CHAPTER 04

THE LIMIT OF STRENGTH

01 — AN INCOMPLETE MOVEMENT

The rain continued until shortly before sunset. Water had collected in a depression beneath the overhang where Roy was sitting. Each time a bus passed the building, the water moved toward the wall and returned.

He had been opening and closing his right hand for several minutes. The movement of the fingers had improved a little, but he could not make the smallest two close at the same time without concentrating on them. When he ceased to concentrate, the hand returned to a position that was neither open nor closed.

A man came out of the building carrying a bucket. He stopped when he saw Roy.

"Are you waiting for somebody?"

"No. I'll be leaving in a minute."

The man emptied the bucket into a drain. He said that the entrance would be locked at seven and that the overhang would remain accessible after the building closed.

Roy thanked him.

It had taken almost the entire day to reach this part of the city. Much of the distance he had covered had been a consequence of the streets he was unable to use. The woman at the tram platform had given him another reason to avoid the places where he might have been observed. He did not know what she would be instructed to do when she reported their conversation.

He had been asked whether he required treatment, and he had answered truthfully. It was a relief to have been able to give that answer without first having to establish what the other person thought he was.

He wondered what would have happened if he had accepted the woman's first offer. There would have been a vehicle, a journey to a building he did not know, and a physician who would have been required to make a decision in circumstances over which the physician had little control. He had already undergone treatment in a building surrounded by soldiers. He could not imagine how a second experience of that kind would end differently from the first.

He stood and crossed the pavement. A small food stall on the other side of the street was preparing to close. The proprietor was lifting a container from the counter when the handle slipped. Roy reached out to help her.

For an instant he felt the familiar certainty that the motion of the container could be arrested before it reached the ground. It was a motion he could almost have completed without looking at it.

His right arm moved. The container turned against his palm. A pain of a kind he had not felt since leaving the hospital passed from his shoulder to the side of his neck.

He let the container go.

It struck the edge of the counter and fell on its side. There was little left in it, and the proprietor laughed as she bent down to retrieve it.

"It's all right. There wasn't much in there."

Roy stepped back. His hand had begun to tremble again.

The woman looked at him more carefully. "Have you hurt yourself?"

"Before today."

She offered him a chair, but he declined it. There were people standing at the intersection now, waiting for the pedestrian signal to change. He remained beside the stall until he could move his arm without an obvious alteration in the position of his body.

The container had weighed less than the equipment Imani had asked him to lift during his first examination. On that occasion, he had been permitted to prepare for the movement. He had been able to stop when she told him to stop.

He remembered the number displayed at the hospital and how little it had seemed to explain about the things he could do. He had thought of his recovery as a reduction in the difference between what he intended and what his body would allow.

The falling container had revealed another difference. His body had begun a movement before he had remembered that he should not make it.

He walked away from the stall with his hand in his pocket.

He had once been able to rely upon the fact that the interval between seeing something fall and reaching it was very short. Now he understood that the interval could be too short for his own safety.

02 — THE UNSUITABLE MEASUREMENT

At the regional facility, the conclusion of M-06's interview was followed by a request for a medical assessment. She received notice of it while she was still sitting in the corridor with M-04.

The employee who came to take her to the examination room asked whether she had been injured during the encounter.

"There was no physical contact."

The employee consulted the request again. "It doesn't say there was."

"What are you assessing?"

"The usual things."

She accompanied him to a room at the end of the corridor. A physician she had not met before was waiting beside a table on which three instruments had been arranged. He explained that he had been asked to confirm her suitability for further deployment.

The examination began with movements of the hands and arms. The physician measured the time required for her to respond to a visual signal. He asked her to repeat the test with the other hand. When he was satisfied with the results, he entered a series of values in the terminal beside him.

"Is there a problem?" she asked.

"No. These are within the expected range."

"Then why was I sent here?"

He said that the assessment had been requested following an operational event. He had not been given the details of the event.

M-06 considered the instruments on the table. None of them could establish why she had allowed a person to leave a tram platform. She asked the physician whether he had seen the medical information supplied concerning Roy Batty.

He had seen a summary of it.

"Could the movements you've just asked me to make be harmful to him?"

