

# *Singularity*

## **Special Sample Chapters**

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## Chapter 32

“I need to go Phase Three immediately,” Aiden said. “The four of them went outside of the community and were gone most of the day yesterday. They’re up to something. If I were Phase Three, I could get into the network and find out what they know and what they’re up to.”

“What do you believe they’re doing?” the voice said.

“I think they suspect that the enhancements we made to Phase Two aren’t what they seem,” Aiden said.

“Have you activated the modified code in anybody yet?”

“Of course not,” Aiden said. “There’s no need. Besides, if somebody gets sick or drops dead after things have gone well for three weeks then they will start poking around and screaming about delaying Phase Three.”

“They said they’re in favor of pushing out Phase Three on schedule.”

“They are, which is suspicious,” Aiden said. “It’s been nothing but resistance from Senara, Killian, and Gyan in particular, but suddenly they’re cooperative. I want to know why. It’s like they know something.”

“I’m sure they know a great deal that you don’t know. You’d better hope that they do.”

“That’s not what I mean. They’ve been different since they went to Reston.”

“How?”

“More secretive. They’ve started roaming around a lot.”

“Where did they go?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’re paranoid, and that’s going to undermine you,” another voice said. “Besides, what does it matter if they did find something? It won’t help.”

“What matters is that the Phase Three enhancement code is our best defense. No nuclear weapons, no environmental hazards, no unintended casualties. Perfectly targeted delivery to neutralize threats with no cross contamination or threat of taking out friendlies along with enemies.” Aiden sank against his bed. “We must protect what’s left. We’re vulnerable.”

“Ensuring we get all the chaff and none of the wheat, eh?” another voice asked.

Aiden curled up and put his hands over his ears. So much for the silence. The voices started again just after they announced the Phase Three rollout. It started with vivid dreams of his past work, so vivid that he swore he was there, in his office in D.C., flying high off top-secret meetings and gleefully typing code that would ensure that the United States was the strongest country in the world.

Now it might be one of the few countries they didn’t completely kill off.

They had messed up. It was up to him to make it right. He couldn’t let anything get in their way.

“Killian and Reid are smart. If they get their hands on it, even an older version, then they could probably come up with a code to counter ours.”

“Somebody will eventually, Aiden. We hope that it works well enough that we don’t need to keep working on upgrades or other weapons to defend ourselves.”

“It’s not the atomic bomb,” Aiden said.

“No, it’s cleaner. If we do this right, then nobody suspects that we’re behind it. It looks like the AI acting up, we fix it, dismiss it as an unfortunate tragedy, and move on in a safer and more secure world.”

“You say I’m paranoid, but I say you’re underestimating Killian and Senara. That could be our undoing.”

“Just because they got the upper hand over you once last summer doesn’t mean it is reality. You’ve rebounded well, and Gyan is well underhand if you keep him busy at the clinic.”

“If they’re so smart, then why haven’t you tried to recruit them to our cause? It sounds like they’d be more valuable allies than enemies,” another voice said.

“I thought they would be until Amanda died,” Aiden said. “They changed.”

“Did they change, or did you change after you got sick again?”

Aiden curled up in a fetal position. “Everybody changed.”

“People do, and you must stay vigilant to make sure you flow with those changes to stay at an advantage. You said Senara and Gyan were agreeing with you. Why not capitalize on that to swing them to your way of thinking, and eventually bring them around to our way?”

“I don’t trust them after all that’s happened.”

“Then change that,” a voice said. “What could you say or do that would guide them back to your side?”

Aiden thought. “A tragedy turned them away. Maybe something else would turn them back.”

“Now you’re thinking strategically again.”

## Chapter 33

Killian and Senara burst into the hospital, a rush of cool air blasting through the doors with them. Gyan met them inside the door.

“This way,” he ushered them to the stairs and walked them to the second floor of the hospital.

“What happened?” Senara asked.

“Taryn woke up bleeding around midnight,” he stopped and stared at them outside of a closed door. “She miscarried. She’s stable now, but heavily medicated. Reid, Liora, and I couldn’t get the AI reprogrammed fast enough to stop the bleeding. Fortunately, we have tranexamic acid and it was still potent enough to work. We’re lucky we didn’t lose her.”

