CHAPTER 01 — THE FIFTH ORDER

Expanded English reconstruction — original long-form manuscript not recovered

01 — The Minister

Rain moved down the black glass of Shenzhen Central while the Minister studied a face that had officially died eleven years before. Roy Batty, registered as deceased, had appeared in the city alive. The law protected a disputed artificial person from destructive examination. The Minister considered that protection a technical inconvenience. He assembled the five operatives of MBU-09 and issued a simple directive: return Roy breathing, and do not allow him to reach another court.

The headquarters had been built without windows, ostensibly to protect its occupants from a city that never stopped broadcasting. Above it the metropolis collected rain and turned the water into a resource. Below it those same citizens lived under rules whose authors they were never permitted to meet. On the Minister's desk the oldest surviving entry in the case was a death certificate. No amendment had been registered. No resurrection had been acknowledged. Yet recent surveillance showed a living figure with Roy Batty's unmistakable face. The bureaucratic contradiction worried the Minister less than the possibility that the living figure might testify. A body could be dismantled. An account of who had given that body permission to live could travel much further.

The legal adviser carefully distinguished seizure from examination. The government might claim that the technology constituted restricted property, but it could not legally infer from that claim that the person

carrying it had no rights. The Minister listened without displaying agreement. When he authorized a team that did not formally exist, the room's records became shorter, not because the operation was simple, but because fewer people would later be able to prove who had ordered it.

02 — Five Chairs

The briefing room contained five chairs, one much smaller than the others. Goliath occupied the largest and regarded the assignment as an insult. Shade watched the target while her outline faded against the wall. Vector studied potential trajectories. Null read the specifications of the NIL-11 life-support regulator. Chronos, looking no older than twelve, asked Goliath to avoid using weapons. His request sounded like a joke until the clocks briefly disagreed with one another.

Goliath's size made his purpose obvious, but every other operative represented a different kind of coercion. Shade specialized in approaching a target who believed he was alone. Vector converted future possibilities into a narrow firing solution. Null interrupted the conversation between living intention and mechanical response. And Chronos watched the whole system as though none of those limits applied to him. The small fifth chair looked almost like an admission that its occupant should have been somewhere else.

Vector did not smile when Goliath promised to bring back the target without a scratch. He had studied enough combat footage to know that confidence was not the same as understanding. Null searched the technical diagram for a particular regulator, NIL-11, and found too many fields hidden by executive authority. Chronos asked whether a man who had once died could consent to being captured alive. No one answered the

question. It did not appear in the mission parameters.

03 — An Old Name

Roy heard his name called in a crowded lower market. Goliath advanced openly, forcing civilians aside merely by walking. He offered no warrant, only an order. Roy asked who had signed it; the giant said the answer was irrelevant. To Roy, that was reason enough to decline. When the first enormous arm reached toward his throat, Roy watched its movement as a set of loads, pivots, and choices rather than as a fist.

The market's residents recognized danger as quickly as they recognized an inspection. They moved away from Goliath without looking directly at him. Roy could see the reaction spreading ahead of the huge operative, a silent clearing of space through stalls and delivery carts. He also recognized the man's challenge for what it was: not an invitation to surrender, but an invitation to demonstrate a superior mechanism.

Roy had crossed the distance between violence and death before. That memory gave him no affection for either. When the giant reached out, Roy measured the point at which the upper arm stopped being a weapon and became a lever. He did not need to overpower a machine large enough to block an avenue. He needed to persuade it, through physics, to misapply its strength. The nearby civilians had no reason to understand the calculation, only the sudden absence of the fist that had been coming toward them.

04 — Four Seconds

A touch at the inner elbow diverted the attacking arm. Another at the shoulder changed the direction of its strength. Roy then displaced a

load-bearing connection at the hip. Goliath struck the pavement, alive and furious, unable to transfer enough force through his damaged lower frame to rise. The confrontation had taken four seconds. Roy turned away instead of finishing him. His vision immediately displayed a warning he had never wanted to see.

A person watching ordinary footage might have assumed that Goliath simply slipped. The decisive movements were too small to resemble the punches of an entertaining fight. Roy touched the inner elbow just as the larger body committed itself to a forward load. He let the mass accelerate past the point where its own actuators could reverse it. The hip assembly then accepted a direction of force its designers had never intended. Metal did not explode. Connections ceased to cooperate.

When Goliath hit the ground the shock traveled into the stalls, upsetting merchandise and sending people back against the walls. Roy remained close enough to finish the encounter, but he saw the giant's movements become disordered rather than predatory. He had won. Continuing would not make the victory more complete; it would only leave one more body to be accounted for. So he asked whether the man was alive and walked away before the first responders reached the damaged pavement.

05 — Something Spent

The power reserve was normal. The artificial muscles had not failed. Yet NIL-11 reported an irreversible depletion event. The system had consumed a portion of the capacity that kept him alive, and no charging station could give that portion back. Roy stood still until the warning disappeared. He had defeated an extraordinary opponent without visible injury, and the victory had taken time from a life whose length was

already uncertain.

At first he thought the alert had to be wrong. The reserve charge remained nearly full. Every joint he tested responded with the expected strength. The wound he anticipated never appeared. Yet the warning persisted in the private depth of his vision: an irreversible event had been recorded in the regulator responsible for the conditions of continued biological activity. It was a bill that arrived after the act of spending.

Roy knew what it meant to count life in units that were not money. The old NEXUS-6 body had forced him to understand a deadline carved into tissue. Now, eleven years later, he stood in a new body and discovered that even extraordinary performance could have a cost no technician would refund. He deliberately slowed his breathing and resisted the urge to test his maximum acceleration. A different danger had entered the chase. He could survive each opponent and still use up the means to survive the next.

