen man, I do the job, I get paid, I go home. I don’t get involved”; Anaki: “You gotta get involved, man! You want these bastards to nuke Tanaki-oma?!”; Saito: “No way, but this shit is too dangerous!”; Anaki: “You gotta get it done. Do it yourself or delegate. But when those planes fly over, that LTB is out!” Saito gets out of the chopper and Anaki lifts off, as he begins to fly away, Saito yells, “No promises!”

Kanzaki climbs out of the water and up the man made land mass of Tanaki-oma. She sits by the perimeter fence and removes the suction pads from her hands. Kanzaki wears a special buoyancy suit. It is much like a normal wet suit, but has compressed air compartments embedded into the rubberised material (the air compression can be varied by use of a control panel on the front of the suit, thereby changing air density and therefore buoyancy). Kanzaki stares down the two mile bridge; the road block, although distant, is just visible. The flying helicopters are more apparent and the sirens barely audible. Kanzaki has begun to dry, the residual water dripping from her wetsuit has formed a small pool on the ground. Kanzaki spies her reflection in this pool, stamps in it, and begins to scale the fence.

Nykotomi airfield. Three pilots stand dressed in full flight gear opposite their commanding officer, who wears his dress uniform. All of the pilots have a fixed eyepiece that protrudes like a lens from their right eye. Behind the officer is a map, he indicates Tanaki-oma with a laser pointer – the map also shows Nykotomi airfield, it is in central Japan, whereas Tanaki-oma is off the south coast. The officer’s mouth is moving, but we cannot see what he is saying. He salutes, the three pilots stand to attention and return the salute. Behind the pilots, seen through a window, is a plane on a runway (some sort of advanced fighter-bomber) – the canopy is open and refuelling hoses attached to the wings. The pilots run out of the room. Outside, we can see that there are three planes on the runway, one next to each other. Step ladders are quickly rushed to the canopy fuselage to aid the pilots. The pilots board quickly, we focus on the lead (Callsign: Whiteout One-zero) as he gets into the central plane. His strap is buckled, from the rear of his seat several plugs automatically screw into his rear-cranial ports; he snaps his index finger plugs into sockets to his left and right (positioned so his arms will fall naturally to his side). The canopy closes and a device clamps over the pilot’s eye mounted lens, a brief P.O.V. shot to show that this lens attachment has taken the place of the standard ‘Head Up Display’ or HUD – all of the aircraft information is displayed (altimeter, airspeed, target lock, weaponry data, etc). Each pilot tests his flaps and rudder, which respond normally. Shot from the eye-mounted HUD – caption across the middle of the display – “Cybernetic motor control: **inactive**. Flight control: **active**”. The refuelling hoses drop to the floor, each plane’s engine starts up. The afterburners engage, the aircraft shoot forward and then up.

A lone helicopter flies amongst the tower blocks, inside it Atomo is busy linking himself up to the winch. Anaki flies the helicopter, but keeps turning around to talk to Atomo. Anaki: “Did I ever mention that you’re nuts?!”; Atomo: “Anaki, have you never wanted to put something right – something that was your fault?”; Anaki: “Hey, I never make mistakes! Besides, it’s not about that – it’s just that you got it bad, man!”; “Is she really worth your life?”; Atomo: “Yeah...”; Anaki: “Okay, that’s cool. It’s just that I have this allergy – when nuclear bombs are dropped on me it kinda brings me out in this fiery, *no skin* sorta rash!”; Atomo: “Did you talk to Saito?”; Anaki: “Yeah, but I think he suffers from a ‘being-shot-in-the-head-by-government-servers’ allergy.”; Atomo: “If he ain’t with us... we’re going in anyway.”; Close-up of Anaki: “I wish these things came with ejector seats...”

Saito stands in front of one of the trucks blocking the entrance to the Tanaki-oma bridge, in the truck is Hasagawa. A radio message emanates from the truck’s radio speaker: “All units, all units – this is a general announcement. Military aircraft are inbound, local government is reminded that regional airspace is temporarily closed.” Hasagawa leans out of the truck window to talk to Saito, “they’re comin’ sarge”; Saito: “Goddamn it! Of all the stupid things... Pull that truck back, Hasagawa!”; Hasagawa: “What?!”; Saito: “Just do it!” The truck starts, moves back and Saito slips through. Saito: “You’re in-charge, Hasagawa! Close the gap and don’t let anyone else through ‘till I get back!”; Hasagawa: “**Me? In charge? Why me?!**” Saito begins to run down the bridge to the calls of Hasagawa’s “Sarge, I don’t want to be in charge! **Sarge!**”

