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CYBERPUNK®

THE BONIN HORSE



**A Cyberpunk 2020® Technothriller
by Eric Heisserer**

Drazier

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Digital Edition Version 1.0

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Special Thanks: Beverly, for encouraging me to "write it down!"

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PROLOGUE

Early Morning Swim

5:34 a.m. North Pacific Ocean.

The *Eel* slipped silently between the walls of the Bonin Trench. The sleek, 200-meter-long form of the Arasaka cargo submarine made not a noise as it travelled toward its destination: The Solomon Islands.

Captain Hyung Mitsumoto looked over his crew thoughtfully, watching them perform the routine tasks associated with trench navigation. He had a competent bridge crew; one which he could take to war and back again. Such cargo missions bored him, but he knew their importance when the time came to lash out at the enemy. *Preparation is everything if you know where to prepare*, his father had told him.

This morning's trip had been more laborious than normal. Recent trench-floor mining operations had altered the shape of the walls enough to warrant manual navigation. That meant occasionally rising to net depth and sitting in the mouth of the trench, while the navigator linked up with the Pacifica grid and downloaded the new contour maps into Arasaka's database in TokyoChiba.

Earlier, at the entrance to the Bonin Trench, Captain Mitsumoto had taken advantage of the extra time by ascending to periscope depth and gazing at the volcanoes of Iwo Jima. That was an hour before. Now he was restless, with no particular sights to view. He waited for his navigator to return to reality.

Abruptly, the navigator spoke up.

"Sir, there is...there appears to be a new LDL within the Pacifica grid, or possibly an interlinked system, south/southeast of our coordinates. This territory was just Wilderspace when I last linked up."

"So, what does that mean?"

"That could mean—signal! I've Net coordinates, off starboard. No parallel sonar echoes from that location."

"None? Give me visual."

The main monitor blipped on as the rest of the crew brought their eyes to it. There, in the middle of a dark blue haze, was a strange, ivory colored squid. By its graphic representation it looked to be approximately 40 meters in length. The tentacles were slowly propelling the great netform, guiding it mindlessly along the trench wall.

"What in Saburo's name— What is it?"

The navigator examined it for a moment, from the perspective of the Net.

"Probably a Virtual Reality program that lost its way. Either that or a rogue AI. Hard to tell with these creatures."

"Monitor it carefully. Destroy it if it gets too close."

"Yessir." The navigator completed his transmission to Arasaka and turned his attention to the squid. The datafortress began to accelerate as the *Eel* moved down into the trench.

"Steady her at one-third speed and dive," ordered the captain.

"One-third and diving," repeated the helmsman.

Strangely, the squid accelerated to match the sub's speed. Unsure of its intentions, the navigator was hesitant to report its new course. He waited a moment.

A moment was all it took.

Without warning, a tentacle lashed out and seized him. The squid moved in on the submarine with astonishing speed as the netrunner battled for his life. He could feel the work of a devilish Brainwipe program ferociously pounding to get inside his mind. Struggling to free himself, he activated his Killer pro-