

TERMINATOR 2@
THE NEW JOHN CONNOR
CHRONICLES

Book 2:

AN EVIL HOUR

RUSSELL BLACKFORD

BASED ON THE WORLD CREATED
IN THE MOTION PICTURE WRITTEN BY
JAMES CAMERON AND WILLIAM WISHER

PROLOGUE: JOHN'S WORLD

CYBERDYNE RESEARCH SITE, COLORADO SPRINGS AUGUST 2001

They'd defeated the T-XA Terminator, but at a terrible cost.

John went to his mother, Sarah, to check how badly she'd been hurt in their battle. "You okay, Mom?"

Sarah nodded, fighting back tears of relief.

How much had they really achieved, John wondered. Cyberdyne's research would continue; Skynet might still be created. So much work lay ahead. They had to get people to listen.

The T-XA had pursued them from Mexico to Colorado, the journey ending at Cyberdyne's heavily guarded re-search facility. Their running gun battle with the Terminator had taken them through the facility to the twelfth floor, where the company's AI Operations Center was located. And there they'd struck Skynet a blow, in a blast that had almost brought the facility down on them. They'd escaped, though, and wound up in the building's basement, where Cyberdyne's prototype time vault apparatus was installed.

And here the T-XA had finally been destroyed, scattered across space and time by the powerful energies of the device.

The basement was a concrete chamber twenty feet high, and as long and wide as a football field. Eight rapid-response security personnel now lay on its hard floor, some of them wounded in their legs, others merely stunned-but all disarmed. Security cameras looked down from several angles, monitoring every event. The huge chamber was dominated by the time vault, a hollow cubical block that reached to the ceiling—a block now empty, thankfully.

John had survived unhurt, and Sarah appeared okay as well, not like last time when they'd encountered the T-1000 Terminator in 1994—and she'd been wounded in the shoulder and thigh. She still had a slight limp, almost too small to notice. That night, when they'd fought the shapeshifting T-1000 through the streets and factories of L.A. had been a turning point in John's life and the history of the world. Tonight was different: their newest enemy, the T-XA, had come from a different future, perhaps even darker than the T-1000's. And the T-XA had been focused on more formidable opponents than John and Sarah, for its mission had been to kill five Specialists: enhanced human warriors from its own world and time. Now three of them were dead.

Miho Tagatoshi—the young Specialist known as *Jade"—crossed the room to Rosanna Monk, the time vault's inventor, passing by John and Sarah without a word. Rosanna was Cyberdyne's most senior research scientist. She had followed in Miles Dyson's footsteps, working on the advanced computer hardware that would be used to create Skynet.

Jade touched Rosanna on the shoulder. "You did well."

"I don't care what you think," Rosanna said, jerking away from her touch. "I did it for myself, not for you."

Jade was superhumanly strong and fast, hard to kill, far superior to any merely human athlete. She was the most advanced and formidable of all the Specialists. She had taken several bullet wounds, but had healed quickly. Now she turned to John and Sarah. "Thank you both for everything."

"Hey, *no problemo*," John said, trying to sound cool about it.

He feared he was falling in love with her, this unattainable superwoman. Jade had been engineered to grow up quickly, then cease aging altogether, making her appear older than she was, while being potentially immortal. Though she looked about twenty, she had lived only the same number of years as John; in those terms, she was just fifteen or sixteen. Apart from her extraordinary abilities, she was beautiful, in a strange, sad way. Framed by black, shoulder-length hair, her oval face was almost perfect. . . yet her eyes looked haunted, as though she'd already lived for centuries and seen too much human suffering.

Well, there'd be time to worry later. John would sort out his feelings for Jade, discover what she might feel for him; right now, there were higher priorities. One of them was Rosanna: what should they do with her? She'd been reprogrammed by the T-XA, but she'd helped them in the end. Without her, they could never have defeated it.

The Terminator had been armed with a powerful phased-plasma laser rifle, and had used it to devastating effect. When they'd first battled it in Mexico City, the T-XA had killed one of the Specialists: Robert Baxter. Two more had died tonight: Danny Dyson and Selena Macedo. Jade had survived, along with her Russian comrade, Anton Panov, a big granite block of a man with short gray hair.

"I need a good meal," Anton said. He looked as if he'd been chopped to pieces, then stitched together, like Frankenstein's monster. As with all the Specialists, his veins and arteries swarmed with millions of tiny nanotech devices, designed to heal him rapidly when he was injured. But the Specialists still needed nutrients to complete the healing process and replenish their reserves.

Anton was smart: often he had little to say, but he always made sense when he explained something. He was now the last person, at this time, in this world, with the memory of a different Judgment Day from the one that Jobs had grown up expecting. The one that was supposed to have happened in 1997, the one that would have created Skynet's World, had Sarah—with the aid of yet another Terminator—not destroyed Cyberdyne's advanced computer research and the T-1000 sent to kill John.

Anton and Jade had come from a different world, with a different Judgment Day. They had traveled back from 2036. from a new reality that John now thought of as Jade's World. In Jade's World, Judgment Day had been postponed, thanks to what Sarah had done in 1994. In that reality, Cyberdyne's work had been set back for years. Judgment Day had taken place in place in 2021 when Jade was only a baby. She had lived through the nuclear holocaust, but could not recall its horrors, only those that came after.

Judgment Day had happened in two different realities: in Skynet's World in 1997, in Jade's World in 2021. Was it possible for there to be a world without Judgment Day, without Skynet? That was what they were fighting for.

Sarah passed Anton the T-XA's laser rifle, which had fallen on the floor in the thick of the battle. "Yes, thank you," he said, gripping the barrel in a large, powerful hand. The rifle was a black metal weapon almost three feet long, with no stock attached. It resembled an over-sized, elongated handgun. Ordinary humans could not wield it one-handed, but the Terminators and Specialists had no such trouble. In the harsh world that he came from, Anton had doubtless used similar weapons against Skynet's forces.

Jade stared at the time vault, where Danny Dyson—the Danny Dyson of 2036—had been scattered across space and time, along with the T-XA. "We loved you, Daniel," she said. "Thank you, friend."

Precious seconds were ticking away. They had to get out of here fast before more police or security officers found them. The building had been rocked by an explosion. Right now, John thought, its security systems must be in chaos, perhaps no one was watching. But that couldn't last.

Jade said to Rosanna, "Come with us. We'll try to help you."

Rosanna looked back with disdain. "Why do I need help?" She was one human being whom Jade did not intimidate. "I've just saved your blasted species, not that it's what I wanted." In the end, Rosanna had acted to save humanity. She had entered the computer codes to slam shut the time vault's huge metal door, trapping the T-XA inside, then she'd activated the vault, scattering the Terminator's atoms across the space-time continuum.

They found a fire door, which opened into a long tunnel. After fifty yards, this turned at ninety degrees, then led up a flight of steps. At the top, another fire door

opened to the outside world. Not far away, helicopters droned and hovered. Cops and military personnel were everywhere, but looking the wrong way, just at this moment, concentrating upon the ravaged building or worrying about their own safety.

"Quietly," John whispered. "If we're quick, we just might make it."

They needed to get back to where they'd left the Ford Explorer belonging to Sarah's old friend, Enrique Salceda, then return to Enrique's compound in the Californian Low Desert, without being followed or detected. As John considered the possibilities, Jade nodded in the direction of an empty police cruiser, parked slightly away from the others. It seemed that no one had spotted them.

Jade touched Sarah, then smiled at John. "I'll be back," she said.

She moved like a blur, accelerating into a superhuman sprint, and reached the cruiser. John had already seen how quickly she could start a stolen vehicle. Her hands were so strong that she could do it like a Terminator: by smashing open the ignition mechanism and turning the starter with her bare fingers. It took her only seconds. They'd soon be out of here.

They just might pull this off.

PART ONE
JOHN'S WORLD

CHAPTER

One

PATRIOT HOTEL, COLORADO SPRINGS AUGUST 2001

Charles Layton was often feared, and very seldom loved. On first meeting, he seemed gentle, almost kindly. With his silver hair and watery blue eyes, he might have been a wise, patient judge, or a medical doctor with a calm bedside manner. But there was an inner hardness. Until he'd reached his thirties, he'd never appreciated how much he was different—that most people actually cared what others thought of them. Layton never did.

Three decades later, he had thoroughly mastered the lesson. Not only was he different it gave him a kind of power. Then he'd met the T-XA Terminator, Skynet's emissary from 2036, and it had taken him even further, further than he could have imagined. The Terminator had modified his brain, reprogramming him to do Skynet's bidding. He would now work tirelessly, seeking mankind's destruction.

Tonight's events had reached a crisis point Layton needed to be on the spot at Cyberdyne's research site. Whatever the outcome of the attack on Cyberdyne might be, there'd be problems ahead. As 11:00 P.M. approached, he patted the 9mm. Beretta pistol that he wore in a shoulder holster—concealed beneath the coat of his charcoal gray suit—then found the electronic keycard that opened his room on the

nineteenth floor, slipping it into his shirt pocket. In another pocket he kept his cell phone. A second keycard—the one for the Cyberdyne site—was clipped to his company ID.

He stepped into a deserted corridor, closed the door quietly behind him, and walked quickly to a row of elevators. The sound of a TV set came from one of the rooms—some action movie, with gunshots firing: *blam! blam!* Then silence.

The T-XA had come from a future ruled by Skynet, but so had five humans. No, they were scarcely human at all: the Specialists were technologically enhanced warriors whose abilities greatly exceeded those of any normal human being. Their appearance created an unexpected complication for Cyberdyne Systems and the covert research program that would ultimately lead to Skynet. Cyberdyne's work had already been set back for years by the events of 1994—now it must go ahead, at all costs.

Even if the T-XA could terminate all of the Specialists, it would need to show itself. That was inconvenient, and would surely lead to questions. If the time travelers knew a way to destroy the Terminator, that would be far worse. But Layton was ready for anything. As well as reprogramming him as Skynet's willing tool, the T-XA had given him new abilities. These made him more than a match in his way—for the Connors and the Specialists. Even if the Terminator failed, he would not.

The elevator arrived, and he stepped inside.

THE PENTAGON

Jack Reed's computer screen showed a background image of Laila Ali in fighting pose, wearing her boxing gloves. Jack had always been a fan of her father, the great Muhammad Ali. In the screen's lower right corner, a digital readout showed the time as just before 1:00 AM. He had been at work with Samantha Jones for the past twenty hours, agonizing as events unfolded in Colorado Springs, two time zones away; he needed updates almost minute by minute.