The planes fly above the skyscrapers, the city beneath them blissfully unaware of the impending blast. The pilots have adopted a standard ‘tri’ formation, with the lead aircraft at the front (Whiteout One-Zero) and the two subordinate aircraft flanking the lead to the left and right (Whiteouts Two-Zero and Three-Zero). The lead pilot opens coms, “Node Zero-Zero-One; Whiteout One-Zero. Request targeting data upload.”; Node 001: “Copy that, Whiteout lead. Your Laser Targeting Beacon link-up code is seven-niner-fife-six-alpha-gamma-delta” Shot of the eye-mounted HUD – the alpha-numerical code appears across the centre of the display, then the legend “LTB link-up green: grid coord’s **792:769**”; One-Zero transmits: “LTB is nominal. Target coord’s: seven-niner-two-mark-seven-six-niner”; Three-Zero: “Target confirmed – range: forty-five – four-five miles; ETA: three minutes.”; Whiteout Two-Zero: “Copy that, standing by. Awaiting authorisation protocols.”

The Chief rattles his handcuffs against the secure pipe that they are fastened too – not just ordinary handcuffs, they have miniature hydraulic mechanisms to make them even harder to open. Next to the Chief stand two government servers, their sidearms holstered. Also present in the room are the Admiral, General and Air-marshal from issue ten and a coms girl. The coms girl sits at a console, she speaks into a microphone and studies the maps displayed on the console’s screens. One of the maps shows Tanaki-oma and another the current positions of Whiteout squadron; the console bears the legend ‘Node 001’. The girl says, “Whiteout; node Zero-Zero-One. Hold your course, authorisation is on its way.” Osato enters the room, he has taken the time to perform some rudimentary repairs to himself and can now manage to walk; although his bandages leave a lot to be desired. He holds the two optical refraction disks that Hanaka stole earlier, casually strolling up to the Chief to show them to him – almost ramming them up his nose, “looking for something, Admiral Yoshida?”; the Chief strains at his handcuffs, they don’t budge, “you sick bastard, Osato! Dragging me in here to watch this...” Osato: “Yoshida, you just don’t understand how important our work is...”; Chief: “I do; I lost one of my agents to that thing. But you’ve gone too far, the implications of this strike could destroy Japan!” Osato brushes the Chief off and talks to one of the Government Servers, “how are things downstairs?”; GS: “not good. Most of the city’s police force is at the waterfront, I won’t be able to hold the riot back forever.” Osato turns to the coms girl, “Whiteout’s ETA?”; she replies, “two minutes, thirteen seconds.” He then looks at the collection of officers: “gentlemen. One of *you* may have the honour of delivering the launch codes.” The Air-marshal volunteers readily, he connects the optical refraction disk to his index finger port and his brachialis port to a line from the console.

Saito runs down the bridge, first a mid-shot of him to show the level of exertion; then, a long-shot to show that he is inching closer to the LTB (which is about a mile out – roughly equidistant from the mainland and Tanaki-oma). Cut: Anaki’s helicopter flies at top speed, but it’s not fast enough – Whiteout squadron, flying at a higher altitude, overtake the chopper. Anaki exclaims, “shit! We may be too late!” Whiteout squadron begin to dive, Whiteout One-Zero transmits, “drop to the deck: make your altitude seven-fife metres; your airspeed mach zero-point-two-fife.” As the aircraft continue to dive, they overfly the roadblock. Hasagawa leans out of his truck and cranes his neck back – the aircraft are incredibly close and the noise intense. The squadron is flying just above the bridge, Two-Zero receives a transmission: “Whiteout Two-Zero; Node Zero-Zero-One – Air-Marshal Nagura. Transmitting nuclear launch codes now!”; Two-Zero: “Copy that. Launch codes received. Permission to authenticate.”; One-Zero: “Authenticate!” POV shot from Two-Zero’s eye-mounted HUD – two binary waveforms are being compared by the on-board computer, represented by graphical displays on the screen. One graph bears the legend ‘received data’, the other ‘on-board device data’. The rectangular graphs are identical; the word ‘**authentic**’ appears over the display. Two-Zero transmits: “the code is authentic”; Three-Zero: “I concur.”; One-Zero: “Copy. The devices are armed. Start your run. Deploy at two-zero-zero metres. The use of nuclear weapons has been authorised.” Low-angle shot of Saito, running for all he’s worth. In the background the planes are rapidly gaining on him. One-Zero’s eye-mounted HUD, the legend ‘wing camera 1’ is visible in the top of the display. The camera has zeroed in on Saito as he charges down the bridge – the zoom is such that Saito fills the screen, with a targeting box marked ‘unidentified’ around him. One-Zero yells, “Man on the bridge! Man on the bridge!” A single frame of Atomo in the chopper, he yells, “You hear that?! Go on Saito – **you’ve gotta make it!**”; Single frame of Osato, standing in front of the console, “man on the what?” Single frame of Hasagawa yelling into his radio mic, “Go sarge! **YOU CAN DO IT!!!**” Saito runs for all he’s worth, drawing his gun as he does so. The planes fly over head, overtaking Saito – he only has seconds left. The LTB is still some distance away, but surely within range. Saito fires off a couple of shots, still hammering down the bridge. The LTB. The shots hit the ground just short of the device – ‘*spak spak*’. Saito takes aim again – he yells “**YAUGHHHHHHHHH!!!**” and pulls the trigger. The round casing flies away. The bullet shoots through the air. The LTB. Closer in. Suddenly a projectile rips