"That would depend upon the extent of his injuries."

"Could he make them in spite of the injuries?"

The physician looked at her.

"Possibly. The ability to perform a movement isn't proof that the tissue can tolerate it. You know that."

She did know it. What she had not known, until that afternoon, was that the assessment of Batty's abilities might be based on movements which he had performed at considerable cost to himself.

"Then the more recent recordings wouldn't necessarily be more useful than the older ones."

The physician asked her what recordings she meant. She mentioned the hospital encounter. He put down his instrument.

"I haven't been authorized to discuss that material."

"I'm not asking you to discuss it. I'm asking you about the relationship between strength and injury."

He explained that the value assigned to a particular response could describe the response without describing the condition of the person who produced it. Several kinds of information would be required to establish what had happened afterwards.

M-06 asked whether it was possible for the same warning to apply to her.

"Of course."

"Would I be told if it did?"

The physician took a moment to answer. He said that he would be obliged to report a condition that affected her suitability for deployment.

"To whom?"

He indicated the terminal. The reports were transmitted automatically to the requesting authority.

She looked at the screen. Her designation appeared at the top of the form. Beneath it was a field that indicated the examination had been requested by the operational department. There was no field in which she could state whether she wished to receive a copy of the results.

When the assessment was finished, the physician told her that she could return to the corridor. She asked him for a printed copy.

He tried to produce one. A message appeared indicating that the document could be printed only by the department responsible for the personnel records.

"You'll have to request it from them," he said.

She had answered every question he had asked. She had performed every movement. He had told her there was nothing abnormal about the results.

The assessment of her own body was already a document to which she had no access.

03 — THE APPROVED INTERVAL

Imani was preparing to leave the hospital when she received a telephone call from the regional facility. The person making it introduced himself as a medical officer and gave her a name. She was able to confirm that the name belonged to an employee of the service.

He wanted to discuss the statement concerning the condition of the patient who had left the hospital during the operation.

"Has he been found?" she asked.

The officer said that he was not in a position to give her information about the operation.

"Has somebody examined him?"

"Not to my knowledge."

He asked her how much time would ordinarily be required before a patient in his condition recovered the ability to sustain prolonged activity.

Imani put her bag back on the desk.

"I would have to examine him before I could give you an estimate. The condition I described in the statement is the condition I observed before he left."

The officer said that he understood, but that the assessment of the operational risk required an estimate of the rate at which the subject's condition might improve.

"You could send us the full findings from a new examination," she said.

"That isn't possible at present."

"Then it isn't possible for me to give you a figure."

He asked whether the patient might have maintained the level of activity observed at the hospital since his departure. She said that it would be unwise to make that assumption. She was more concerned about the possibility that he had been attempting to do precisely that.

The officer did not seem to understand the distinction.

Imani explained that a patient could have a greater immediate capacity for physical activity than would be compatible with his longer-term recovery. A person who had to escape a dangerous situation might use that capacity without any knowledge of the damage being done.

"That isn't peculiar to him," she said. "But the consequences may be."

The officer asked her whether she could express the warning in terms of the period during which the patient should remain at rest.

"I can't prescribe an interval for a patient I haven't seen."

He thanked her for her time. Before he ended the conversation, she asked him to record that she had advised a further examination, and that if the patient was located, the examination should precede any nonessential movement.

He agreed to record it.

Adrian was in the room next door, trying to establish the history of the amendment to the missing appendix. Imani told him about the call.

"They want to know when he'll be strong again," she said.

"Strong enough for what?"

"I don't think the person who called me had been told."

Adrian turned the paper on his desk so that she could read the reference. He had found an earlier version of the directory in which the unfamiliar medical department was still listed. Its functions had been described in a few words: the evaluation of exceptional service conditions.

"It wasn't originally a department dealing with patients," he said.

Imani read the description. It said very little about the people whose conditions the department had been established to evaluate.

He had also found a reference to a form which allowed observations to be carried from one examination period into the next. The copy available to him contained only the instructions for completing the form. There was no example of a completed one.

"This is probably why they wanted the appendix," he said. "If the same form was used for material in the preliminary trial, it may tell them something about the source of a sample."

"Or tell us something about it."

