



Digital Burn

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Cyberville was raining bullets.

Live rounds from the black heart of space.

Acid pellets that ate in to the ground.

The reconstruction of the satellite village would only be further slowed by this development. Artificial climate generators were still in the beta stage and unfortunately unreliable.

Hence the acid rain.

Roxanne was five seven. She was thin but big-busted. She augmented her 38 Double D breasts by wearing only tight micro-pore T-shirts when she did business.

Which was pretty much all of the time.

Roxanne stood beneath the protective alloy awning and watched the rain upset by the development of yet another weather system.

Roxanne was a knowledge/matrix slash pleasure model. A droid that had turned into something more.

More dangerous. More lethal. Smarter. Sexier.

Deadlier than the male.

Roxanne's mark was somewhere in the guts of the satellite village. Unknowing. Unsuspecting.

She checked the pockets of her sprayed-on leather pants. Felt the lethal rounds in her zippered pouch.

Felt the modular units of the fusion pistol, an X-17 model she'd had especially machine-tooled for her purposes.

Roxanne was making a small fortune on the black market as a mercenary who gladly sold herself to the highest bidder. As a beta model, she was unknown in the droid world. An enigma.

With every kill she upgraded automatically; with every kill she experienced new spikes of pleasure, a greater depth of sensation.

As she stomped black puddles in the steady rain, she checked her corneal telescreen. Her mark was in Japan-town, currently pondering a purchase of

some rare herbals from off-planet that supposedly increased sexual pleasure. Roxanne was skeptical about the supposed benefits of the herbals. Like a lot of things in Cyberville, expectations outran the actual experience.

An event production was in progress. The Situational Matrix was being reprogrammed for the amusement of certain individuals who resided in the downtown district of Cyberville.

Too bad for them. But great for Roxanne. Because while the aristocrats lay in decay, Roxanne was growing stronger.

Her mark. Waiting. Unknowing.

Hurakimi Nishima. Better known in the underground as Mr. Size. A very short man, not even 5 feet tall, but extremely dangerous to certain vested interests in the rebel underground. Interests willing to pay any price for his head.

She was somewhere near Pain.net on the edge of the satellite village when the drones attacked.

She sensed them, of course. She always did. But something was wrong. Although she could feel them, see them as green sparks on her corneas, her rhythms had begun to slow. Her 'blood' felt thick. She could no longer see, no longer stand.

Someone, or something—had hacked her. Paralyzed her controls. Brought down her force field.

Now she was the bait.

She closed her sensors.

The kidnapping was swift, professional. Steel bands enclosed her legs, snapping her boots together.

Another band snaked out and winched her arms behind her back.

A black leather pump gag inserted itself between her lips.

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When she awoke, she was lying on her back on a metal lab table. She saw that the walls dripped with nanocodes. Rhetoric from ancient Earth, part Sumerian, part Egyptian, part Prevac. It was an assembly language for the damned.

Strings of figures ran up and down the walls in flaming letters that vaguely resembled Urdu. But she wasn't sure. She hadn't studied Earth Prime languages and would need to download that module to understand.

Now was not the time.

A man or what was once a man welded to a built-in matter compiler said. "Welcome to Pain.com."

She was unable to move her head more than half a centimeter in either direction. Straps bound her chest, her abdomen and her legs.

If only she could reach for her pistol.

"Welcome to Pain.com," repeated the thing. "You have been slated for torture and demolition. Please do not attempt to escape."

Roxanne winced at the futuristic clichés. It was the year 2562 A.P. (After Prevac), and postmodernist slang was considered somewhat Cliché.

After all, weren't escape attempts justified by the situation? Deeply justified, in fact. This thing was planning to kill her. Slowly. After, that is, he had extracted all the secrets from her memory chips.

He could do that without torture, simply by jacking in to her and uploading the data. But this was the kind of thing that liked to torture young girls.

Hurikimi Nishima was behind the kidnapping, she was sure of it. It had all the traces of the crime lord's usual modus operandi. The sick bastard was going to get his, and Roxanne was expendable.

Erotic tracers.

The thing paused over her, dripping fine tendrils of a gray, opalescent slime. His one good eye was opaque. His chattering mechanical right arm reached down and flicked her cheekbone.

Striking a thick bundle of nerves and sensorineural implants. Sending a sharp, hot spike of pain down her spine. She flinched, but only briefly. Somewhere deep inside her reactive core, a baroque calculus of nanoengineering was hard at work turning that pain into pleasure.

The thing reached for a gleaming scalpel from a tray of cruel-looking instruments, most of which he had obviously invented. Holding the scalpel in his mechanical grip, the thing swiped open the thin fabric of Roxanne's nanopore T-shirt, revealing her large, firm breasts.

His organic eye appeared to glow faintly.

Blessed are the sick, thought Roxanne as the scalpel passed again, opening up the tender epidermis of her chest.

Finally the circuit was complete. She felt bolts locking and welding inside her body. Turning the pain into pleasure. Into hot bauds. Anger and desire soared through her nerves. The man-thing was about to be very sorry.

But not before he had attempted to deliver as much hurt as was humanly, or should she say biomechanically, possible.

The thing nodded. A thin stream of yellow fluid appeared to be dripping from his mechanical eye, but Roxanne realized that this was just an optic daze. A scatter-screen he'd erected in the air between them to augment the pain. The torment. The fear.

Had she been able to feel fear.

But no more.

No more pain for Roxanne.

Every swipe of the scalpel tossed a delicious blaze of energy back down her spine. She sensed her strength growing as her data matrix reformatted itself against the bonds. Patching into the fusion box that guided the torture bed's computer, she directed her bonds to release.

They came off with a harsh snap.

Roxanne sprang from the table.

The thing had begun to spasm, violently twisting its neck forward and backwards.

With a few flicks of her right hand, Roxanne assembled the fusion pistol in her pocket. She leapt backwards over the table, sending her bonds flying into the

creature's rotten flesh. He stepped back, startled, as Roxanne climbed atop the main compugrid and pointed the fusion pistol directly at the thing's head.

And squeezed.

The shower of blood and slime-flecked oil warmed her heart. But Roxanne had only just begun with the bastard.

He would have to pay. Not only for trying to kill her—that was a trivial thing, an everyday event for Roxanne. And neither did she feel the need for vengeance. This was something different. Something unique to her species.

Not vengeance, but the wielding of power, was the greatest joy the Knowledge Matrix/Pleasure model could experience. Something she alone was constituted to perform.

And perform she would.

The thing gripped the remains of its head with both arms. Little spurts of machine fluid squirted out of the open neck cavity. It pitched itself forward at her, clawing blindly at her legs.

Roxanne kicked it aside. It slammed against the opposite wall and slid down, leaving a trail of yellow sludge. She picked up the scalpel he'd dropped and crushed it.

She windmilled into the thing, using both fists to jam the thing's thorax. Sparks and smoke rippled through the chest cavity as she twisted in the metal.

She heard noise behind her. Giving the thing one last kick against the wall for good measure, Roxanne whirled around to confront the intruder.

Then Roxanne smiled.

Standing before her was a tiny NeoJapanese man holding a knockoff fusion pistol from the Late Prevac period.

“So nice to meet you,” Roxanne growled. “Killing you will give me great pleasure.”

The End