

Blade Runner Blues

Chapter 2 – The Shoulder of Orion

Roy casually walked across the gridded flight deck of the launch bay to where Leon was packing his gear in a duffel bag. "Remember that idea I told you about?" Leon stopped packing and looked up slowly as other Replicant troops ran toward their prepped fighters. "Yeah" he said, looking around slowly. Roy stared off into the hallway on the far side of the bay toward the next port, "Be ready. I'll get in touch with the others. This attack may be exactly what we need . . . a nice diversion." Alarms blared as he thought, "Where are we anyway?"

Leon pulled a star chart from the pocket of his flight suit and opened it up, indicating a small cluster of stars. "Here. See the three that make up the belt down here? That puts us about where Orion's shoulder would be."

Roy looked up from the map toward the front of the bay in time to see an attack ship bearing down on the bay, flames trailing from her twisted hull in a blinding stream. He grabbed Leon and the two ran for the hallway as the flaming, crippled ship crashed headlong into the rim of the bay's launch port, exploding in a spectacular fireball of gases and superheated debris, damaging the bay's airlock systems. There was a howling rush as the airlock failed and the air inside was sucked out into the cold blackness of space. Screaming Replicant pilots and their fighter craft were also pulled out. The two running men dove into the adjacent hall just as the emergency airlock doors came slamming down.

Roy's eyes were wide as he and Leon stood up, "Find us a ship. We're going now. We can slip away in the confusion. I'll get the others and find us some clothes. We won't blend in long wearing these slave jumpsuits" he said, running a hand over his sleeve. Nodding, Leon headed off down an intersecting corridor toward the bay on the far side of the station as Roy ran off down the main passage toward the Officer's club.

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Eldon Tyrell spoke softly into the vid-phone, "So, the attack has begun, has it Commander Rosen? Excellent." He removed his glasses, wiping them on his robe. "Be very careful. Everyone must think this attack is a random act if this is to work." He looked through the clean lenses and then replaced them on his face.

"Mr. Tyrell, this has to work flawlessly. This can't turn into another Tanhauser Incident. That would set us back years if not decades."

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"Not to fear, my dear Commander. Mistakes were most certainly made at the Tanhauser Gate Colony. Although that team in 2017 was primarily Nexus 6 models, there was a contingent of Nexus 3's that were in the mix. This time they will all be from the 6th generation. The Nexus 6 that will rise as the leader this time was part of the group involved at the Tanhauser Incident. In addition to his firsthand knowledge, he has been gifted additional implanted memories from the leader of that group. He will learn from the mistakes of 'his' collective memories of the event. I know we both intimately understand the importance of this plan. If asked, deny any and all knowledge of this operation, and I'm sure that you'll be awarded Admiral's status by years' end."

"Yes, sir." Came the response and the vid-phone screen went black.

Tyrell smiled as his perched owl lazily turned its head to stare at the aging genius.

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The malleable explosive was kneaded in strong hands and pressed firmly into place. Leon withdrew the last of the stolen ignition timers from his flight suit and pressed it firmly into the soft putty and activated it. The clanging of a wrench on the deck to his right startled him for an instant. "Hey, what're you doing there, Leon?" He turned his head to see one of the flight mechanics placing a few tools on the tech bench, then bend down for the one he had dropped.

"Just grabbing a few supplies to take over to the other bay."

The mechanic looked confused, "I thought the other bay was destroyed in the first attack wave?"

As he looked back over to Leon, the Replicant brought his weapon up squarely into the mechanic's face and fired without thinking twice, blowing the back out of his head all over the workbench behind. The stunned mechanic stood for a moment wide-eyed before his legs buckled. Leon grabbed him by the collar, looking down into his dead face. He noted the embroidered name on the man's breast patch, "Kowalski, huh? I like that" he said as he dropped the man to the floor, "Leon Kowalski."

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Alarm claxons blared throughout the hangar as he boarded the ship. Pris and Mary ran out of one of the side hallways and scampered about under the hull removing the docking umbilical lines and fueling sensors. Zhora and the sixth Replicant, Andy, who ran in behind them, entered the ship as the others finished and followed behind them. Leon now had the engines idling and readied for liftoff as the others joined him onboard.