There was silence as they stood in the hum of the florescent lights and the tick of the wall clock, which read two o’ clock in the morning.

“How did this happen?” Killian asked. “I thought Phase Two was supposed to protect her against this.”

They stepped into the cool room, where Taryn’s bed had elevated her to a sitting position. Reid sat on her left side holding her hand, and Liora sat to her right, looking at a computer in her hands. Liora stood as they entered the room.

“I’ll let you talk while I continue monitoring from my office.” She looked at Taryn and patted her on the shoulder. “I’m sorry. Get some rest.”

“Thanks for coming in to help me,” Taryn mumbled.

Liora kissed Taryn’s forehead. “Anytime.” She walked out of the room.

Taryn motioned for Killian and Senara to come closer. “Thank you for coming, too. I’m sorry for the call in the middle of the night.”

Senara rushed to Taryn's right side and leaned over, hugging her gently. "I'm sorry. Is there anything we can do?"

"Find out why this happened," Taryn said. "I thought things like this didn't happen when you're in Phase Two. Why did I lose my baby?"

"I know a little about that," Gyan pulled a round, rolling stool next to Reid. "I studied your AI logs. It looks like the fetus had Trisomy 21, so the AI aborted it."

"Isn't it supposed to fix that?" Reid asked. "We designed it to correct genetic errors. Instead, it terminated the fetus and nearly killed my wife!"

"I'll have to review this more, and monitor your AI as you heal," Gyan said. "I need help from these gentlemen to make sense out of it. I thought the AI was supposed to correct it too, and I don't understand how it terminated the pregnancy instead of correcting the error. You did everything right."

"Sometimes you do everything right, and things still go wrong," Senara mumbled.

"Or somebody interfered," Reid said.

"How?" Gyan asked.

They looked at one another in the silent room. Killian cleared his throat. "Have you been able to identify anything in the AI or nanotech coding that might have caused this?"

"I'd need you and Reid to know that," Gyan said. "I want to keep Taryn for monitoring tomorrow, and perhaps the next day to see if I can figure out what happened. I want to do a fetal autopsy too. That shouldn't take long. I'll get it done tomorrow so you two can make your arrangements."

Taryn sobbed loudly.

“We can plan a private ceremony if you want,” Senara said. “I’ll help. Let me know when the autopsy is done and I can take care of that.”

“Thank you,” Reid said softly as Taryn continued to sob.

Gyan stood. “I’m sorry, Taryn and Reid. I know how much you wanted this, and I don’t understand how it went wrong. I promise I’ll do everything I can to find answers. Nobody should experience what you have tonight.”

“Thank you, Gyan,” Taryn said.

He nodded to her. “Get some rest.” He looked at Killian and Senara. “Thanks for coming. She needs you.”

They nodded as Gyan left the room and softly closed the door behind them.

“Did Aiden do this?” Reid asked coldly. “Did he kill my baby and hurt my wife because we got too close to his truth?”

Killian pulled Gyan’s vacated stool next to Senara. “I don’t know how he could have found out. We’ve only talked to Eliana and Decklan once since we went to Reston.” It was about day-to-day things, like how the Phase Two rollout is going, their preparations to start their rollout next year, and some personal updates.”

Senara patted Taryn’s hand. “We’ll figure this out. It might have been an AI malfunction. Remember what happened to Amanda? It could be something similar. The AI might have misread the genetic error as something fatal. If it is, we need to work it out so none of the other expectant mothers experience this. Or so you won’t again.”

Taryn smiled, her face red and tears rolling down her cheeks. “Thank you.”

“If it’s something else, we’ll figure that out too,” Killian said. “Can I have permission to help Reid review your AI logs?”

“Absolutely,” Taryn said. “Bring me a computer, and I’ll sign off on that.”

“I’ll get it on my way into the plant this afternoon,” Killian stood up.

Senara stood, following Killian’s lead. “You need to get some rest. Will you be alright? I’ll come by before and after my work shift to check on you. Of course, you call if you need me before then.”

Taryn nodded. “I will be eventually.”

They bade her farewell and stepped out of the room. Reid followed them into the hallway.