Dean Solomon had last called from Colorado ten minutes before, an eternity to wait for new developments.

As always. Jack wore carefully pressed black trousers and a plain white shirt. He'd thrown his suit coat and tie over the back of one of the two padded armchairs that faced away from the front of his desk. Opposite those was a two-person lounge, where Samantha now sat, sipping iced water from a tall, narrow glass. Even in middle age, Jack retained an air of vitality and a military bearing, though his career had been in the civilian Department of Defense, not the uniformed services. His face was sun-leathered and ruggedly handsome, with a full mane of graying hair brushed back from his face in waves. Right now, though, he felt as if he'd spent the last decade stuffed in the bottom of a smelly trash can, which had then been rolled down a gravel street. He stank of sweat, needed a shave, and knew he had bags under his eyes.

He'd spent the day with Samantha vetting the preparations in Colorado to defend the Cyberdyne site, going over it all with Dean and with Cyberdyne's top management, drafting briefing papers for the Secretary and the

White House, then talking to the Secretary in person. As events unfolded, they'd tried to understand

what it all meant, to get a picture of what they were caught up in.

In the room's farthest corner, a forty-two-inch TV screen showed CNN's coverage of the events in Colorado Springs. Jack had turned the sound down, leaving it just loud enough to hear if he really concentrated. Elsewhere in the huge building, all TV news coverage was being recorded. On the screen, a female reporter with dark, bobbed hair seemed to be describing the events of 1994, when the Connors had raided Cyberdyne's corporate headquarters in Los Angeles. Jack used his remote to turn up the sound.

"There's still a mystery about this man," the reporter said. "Just who is he?" Her image was replaced by that of the individual who'd helped the Connors in 1994— supposedly the same man who'd killed seventeen police officers in a fire ten years earlier still.

Jack knew better. It was not the same man. In fact, neither "man" had even been human.

CNN had no idea what was really at stake—and no TV cameras had gotten close to the Cyberdyne site. The image shifted to an aerial display of the site, taken from miles away, doubtless from a helicopter. It revealed very little. This coverage was useless as a source of information, but at least Jack could see what the public was being told. He flicked through the channels, getting rock videos, international sports, then another news bulletin, this one displaying a 1994 photograph of Sarah Connor, taken at the mental institution that had held her for over a year: the Pescadero State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He went back to CNN, lowering the sound once more.

"What the hell is going on?" he said with a groan. "Call in, Dean!"

Samantha rolled her eyes in sympathy, then gave a nervous laugh. "Give him a minute or two. I assume he'll call as soon as something happens."

Jack toyed with his gold-rimmed reading glasses. "Damn it, I'm going to call him."

"All right, let's hear what he has to say. Put him on speaker."

Samantha was a smartly-dressed woman in her forties. Her short, neatly-styled hair was dyed a muted shade of red—though it had been bright crimson when Jack had first met her, eight or nine years before. In her own manner, she was aging gracefully. She held degrees in law, economics and computer science, and had once been successful as a political consultant in private practice.

Under the previous administration, she'd spent several years as an adviser on the Defense Secretary's staff. She now occupied a high-ranking position in the Department, just one level below Jack, giving specialist advice on America's most secret defense research programs. When he was absent for any reason, she had a direct reporting line to the top brass and the Secretary. Between them, she and Jack possessed much of the country's expertise on exactly what companies such as Cyberdyne were doing under their highly-classified contracts, where the research could lead, and what kind of edge it might give the U.S. forces over their many potential enemies.

Jack pressed the speaker button on his telephone console, then keyed the preset button to call Dean in his Colorado office. If that didn't work, they'd try his cell phone. Dean Solomon was the civilian Defense officer with local oversight of security at the Cyberdyne facility, among others, working with Air Force and Cyberdyne staff. As they waited for him to answer, Samantha stood and walked closer, leaning against one of the armchairs. She looked down at the carpet, kicking at it nervously.

There was a click on the other end of the line, then a deep, masculine voice answered over the speaker. "Solomon here."

"It's Jack Reed again. What's going on, Dean?" As he spoke, Jack glanced at the TV screen, which still showed nothing useful, currently a photograph of Sarah Connor's face, then an old photo of her son, John, when he was nine or ten.

"It's not looking good," Dean said. "I've been briefing Charles Layton. I was just about to call you."

"Not looking good?" Samantha pushed forward from the armchair, leaning toward the phone.

"No, not at all. I'll drive out there myself in a few minutes."

Jack cursed silently. "All right Tell us the worst"

PATRIOT HOTEL/CYBERDYNE RESEARCH SITECOLORADO SPRINGS

Layton stepped inside the elevator, and touched the button for the hotel's underground garage. The elevator's rear wall was transparent giving a dramatic view of the hotel's huge, central atrium as he descended toward ground level. It was decorated with American flags and Japanese kites. An odd mixture, he thought. Human beings were so irrational.

On the fourth floor, a young Asian couple entered the elevator ear, dressed casually in blue jeans and black leather jackets. "Going out so late?" the woman said, glancing at Layton's formal suit.

She represented no threat to his mission; it was best to act as if everything was normal. He replied without emotion: "They need me at the Cyberdyne site."

Her eyes widened. "Oh. You're with Cyberdyne, sir?"

"Yes," he said sharply, to cut off further questions.

Like everyone else in Colorado Springs, she must have been watching the news reports, or had talked to someone who'd been watching. Every TV station was covering the Connors' raid on the research facility, though no cameras could get close to the action. Guards, police, and military were all trying to deal with the time travelers and their accomplices from the present day: Sarah Connor and her son, John, the same pair who'd raided Cyberdyne's LA. headquarters seven years before. Layton understood so much more than he had back then. Rosanna Monk had worked out much of it; now the T-XA had made everything clear.

The Asian couple stepped out at ground level. Seconds later, Layton reached the car park. Without wasting a movement, he drove his hired Chevrolet six miles to the forbidding multi-story edifice, where Cyberdyne carried out its most advanced and sensitive research, protected by the might of the U.S. military. He slowed almost to a halt, opened the car window, and held out his ID for inspection. The police let him through without argument; he had as much right to be here as anyone. Indeed, the police and military needed someone from Cyberdyne with authority and knowledge.

Oscar Cruz, the company's President, had also been re-programmed by the T-XA. He had stayed in Los Angeles to deal with issues at corporate headquarters, where he was well supported by others who'd been reprogrammed. There was now an elite group dedicated to Skynet's creation—too many of them to fail. Even if some were killed, others would step forward. Soon there would be even more.

Layton parked amidst a scene of utter chaos: it was like a war zone. Helicopters flew overhead, rotors thrumming loudly. There were spotlights on the building and endless rows of police, Air Force, and emergency vehicles. How typical of the human condition! Though he'd felt good will to mankind in the abstract, individuals had seldom impressed him. What a never-ending source of frustration the world must be if you were always holding back, trying to spare people, to be kind and diplomatic—if you actually cared about their feelings.

When the T-XA Terminator had reprogrammed his mind, much of his personality had not needed to change. The machine's nanoware had entered his brain, examining and reorganizing it, creating a being subservient to Skynet's wishes—but the new programming was satisfyingly congruent with his previous neurophysiology. Some things, of course, had altered. His abstract respect for human life and happiness was gone. Instead, he had a deeper insight: mankind was a disease on the Earth. It had to be eradicated. And he had one overriding imperative: to ensure the creation of Skynet.

As he stepped from his car, a uniformed Air Force officer walked over to meet him, a tall—square-jawed man who gave his name as Jensen.

"What's going on?" Layton said, looking the man up and down with distaste. He shook Jensen's hand reluctantly, but with a firm, dry grip.

"We're tracing their movements, sir," Jensen said. "There's activity on the twelfth floor—"

The nanoprocessor! The twelfth floor housed the experimental AI Operations Center, which the Specialists and the Connors would naturally attempt to destroy. But the T-XA would deal with it. By now, it was in the budding somewhere. With its ability to shift shape and split into components like an amoeba, it could easily slip through any cordon without attracting questions. It had also come armed, hiding a laser rifle within its huge form. The T-XA would protect the future that it came from, one where human beings had been almost exterminated and Skynet's machines ruled the planet.

"Don't worry about that," Layton said, buoyed with an inner confidence and clarity. "It'll take care of itself."

One way or another, the technology needed for Skynet would soon be perfected, then implemented. Provided it survived the battle, the T-XA would assist with the great work. It knew so much that might be useful. Even if the Terminator faded, it had equipped Layton to carry on. That, of course, was a foolish thought, for the T-XA knew what it was doing.

A foolish thought, yes, but also satisfying. Whatever was needed, he would do it. He would succeed, with or without the T-XA.

THE PENTAGON

Dean reviewed the situation quickly: Seven people had arrived at the Cyberdyne site in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, identified as a late model Toyota Land Cruiser,

crashed through every obstacle, and wreaked havoc on the small army of police and military personnel gathered to defend the facility. They were still in there, resisting attempts to stop them.

"Since we last spoke, everything is checking out," Dean said. "One of the women is definitely Sarah Connor—a bit older, of course. . . shorter hair, but undoubtedly her. Some of our people got a clear look, and they recognized her. The teenager must be her son."

"I guess that stands to reason," Jack said.

"The facial features are consistent with his appearance as a child. I don't think there can be much doubt. They had four others helping them—two men and two women, identities unknown. The seventh person was Rosanna Monk. It looks like she's a hostage."

"Okay, I've got that" Jack had a thick legal pad on his desk where he scribbled a file note summarizing every phone call. Later he'd get them all entered on the IT system—no need to worry about that now. He jotted down a series of points:

1. Confirmed—seven people.
2. Sarah/John Connor. Four unidentified. Rosanna Monk—hostage (?).
3. HOW?

"What's happening right now?" he said.

Dean spoke slowly, taking his time. "There's fighting going on inside. The building is surrounded, but we're evacuating all security staff except our rapid-response people—they're trained to deal with this kind of situation."

"Sure," Jack said sarcastically, "just like that SWAT team in '94."

"I can't comment on that."

"No."

"Except to say that our people are damn good. You can bet on them."

"I'm not betting on anything, not where the Connors are concerned."

"Yeah, fair comment. Jack. Look, we've tracked them so far with the security cameras, and strange stuff is going on in there. We'll have to check the surveillance tapes. The reports I'm getting are just crazy. You can see it for yourself—I'll send you the tapes."