Roy entered the bay behind them, headed for the entry ramp, his arms and hands stained red with blood and carrying Rosen's long, black leather officer's coat. He stopped momentarily, just long enough to unzip his coveralls and drop them to the floor. He stepped out of the slave garb, now wearing only a light grey shirt and dark grey pants. He slipped on the black leather coat, pulling the thick collar up high on his neck as he stepped foot on the ramp. He was the last onboard, closing and sealing the hatch. Leon, noting the sensor for the closed hatch, lifted the small supply ship from its landing gear and slipped it through the shield membrane into the bone-chilling cold of space.

As it throttled away from the station, the explosives Leon had set began to erupt in brilliant crimson blossoms, crippling the station's atmospheric shield generators. Once the shields failed, as in the other damaged launch bay, all the air, loose tools and bodies of the scattered dead in the bay were sucked out into space behind them. The hurtling, ejected corpse of one of the technicians slammed into the viewport Zhora and Mary were looking through. In the vacuum outside, it smeared blood across the outside of the glass just before its rapidly expanding body expelled all bodily fluids and internal organs from whichever orifice offered the least resistance.

Leon was strapped into the pilot's seat in the cockpit maneuvering their ship away from the station, which was now swarming with attack ships. Roy sat beside him grinning from ear to ear, eyes darting this way and that following the agile attack ships. One of the ships he was watching took a hit and rolled over into a steady stream of fire coming from the dorsal cannons of the station. For a split second it splintered into a silent, beautiful explosion of color and vaporizing metal fragments. The flash reflected in Roy's wide eyes. Something in him had snapped. He wanted more life, and he didn't care who stood in his way or what he had to do to get it.

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"Damn. That *was* a weird dream, pal" said Bryant as he and Holden helped Deckard rearrange the chairs in the interrogation room. Holden closed one tearing eye as the smoke from the cigarette clenched in his lips drifted up and into it. He dragged deeply and pulled it away, exhaling purposefully, blowing smoke across the table, "Yeah, that's pretty out there Deck, even for you. If you ask me, you need to plug yourself back up to the mood organ, buddy. Despite all the valiant efforts, the Johnnie Walker isn't enough by itself." The smoke drifted beautifully through the intense shafts of light streaming down from overhead. Deckard gave a half-smile as Holden and Bryant both laughed.

Holden reached down to the floor beside the table leg, grabbed his VK machine and set it down on the table. He unlatched the case and folded it open, setting it up for an interrogation.

"Do we have somebody to put on the machine?" asked Deckard. Bryant glanced at Holden as the latter gave the response, "You, buddy."

"Me?", said Deckard as he raised his eyebrows incredulously, "Well that should be fun. What the hell is putting me on it gonna prove?" Holden continued with the setup as he responded, looking up when he could, "My machine's been giving false readings. I noticed it starting to

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intermittently spasm during my last interrogation. You remember that NEX-5 we uncovered over at the refinery? It stretched that session out to almost 40 questions before I knew for sure. When I got back, I took the VK unit in and had the techs downstairs rewire it. I want to check the calibration on a human . . . make sure it registers a flat 0-0-0 on everything before I entrust my life to it with a Replicant subject."

"Well, I can understand that, I guess." was Deckard's response. "Come get me when you're all ready. I'm going out to my desk for a few minutes." Gaff sidestepped, passing him in the doorway, cane in hand, and walked into the room heading for Bryant as Deckard stepped through the door to leave.

"Sure. I won't take long." replied Dave.

Deckard made his way through the maze of small desks to his little corner of the universe, a real wooden desk and chair, nicely broken in and comfortable. As he sat down and reached over for the vid-phone, the front of the broken armrest slipped out of place. He dialed with one hand and with an audible exhale venting his frustration, he repositioned the armrest. Once again he made a mental note, the way he did every time he sat down, to remember to fix it. Once again he would become involved in something else and forget all about it until he sat down again and it slipped out of place. It was nice to know things were still as they should be, however like dysfunctional clockwork they might appear to the outside observer.