He nodded. Neither of them had the document that would allow the possibility to be tested.

Imani took the report of her last examination of Roy from the drawer. She had made the assessment to decide whether he could safely be discharged. Somewhere in another building, the same observations were being used to decide how much force might be required to take him into custody.

She was not certain that the person who had telephoned her understood that the two questions were different.

04 — THE INTERVENING PERSON

Rachel reached the medical association shortly before it closed. The receptionist recognized her and went to see whether Min was available.

While she waited, Rachel watched a delivery man bring a box of envelopes into the building. He passed through the door without being asked for an identification document. He had probably been making deliveries to the association for years.

She wondered how long such ordinary exchanges would continue to take place without some alteration in the procedure.

Min came out to meet her. The association had received a formal request for information concerning the records it had accepted. The request did not instruct it to surrender the records. It required the association to identify the authority under which it was maintaining them.

"We can answer that," Min said. "There is a procedure for the independent preservation of medical records when their integrity is in question."

"Will that be sufficient?"

"It should be. I can't tell you whether it will be accepted as sufficient."

They went into the office. Min had obtained the consent of the chair to issue a statement concerning the existence of the records, without disclosing their contents. She showed Rachel the draft.

The statement included the time at which the material had been accepted, the description of it in the acknowledgment, and the duty of the association to preserve it unchanged. It did not claim that the material demonstrated a violation of the law.

Rachel read it twice.

"Could you send a copy to the hospital?"

"Yes. To the physician responsible for the records."

"Then Dr. Imani will know that some of the work is still here."

Min asked her whether the physician knew that she was in the city.

"I think she knows I'm still trying to get the material to someone. I don't know what she knows about where I am."

The lawyer set the statement aside. There was another matter she wanted to discuss. A man had come to the association that afternoon asking for the names of the people who had delivered the records. He had not produced a document requiring the association to disclose their names. The receptionist had referred him to Min, and he had left before she could speak to him.

Rachel asked whether he had left a message.

"Only a number."

Min showed her the card on which the receptionist had copied it. It was a reference to an authority, the title of which was not given. Rachel did not recognize it, although she recognized the form of the reference. She had seen something similar in the papers Adrian had shown her at the hospital.

"If he comes back, please don't put anybody here in danger because of me."

Min looked at her.

"My receptionist shouldn't have to decide whether an official is entitled to have your name. That's my responsibility. If I can't establish that he is, there is a way of dealing with it."

Rachel appreciated the answer. It was not the same as a promise that nothing would happen to them.

She told the lawyer that she had still been unable to reach Roy. She had begun to consider going to the hospital, if only to speak to Imani. Min advised her against arriving there unannounced. People involved in the inspection of the research might still be present.

"Would you be willing to ask her whether she's received any news?"

"I can ask her when I send the statement."

Rachel gave Min the only piece of information that she could give with confidence: Roy had been injured when they separated, and she did not believe he could have obtained appropriate treatment since then.

The lawyer made a separate note of it. She left it outside the file concerning the preservation of the research.

"He may need someone who isn't involved in the argument about the records," she said.

"He does."

Rachel looked at the packet on her lap. In every office she had visited since leaving the hospital, she had been required to explain why the papers were important. She was beginning to understand that the importance of the papers might become a reason for somebody to stop listening when she spoke about Roy.

Min picked up the telephone and asked to be connected to Imani's office.

05 — THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

The passage alongside the municipal pumping station remained open after the businesses in the district had closed. It was used by the employees of the station and by people walking between the two residential streets on either side of it. Roy had crossed it once before, when there had been no reason to remember anything about it.

He arrived as a maintenance employee was coming out of a side entrance. The employee locked the door and went toward the street. A woman waiting there greeted him. They began to walk away together.

Roy stopped beneath a lamp that had been fixed to the outside of the building. He could hear the motors behind the wall. Their sound was more regular than anything he had heard in the street during the preceding two days.

A man in a suit came into the passage from the opposite direction. His appearance was unremarkable except for the fact that his shoes were wet and his trousers were almost dry.

He stopped several metres away.

"Roy Batty."

Roy did not answer. There were no other people in the passage now. The maintenance employee and the woman had reached the corner of the street.