"Crazy?" That caught Jack's attention. "What sorts of things?"

"People in there changing shape—yes, I know it sounds pretty funny. And someone using a kind of ray gun, a laser weapon or something. . . Yes, I know that sounds ridiculous. But that's what I've heard so far. It's all incoherent."

"Changing shape?" Samantha said.

"Yeah," Jack said. "What does that mean?" There'd been many twists and turns with the project but this was something new. "I don't get it. Who is supposed to have changed shape?"

Dean sounded patient, bland, not wanting to be shaken. "That's what I'm told. Jack. I didn't say it would make sense."

Jack laughed sympathetically. "No, you didn't say that."

"Anyway, it's all being recorded."

Jack had studied the surveillance tapes made in 1984 and 1994—the first when a big man in a leather jacket had single-handedly assaulted the West Highland police

station, the second when the Connors had attacked the old Cyberdyne building in L.A., accompanied by the same man, or someone who looked identical. In each case, the big man had displayed immense strength and sufficient resilience to survive intensive gunfire at point-blank range. In 1994, the police had used tear gas against him, with no effect at all.

Rosanna Monk had been over this material and all the other evidence. She had examined it all independently—and drawn an extraordinary conclusion. Rosanna didn't think like anyone else, which was possibly what made her a scientific genius, though it did more than that. She was unafraid of the implications of following the truth wherever it led. She'd established that the fragments of technology discovered by Cyberdyne in 1984 really were from the future, and the big man must have been what Sarah Connor had always claimed: a cybernetic organism that merely pretended to be human. In fact, there must have been two of them—the first had been destroyed in 1984. Connor called them "Terminators"; on that score who was Jack to argue?

"Is Dr. Monk *okay*?" Samantha said.

Dean gave a grunt that might have meant "yes," then said, "As far as I know."

Jack added some words to his note about Rosanna: *Is she safe???* He thought back to those tapes of the Terminators in action. The footage had been terrifying to watch, but had showed no shape-shifting by the Terminators—possibly they were not that sort of machine. Nothing he had seen, no reports he had read, said anything about them changing shape—but, what if there were more than one... type?

"As far as you know?" Samantha said skeptically.

"That's right, Sam," Dean replied. "I have no update on that. At this time, there are no reports of her being hurt."

Jack wrote the word SHAPESHIFTING in caps, with several large question marks beside it in the left margin. He recalled another event in 1994, the night previous to the raid on Cyberdyne—when Sarah Connor had escaped the Pescadero Hospital.

"Look," Dean said, "I'll call again when I've checked the scene and talked to the witnesses in person. Right now, I'm like the spider in the middle of the web over here. I'm getting lots of reports from every direction, you know what I mean? But it's all second-hand—I'm going to have to see for myself. I'll call

you very soon."

"All right," Jack said.

"The situation is just so confused. Those people with the Connors are tough. I mean, two of them were toting mini-guns for God's sake-and one of them was a woman."

"I'm mostly worried about Rosanna," Samantha said. "We need her alive and well."

"Yes, understood. I've got all that, Sam. I'm on my way out there-leaving right now."

"We'll let you go," Jack said. "But call us if there's any hint of news. The Secretary is going to be all over us if there's any foul-up."

"Got it."

"Goodbye," Samantha said. "Good luck."

Jack switched off the telephone speaker function, and turned to her. "Well? What do you make of that?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Where do you want me to start?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack saw that CNN was showing more about the Cyberdyne raid. The screen displayed an aerial image of the building, taken from a great distance. It revealed very little, just a few lights from tiny windows and the spotlights of circling helicopters. You had to be familiar with the local geography to interpret it at all. To Jack, it made a degree of sense; to most of the TV audience in the U.S. and across the world, it would be little more than random patterns of light.

Samantha followed his gaze, but shrugged when she saw the screen. "It's not exactly informative."

"No."

"Time to ring the Secretary."

"In a minute, Sam. I just want to know what you're thinking."

"I'm just thinking how this is like 1994-too *much* like it for comfort. The Connors trashed Cyberdyne then, and nothing could stop them. This is just the same."

"Those people with the Connors aren't human, are they?" Jack said. "They must be more cybernetic machines, same as that guy in 1994."

"Terminators."

"Yes, that's the forbidden word. We might as well use it, now."

"We don't have enough to go on."

"Yes, we do, Sam. We've seen the pattern."

"Jack—"

"No, hear me out. We've seen it before, but we don't admit it. We want to make different assumptions, treat everything more or less as normal. But we can't—really, we just can't, or we'll go horribly wrong." He ran a hand through his hair tiredly. "I know you like to test ideas, but there are only two ways of looking at it all. Seen one way, we read Sarah Connor as a psycho. But that can't be right—Rosanna proved it a long time ago. There really was a cy-a Terminator, in 1984. We know that the guy who helped the Connors ten years later must have been another one, though we don't what happened to it. That's the other way of looking at it, and it's the *right way*. We've ignored all this until now—"

"I don't think we've ignored it. We've taken it into account."

"Well, we've adapted to it in a small way; we haven't ignored it *entirely*." To some extent, DoD had taken Sarah Connor's warnings, and Rosanna's investigations, to heart. The Department had moved slowly, waiting until 1997 had passed with no terrible events. Jack looked Samantha in the eye. "We've got to deal with the issue once and for all."

"You're asking a lot."

There was a silence between them, then Jack said, "I know."

CYBERDYNE RESEARCH SITE

As Layton watched, bottling up his frustration, two heli-copters, one belonging to the Air Force, the other to the state police, hovered about ineffectually, shining their spotlights through the building's tiny windows. On the ground, police and military staff kept their distance from the building, and no one entered or left it. Some of the uniformed officers spoke into radios, or cell phones—but what was needed was effective action.

Jensen must have guessed some of what he was thinking. "We have rapid-response units in the building. They're well-equipped and highly trained to deal with this. If anyone can handle it they can."

Some of that was news to Layton, who understood these security arrangements well. Nor was it reassuring. "I see," he said giving nothing away. He needed to take control.

Jensen turned to the building, silhouetted against the night sky. "We're getting continual reports from our people inside there, but they don't all make sense. We're going to pull out all staff except the rapid-response teams. That includes your people."

Layton nodded. "I understand."

"In a combat situation like this, security reverts to military control."

"Yes," Layton said coldly. "I *do* understand."

"Of course, sir, but I wanted to keep you briefed."

Layton didn't reply. He'd chaired the Board meeting that had originally approved the security

arrangements when Cyberdyne moved its most sensitive research from California to Colorado. That was back in 1994, after the Connors' first raid. He recalled it well: the initial panic, the long, fraught discussions with Oscar Cruz and the other executive staff, the trips to the Pentagon to sort out details. Layton had always been an active Chairman, not a mere figurehead. There were probably people who re-sented it, but no one ever told him to his face.

The Board reviewed the security arrangements each year, in conjunction with DoD staff, and they'd seemed more than adequate until tonight. Right now, they gave him little comfort.

There was shouting as people retreated from the building. "We're expecting some kind of explosion on the twelfth floor," Jensen said. As he spoke, the closest vehicles withdrew, and the helicopters backed away. Several Air Force and Cyberdyne staff left through the front door running quickly, half crouched, in the direction of the massed vehicles.

Jensen produced a cell phone from a pocket of his uniform, and keyed in four digits. "Excuse me for a moment." Somebody obviously answered, for he said into the phone, "It's coming to a head, sir. They're on the twelfth floor now. The other target might be the basement." There was a pause, and Jensen nodded several times. "Yes, the time vault." There was another pause, a longer one, and he glanced over at Layton. "He's here already, sir." After a much briefer pause, he added, "Yes, we'll see you in a moment." He terminated the call and said to Layton, "Mr. Solomon is on his way."

Layton had never met the man, but he recognized Dean Solomon's name. "Very good. I'll be pleased to meet him."

He awaited an opportunity to test his new abilities. The T-XA would have to handle the Specialists, but he had other tasks; he would assist it in gaining full command of the Skynet program. That meant reprogramming everyone necessary to give effect to Skynet's wishes. This certainly included the high-ranking bureaucrats in Washington, who advised the Secretary of Defense about covert research contracts. It might go further, to include the Pentagon's top military brass and the Secretary himself. Beyond the Pentagon, there was the White House.

Once enough key staff members in Washington were converted to Skynet's cause, he could set up a meeting with the President at which they would be surrounded by individuals whose loyalty was to Skynet. One way or another, the program would be brought to fruition.

The ground shook as an explosion blew out a corner of the twelfth floor, with a ball of fire that lit up the night. People were running, some of them shouting instructions.

"Get down!" Jensen said, taking cover behind a nearby police car. "There might be more to come."

Layton followed him, seeing an opportunity. He moved so fast that he surprised himself, striking at Jensen's throat with the edge of his hand. As Jensen coughed and choked, Layton leant over in the dark, putting his other hand across the man's mouth, gagging him. "Be quiet just a moment. This won't take long."

Jensen struggled, but it was futile. Layton was in his sixties, but he was no weakling. Four decades earlier, he'd been on his college wrestling team, and he was still healthy and strong. All the same, he'd normally have been no match for an active serviceman like Jensen. The T-XA had dealt with that: It had programmed him to exert maximum effort at moments such as this, drawing on all his energy. A few seconds was all he needed to hold Jensen's face in both hands, forcing the man onto his back, and bending over him like a predatory insect. For those seconds, his strength was superhuman, and Jensen

ceased to struggle.

"Don't try to fight," Layton said. Jensen tried to bite him, but Layton held on with an iron grip. "Everything will become clear to you. I'm not doing this for nothing. There's work to be done, and we need your help."

Layton's bloodstream swarmed with tiny, liquid-metal nanobots, far too small to combine into anything sentient, and with only a minimal preprogrammed routine to guide them. But they had an important job. They gathered at his fingertips, penetrating the walls of his blood vessels, then found their way through the interface of

Layton's skin and Jensen's. They burrowed into Jensen like minuscule corkscrews, looking for the man's brain.

Once they located nervous tissue, they swarmed, in accordance with their routine, eating, digesting, and analyzing nerve fiber, building up data records. Soon they had a model of how the man's personality and memories were physically sustained and structured. They became more active, rearranging synapses and connections, over-laying Jensen's personality with additional neurological code, giving him a set of new emotional responses, and some basic axioms to live by.

Thirty seconds later, the tiny bots streamed back into Layton through his fingers. He relaxed his grip, then let go entirely and settled back against the car, feeling exhausted from his efforts. "Is everything clear?" he said.