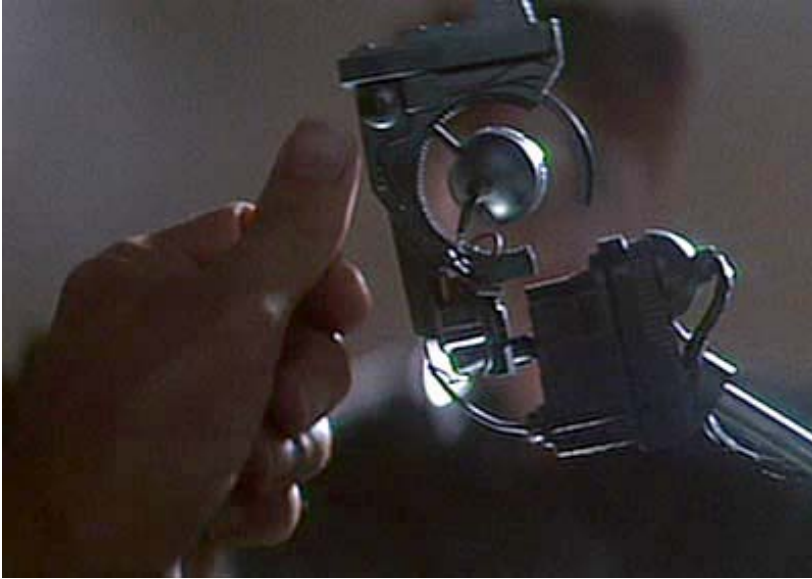
What the hell was Gaff doing now, more brown-nosing of Bryant? He heard the first ring on the vid-phone as he thought more about the gimp. He got the whole "injured cop that still has something to give" thing, but come on; he wouldn't exactly be able to contribute to the team effort, not in the field, anyway, and certainly not with the physical requirements in this division. If he stayed on, Bryant needed to put him on desk duty, and not in Rep-Detect.

The vid-phone rang and rang, but no one activated the camera on the other end of the line. Somewhere in his empty house across town, his electric sheep lay on the floor with a drained battery, too weak to lift its head and look at the sound the vid-phone was making. He hung up the receiver. Apparently she's left, or is ignoring me, he thought to himself as he watched Gaff stroll out of the interrogation room, followed by Holden, who was waving him over. Deckard nodded his head, grabbed his cup of coffee and headed back across the room.

Bryant was settled in a chair in the corner prepared to watch, and Holden was adjusting the lighting, dimming it down as he stepped into the room and closed the door, shutting out the distracting noise of the outer office. Holden sat down behind the machine. The mechanical bellows on the side of the Voight-Kampff machine began to rise and fall with a looping hiss followed by an exhale. Deckard took a seat across from him, sipping on his coffee.

The optical scanner ring elevated itself into place and acquired the edges of Deckard's pupil as its focal point.

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Dave entered the subject's data and switched on the recording mode, glancing at the display showing only Deckard's eye.

Bryant coughed in the corner as Dave began the test, "Deckard, Rick. Ok. You're walking along a secluded beach and come upon a young boy fishing from the ocean. He has a bucket full of caught fish."

Deckard cupped the bottom of his coffee and lowered it as he replied, "I'd put on gloves, take the torture device from him and call Haz-Mat."

Holden nodded slightly, noting the -0-0-0- readings on the machine. He sucked in a lungful of smoke from his cigarette and exhaled it through his nose. "You discover that the wife of a good friend is cheating on him with her neighbor's husband any chance she gets."

"I'd take him out for a drink and tell him."

Holden moved his head around the optical scanner to look into Deckard's eyes, "He tells you he's known for months and already has plans in place to kill them both that weekend."

"I'd ask the bartender for the bottle and try to convince my friend that killing them won't solve anything and that he . . ."

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Bryant rubbed his eyes and squinted to read the time on his watch in the dim light. Almost an hour had gone by since they had started the test. He looked over at Holden who was noting that the last response had registered a -0-0-0- on the VK machine.