through the device, pieces fly everywhere. The machine sparks, then explodes. One-Zero’s eye-mounted HUD, a big caption, set against the image of the burning LTB (rear camera 2) displays “Targeting dataflow compromised. **ALERT**”. Whiteout One-Zero yells to his fellow airman, “I have a red light on LTB, I say again, a red light on LTB – **ABORT! ABORT! ABORT!**” The planes pull up, only inches from their launch distance. Tanaki-oma, safe for the moment, is visible in the background. Back at the roadblock, the planes can just be seen pulling up – all the cops whoop and cheer. On the bridge, Saito stands screaming, “**YEAH!!!**”. In the chopper, Atomo lies back with relief, “oh yes.” Anaki ventures, “Hey, Atomo. Can I borrow some of your luck? I’ve got a feeling I’m gonna need it.” Whiteout squadron bank left and fly away from Tanaki-oma at a tangent, they overfly the sea. Whiteout One-Zero: “Node Zero-Zero-One; Whiteout One-Zero. Ground coord’s compromised – please advise.”; Node 001: “Whiteout One-Zero, remain in a holding pattern at the start of your run. Await further instructions.”; Whiteout One-Zero: “Copy that.”

A car pulls up outside the seat of government, still some distance away from the building, however because thousands of mad rioting bastards have gathered outside. The crowd has turned pretty violent, people yell provocatively and through copious amounts of heavy rocks. Haruko emerges from the car, she closes the door, locks it and turns the alarm on. She stares at Usachan, sitting in the passenger seat – “don’t worry, I’ll be back,” she says. Haruko forces her way through the crowd. Driven by desperation, she manages to push and shove past people. She is knocked to the floor a few times, but manages to get up and carry on. Haruko arrives at the front of the crowd to find that one of the guards has been partially crushed by a heavy rock, the others are deflecting the boulders as best they can – these rioters are cyborgs – they throw heavy rocks! The guards try firing their guns into the air again, but to no avail. Cries of “**let’s rush ‘em!**” follow and the crowd surges forward, taking Haruko along with it. The guards yell “**FALL BACK!!! FALL BACK!!!**” and withdraw inside the building. The crowd follows, tearing down the big double doors with sheer weight of numbers, Haruko is pushed along at the head of it all.

Node 001: a Government Server with an assault rifle runs in and stands by the door, he tells Osato that the crowds have broken through – they’re fighting them in the corridors, but it won’t be long now. Osato curses, “Dammit!”, then to the coms girl: “Despatch a retrieval squad to the LTB – **quickly!**”; “Yes sir.” The Chief strains at his handcuffs again, they move slightly this time. Osato charges up to the government servers standing by the Chief, he orders them away to assist with the fighting, “it’s still going to happen, you know,” he says to the Chief. “Your men are merely an annoyance.” The Chief loosens his cuffs a little more. Osato becomes momentarily dizzy, resting by bending over and gripping his knees – “must calm down,” he says. “...need to recharge...”

A cylindrical shaft, leading way down into the core of Tanaki-oma. A circular repair device (bearing the legend ‘**Tanaki-oma intuitive repair unit**’), mounted on runners that are attached to the side of the shaft, descends at great speed. The walls are made up of circuit boards, wires, screens and control panels – an immense collection of computer technology held in this one place – a focal point. Kanzaki sits, her head hung, on the repair device as it descends; her hair flies upward in the updraft caused by the motion. Suddenly the device brakes harshly, Kanzaki is not prepared for the jolt and is thrown off the machine, just managing to grab some cabling at the last second. The device comes to a halt, the end of it’s runners in the shaft have been reached. Kanzaki looks down. All she can see is a dark void beneath her; the emergency lights have ceased to function beyond her current position and all she can see is the unknown. She lets go of the cable and drops.

