

Excerpt from *Survivors of the Chaos*

by

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The woman was well armed, serious, and not keen on starting a conversation.

“Do you have a name?” asked Posada.

“Serena,” came the curt reply.

He nodded. He was already enjoying the way the local street thugs backed away from them when they came too close, their eyes on the tall woman. He was sure Serena could do them damage if the circumstances required it.

Moreover, I could help her, just for the hell of it! He connected to the internet and began scouting out the list of restaurants and nightclubs in the Village. *It should be a fun night on the town, and very secure.*

He was addicted to his data, though. As they walked, he stayed plugged into the U.N.S.A. network with his data link. It was an old habit. Some might call it multitasking. Long ago, they had declared it an illegal activity while driving. He wasn't into the data as much as he had been with the large bandwidth connection, but he already had a picture of Serena in her birthday suit together with a complete bio.

No privacy at all, he thought with a smile. Bai would be pissed that I'm using her servers in this way. Too bad!

Unfortunately, Serena was only good for protection from the common street thug. She was no match for a hired assassin. They were as uncommon in New York City as anywhere else that mercenaries kept the peace. Nevertheless, a worldwide economy meant freedom of movement for anyone that could pay for it, so it was not possible to eliminate all danger.

A man or woman pissed off at his girl friend or her boy friend could make one call and set up a hit, for example, if he or she so desired. It was a lot easier now than at most times in human history. It was also illegal and if caught, both the assassin and

the person that hired the assassin would receive a lethal injection, unless there were mitigating circumstances.

However, the death penalty wasn't much of a deterrent. Never before in human history was there such material abundance and never before was such a small value put on human life, especially in the large cities suffering through the Chaos.

It didn't help that many people were armed either. The smallest argument could turn into a blood bath when tempers were lost over trivia and hotheads went for their guns. It was a trend started in the U.S. over a century ago when the Supreme Court interpreted the Second Amendment of the Constitution as a personal right to bear arms although the amendment only mentioned militias and not individual persons.

The trend to carry weapons openly had spread throughout a world uneasy about its future, especially in nations where anarchy ruled and life was cheap, nations where food and medicine were often obtained at gunpoint. When the mercenaries swarmed in their first action was to disarm the population, by force if necessary. The U.S. Constitution and its legal progeny were just relics.

However, New York City even under WorldNet occupation was still very dangerous. Posada knew that life was not this way among the Spacers. Therefore, he had often thought of becoming a Spacer. Almost immediately, the big negative would jump up and slap him in the face: he would miss his nights in his beloved Village.

The assassin found him in the men's room at *Tio Pedro's*, a posh new bar on Bleecker Street. Posada had stopped in for a *mojito* while he still went through the list of restaurants and nightclubs. He would often visit two or three during a night on the town.

Wild conversations drowned out *Tio Pedro's* booming sound system. Pulsing lights turned customers into psychedelic aliens. Women with proud breasts and gyrating hips and their muscular male companions endeavored to hold their partner's interest. Unattached men and women circulated in search of fresh prey.

Posada left most of his drink, which was poorly made, bent to whisper a few flirtatious words in the ear of a supple black woman at the next table, and made his way to the WC. Serena followed.

She was standing discreetly back by the sinks, waiting for Posada to finish his business at the urinal, when the assassin came in.

“Look out!” she screamed.

The man had stepped up to a urinal on the left side of Posada, who was struggling with a stubborn zipper that had lost all memory of its purpose in life. It was an old pair of pants and the MEMs didn’t always function correctly.

He glanced towards the man and saw a vibrablade arcing towards his back. Serena stopped it in mid-arc and applied enough torque to flip the man over.

Unfortunately, the attacker didn’t lose control of the knife. He simply switched hands and threw. Serena’s shot went wild as the vibrating knife landed below her left breast.

“Sorry,” she whimpered sadly, falling to the floor, gushing blood from the knife wound starting to cover her torso. She dropped the gun on the way down.

Posada backed away from the assassin. Although he knew that someone outside in the bar had probably heard the shot, he also knew that no one would dare investigate. Not in the Village.

But why me? Why is a pro coming after me? Who have I pissed off enough for this to happen?

The man picked up the gun, fired three rounds in a tight cluster into Posada’s chest, tossed the gun down on the dying woman, and hurried out of the men’s room. Already on the cold tiles, Posada watched the feet of the man disappear.

The data kept coming. *My data.* He touched it with his mind, caressing it, feeling its information content. *Entropy. Shannon’s theorem. So much to know, so little time. I need to smack Shannon around a little. He didn’t know quantum encryption. I do. Too many worlds of data.*

And then all turned black.