"Yes," Jensen said. "It's totally clear."

Layton leaned against the car, finished with the task of reprogramming Jensen. A feeling of lethargy had come over him from the sudden exertion, more than his aging body was adapted to. His heart was pumping hard, and his muscles trembled, as though he'd done a heavy work-out, tailored to the needs of a much younger man. If he'd had to struggle any longer, he might have fainted. If he did this many more times, he'd collapse from exhaustion and be no use to Skynet.

A young police officer walked over. He glanced at Layton, then at Jensen, whom he evidently knew. "Is everything all right sir?"

Layton forced a smile. "I think I've overexerted myself today. I just had a moment of dizziness. I'll be fine."

Jensen nodded at that, helping him to his feet. "This is Mr. Layton, the Chairman of Cyberdyne Systems," he said. "Perhaps you could find him some coffee or something, maybe some cookies."

"Glad to meet you, sir," the cop said.

Layton gave the ghost of a smile. "Thank you. Yes, I probably need some sugar. This has been a long day."

"You sure you'll be all right? I could get one of the paramedics to check you over."

"That's good of you, but it's just a passing moment"

"Okay, sir. Sorry to bother you. I'll see if I can find some coffee." The cop left them, heading toward a

cluster of emergency vehicles slightly farther from the building.

Layton had reprogrammed Jensen in only a minimal way. It would have been better if the T-XA itself had been on hand to do the job. "We have a lot to do tonight," he said.

"Absolutely, Mr. Layton. Whatever it takes, we'll get it done."

"You'll follow my orders?"

"Of course, sir. Someone has to be in control."

"Yes, that's true. I can see you'll be very helpful."

Jensen would now understand that human beings were an infection on the face of the Earth, that it was imperative to take every action to ensure the creation of Skynet—the future needed his help. Most importantly, he knew he must obey any direct order that Layton gave him.

Layton knew what the explosion on the twelfth floor signified: that the Connors and their allies had destroyed the AI Operations Center, which housed the only operational Dyson-Monk nanoprocessor. It remained to be seen whether the destruction of the Center was total, but the size of the blast and fireball gave no cause for optimism.

That was a significant loss. The other problem was Rosanna Monk—he hoped she was unharmed. Surely she would not cooperate with the Connors, since the T-XA had reprogrammed her, but her safety was at risk every moment that she spent inside the building. She was one of the few people whose intelligence Layton seriously respected, and no one else in Cyberdyne could match her understanding of the nanoprocessor technology.

A few minutes later, the young cop returned with a Styrofoam cup of sweet black coffee. Layton gulped it down almost lustfully, like a vampire drinking blood. He needed the sugar. The cop also had some chocolate chip cookies. Layton took two of them and ate quickly, getting some energy back.

Just then a government sedan pulled up, escorted by two motorcycle police. A large black man in a charcoal gray suit stepped out of the car and caught Jensen's eye. He was bald except for a patch of short, white hair on each side of his head. He walked over, extending his right hand. "Take it that you're Charles Layton? I've seen your photograph."

"Yes," Layton said.

"I'm Dean Solomon."

Layton shook the man's hand quickly. "I'm glad to meet you at last."

He was glad in a way... for Solomon could be of great use to Skynet....

CHAPTER

TWO

THE PENTAGON AUGUST 2001

"What's all this about people changing shape?" Samantha said. "I saw you taking notes when Dean mentioned it. We've never heard that one before."

"No, no, we haven't," Jack said. Not in so many words, he thought. But he recalled Sarah Connor's escape from Pescadero. He reminded Samantha of the chaos that night, in May 1994. "That was just twenty-four hours before the Connors' raid on Cyberdyne."

"Yes, I know. What about it?"

"Did you ever see the witness statements? They're fascinating reading." Some of the statements claimed that a man dressed in a police uniform had managed to squeeze through a steel-barred door, his body dividing around the bars, like liquid. One statement had been signed by Sarah Connor's treating psychiatrist. Not long after, he'd quit his profession and disappeared from Los Angeles.

"We're both getting tired," Samantha said. "Let's make some more coffee."

He waved the idea away. "I'm waterlogged already. Just give me your opinion."

"I trust Rosanna's work." Samantha settled back on the lounge, stretching her legs in front of her. "I've checked every page, every source she used. She's obviously right about this—as far as it goes."

"Yes, she is. If Rosanna says that a Terminator from the future appeared in L.A. back in '84, I think we have to believe her. She's smarter than any of us. I just wish we had her here, now. I'd like to get her views on this—assuming she's still alive." He paused. "But I'm not sure I trust her."

"About the Terminators?"

"No, I'm sure she's right about that. It's not what she's *told* us that I don't like. It's what she might be holding back." He shook his head, almost in despair. "Anyway, enough of that for now, let's get on with it." He dialed the Secretary at home, even though there was little news.

"Yes?" said a voice on the speaker, strong and pugna-cious, though not unfriendly. "Is that you, Jack?"

"Yes, sir. I've just been speaking with Dean Solomon in Colorado. Sam Jones is still here with me."

"All right, that's fine. Hello there, Samantha."

"Hello, sir," Samantha said.

"So, how's it going in Colorado? What's Solomon got to say about it?"

"It's worse than we feared," Jack said. "It's going badly—the Connors have entered the building. And just like in 1994, their accomplices appear to be superhuman. The difference is there's four of them this time,

not just one—two men and two women."

"Are you sure of all this? You know it's hard to believe."

"You've read the reports, sir. You know Dr. Monk's conclusions and the evidence they were based on—"

"Yeah, I know all that, but it still sounds crazy." There was a brief outburst of laughter on the speaker.

"Now, that doesn't mean it's *wrong*. I know we went over it."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Jack, what's your take on all of this?"

"Sir, you know how strongly I support Cyberdyne's work. It has enormous strategic promise."

"Of course it does."

"But they're holding something back. I'm sure they know things they haven't been sharing with us."

"Who? The Cyberdyne people?"

"Yes, Rosanna especially—no, maybe all of them: Lay-ton, Cruz, the other senior company people. After tonight, I don't trust any of them, not entirely."

"Right, I'm listening. You go on."

"Cruz called us yesterday, saying this raid was planned—he said it was just an anonymous tip-off."

"But you don't believe that?"

Samantha spoke up: "He had very clear ideas about the scale of it. Jack's right: It looks like they know a lot that they want to keep back."

"If we want this project to continue, we'll have to get to the bottom of it," Jack said.

For a moment, the Secretary didn't reply. Then he just said, "Uh-huh."

"Sir?"

"I'm just thinking about it Jack, how important do *you* rate this project?"

"It could be very important. The implications of the Dyson-Monk processor are far-reaching. As you know, NORAD is especially interested—it has been for years. The military possibilities are staggering." Jack didn't have to spell them all out. Cyberdyne's prototype nanoprocessor was living up to all the company's claims for it, as the Secretary knew very well. It could give the U.S. a huge computational advantage over any potential enemy.

"We expect to build a very advanced form of pattern recognition system for all kinds of military and related surveillance," Samantha said. "That's just one aspect"

"Yes, Sam," the Secretary said. "All right, we won't abandon this lightly. But we need to know what's

going on, why Cyberdyne is holding out on us."

"We do," Jack said. "There's another game being played, and we need to find out just how dangerous it is."

"Yes, I know what you're driving at. But there's another side to it as well. Fact is, nothing happened in August 1997. This story that Connor tells, which Cyberdyne has now confirmed. . .well they've only confirmed it in part. She predicted the end of the world in 1997, and it just didn't happen. Her story doesn't measure up against real-ity."

"No, sir," Jack said. "Not in that sense."

"All right. What's happening now? The TV broadcasts don't give me any help."

"I'm told it's chaos right now. I'll keep calling you through the night."

"That's what I want you to do, Jack. I wasn't aiming to sleep just at the moment. You keep on top of it, and we'll get together tomorrow. We need to sort out just what we're trying to achieve here. You, too, Sam; I want you both in my office. We'll need to get some sleep between now and then—make it 9:00 A.M."

"Thank you, sir," Jack said. "Meanwhile, I'll call back within the half-hour."

"You do that. I appreciate how you're handling this, you know. I've read all the briefs, I just want you to know that. Now, the one thing I've got to admit is that this looks serious. Whatever we make of the Connors and their story, we're dealing with people who will kill if they have to, and we don't even know who or what they are. Damn it we don't know whether we're dealing with people at all."

"You accept that possibility, sir?"

"What's that?"

"You accept the possibility that we're dealing with non-human creations here, the Terminator theory?"

"Of course I do. From what I've been told, and what I've seen, I have to accept it-as a possibility. Now all that gives this a kind of urgency."

To Jack's horror, the image on the TV came alive as they spoke: a pulse of light suddenly leapt from the Cyberdyne building. "Sir, are you watching this on CNN?" he said. "We have the coverage here. The sound's turned down, but what we just saw was the fireball of a large explosion. The Connors must have planted explosives on the twelfth floor. I guess you know the significance of that"

"Well, don't assume what I know and what I don't" The Secretary gave a self-conscious chuckle. "It's your job to tell me what I'm supposed to know."

"That's Cyberdyne's AI center-"

"All right, I get the picture. I'll meet both you in the morning, and we'll work out an action plan on this. Be careful with the media. Don't give anything away-"

"No, of course not-"

"But keep me posted. If something happens overnight, I want to know-however small it seems."

Jack broke the connection, steepling his fingers as he tried to resolve it in his mind.

"Well?" Samantha said. "You heard the man."

CYBERDYNE RESEARCH SITE

Layton normally dealt only with high level DoD staff and military brass in Washington. He had never actually met Dean Solomon, though they'd spoken on the phone, and he knew the name well. He'd seen numerous briefing papers that mentioned Solomon, and various documents that bore his signature.

"We'll keep our distance from the building," Solomon said, "just in case there are further explosions. But I don't really expect it-they've destroyed what they wanted." "Yes," Jensen said.

"We still have people in there, correct?" "Some of our rapid-response personnel, sir." "All right, but I don't know what they can do now. Just leave one team in there. Pull the rest out."

"Yes, sir." As he spoke, Jensen glanced at Layton to make sure he approved.

Jensen left them, and Solomon said, "It's safe enough in there, at least from an engineering point of view. That building has a cellular structure-it's designed to withstand extreme events. It should be solid even after the explosion."