"I've been sent to bring you to the regional facility," the man said.

"Someone else has already asked me to go there."

"I'm aware of that."

"Did she tell you why I wouldn't go?"

"She reported the circumstances of the encounter."

The man spoke without any apparent difficulty. He did not seem impatient. Roy found himself looking at the position of the man's hands, then at the distance between his feet and the edge of the pavement.

"What's your number?"

"M-08."

Roy moved a little away from the wall. His shoulder was still painful from the incident at the food stall. It was not yet possible to tell which movements would cause the pain to become more severe.

M-08 asked him to remain where he was. He said that a vehicle could be brought to the entrance of the passage.

"Am I under arrest?" Roy asked.

"You're subject to an acquisition order."

"I know what the order says. Is that what you call being arrested?"

The man did not attempt to answer the question. There was no indication that he wished to prolong the conversation.

Roy looked past him. At the other end of the passage, a security lamp had come on. Someone was standing in the entrance to a building, looking at a telephone.

"I won't go with you," Roy said.

M-08 began to move forward.

There was very little warning in the movement. Roy had seen something similar in the hospital, but there was a difference in what happened when the distance between the two men decreased. M-08 was not attempting to establish an advantage in a contest. He had been given a person to recover, and the first motion he made was directed at the part of that person's body he believed could be controlled most easily.

Roy turned. His left hand met the man's arm. The force of the contact brought him against the wall. He felt a sudden change in the pressure across his back as the man attempted to prevent him from moving away.

He recognized an opportunity and used it. It was a brief movement, and the space between them opened before M-08 could make use of the position he had established.

M-08 recovered his balance almost at once.

Roy had not experienced the pain in his shoulder when he expected to experience it. It arrived afterwards, when his left hand was no longer in contact with the other man. For a moment the passage seemed lighter than it had been. He was conscious of the effort of remaining upright.

M-08 watched him. He had been given an account of the ability of the subject to interrupt movements involving a greater expenditure of force than the subject appeared to make himself. He had also been given an estimate of the probability of accomplishing the recovery with one member of the classified personnel.

Neither had described what had just happened with much accuracy.

Roy took a breath. He was familiar with the difference between being ready to move and being able to move. He was beginning to lose the ability to conceal it.

"You don't need to do this," he said.

M-08 looked at him without speaking.

A door opened behind them. The maintenance employee had returned. He was carrying the keys to the side entrance and had stopped a few steps beyond the door.

"What's happening?"

Neither of the two men answered him.

When M-08 turned his head to look at the employee, Roy became aware of something more important than the opportunity the movement had created. There was now another person between them and the machinery in the building.

He stepped back instead of advancing.

06 — THE PRICE OF THE NEXT MOVEMENT

The maintenance employee had returned to collect a bag he had left in the station. He was trying to understand what he had found in the passage. He could see that one of the two men was hurt, but he did not know which of them had caused the injury.

M-08 took a document from his pocket and told him that the passage was being used in connection with an official operation. He instructed the employee to return to the street.

"I need to lock the door," the man said.

"You can do that later."

Roy saw that the employee had left the door open. Behind him there was a flight of steps descending toward a lighted part of the building. A second employee was coming up the steps.

M-08 moved again. Roy had expected him to wait until the other people were clear of the entrance. The expectation cost him part of the interval in which he might have responded.

He found himself pressed against the wall. The movement he attempted with his right arm ended before his hand reached the place he had intended it to reach. He could not tell whether the arm had been prevented from moving or whether he had failed to move it.

M-08 had been able to maintain his balance without difficulty. He made an adjustment to his position and called out to the employee to clear the area.

Roy struck the wall with the back of his head. For a fraction of a second he could not see the face of the man in front of him.

He thought of what he had done to Havel.

There had been a moment at which the movement was no longer governed by the intention that had begun it. He could remember the minister's face before that moment. He could not go back to it, and no amount of thought concerning what had happened afterwards had enabled him to establish how he would have acted if he had been given another opportunity.

He was being given an opportunity of a different kind now.