Deckard was obviously ready to be finished, tapping his fingers rapidly now on the right arm of his chair, his near-empty coffee cup in the other.

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Holden looked up, continuing "Your synthetic animal develops a glitch and needs to go in for servicing. While it's away at the shop, you have a dream that your wife becomes a snake in the forest. A wild unicorn comes running through the trees and tramples her."



Deckard abruptly stood up from his chair, flipping it backwards to the floor as he threw his cup against the wall, spraying cold coffee across the room, "You know, I can't do this anymore, I quit."

Bryant laughed and a stunned Holden sucked on yet another cigarette in the smoke-filled room.

"No, I'm serious. I quit. I'm officially retired." He opened the door and left the room, heading for his desk. Holden dragged deeply on his cigarette, eyeing Deckard carefully as Bryant straightened up, calling after him, "Go home, Deck, take a couple of days. You're under a lot of stress. Holden can take your caseload while you get your head on straight."

Bryant stood up from the chair in the corner and stretched "He'll calm down. You want to get some lunch, Dave? I'm starving"

There was no reply. Bryant looked over at Holden and saw he was staring at the display, his cigarette hanging precariously from his lower lip.

The last response had registered a -1-3-5- on the VK machine.

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The pleasure model, Pris, sat in the dark next to Mary, Zhora and Andy. They had been designed with a high threshold for pain, heat and cold. That genetic alteration was now serving them well as the interior walls of the small ship were now frosting over with ice crystals. The four Replicants here in the cargo area were quite comfortable and content in the bitter cold.

Leon had diverted all of the small craft's secondary internal power to the engines to get them this far and it was now, for all intents and purposes, nearly a lifeless ship. It had taken them almost as far as it could. Batty sat silently in the co-pilot's seat peering out at the darkness while Leon surveyed his star charts and checked their heading on the dimly illuminated instruments. "We're just off the coast on a momentum path headed toward a colony relay station. It's not far. I think we can make it"

Roy adjusted the focus of his eyes off the distant stars light-years away and refocused on the reflection of Leon's face in the glass just in front of his face. "I was beginning to lose faith in you. Shuttles carrying people on their way from Earth pass through those fuel and provision stockpile stations all the time on their way to the colonies. If we can make it that far, I'm sure that between the six of us, we can find a way to convince someone that we need their ship more than they do."

As Roy finished speaking, a smile spread across his face and a garbled, static-laden voice emerged from the hissing. Leon pulled on the leather headset and adjusted the mic tip up to his mouth as he glanced over at Roy, smiling, "Mayday! Mayday! Our ship has lost power. We need help."

Through the static finally came a voice, "Copy that distress call. This is Off-World Transports Flight 2187. You are on a glide path headed for our destination at the relay station just ahead. Please advise. Can you make that location or should we attempt to directly dock with you?"

Leon glanced over at Roy, who thought for a moment. Then he put his hands together symbolizing a docking motion and looked back at Leon.

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"Off-World Transports, We have almost no power or heat, and are in need of an emergency docking. Four of our six passengers need medical attention due to exposure to the frigid cold in here."

"Copy that. Coming around. The threshold is now primed and ready for docking procedure. We currently have a crew of three, and twenty passengers onboard that are anxious to get to the colonies, but I think it's safe to say we can squeeze another six in here."

Leon flipped several switches as he responded, "Docking threshold primed and ready."

Roy smiled as he pulled his collar up higher, "Looks like we found our ship."

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Deckard pulled his collar up higher around his neck. A cold, gusting wind blew in from the direction of the Pacific, flinging and transforming the otherwise innocuous raindrops into a stinging assault on his exposed skin. His drenched hair lay flat, matted against his head, his eyes squinting. He carried several parcels wrapped in brown paper, now stained in a speckled pattern by the tiny water droplets, and made his way along the busy sidewalk until he came to the entrance to his apartment building.