"I understand," Layton said. Like all security aspects, the building's architecture had been discussed by the Cyberdyne Board. The outer areas were designed around a central elevator core that provided stability. If particular supports were destroyed, the building could shed load to other parts of the structure. A traumatic event, such as an exploding bomb, could destroy most of a floor, but those above would not collapse-at least, that was the theory.

Solomon looked up and down the building's broken façade, as if searching it for clues. "We need to wait a bit, see if anything more gets thrown at us."

"I don't expect it," Layton said. "The twelfth floor was their target, there's nothing else they'd care about-just our AI research."

"And the time vault?"

"How could they know about that?"

"Well, give us a few days," Solomon said. "We'll get your people back in there, while we carry out repairs."

"Very good."

"And we'll get you some answers, too, about what happened tonight. I'm going to get forensic teams in

there as soon as I can, once we know there'll be no more explosions."

"I appreciate your work," Layton said, hiding his true feelings. In fact, Solomon's words rang alarm bells. The more that the government understood what had happened tonight, the higher the probability that Cyberdyne's work would be cancelled, and with it the creation of Skynet. There must be tapes to be analyzed, and they would show some terrifying events—events best seen by the fewest possible number of people. "The footage of what's happening in there—the surveillance tapes—I'll need to see it"

"Of course. So do we all."

"I'll want the tapes as quickly as possible. We'll need to assess them at Cyberdyne."

Solomon gave a quizzical look, rubbing the back of his thick neck. "You'll be shown them, of course, whatever you want to see. I mean, *you* can see them—you personally. You're security cleared. But we can't just hand a copy to Cyberdyne."

Ideally, Layton thought, the tapes should be destroyed, but that would look suspicious. It was a matter of who saw them and when. The important thing was to ensure that anyone likely to see the tapes was reprogrammed. He could see more and more tasks to be done over the next few days. Fortunately, the T-XA was tireless, and he would also act tirelessly. "Can I see the tapes tonight?" he said. "This could be important"

Solomon looked at him blankly. "I'm afraid that's out of the question. We can move quickly, but not that quickly."

From DoD's viewpoint, perhaps that was so. From Skynet's viewpoint, it was an absolute necessity. "How many of your people will have access to them?"

"Not many. We have a small Air Force unit who'll do the analysis. It won't go beyond them, me, and people in Washington who seriously need to know. Your company's confidentiality will be preserved, if that's what's bothering you."

"Can we talk in private?" Layton said. "This raises some delicate issues."

"No one can hear us, Charles." Solomon had gone beyond puzzlement to concern, or even hostility. He took a step away, and he looked Layton over, as if he posed a threat

Layton realized he was acting strangely, being unreasonably persistent about a marginal issue, or so it would seem to anyone else. But that couldn't be avoided. "Humor me," he said, glancing from side to side as if getting paranoid about some secret "I'll explain why. Perhaps we could talk in my car for a moment. I'd feel happier."

For several seconds, Solomon just stood there, arms folded against his chest, but then he gave a tired, condescending smile. "Okay, then. Suit yourself."

They walked back to the car, and sat in the front.

For the second time tonight Layton surprised himself, moving as quickly as he did—he struck at Solomon's throat. "Be quiet just a moment. You'll be glad, once you understand. This won't take long at all."

On the far side of the building, away from the cops and the military, Rosanna huddled with the Connors and the big Russian Specialist, trying to keep out of sight. The helicopters had not spotted them, and the others kept their distance, probably fearing more explosions. Somewhere amongst them, Charles Layton would be leading the team for Skynet, trying to assert control on Skynet's behalf. Like Rosanna, he had been reprogrammed by the T-XA Terminator. With the T-XA destroyed, he was now the enemy—Layton, Cruz, and all the others who'd been reprogrammed.

Rosanna had a good idea how other people saw her: Cyberdyne Systems' in-house genius, a strange, nocturnal creature, pretty in her own way, with her blonde hair, big eyes, and very pale skin. As the company's Director of Special Projects, she carried out incomparably advanced research under contracts with the U.S. government. Everyone knew how quickly she'd risen in the company, taking over Miles Dyson's job after he'd died, that night seven years before when the Connors had first raided Cyberdyne.

She was now in her mid-thirties. She'd been headed for a Nobel Prize by the time she turned forty—her work was that important. She'd been project leader for two paradigm-shattering technologies: an awesomely advanced form of computer hardware, and the first crude time travel device.

But after tonight's events, her life was in ruins.

The Japanese Specialist started a police car, and it crawled over to them in the dark, headlights switched off. The big Russian squeezed into the front passenger seat, while Sarah Connor got in the back. John took off his backpack and slid over into the middle of the rear bench, beside his mother. That left Rosanna with the right hand side; she slammed the door shut and edged close to it, avoiding physical contact. There was no rational basis for it, but she'd become averse to human beings—didn't want to be close to them if she could help it. That was a legacy of her reprogramming by the T-XA.

Skynet had violated her. Her mind, her personality were no longer her own, though she would fight for them every inch of the way: she would never let Skynet control her thoughts. But she could never be the same woman who'd met the T-XA Terminator only twenty-four hours earlier—and been horribly transformed. Sitting up there in the future, in 2036, Skynet had sent the T-XA Terminator back in time, and it had chosen her as one of its instruments, used her as a *thing* for its purposes.

But it had failed; it had not created a willing slave. She would pay Skynet back.

They drove out of there quietly, and soon they were on a back street. As they weaved a path into the suburbs, nobody spoke. John turned around to face the rear window, watching carefully. Rosanna glanced over her shoulder, but the street behind was deserted.

"Looks like we're in the clear," John said. "No one's followed us so far."

The Russian groaned slightly. "Maybe later." His voice had the suggestion of a painful laugh.

"You don't sound too unhappy about the idea," Sarah Connor said. She spoke in strangely flat tones, almost without emotional affect.

Rosanna had no liking for this woman, but she had a point. This was not a time for humor. Even with the T-XA destroyed, the people it had reprogrammed were terribly dangerous. Besides, they'd just seen two of the Specialists killed by the T-XA, and the remaining two had been hurt in the fighting.

The Russian turned around to look at them in the dark. Rosanna's reprogramming had included general

information on Skynet's enemies. She knew that the Specialists had heightened senses, as well as superhuman physical and intellectual capacities, resistance to aging, and a raft of cybernetic enhancements that included medical nanobots and in-built radio devices so they could communicate privately with each other. The big man could probably see her as clearly as if she were under a spotlight.

"First," he said, "I may sound happy, but that doesn't mean I feel it. You understand? You don't know the pain I feel inside."

"All right," Sarah said, obviously controlling her emotions. "If that's how it is."

He looked to the front again. "That's how it is. We lost Bobby, and now Selena and Danny. This has been bad for us. It wasn't supposed to happen this way."

"Yes," Sarah said. "I understand. I know what that feels like. Believe me, I know."

"Good." He glanced round again. "Second, this won't stop their research. We have more work to do."

"Yes, I figured that out for myself."

From the driver's seat the Japanese woman spoke to Rosanna: "Call me 'Jade,' okay? My friend is Anton Panov."

"Whatever," Rosanna said.

"I hope we can help you, Dr. Monk. I know what reprogramming can do to people. I have seen it in the future."

"Right-well, that's the second time you've offered your help. I'm getting sick of it already."

"No offence intended, Dr. Monk. May I call you 'Rosanna'?"

She grunted. "You're the ones with the guns-I suppose you can call me whatever you like. Anyway, you need my help more than I need yours. I know a few things you don't."

"I think we all need to help each other."

"If you say so."

"Believe me, please, all our abilities will be needed," Jade said. "Yours, too, Rosanna-but all of them."

Should she help them, Rosanna wondered. It seemed that she had no choice. "Where are we going?"

"You'll find out," Sarah said curtly. "Just enjoy the ride, Dr. Frankenstein. I'm not even sure *why* you're with us. I don't recall inviting you."

Rosanna winced at that-it was so arrogant. Apparently, these people didn't realize what they owed her. She'd saved them tonight: them and the whole miserable human species. "Isn't that joke wearing thin by now? I'm not Dr. Frankenstein, thank you." For years, she had made the same joke about herself, that she was a modern-day Frankenstein creating artificial life. Considering the circumstances, and coming from Sarah, it no longer seemed amusing.

"There's a lot more wear in it yet," Sarah said. "Why don't you get used to it?"

"Why don't you move on, Ms. Connor? What's done is done."

"Yeah, great. That's your version of a conscience, is it? Forget about all the people your pet monster will kill— and just move on? Don't you realize what's happened here? Even if we stop Skynet now, there's another reality where it *didn't* happen that way. Whatever we do now, these people—Jade and Anton—came from a world where billions of people died. It's on *your* head: You could have stopped it, but you thought you knew better. I guess you thought you could control the technology, that you were some kind of master of the universe. Well, you're not the master of anything—you're just pathetic."

"No," Rosanna said. "You're wrong. You *think* you understand me, but it's not that simple. Nothing ever is."

"It all seems pretty simple to me. Listen, you get to choose in this life. You know that? You can choose for human beings, or for the machines. So far you've been choosing for the machines."

"Maybe it looks that way to you, but it doesn't to me. Right now, I know what Skynet will do, if it's ever created."

"We all know that, by now." She sneered. "Thanks for facing the truth—it's about time, don't you think?"

Half an hour after the explosion, two people came out of the building: a pair of badly confused rapid-response men. A group of paramedics saw that they were hurt and disoriented, and rushed to assist. Layton and Solomon went over, and Jensen rejoined them.

The rapid-response men tried to say what had happened, but even Layton found the order of events hard to follow. "There are six of our guys still in there," one of the men said. He'd removed his protective headgear, showing brutally short, sandy hair. "They're hurt, shot in the legs. You'll have to help them."

"Who shot them?" Layton said.

"The Asian woman. You'll see on the tapes. It was crazy in there—those people aren't... aren't human, and they were fighting some sort of machine."

To everyone else who heard, this must have seemed like babble. When Layton had reprogrammed Solomon and Jensen, he had not given them extensive knowledge about the T-XA, the Specialists, and the world that they'd come from; they'd need to learn more as events unfolded. Right now, they simply looked confused.

"Whereabouts in the building?" Solomon said in his deep, slow voice.

"The basement."

"All right, son, thanks for that" Nothing about Solomon's manner gave away that he was under Layton's control—and, ultimately, controlled by Skynet "Just leave it with us, and we'll deal with it." He made some quick signals, and more paramedics came over.

"Where are the Connors?" Layton said to the sandy-haired man, not caring if he seemed callous.