06 — Revised Instructions

In the command vehicle Vector replayed the fight frame by frame. Shade suggested that Roy had anticipated the giant. Null pointed to the regulator trace and the hidden cost of exceptional exertion. Chronos said that perhaps the instruments measured the wrong thing. The Minister saw only a failed operation. His revised order preserved the head and life-support core; everything else became expendable. Subject survival was no longer required.

The revised directive moved across the command console with the chilling neatness of administrative language. The Minister did not have to write that Roy should be tortured, only that the head and life-support core

should be preserved while the other structures were expendable. The body disappeared from the document as a whole. Its parts became priorities in an inventory.

Shade read the message twice. An assassin learned to distinguish killing from restraint, but the directive seemed to pretend the difference could be solved through a list of components. Vector considered what kind of shot could spare the prescribed assemblies while destroying everything that made the subject capable of escaping. Null realized that any such operation might itself destroy the regulation system they wanted. Chronos looked at the revised instructions and asked whether the Minister had ever considered that the person inside the body might be reading them too.

07 — Rachel Below

Rachel watched the footage from the private water network beneath the city. She recognized the moment Roy paid for his speed. Replacement helium meeting the original regulator specification was controlled by the state. Her alternative was ready, but the NIL-11R would cap peak output at seventy percent. It could stabilize what remained; it could not restore what had been irreversibly lost. She ordered the surgical chamber prepared, resolved to ask Roy for consent before touching his body.

Rachel's network did not see the city the way the Minister did. Where the government counted checkpoints, she counted water moving through pipes, tanks, valves, and filtration beds. The smallest pressure fluctuation could reveal an unauthorized opening several districts away. A shadow across an intake camera was not a military image, yet combined with other measurements it could show the shape of a conflict that officials had

intended to keep invisible.

The film of Goliath falling alarmed her for a reason nobody on the command channel mentioned. Roy had moved exactly as his old design allowed. The motion was brilliant, efficient, and ruinously expensive to the hidden regulator. Rachel ordered a sealed medical bay prepared and opened the specifications of a replacement called NIL-11R. It would be less powerful; it would not restore the portion of lifetime already consumed. More importantly, it could be built without surrendering Roy's survival to the government-controlled helium supply. She would still have to ask him whether he wanted it.

08 — The Street Speaks

A public display changed its advertisement to a warning: DO NOT TAKE THE MAIN ROAD. Rachel spoke through a maintenance terminal and offered a route into the hydraulic network. Roy asked why she was helping. She said the missing eleven years were not as empty as he believed. He had scarcely considered that answer when another voice entered the line, small, curious, and strangely familiar.

Roy had never trusted messages that appeared too conveniently in deserted streets. The signal on the advertising board had the precise brevity of someone with access to infrastructure rather than a person waving from a window. He followed it not because he trusted the sender, but because he could identify the pattern: a guidance system that operated through maintenance devices instead of the police network.

Hearing Rachel's voice complicated that calculation. It stirred impressions that belonged to another life, a life in which remembering someone did not guarantee that they would remember you. She told him

the command had changed. She told him there was a narrow route into the hydraulic service corridors. Roy asked what the Minister could gain from his head and core when all of the other parts were dispensable. Rachel hesitated. He heard that hesitation clearly enough to know she was deciding how much truth to offer a man who had already lost eleven years.

09 — Rain Suspended

The rain in front of Roy stopped in midair. Some drops rose instead of falling. His senses disagreed about the distance to the opposite pavement. Chronos laughed somewhere out of sight, asking whether Roy could win a second encounter as quickly as the first. The suspended water then struck the road with inexplicable force. Roy moved before the resulting debris reached him. His combat predictor displayed no reliable solution.

The street itself became an uncertain witness. Rain suspended under the lamps, neither falling nor evaporating. A reflected sign appeared on the wrong side of a droplet. Roy checked for projection systems and magnetic anomalies, but the measurements disagreed at their most basic level: how long the phenomenon had lasted. For the first time since awakening, the models that usually prepared his body for the next second offered no reliable next second at all.

A child's voice asked whether he could still win without knowing where the world would be. Roy searched the roofs and windows. He could see nobody. It would have been easy to call the event a trick, but he had learned that dismissing a new mechanism did nothing to make it less dangerous. Somewhere beyond the sensors stood the fifth operative, the one given the smallest chair and perhaps the oldest authority.

10 — The Fifth Order

A municipal door opened into darkness. Rachel asked him to descend; the water network offered routes the Minister did not control. Behind Roy the city continued its indifferent commerce. Ahead were surgery, missing records, and a child who could make familiar distances treacherous. Roy took the stairs. Above him, the command center registered the new order as active, though its five operatives had already begun to interpret it differently. — END OF CHAPTER —

Beyond the market, the rain resumed its familiar descent. Roy approached the maintenance entrance Rachel had indicated. Behind him the Ministry would revise its orders again, and somewhere a giant lay alive but furious among the broken stalls. Roy did not think about victory. He thought about the warning that remained stored beneath his vision, the invisible expenditure associated with every moment of overwhelming force.

Then a drop of water rose past his face. It moved upward without visible support, slowly enough that he could have touched it. The child spoke once more, no longer sounding amused, and said the important part of an experiment was not how often its subject escaped but what the subject remembered afterward. Roy did not reply. His memory ended eleven years earlier in the rain. Somebody had spent the intervening time watching, and whatever had watched him was now close enough to disturb the rain itself.