The rainwater dripped off the lower edges of his coat as he entered the dim lobby. He rapidly brushed his fingers through his hair, shaking off yet more water. Several old residents sat in outdated furniture by the large glass panels staring out at the rain, dreaming of days long past and sunshine. One old woman turned her head to watch him pass by. The elevators were just ahead, and he sneezed violently as he proceeded on to the call buttons, pressing the one adjacent to the upturned arrow. A whirring sound emanated from somewhere behind the art deco elevator doors as the car was summoned from a higher level. His bloodshot eyes were burning and he shook with chills from a fever. Generally, he felt like he had been hit and dragged ten city blocks by a bio-waste removal truck. It took every ounce of energy he had just to stand and wait.

Finally the car arrived and the ornate doors parted. He stepped inside. "Deckard. 97th floor" and leaned against the side wall of the car which began to vibrate as he began his ascent. Peeling back the brown paper wrappings of one of the three items in his arms, he pulled out a tall, clear bottle. Effortlessly, he skillfully removed the wrapped stopper and placing the bottle to his lips, raised it high, swallowing a large mouthful of the clear Asian liquor. His throat was sore, burning even more now. He lowered the bottle and wiped his mouth with one hand as he rubbed the cool bottle across the furrowed skin of his forehead with the other. His head pounded with a splitting headache and chills raced along his sore skin, spreading across his shoulders, then down to his fingertips and toes in an invisible wave. He needed rest. This flu or whatever it was he had caught was draining his energy.

After what seemed like hours in the musty elevator, the doors parted, emptying him out into the hallway which led to his place. It was a good fit for him, low-key, stylish, efficient. The substantial door closed solidly behind him as he stepped into the comforting darkness.

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Leon shoved the limp body of a young flight officer through the narrow hatch and watched it tumble down the mound of lifeless bodies already sprawled across the frozen deck of their dead supply ship. The dead man's head hung precariously, twisted and backwards. Roy had spun it right off its feeble, human spinal column in a single violent motion, ending his life instantly. That makes twenty-three, he thought to himself. He looked around, sweeping the still, cold room for any signs of life from any of the colonists or crew members. When he was certain there were none, he pulled his head and shoulders back out of the cold ship and closed the small hatch over, sealing it.

With the connection to their old ship closed off, he backed back out of the narrow docking collar, and stepped back into the new, larger shuttle. He closed the hatch over, clamped it shut, and walked away heading for the cockpit. Pressure seals hissed as the hidden, inner hatch airlock mechanisms seated themselves.

In the main passenger area, Mary and Zhora sat on either side of Pris, who had begun to look and feel rather seasick. Andy was rummaging through a crate of food supplies seeking a makeshift breakfast for everyone. He pulled out a handful of dried fruit energy bars and began handing them out. After making sure everyone had taken one, he wandered off toward the cockpit to deliver one to Leon and Roy. There was a loud noise as the shuttle released its hold from the docking collar threshold of the supply ship and drifted away. Moments later, the main engines were engaged and the shuttle pulled away from the drifting morgue it left behind.

The thick aroma of exotic fruits filled the air as Mary and Zhora opened the packaging of their bars and began eating. Pris just eyed hers, still wrapped up and airtight. Her stomach began flipping inside as if she were going to be sick from the heavy smell. Mary noticed her expression and put an arm around Pris, rubbing her shoulder as she continued eating her own fruit bar.

Suddenly, Pris stood up and darted for the bathroom, dropping her bar with a clank on the deck plates. Soon after, the cabin was filled with the intermittent sounds of her vomiting. Mary went to look after her and see if she needed help.

Zhora simply stared out the porthole, watching the stars slip by as the shuttle proceeded along the rim of the coast, heading for Earth. Then she stood up, stroking the huge snake draped firmly around her shoulders, and walked toward the cockpit, passing Andy, who was headed the other way. She stuck her head in through the cockpit hatch, looking over toward Roy, "There's something wrong with Pris."

She saw his head move slightly toward her. He stood up, paused and glanced over to Leon, touching him on the shoulder, "Los Angeles. Get us as close as safely possible." Leon nodded as Roy stared pensively off into nothingness for a moment, then briskly pushed past Zhora toward the rear of the ship.

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