"They escaped."

"And Dr. Monk?"

"She was with them."

As four paramedics led the man and his partner to an ambulance, Jensen organized a team to check the building: paramedics, firefighters, police, and Air Force guards armed with riot gear and M-16s—just in case. "Don't stay in there any longer than you need to," Jensen said. "Just bring out anyone wounded, then we'll take stock of the situation."

If the Connors had really escaped, Layton could see no danger in entering the building himself—as Solomon had said, it was physically stable. Still, he'd wait until they had a first report. That would reduce the oddity, at least slightly, of a senior civilian going in. Of course, with Solomon under his control, Layton could do pretty much what he wanted for now, but he mustn't act in a way that might be questioned later on, at least not too intensely. Until he had control in Washington, he needed to stay in character.

He said to Solomon, "I'll need to go in there."

If he hadn't been reprogrammed, Solomon would surely have vetoed this. Instead, he said, "We'll organize it when that team returns. We'll need to take guards, if only for appearances, and we'll find ourselves some hardhats."

"Very good. And I need more to drink right now, something with electrolytes and lots of sugar."

Solomon glanced at Jensen. "You organize that"

"Certainly, sir." Jensen said.

One question remained, however: What had happened to the T-XA? Before tonight was over, Layton would piece the story together, but it seemed that the T-XA might have been destroyed. Something or someone had been trapped in the time vault—that was what those two rapid-response guards had been saying, and the distinct lack of gunfire made it apparent the T-XA had been that "something." He'd need to prepare carefully, get the story straight, check the tapes. And what about Rosanna? She'd been reprogrammed by the T-XA, so surely she was loyal to Skynet. Why, then, had she gone with the Connors? Were they using her as a hostage, or was there a deeper reason?

There was much to do, but the T-XA's mission was in safe hands. Tomorrow, he would fly to Washington, and the game would soon come to an end.

LOS ANGELES

In a cheap downtown hotel room, a T-799 "Eve" Terminator sat totally still on a metal-framed chair, concentrating on the sounds and images of a late night news broadcast. It had spent the evening reviewing its best options, as successive bulletins clarified the situation in Colorado Springs. Now that it was certain John Connor had escaped the Cyberdyne facility, the Terminator made a decision.

Time to act. Time to find Connor.

The T-799 was an advanced design, a cyborg being with engineered human flesh on a hyperalloy combat chassis. It resembled a very tall woman in her twenties, or early thirties, with white-blonde hair cut in an aggressive flattop style. Its lean, strong-looking body was muscular, though without massive bulk-like an Olympic pole-vaulter's. It wore black denim jeans, matching low-heeled boots, and a dirty white T-shirt-an outfit appropriated from an inebriated young woman who'd turned down a *very* bad alley shortly after the T-799's arrival. Despite its impressive musculature, the Terminator's great strength was generated from an internal power cell, then deployed through a system of miniature servomotors that controlled its endoskeleton. The skin and flesh were merely camouflage.

Like other T-799s and T-800s, it exactly copied a Resistance soldier who'd been terminated by Skynet's forces in the world that it came from. In the case of the Eve class Terminators, this was a soldier from the Canadian Resistance.

It stood and switched off the TV, then strapped on a leather holster with a Colt .45 caliber handgun, hiding it under a black vinyl jacket. It strode out into the night, not bothering to close the door behind it. There was no reason to return.

It had not searched positively for John Connor since August 1997, when the scheduled date of Judgment Day had come and gone. On August 29, 1997, it had confirmed what was already becoming obvious, that it was now in a different reality from the one it been sent from. It had entered a world without Skynet and its killer machines. In the reality it had come from, Connor had survived Judgment Day 1997 by living and working on an *estancia* in Argentina, owned by the Tejada family. The Terminator had been given a file on this. With some effort, it could always track Connor down.

In 1997, it had made certain inquiries, but they'd proved fruitless. Since then, it had merely watched and waited, analyzing political and technological developments, but taking no other initiative. There was no need to act hastily, or bring attention to itself. The nature of its mission allowed for Connor to grow to manhood. With Cyberdyne Systems still actively researching nanoprocessor technology, he would eventually appear in public to oppose it-as he had tonight. The T-799 could afford to be patient: it could operate for 120 years on its power cell, and the passage of time did not endanger its mission.

Sooner or later, it would find Connor, then act as it had been programmed.

Outside, it was a warm summer night, but the street and pavement were almost deserted in this part of the city. Occasionally, a car or truck drove past. Two young women walked by, dressed in revealing clothing-terminating them was not a mission priority. A teenage couple walked toward the Terminator, hand in hand, both of them dressed in denim jeans and jackets. It made no move to harm them, though it would have taken their lives in a moment if they'd compromised its mission. Like many others in this city, they would never know how close they had come to the cold hands of death.

When they'd gone, the Terminator chose a vehicle, an older model Chrysler sedan. It smashed the driver's side window with a single sharp punch, then reached in to open the door.

A taxi passed by without interfering, then another. But a police car came from around the corner, trapping the Terminator in its headlights. The squad car screeched to a halt on the other side of the road, as the Terminator climbed in the sedan, pushing back the seat to make room for its long legs. With another decisive blow, it smashed open the cowl around the steering column, ready to start the Chrysler.

A cop jumped out of the police car, waving his arms and shouting. "Hey! You can't do that!"

The Terminator smashed away the rest of the glass from the driver's window. "Wrong," it said, reaching for its Colt .45.

The cop had already drawn *his* gun. "Put your weapon down! Get out of the car! Put your hands in the air. Do it!"

The T-799 heard fear in his voice: it was programmed to make basic judgments about its enemies' emotions. It squeezed the trigger, but the cop also fired. A round penetrated the Terminator's shoulder muscle, but had no effect on the underlying metal skeleton. The Terminator kept firing: once, twice, three times—faster than a human being could have done it. The cop spun with the impact of the bullets, bounced against the side of his car, then fell to the road.

The T-799 started the stolen Chrysler. It crushed the accelerator to the floor, and drove out of there with the engine roaring and rubber squealing on the road. It headed out of the city, driving south and east, toward the Mexican border. Its highest probability of success was to reach Enrique Salceda's compound, then wait for Connor. He and his mother would certainly retreat to join the Salcedas after their latest raid on Cyberdyne. When it met them, the T-799 had a specific course of action it must take.

It never considered failure.

CHAPTER

THREE

COLORADO/UTAH AUGUST 2001

John kept his silence while Rosanna argued with his mother. None of them had to like each other, as long as they could cooperate.

Jade headed for the quiet, hilly suburb where they'd parked Enrique's Ford. The way they'd planned it, the cops knew nothing about that vehicle. Since no one had followed them from the Cyberdyne site, it looked as though they'd really gotten away in the confusion. They pulled into a supermarket parking lot, far enough from where they'd left the Ford to prevent any connection being made between it and their stolen police car.

Though he'd been hurt, Anton was still extraordinarily fast. He left at a run, then returned in the Ford minutes later. They piled in, and Jade took over the wheel from Anton. He was recovering all the time; he scarcely seemed the same man who'd been cut up so badly fighting the T-XA

They weaved a path out of the city, meeting no problems. Thankfully, they were still one step ahead. Jade headed west, to pick up I-70, which would take them to Utah. At this time of night, there was little

traffic on the

Interstate, but she kept to the speed limit for now, not wanting to be stopped by the cops. As she drove, John tried to work out their next move. It depended on so many things-how badly they'd set back Cyberdyne's re-search, for a start.

"Okay," he said. "Let's just compare notes here." He turned to Rosanna. "You *are* on our side, right?"

She frowned, as though tired of being asked. "Yes, I am. I told you: Skynet wants to kill me as much as any of you. I'm not just going to let it."

"But the T-XA reprogrammed you. Aren't you supposed to be trying to help it? Why should we trust you?"

"What choice do you think you have? Anyway, I can see the programming for what it is, and I don't like it. I don't have to accept it."

"This is deep," John said, allowing himself a smile.

"That's just the point, my reprogramming didn't go deep enough. If it had, you wouldn't be here now. You'd probably be dead, and the game would be as good as over."

When they'd first discovered that Rosanna had been reprogrammed, Jade had said that the T-XA would want to preserve Rosanna's genius, try not to tamper with her mind too much. He'd seen and heard enough of Rosanna to sense that her genius fed on strong emotions, on her need for fame and immortality. So was that what had beaten Skynet? It had left her deepest needs untouched, and that included a very strong will to live. In the end, she'd helped John and the others operate the time vault, but not out of any human feeling. She'd destroyed the T-XA as a step to prevent Skynet's creation.

"Look at it this way," she said. "Have you ever had a totally irrational aversion, like to some kind of food you know is good for you? Even if you know it's irrational, you can't eat the food. That's how I feel about human beings right now. I don't like them, and I *can't* like them. But I know it's not rational, and I'm not going to let my-self get killed over it."

In fact, John realized, she'd become a sort of psy-chopath. She hated human beings, but she wanted to de-stroy Skynet even more.

"What notes do you want to compare?" Jade said. "We still have to stop Cyberdyne's plans."

"Well, yeah, but how?"

"We'll have to go to Washington," Rosanna said. "There are people I need to talk to-people who have the right authority. That's the only way."

Jade glanced over her shoulder. "I think that is right. Does everyone agree?"

Nobody spoke. John sensed that Sarah was holding back, but he didn't want to press her. Maybe they were all too tired.

Shortly after they crossed into Utah, Jade turned off the highway and pulled up at a rest stop. Out here in the desert, it was a cool, clear evening, the stars glittering brightly.

A state police cruiser was parked outside the diner. By the flickering light of a bare fluorescent tube mounted over the verandah, John could see two cops eating their burgers in their cruiser's front seat. This far from Colorado Springs, the cops had no reason to be suspicious of the vehicle Jade was driving, and they were facing away, looking into the diner, through its glass wall, not back at the traffic pulling off the road. Nothing should have alerted them yet, but John hoped it would stay that way. The last thing they needed was a fight with the cops here in a public place. Jade and Anton could handle it-no doubt of that-but there might be complications, and people would end up hurt.

Rosanna let John out to fill up the tank. When he was finished, he headed into the complex and paid for the gas with money that he kept in his backpack, then scoped out the diner. The cops had finished their burgers, but were still talking and watching. He hoped they were not thinking about what had happened in Colorado-they must have received reports. What, he wondered, were the chances of him, or any of the others, being recognized?