“I glanced at the computer code for her AI when Liora was connecting her monitors,” Reid said. “It didn’t look right.”

“Are you sure the AI didn’t change it when this happened?” Killian asked. “It’s partially sentient. It can adjust the code to help the host.”

“The blood clotting code should have worked. It didn’t. It seemed to have the opposite effect,” Reid looked around the empty hallway. “Taryn is right. This isn’t an AI malfunction. Somebody tried to kill her tonight, and I think I know who.”

Killian sighed. “Then we better get that killswitch engaged sooner rather than later.”

## Chapter 34

“Senara?”

“Hmm?” she mumbled, against the hand softly shaking her shoulder.

“I’m sorry to wake you, but Renata is here,” Killian said softly.

Senara’s eyes slowly opened. “What time is it?”

*The time is 1:14 a.m. on November 2, 2114,* her AI said helpfully.

Senara shook her head and pushed back the covers. “Never mind. Did you say Renata is here?”

“She knocked on the door five minutes ago. I’m sorry to wake you, but she wants to speak to both of us.”

Senara plucked her phone off the charger on the bedside table and picked up her bathrobe from the nearby rocking chair, wrapping it around herself as they stepped into the den. Renata rose from her seat on the couch next to the single lamp softly glowing in the room. “I’m sorry to wake you, but I needed to talk to somebody tonight.”

Senara yawned as she motioned for Renata to take her seat. Killian and Senara sat in the two recliners facing the couch, across from the coffee table. “What’s happened?”

Renata looked down, fidgeting with her hands. “The cancer is back.”

“I thought you went into remission when you got the Phase Two rollout?” Senara asked.

Renata nodded. “I did. Gyan said I was in full remission in mid-September. I started feeling bad a couple of weeks ago.” She paused. “It was right after Taryn miscarried. I didn’t think much about it at first, but it didn’t take long for me to recognize the symptoms. This is my third experience with them.” She looked up, tears in her eyes. “Gyan thinks whatever happened

to Taryn happened to me too, or something like it. Is that possible? Killian, I know you're looking into that."

"I can if you'll give me access to your AI and nanotech logs," Killian said.

"Yes, please," Renata said.

Killian stood to get his computer from the study.

Senara also stood and moved to the couch next to Renata. "I'm sorry, Renata. When did you confirm that the cancer was back?"

"Gyan confirmed it around nine o'clock."

Senara nodded. This was Gyan's third shift week, but that was four hours ago. It was early Friday morning, so Killian saw Gyan when they returned to the complex after the shift ended. Then again, Renata was upset, so her perception of time was probably off. "What have you been doing since you left the clinic?"

Renata shrugged. "I took a walk through town. I don't understand what's happening. I thought about calling the plant to look at my AI logs, but I realized that it's fourth shift now."

Senara nodded. "The overnight staff are mostly trainees who don't know the advanced code on the AI. Their main duties are to keep the 24-hour functions running."

Killian returned to the room and sat on the couch beside Senara with his computer open to tablet mode. He had already connected with the network at the plant and had pulled up his research files. "I sent you a query to authorize me access to your logs. You should get it on your phone or watch soon."

A soft chime sounded on Renata's wrist. She lifted it and tapped the authorization key. Another screen opened on Killian's laptop. He toggled it to projection mode and laid

the tablet on the coffee table as the screens appeared over the table. “The one on the left is my research from Taryn’s code. There was a modification in her AI code that caused her miscarriage.”

“We’ve talked about that in the committee meetings,” Renata said. “Do I have the same modification?”

Killian studied the screen on the right, tapping with his hand to scroll through the code. “There has been a modification in your nanotech programming. I’ll need more time to study it in detail, but from what I see, this modification caused a genetic mutation in one of your cancer predisposition genes.”

“Phase Two should have corrected that mutation,” Senara said as she stared at the screens.

Killian pulled up the history data on Renata’s AI and nanotech functions. He nodded. “It was corrected with the Phase Two rollout. That was part of your treatment programming: to kill the cancer cells, and to correct this mutant allele so you wouldn’t be susceptible to a recurrence, or any other form of cancer.” He scrolled forward on the timeline, his eyes widening when it hit two weeks ago. “The code rewrite happened the same night that Taryn miscarried.”