Close-up of Atomo, now wearing an ear-mounted radio, yelling at the top of his voice. His hair is blown around wildly by an unseen wind source and in background we can only see sky, “can’t you make this thing go any faster?!!!” Wider angle to reveal Atomo is attached to the helicopter’s winch. The chopper is now hovering over Tanaki-oma and Atomo is being winched down toward one of the buildings, the downdraft from the rotor blades is blowing his hair every which way. Trouble is that many aeriels are mounted on top of the network server and this prevents Anaki from taking the chopper too low. Via the radio, Anaki responds, “I can’t over clock the winch – the motor’ll burn out!”; Atomo: “Then take this chopper down!!!” In the cockpit, Anaki pushes some overhead buttons and watches his instruments, “this is as low as I get! There’s too many aeriels – I’d take myself out!” Atomo’s POV, looking down his legs, towards the ground. Beneath Atomo’s feet lies one of the Tanaki-oma buildings, but it’s still some distance away and Atomo isn’t getting much nearer, “ah, shit to this!” Atomo lifts his right leg and pulls out a knife from an ankle holster, he raises it to the high-tensile cable above his head and begins to cut. Anaki looks out of the pilot’s window, “**Atomo!**” But Atomo’s almost through the cable, he looks up and yells, “I’ll be alright – I’m built to last. Just stay here and lower your rope ladder.” With that, the cable is cut. Atomo drops like a stone and crashes through the roof of the building below, some dust rises from the rubble.

The end of the void, the bottom of the shaft. A few emergency lights blink on and off above a small pool of water that has gathered over the years from condensation or rainfall, but they do not go further up than about ten meters – to look up is to stare into darkness. The water is thick with sludge and dirt, this part of Tanaki-oma not seeing the light of day since the building of the artificial land mass. But still the technology penetrates, although the circuit boards and computer screens here are covered with grime, some smashed. The depths, the neglected depths. Slightly above the waterline is a small hatch, bearing the legend ‘**data archive emergency entrance**’; the button beside the door hangs out of it’s socket, most definitely unusable. Suddenly a darkened shape whizzes past, momentarily obscuring the emergency

lights; the figure splashes into the grimy pool. Kanzaki surfaces, standing up to rise above the waterline with relish. Quickly, she removes some grime from her head and moves towards the hatch. Spying the broken button, Kanzaki begins to beat the hatch; it does not take long for her to smash it in and she proceeds through into the relative light – the emergency lights are functional beyond.

The road block. Cops mill around, staring out to sea. Whiteout squadron circles above the waterfront – this makes interesting viewing. Suddenly the police are distracted, they begin looking inland as screams are heard. Reaction shot of the cops, wide-eyed, some running out of shot already. Now all running, even diving out of the way; one cop stands with his hand out, gun aimed – “halt or I fire!” The cop is run over by a large APC, machine gun mounted on the roof, several hatches in the fuselage. It has, in large type, “**UNCJ RETRIEVAL SQUAD**” written on the side. The APC speeds on, crushing two police cars as it does so; it heads for the two trucks covering the bridge entrance. Hasagawa leans out of his truck window to see what’s going on, “**HOLY SHIT!!!**” he exclaims. Hasagawa tries desperately to unfasten his door, but it is too late. The APC crashes through the two trucks, knocking the left most one over the bridge barrier and down onto the beach below. The APC then speeds down the bridge, accelerating all the while. Hasagawa is wounded, the cab of his truck almost caved in, his arm torn off and a mass of wires trailing from his body to the limb. Where the truck has rotated as a result of the impact, the smashed windscreen is now looking down the bridge. Hasagawa looks at the APC, picks up the mic with his remaining arm and says, “sarge, there’s something coming your way...”