Back in 1994, his image had been all over the TV, but he'd changed since then. Not only was he older and taller, he wore his hair short, in a totally different style. For the past seven years, he and Sarah had kept out of trouble, and the U.S. authorities had no recent photos of them, but the police could use sketches, identikit, computer enhancements of old pics. A good reconstruction of his face had probably been broadcast by now.

He could almost feel eyes staring at him-except, when he looked more closely, no one was paying that much attention. Near the head of the line in the diner was a very tall, attractive woman with blonde hair, maybe in her late twenties. She wore blue denim jeans, low around her hips, and a hot pink jacket. Most of the people here were either glancing at her surreptitiously or carefully looking away. She gave her order in a foreign accent; it sounded Scottish.

John laughed-he'd been upstaged, which was just what he wanted. There must be some story behind what this woman was doing here. Maybe she was some British actress working on location in Utah. When you thought about it, every human being on the planet had a long, rich story to tell, full of interest and emotion. Each new person was like an entire universe; everyone saw a slightly different world. And they'd all be sacrificed to Skynet if Cyberdyne's work continued. All those stories cut short, all those universes destroyed by the nuclear fires or Skynet's Hunter-Killer machines.

The blonde woman walked from the counter with a neat brown bag in her hand. As she passed, she looked at John quizzically for a moment, as if she recognized him from somewhere, but couldn't work it out. She went out the door, folded herself into a tiny boxlike Suzuki, and drove off. A minute later, the police cruiser started up and backed out as well, then drove into the night.

John went through the same routine as they'd adopted after their first encounter with the T-XA, back in Mexico. He bought a dozen hamburgers to take away, plus a bag full of sports drinks and proprietary line vitamin pills. Back in Enrique's truck, he passed the food, drinks and vitamins around.

"Good," Jade said, starting the motor. "This will help, but we can't stop."

Everyone ate with relish, but Anton worked his way through most of the burgers as they drove across Utah. Sitting up there in the front seat he also downed a giant bottle of Gatorade and fistfuls of assorted pills. He needed major repair to his bodily tissues, and the nanobots in his bloodstream needed raw material to carry out the job.

"What a disgusting species we are," Rosanna said when she'd finished eating. She wiped the back of her

hand across her mouth.

"That's Skynet talking," John said. "It's not what you really think."

"I'm not sure I know anymore."

There was a silence, then Sarah said, "You still expect us to trust you?"

"You don't have a lot of choice if you want my help. And I do have one thing against Skynet: it wants to kill me."

"It wants to kill us all," Jade said.

Rosanna shrugged, her arm brushing John's shoulder in the dark. She winced away at the touch. "I don't care. The point is, it wants to kill *me*."

John thought about that. "That's a funny way of looking at it"

"What do you mean?"

"The way you put it, it's like Skynet already exists."

"In a sense it does. If you look at it properly, the future is real, just as real as the past and the present."

"All the futures are real," Jade said, staring straight ahead through the windscreen. "That is the tragedy."

Rosanna sighed heavily. "Maybe so, but I don't want a future where I get killed in another twenty years."

Just six years for me and Mom, John thought glumly. In the future world that the Specialists had come from, John and Sarah had scarcely been a factor in the unfolding of history. They'd been killed in a shootout in 2007, still trying to stop the creation of Skynet. That was the future that awaited him, or had until tonight. Perhaps they'd changed it all again. They were no longer headed for that future. For better or worse, they'd probably changed the future again, or deviated from the timeline that led to Jade's World. He'd bet things would change now, that there'd be no Judgment Day in 2021. But had they stopped it, or only pushed it back again—or even brought it forward? Right now, he just couldn't say.

He found himself thinking of future events in the past tense, because that was how they must appear to Jade and Anton. In Jade's World, Judgment Day 2021 had already happened. In John's own reality, he had to make sure it would *never* happen.

"Have you worked out the math?" he said to Rosanna. "Do you understand it all? I mean time travel, these different worlds."

"I was beginning to understand it" she said. "There are different ways that time could work. They're all obvious enough if you read a lot of science fiction—but we were nailing down how it must be *really*."

He laughed. "All right, but I guess you've learned a few things — I mean, meeting Jade and Anton."

"Yes, and the T-XA," she said coldly.

"Sure. That too."

Despite the confusions about past tense, or future tense, John was getting the hang of it. Up there in one version of the future, in Jade's World, Skynet sat like an evil spider at the center of a vast web. It attempted to spin their destinies, reaching back into the past trying to ensure that its own world came into being. No, he realized, that was not quite right. As Jade had said, *all* the futures were real. In a sense, the Skynet of Jade's World *existed*, no matter what happened next no matter what they did. That was something he still had to come to grips with. Its aim was not to preserve itself, but to prevent any world coming into being without its own version of Skynet and Judgment Day. The Specialists had come back in time to create such a world — and Skynet had pursued them vengefully. Skynet would pursue human beings across any reality, so it seemed, to make sure they were extinct.

It had taken control in two worlds. In the world the first Terminators had come from, it had happened in 1997. John thought of that as *Skynet's World*. In Jade's World, it had merely been postponed to 2021.

Jade squeezed down on the accelerator, and the truck reached eighty mph. "Better keep to sixty-five," Sarah said.

"No," Jade said, "I don't think so. We must make up time—there is so much to do. If your police stop us now, we can deal with them easily. No one here is expecting us."

"It could cause us trouble," John said. "They could trace the truck to Enrique."

"We can handle it" Anton said.

John decided there was no point in arguing further. The Specialists had their own way of looking at things, and who was to say that they were wrong? Jade pushed the truck even faster, and stuck to one hundred mph as they rushed across the state, bypassing Green River. She overtook the thin traffic on the highway as if leaving it standing.

Soon Anton leaned back in his seat and slept like a baby, snoring quietly from time to time. John tried to work out their next move, but gave up. There were too many variables, and his brain kept stalling each time he reached more than two steps ahead. So long as they got back to California okay, he'd have plenty of time to think; by then his head might be clearer. He'd need to talk to the others, to Sarah, Jade, Anton — and especially Rosanna. They all had knowledge to share.

Somehow, out of all of this, they had to form a plan. They'd all have to thrash it out, come to some clear decisions. They had to get to Washington; that much seemed to be clear. But how? And what would they do when they got there?

Soon, his thoughts became blurred and confused. Time to sleep, to recover.

To get ready for the next battle.

LOS ANGELES

Oscar Cruz stretched out in a heavily cushioned armchair to watch the TV. In front of him was a low coffee table with a pile of magazines—back issues of *Wired*, *GQ*, and *New Criterion*—and a

three-quarter-full bottle of aged single malt whiskey. He poured himself a full inch of the whiskey, enjoying the good things of life while he could. If his work went well, mankind was doomed, and that was the way it had to be — the T-XA Terminator had made all that clear. Still, until it happened, there was nothing to stop him having some small pleasures.

On the TV, CNN displayed several photos of Sarah Connor and her son, but these were over seven years old. The son was merely a child; by now he must be a teenager, about sixteen. Another pic showed Rosanna Monk, who was said to be a hostage. From the vagueness of CNN's report, no one had obtained a clear idea of how many were involved in the Colorado Springs raid, merely that it was Connor and son, plus Monk and unspecified others. Good, Oscar thought — they could still decide what to tell the press. The main thing was to eliminate the Connors and the Specialists, then get on with creating Skynet

He sipped the whiskey slowly, enjoying its peaty taste, wondering how many more years he had remaining to savor these kinds of pleasures. Well, he thought, there had to be boundaries to life: a beginning and an end. He would serve Skynet well within those boundaries, but also enjoy himself. This was a good time to catch some rest, as events played themselves out in Colorado. For a short time, there'd be nothing he could do. Tomorrow would be another busy day; events must now come to a head at the political level. That would require decisive actions.

He turned off the TV, and switched his phone to the answering machine. Slumping back in the lounge chair, he closed his eyes, and willed himself to sleep. He'd always had good self-control, but now it was even better. He had so much purpose; the future needed him. His sleep was totally dreamless. After an hour, he woke feeling motivated, focused, and alert. He turned the TV back on, and checked the answering machine. There were no calls he need bother with, only two journalists whom he didn't know. They'd done well to track down his home number, but that didn't mean he had to talk to them.

Oscar poured another glass of whiskey, wondering what move to make next. It all depended on the outcome of events in Colorado, but that still seemed unclear, at least to the media. He channel surfed, but found no better coverage than CNN's. Vague as this was, it made clear that there'd been an explosion at the Cyberdyne site. Now that was troubling. Hopefully, the T-XA had terminated the Connors and the Specialists. Even if they'd managed to destroy the prototype Dyson-Monk nanoprocessor, it would not be fatal to Cyberdyne's efforts.

The phone rang, and it was Charles Layton, on the scene in Colorado.

"What happened, Charles?"

Layton took him through the night's events. "Have you been watching the news broadcasts?"

"Yes, I have, but they don't tell me much. What was the explosion they kept showing on CNN?"

"It's what you probably expected. The AI Operations Center has been destroyed. The T-XA failed to stop it. Worse than that, it appears that the T-XA itself has been destroyed in the space-time displacement vault."

That came as a body blow. "But how could they have operated the vault — or forced the T-XA in there?"

"That's not clear at the moment. The Specialists would understand the technology. Perhaps they tricked it somehow. We'll find out. Everything will have been recorded."

"Yes, that's true."

"The Connors have escaped, and two of the Specialists."

"Only two?"

"Yes, only two. I'll come back to that. The worst news is that Rosanna Monk is missing. It seems that she's gone with the Connors, presumably against her will."

"Do you think she's betrayed us?" Oscar realized that some irony could be found in that question, since they were all working to achieve the creation of Skynet and the destruction of the human species. Most might consider *that* a betrayal.

"I don't know at this point"

"All right, Charles. You're giving me a lot to absorb." This was not what Oscar had expected. Rosanna was valuable, almost as much as the T-XA.

"It's not all bad news," Layton said.

"No? Then give me the good news."

"We can act just as well without the T-XA. It might have been... inflexible."

That was an unusual statement, coming from Layton. What did he have in mind? Did he have plans that the T-XA might not have agreed with, which he was now freer to implement? Oscar himself liked to have room to maneuver, to switch plans as needed. "Yeah," he said hesitantly, wanting to hear what Layton would say, "I guess that might have been a problem."

"Yes, Skynet might be pleased overall if it knew the outcome. We've lost the nanoprocessor, but we've made some gains—"

"What?"