He responded with an effort greater than he had intended to make. The man in front of him was displaced from his position. There was a sound as something struck the metal casing of an electrical cabinet. Roy caught sight of M-08's face and saw that the man had understood what had happened only after it was over.

The maintenance employee cried out. He had stepped back against the open door and fallen on one knee. His colleague was trying to help him to his feet.

Roy could have moved toward M-08 again. He had already begun to do so when he saw the two employees at the entrance.

He stopped.

The effort of stopping was almost as painful as the effort he had just made.

M-08 got to his feet. He looked at his left arm and then at Roy. He appeared surprised by nothing except the fact that Roy had remained where he was.

The second employee shouted that he was calling for assistance. He had seen his colleague fall and believed that there might have been an injury to his leg.

Roy looked at the first man.

"Can you stand?"

The employee nodded. His colleague was holding him by the elbow. Neither of them seemed to want Roy to come any closer.

M-08 took out the radio he had been carrying beneath his coat. He began to speak into it. His position still obstructed the direct route to the street, but he was no longer moving toward Roy.

Roy walked toward the other entrance of the passage. He expected every step to bring the sound of the other man's shoes behind him. Halfway to the entrance he felt a curious absence of sensation in his right hand. He looked down and saw that the hand was still there, moving with the rest of his body.

He reached the main street. Two people standing outside a closed business turned to look at him. He kept walking.

The traffic signal had changed while he was in the passage. On the other side of the road was an illuminated sign indicating the entrance to a public stairway. He knew that he would have to stop before he could climb it.

He had not been defeated by the man in the suit. In the brief interval during which they had been in contact, he had managed to do something that the man had not been able to prevent.

He could not imagine doing it again.

07 — A SUCCESSFUL DISPLACEMENT

Deren received notice of the encounter before the report describing it was available. The notice stated that a member of the classified personnel had made physical contact with the subject near a municipal installation and that the recovery had not been completed.

A second communication referred to a civilian incident at the same place. It had been transmitted from the municipal service rather than from the unit involved in the operation.

Deren asked for an account of the condition of the two employees. One man had sustained an injury to his knee. The other was arranging for a replacement to attend the station so that the installation could be left secure.

There was no reported injury to a third person. The medical assistance requested by the municipal service had been for the employee alone.

"And Batty?" Deren asked.

The lieutenant said that he had no information about his condition.

The captain told him to ask the personnel involved in the encounter. The lieutenant forwarded the request. A reply arrived stating that an assessment of the member of the classified personnel was being undertaken and that further information would be provided upon its completion.

At the regional facility, M-08 was sitting in an examination room. He had removed his jacket, and the physician was examining the arm that had struck the cabinet.

There was no serious injury. A mark would probably remain for several days. The physician asked him to perform the same movements that M-06 had been asked to perform earlier that evening.

M-08 completed them. The physician entered the results.

An officer arrived before the examination was over. He waited by the door until the physician told him that the personnel could return to duty. Then he asked M-08 to describe the physical action by which the subject had prevented the recovery.

M-08 gave an account of the encounter. The officer asked him to repeat the part describing the second displacement. He wanted to know whether the movement was consistent with the level of strength attributed to the subject after the operation at the hospital.

"I can't determine that," M-08 said.

"Was the force greater or less than you anticipated?"

"Greater than I anticipated at that point."

The officer made a note. He asked whether the subject had attempted to continue after the displacement.

"No."

"Was he prevented from continuing?"

M-08 considered the question. "There were two other people present."

"Were they assisting him?"

"No. They were employees of the installation."

The officer asked him whether the subject had used the presence of the employees to interrupt the recovery.

M-08 said that he had not observed anything to indicate that the subject had intended to bring them into the passage. One of the employees had returned to obtain something from the installation. The other had come to the door when he heard what was happening.

The officer wanted to know what Roy had done when he saw them.

M-08 told him.

The officer entered the information in a separate part of the report. The section concerned the subject's behaviour in the presence of civilians. Nothing in the form explained how the statement was to be used alongside the estimates of his physical capability.

"Could you have resumed the recovery?" the officer asked.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you?"

"The site was no longer suitable. I reported the change."

There was a pause. M-08 had answered the same question that had been put to M-06, although the circumstances of their encounters had been different. The officer looked at the document containing the authorization for the operation. He appeared to be trying to establish whether something in it required a different answer.