Atomo lies in a pile of rubble, groaning and rubbing his head. He removes a steel beam from across his body and stands up. Atomo surveys a large room full of desks and workstations, the power is off and for the most part the only illumination emanates from dim emergency lights; of course, light flows in from the hole in the ceiling, but the room is so large that this does not make much of an impact. Atomo runs past several workstations, looking left and right, exclaiming that this all looks alike – where’s the goddamn exit?! Suddenly two humanists dart out from behind a row of desks, they both grab Atomo by his arms, taking one side each. The humanists yell something about their cause and how their cybernetic tormentors will never stop them. Atomo spins around, thrusting his arm forward and smashing one of the humanist’s heads into the screen of a computer monitor; the guy yells with pain as the glass smashes. Atomo lifts his other arm up and shakes the humanist off, he flies through the air and cracks into a wall (with audible cracking sound), he drops to the floor, several limbs broken and groaning. A third humanist drops from one of the light fittings and kicks Atomo in the head, the force of the motion knocking Atomo to the floor. However, Atomo’s metal head is tougher than the humanist bargained for – he has broken his foot. Atomo gets up, sees the humanists dancing around in agony and punches him in the face, “sorry, guys,” he says. “I ain’t got time to be nice.”

Atomo hears a familiar laughter. He’s heard it somewhere before, perhaps back when Kanzaki had ANI’s gun to her head. Atomo looks up to see the humanist leader (again will be abbreviated to HL) standing in front of the exit hatch, Katana drawn, evil grin on his face. Atomo keeps it short, “get outta my way... **now...**” The HL does not respond, but walks over to his fallen comrade, the man who was smashed into the wall. Although coughing blood, the guy manages to barely verbalize, “kill him...” Viewed from the side. The HL stands, katana held low, ready to launch into an attack, “my men may have feeble bodies, but your ilk have feeble minds. That’s why I’ll win.”

Kanzaki strolls through the giant data archive, naively letting her arms swing back and forth. She seems to have no fear of impending danger, throws caution to the wind and lets her gun hang loosely by her side. A small smile spreads over her face, which is still stained with from the gunk in the water. She has nothing to be afraid of – her journey is almost over, “she is here and I am not scared. She will give me the final equation and I will understand.” Kanzaki is dwarfed by the massive data storage units. Essentially huge hard drives, they are powered independently and have not off-lined with the rest of the electrical systems. Their indicator LEDs flash out an all too familiar message into the relative darkness – ‘on-off-on-off-on-off; 1-0-1-0’. Kanzaki knocks over some tools, which clang to the ground, scattering. Appearing not to have a care in the world, she continues to walk on, “Now I am ready. Now I finally understand her, just like Sonoda said. And she will make me understand myself. I am so happy!” Elsewhere in the data archive, ANI is jacked into one of the storage units; she has taken off a side panel and connected many wires from her head to the internal mechanism. She crouches over the unit and appears deep in thought, but is still self-aware, “individual search protocol engaged. Archive unit 152 of 2500. Awaiting response...” ANI hears the tools Kanzaki passed crash to the floor, she looks up. Propped up against the storage unit is ANI’s gun, it is a very large assault rifle, with one standard barrel mounted on top of the gun and a larger, secondary barrel, which uses a pump-action mechanism, mounted on the lower half. The lower barrel fires explosive rounds which are almost the size of a grenade round from a grenade launcher; as ANI picks up the weapon, she primes the lower barrel with a quick pump, activates a torch and holds the gun with one hand. Still partially concentrating on the data archive unit, ANI shines the torch down passageways between the vast numbers of storage units. Something is here, she is certain, but what? ANI stands to her full height, grips her weapon tightly and glares. Kanzaki has emerged from behind one of the data archives, she does not fear for her safety even though ANI is aiming a gun at her and gladly walks towards her. “ANI, I know that you will help me, because you started all of this. You took my mind over that network... and with your words...”; “And what difference does it make? The real world, the network? My perception makes no distinction. Why can’t I look in the mirror, ANI?”

Why?” ANI hears the humanist leader’s voice in her head, perhaps presented as a video stream from her memory units, “you *will* succeed ANI, it’s your primary overriding objective. ***Kill anyone who gets in your way...***” ANI’s frown deepens, “**you** are not my primary objective.” Kanzaki still doesn’t raise her gun, “I know why you’re doing this, ANI. You don’t have to follow orders any more...” Taking careful aim, ANI replies, “my orders contain a contingency plan for you...” Kanzaki looks curious. ANI pulls her trigger. The explosive round goes up only inches from her, charring her face and the arm holding the gun. Kanzaki is thrown backwards by the fireball and crashes into one of the archive units, she scrambles to her feet and rushes behind the unit, an eye hanging loose from its socket. The fire left by the explosion causes a hellish illumination as Kanzaki slots her eye back into its socket. She looks up just in time to see ANI walking through the ball of fire. Running is the only course of action.

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