“You said that Taryn had a code rewrite in her AI,” Renata said, “but mine was in the nanotech. What’s the difference?”

“The nanotech works through the AI, so the basic effect will be the same,” Killian said. “The difference is where the error starts. Hers started in her hardware. It told her brain to reprogram the body. Yours was more of a software issue, with the body using the brain as a server. The nanotech told your AI to change the focus of the DNA rewrite.”

Senara sat up straight. “The effect on the body is the same, but the difference in origin makes this more difficult to figure out what’s responsible for the code rewrite.”

“Can the AI rewrite the code?” Renata asked. “I know you and Aiden have mentioned this in the city council and committee meetings, but I can’t remember.”

“It can do code rewrites, but they’re supposed to be minor modifications to protect the host,” Killian said. “Phase Two has partial sentence functions, which means we programmed it to learn and adapt. Something like this shouldn’t have happened. The primary directive is to not harm, but these rewrites are harmful to the host. The AI should have fixed the code as soon as any sign of harm appeared in the biological functions.”

“But it didn’t,” Senara said, “which means there’s a disconnect between the biological and mechanical functions or the code has been changed at a deeper level.”

“What does that mean?” Renata asked. “Does it mean that somebody at the plant did this on purpose?”

Killian shrugged as he closed the screens. “It means there’s probably a code error in the server for the AI that’s allowing these rewrites to happen at the individual level. All our AI is managed through a cloud-based server. It’s not as large scale as the National Medical Database that we had before the pandemic, but it does serve as a clearinghouse for the AI of every person in the community. I’ll have to get my team to look at it to see what we can find.”

Renata paled. “We’re all linked. That server is the community hive mind, and somebody has tampered with it.”

“We don’t know that,” Senara said, “and we aren’t a hive. The server is to connect us with our technology so we can adjust functions remotely if needed. For

example, I think you need a sedative. You're distressed and agitated, and need some rest so we can work on this problem with the full team later today." She pulled her phone out of her bathrobe pocket and tapped at it. "I'm using the server to deliver it through your system in twenty minutes. That should give you time to get upstairs and settle in so you can get some sleep."

Killian typed into his computer. "I sent Gyan a message to arrange a time to talk about this. I'll talk to Aiden when I get in this afternoon." He closed his computer and stood, offering his hand to help Renata up. "Let me get you to your suite so you can rest."

Renata accepted his hand and stood. "Thank you for seeing me. I'm sorry for waking you, but I didn't know who else to turn to."

"You can see us anytime," Senara said, standing. "I'll go with you."

Killian shook his head and put his hand on her arm. "Stay here. It's late, and it's cold. I'll be right back. Her penthouse is right off the elevator. I'll see her to the door and be right back." He nodded toward his computer on the coffee table, unlocked. Senara followed his gaze.

"Be careful," she said.

She waited for him to leave and walked to the couch, picking up Killian's laptop and studying the scans herself. She didn't know much about programming code, but she had reviewed Taryn's data enough to recognize this code rewrite.

It was the same.

## Chapter 35

“It’s not just Taryn and Renata,” Gyan said Friday evening in Killian and Senara’s kitchen, where Killian, Senara, Reid, and Taryn sat at a table in the breakfast nook Gyan stopped by for a private conversation. Since they had planned to eat together anyway, they asked him to join them. “Every cancer has recurred, and there are signs of recurrence in other age-related and genetic cases.” He paused. “Including Aiden’s dementia. His is the worst. I don’t understand his readings. It’s like something is there pushing everything into chaos.”

“Maybe it wasn’t a targeted attack then,” Taryn said, taking a spoonful of chili. “Is it possible that this is an AI error from the Phase Two rollout?”

“It’s possible, but I don’t know if it’s probable,” Reid said. “The AI capability to rewrite code is limited and shouldn’t spread through the system.”

“We did find code in the server to enhance these rewrites,” Killian said. “It was buried deep.”

“What are the chances that was an AI rewrite?” Gyan asked.

“Possible, but low,” Killian said.

“It happened a few hours before Taryn miscarried,” Reid leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. “That was a Wednesday. We know who’s on third shift at the plant on Wednesdays.”