He told M-08 to remain available for another deployment.

When the summary of his report reached the command centre, the account of the civilian incident was attached as a separate item. Deren read both documents.

The summary described an unexpectedly successful displacement by the subject. It contained no observation concerning the condition of the subject after the movement, although M-08 had mentioned that he appeared to have difficulty using one arm.

Deren telephoned the joint staff. Vale answered.

"We have a second unsuccessful recovery," Vale said.

"We have a patient who may be in a worse condition than he was this afternoon."

"The latest report indicates that he remains capable of resisting the personnel assigned to him."

"It also indicates that he didn't continue when he could have continued."

Vale said that the latter statement was an interpretation. A further assessment would be made before the next deployment.

Deren looked at the two reports on his desk. He wondered how many assessments would be made of the same man before someone was permitted to examine him.

08 — WHAT REMAINED POSSIBLE

Roy had reached the bottom of the public stairway but had not begun to climb it. There was a bench beside the entrance, where people waited for friends arriving from the upper street. He sat at the end of it and breathed as slowly as he could.

He had been able to walk there. He took some comfort from the fact that his legs seemed to be functioning normally. He could no longer be certain that he would know when something ceased to function normally until he attempted to use it.

The sensation in his right hand began to return. It did not return all at once. There was discomfort in the fingertips, then a pressure that seemed to come from inside the wrist. He left the hand resting on his thigh.

A child came down the stairs holding the hand of a woman. The woman was looking at the wet steps and did not see him until she reached the bottom. The child looked at Roy's face. He smiled at her, and she turned toward the street with her mother.

He waited until they had gone.

There were people he could still approach for help. The difficulty lay in the consequences of asking them to help him. He had seen what an authorization could do to a hospital and what a question concerning an overnight guest could do to a small business. He could not carry the consequences away with him when he left.

He took the telephone from his pocket. The screen was undamaged. He looked once more at the messages that had preceded his departure from the hospital.

He could have sent a message describing the street in which he was sitting. He did not know whether it would reach Rachel before he had to move, or whether she could reach him without being directed into one of the streets now occupied by the operation.

He closed the application without writing anything.

At the hospital, Imani had just finished speaking to Min. She had learned that the association had accepted copies of some of the records. She had also learned that Rachel was still trying to establish contact with Roy.

She told Adrian about the conversation. He was relieved that part of the research had been preserved outside the hospital, although he did not yet know which part. He asked whether the association could convey a message to Rachel for him.

"What do you want to tell her?"

"That we may have found the reference for the missing appendix."

Imani sat down. She had been thinking about another message. The hospital's emergency department had received an inquiry from the municipal service concerning the capacity of the department to examine someone injured in an incident at a pumping station. It was a routine inquiry, and she had learned nothing further about the incident.

She did not know whether it had anything to do with Roy. The fact that she had considered the possibility showed her how little information she possessed about what was happening outside the hospital.

"We'll have to find some way for Rachel to speak to us directly," she said. "One that doesn't depend on her coming here."

Adrian agreed. He asked whether the association might be able to help them arrange it.

Imani picked up the telephone again.

In the corridor of the regional facility, M-06 saw M-08 returning from his examination. She asked what had happened at the pumping station.

He told her that he had encountered the subject and had not recovered him.

"Was he injured?"

"He was already injured when I saw him."

"Was he worse afterwards?"

M-08 did not answer immediately. He remembered the appearance of Roy's face when the man had stopped moving, and the way he had walked toward the entrance of the passage.

"I think so," he said.

M-06 looked down the corridor. The office in which the request for further instructions had been received was still open.

She went back to the chair in which she had been sitting when the employee came to take her to the examination room. She had not received an answer to her question about an independent examination of the subject.

She decided to ask it once more.

At the bottom of the public stairway, Roy put his telephone away. The pain had diminished sufficiently for him to stand. He placed his left hand on the railing and climbed the first step.

He stood there for a little while before trying the second.

He had spent much of his life learning how to make the distance between one movement and another as small as possible. He was learning something different now.

He climbed another step, and waited.

END OF CHAPTER 04