“Aiden,” Killian and Reid said together.

Gyan looked around again. “Whatever it is, it's spreading. The sick people are getting sick again. We’re getting back to pre-Phase Two numbers at the clinic again. I don’t want to call this rollout a failure, but there’s a problem that we can’t deny. If this

code isn't fixed then we not only lose them, but run a risk of it spreading to the healthy people and finding genetic mutations to exploit in them."

"We might be looking at another Pandemic," Taryn said softly.

Gyan nodded. "I don't want to cause alarm, but this is how it started before. Fixing this needs to be a top priority. I don't care who did it at this point. We can figure that out later."

"We may need to know it now to fix it," Reid said. "If we can figure out who did this and why, then we have a better chance of writing code that will work, and not have to worry about somebody trying to sabotage it."

"Or write another code to do something else," Killian said. "In other words, this could turn into an endless cycle that we don't want to spend all of our time fighting."

Senara nodded. "We need to know the 'why' behind this so we can address it and work together again. Winter is on the way. We might not have any new arrivals for a few months, but we need to stick together to make sure the community is functional and healthy."

"We're supposed to be growing," Taryn rested a hand on her core, "but we aren't. It's time to move past survival and start thriving again."

Killian raised an eyebrow. "I can think of a few people who would say that such logic is justification to push out Phase Three quickly, especially since the correction codes aren't working anymore."

Senara crossed her arms. "I'm sure that will be the first suggestion. We had terminally ill people, and we needed Phase Two. Now we have a larger scale problem, and they'll probably say roll out Phase Three. The leadership of this community doesn't believe in troubleshooting. It's always pushing ahead and the next thing will fix it."

“That hasn’t worked yet,” Gyan stood. “I must get back to the clinic. I wanted to let you know what I’ve found so you’ll know how to direct your efforts to fix this problem. Let me know if you need anything from me.” He walked out of the door, closing it softly behind him.

Senara looked around the table. “There’s been heavy pressure to push out the full functionality of the AI since Phase One rolled out last spring. Things go fine for a while, and then something goes wrong and there’s an emergency reason to push out the next phase. Think about it. Who pushed for the Phase Two upgrade?”

“Renata and Aiden, after they got sick and invited those other sick people here,” Reid said. He put his spoon down. “Taryn miscarried after people started having flashbacks and anxiety attacks.”

Senara nodded. She was surprised to discover that she wasn’t the only one who struggled with that after the Phase Two rollout. Eleven other people came to the clinic complaining about a flood of memories waking them in the middle of the night and causing anxiety attacks. Fortunately, Killian found programming code in Aiden’s data from D.C., confirmed by the information Decklan gave them, to push a fix out through a community patch.

“Don’t forget Aiden’s ties to D.C.,” Taryn said.

“Such as they are,” Killian said. “Decklan hasn’t had any luck finding them. I wonder if they’re real.”

Senara’s stomach churned. “You said he talked to himself a lot, and you joked about voices in his head.”

Killian raised an eyebrow. “Do you think he has a mental illness?”

“It would explain his quicker degradation with the dementia,” Senara said “Maybe I should check the files again. Gyan said that Aiden’s regression was worse than everybody else’s, but if he has a mental illness on top of dementia, then that could explain it. You can’t treat both, or it could fast-track dementia.”

“Interesting,” Killian mumbled. “No wonder Aiden locked down his AI code.”

“He can do that?” Taryn asked. “I thought we were connected through the AI server.”

“We are, but Aiden designed firewall protection that he has to lift to access his,” Killian said. “I can’t figure it out.”

“Why would he would want that, unless he’s hiding something?” Reid said. “It’s dangerous to block AI access. What if something renders him unconscious, and he can’t release the firewall?”

“I doubt he cares, especially if he is mentally ill,” Senara said, “which I’m suspecting more and more. Plus, he’s running the AI and has charisma and power. You see the pattern of how things have unfolded. Now here we are again, in a community crisis. What comes next? The city council meeting is the first Sunday of the month.”

“Which is in two days,” Taryn said, “meaning we have forty-eight hours to prepare for Aiden to push for Phase Three.”

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