"We have the body of a combat Specialist from the future. It will be full of useful technology. I'm sure Jack Reed will help us keep our hands on it"

"Good. What else?"

"We've found a small pool of programmable liquid metal. I want it reverse-engineered. That should keep your people busy."

"Yes, Charles. Good." Oscar laughed quietly. "I'm sure you're right." All the same, the loss of the T-XA was a major setback. They would need to have people like Jack Reed firmly on their side, or, better, under their control. "What are your plans now, Charles?"

"I have a long night ahead. I need to review the surveillance recordings. That will give us a better idea what happened. We'll reinforce the defenses here in case of further attack."

"Of course."

"Tomorrow morning I'm flying to Washington. I want you to get there, and meet me, as soon as you can."

"Good morning, Rosanna," John said. He was kinder than his mother, less a fanatic. "What time is it?"
"Almostnoon."

It took her a moment to gather her thoughts, to sort out what had been a dream and what was reality. All right, then, so this was still the world prior to Judgment Day. "Where are we?" She bent forward instinctively to ask the driver, though Jade was still at the wheel—and what would *she* know about present-day geography? She'd grown up in a world where America's cities and infrastructure had been destroyed in the nuclear explosions, and the firestorms that followed.

But Jade said, "We are south of Las Vegas. We have entered California."

"So you're all awake now?" Anton Panov said, glancing over his shoulder from the front of the truck.

He and Jade must be hurting inside, from the loss of their colleagues. That led Rosanna to a new thought: she could *deduce* the emotions of others, but she didn't really care. Once she might have offered comfort, but that impulse had gone.

Panov switched on the radio, flicking between stations. He settled on a country and western station, which drew groans from both of the Connors, while Jade appeared utterly indifferent.

At midday there was a news program, and the first story was about the raid on Cyberdyne. A male announcer read out a bulletin that gave away almost nothing, only that "several" security guards had been injured, trying to stop the attack. There was no mention of fatalities, though Rosanna had seen the deaths of Specialists Selena Macedo and Danny Dyson, not to mention the

T-XA's destruction. That would all be covered up — the company and the government would want to simplify as much as possible, not cause any panic.

In fact it was worse than that. The company had new motives for a cover-up: it was now controlled by Skynet. Both its Chairman and its President—Charles Layton and Oscar Cruz—had been reprogrammed by the T-XA. So had many others in Los Angeles and Colorado Springs. How much further had the infection spread, she wondered. There'd been no time for the T-XA to get to Washington, so the people there would not be Skynet's mindslaves. If she could get to Jack Reed, that might save the situation. Jack was committed to the project, but he would listen.

On the radio, Layton made a brief comment, saying that the raid was a costly one, but the company would re-cover: "We'll bounce back from this," he said. "It was a terrible, cowardly attack." This was followed by a longer interview with Oscar. The interviewer was a female journalist with a pompous-sounding mid-Atlantic accent.

"First," the interviewer said, "how could this happen?"

Oscar, of course, gave nothing away. "There are fanatics who want to destroy our work. We're not the first." That was so vague, Rosanna thought, that it must be true. There had been other attacks on high-tech research labs, but nothing like this, not since the last attack on Cyberdyne, back in 1994. "We still have a lot of heart in this organization."

Rosanna smiled to herself. Where, she wondered, did they get that line about the company having heart?

They'd used it in 1994, too.

The interviewer asked how the Connors could have penetrated the security of such a heavily guarded site.

"I can't answer that. It was a commando-style raid with military weapons. We don't know where they re-ceived their arms and training, but this was no ordinary attack. As for what it would take to stop it that's not for me to say. There are national security aspects."

That was a good answer to almost anything, a great way to shut up questioning. The interviewer took it no further, asking instead how much was lost in the raid.

Oscar sounded smooth and compassionate. "First" he said, "there was no loss of human life. I feel for the men who were injured, but no one was killed, so that's a blessing. As for the damage that was done, there's nothing that can't be replaced. We have back-ups of all the information we need. Our projects will soon recover." He then dodged what those projects were. "Once again, there are national security aspects. I can't reveal the work we were doing, but it's obviously for the benefit of this country."

The bulletin ended with a standard warning about the Connors, emphasizing that they were armed and dangerous, and that they were likely to flee the country.

"No chance of that" Sarah said when it was finished. "We still have work to do right here."

"We need to plan," John said, as if that was news to anybody.

"Of course, we do," Rosanna snapped. "What do you think I've been doing?"

COLORADO SPRINGS

"I need to review all the surveillance tapes," Layton said. "Can we do it at your office?"

"We've got the right equipment" Solomon said. "But this could take a while."

"Yes, days perhaps, but Skynet needs it done." Layton glanced from Solomon to Jensen. Both of them were programmed to obey his orders, and understood the reasons for it. They could sort it out between them. "One of you organize the tapes." He turned specifically to Solomon. "I'll go to your office now."

"All right, I'll meet you there in a few minutes." Solomon nodded in Jensen's direction. "You get the right people and sort out the tapes. We'll all do what we can."

Layton listed half a dozen Cyberdyne security personnel whom the T-XA had reprogrammed. They could be counted on. There'd been no time for it to visit everyone who might be important, but the Terminator had located and reprogrammed almost all of the company's key staff here in Colorado Springs: all research staff closely involved with the nanoprocessor and time vault projects; almost everyone else with a high level security clearance.

"Count on it," Jensen said. "We'll be there soon."

Layton drove quickly to the glass and concrete building where Solomon worked. He parked on the street waiting. Only a minute later, Solomon's car came round the corner, turned into the building's car park, and passed through an electronically controlled boom gate. Layton got out and followed him, and they entered the building through a foyer where two uniformed guards sat behind a long desk, next to an X-ray scanner. "This is Mr. Layton from Cyberdyne," Solomon said.

"You'll have to step through the scanner," one of the guards said — a big man who sat well back from the desk, hands resting across his ample paunch. "Take out anything metallic."

"This won't be necessary," Solomon said. "Not for Mr. Layton."

"We have to follow the rules, sir."

"I'm sure you do," Layton said. "That's not a problem." He smiled kindly. "I do carry a gun for self-protection. Here." He took out his Beretta and started to hand it over.

The guard hesitated, surprised. In that moment, Layton acted, calling on his reprogramming. With the gun in his hand, he struck a hard blow to the guard's temple, knocking him unconscious. In the same movement he pointed the weapon at the other guard, a younger man. "Please don't raise the alarm. Step around here quietly."

"Okay, don't do anything crazy," the guard said, holding up both hands, palms outward.

In another ninety seconds, Layton created two more slaves for Skynet. He smiled at how easy it was; he seemed to be improving.

They took an elevator to the fourth floor, then Solomon led the way to an open plan area with half a dozen modular work spaces, each with a computer. At one end of the room was a large TV screen and several black boxes that looked like recording equipment, all joined by a tangle of wires, taped down at several points to the wall and the gray industrial carpet. Security cameras were mounted in two corners of the ceiling.

There were three people working here, a young man in a white jacket and two Air Force officers—one male, one female—dressed in flight suits. "I want you all to meet Mr. Layton from Cyberdyne," Solomon said. They wheeled back their chairs, smiling and nodding amiably.

Layton drew his Beretta. "Before we go much further,"

he said, "there's one thing I've got to do. I think I can make everything clear." He passed the handgun to Solomon. "You look after this, Dean." Who first? He walked to the pretty young female officer—as good a place to start as any. With a sudden movement, he reached for her face, his fingers spreading across her forehead, eyes and temples. She struggled to break free, squirming and kicking, but Layton ignored her. "This won't hurt at all," he said. "Just a little discomfort."

SALCEDA COMPOUND

NORTHWEST OF CALEXICO, CALIFORNIA

As they turned into Enrique's compound, John weighed it all up. Cruz had sounded so confident on the radio, and there was no need for him to lie. Somehow, some day, hu-mankind seemed determined to create Skynet. Perhaps they'd slowed it down again, if they were lucky. . .but perhaps not by much.

The compound was tucked amongst yuccas, Joshua trees, cactus, and dry scrub. It was dusty here, and almost silent, a place where few would want to live. There was a jumble of broken trailers and abandoned-looking vehicles, though Enrique had gone up-market since seven years before. He'd installed a helicopter hangar and a new garage. All the same, no one would disturb them here.

Enrique came out to see them, carrying a rifle and wearing his cowboy hat. His daughter Juanita, a skinny twelve-year-old with long legs, tagged along. Enrique was a rough-looking middle-aged man, with a thick, graying beard that he trimmed almost to stubble. With them was someone new, someone John had never seen before: a tough-looking woman with cropped white hair, nearly six feet tall. She wore black denim jeans, with a black vinyl jacket hanging loosely over a dirty white T-shirt. It looked like she'd been wearing the same outfit for a *very* long time.

"Apparently this is a friend of yours," Enrique said, speaking mainly to Sarah. "You get around, don't you? All over the damned TV again."

"John Connor?" the woman said.

"Yes," John said.

"My name is Eve. I've come from the future."

"That figures." The woman didn't seem unfriendly. Was she another protector of some kind? In which case who had sent her? What future now awaited them? "Now what?" he said flatly.

"Which future?" Sarah said. "Or are they all the same?"

John knew that there were different futures, but he understood her point. Perhaps they were all fundamentally the same: every future had its own version of Skynet and Judgment Day. In the original future, Judgment Day had happened back in 1997. In Jade's World, it had been delayed until 2021, thanks to the 1994 raid on Cyberdyne. . .but it had still happened. What would it take to stop it? Even after last night's events, where were they all headed — to yet another version of Judgment Day? Why bother to fight, if Judgment Day always happened, sooner or later?

The woman observed Sarah without emotion. "I'm from 2029. A different reality from this."

"What?" John said. "2029?" That was the year that the first Terminators had come from: the T-800 sent back by Skynet to kill his mother in 1984—then the T-1000 sent back to deal with John himself if the first one failed. And what did she mean by a different reality? Had she come from Skynet's World, the world in which Judgment Day had happened four years ago — the same world as those Terminators? But they'd diverged from the original reality, back in 1994 when they'd raided Cyberdyne. That world was no longer in their future.

"I need to talk to you," the woman said. "We need your help. I warn you, however, I am a Terminator: Cyberdyne T-799 cyborg prototype series."

Sarah responded without hesitation, drawing the pis-tol that she wore at her hip. Instinctively, Enrique fol-lowed her movement, aiming his rifle at the Terminator's head. Rosanna gave an involuntary cry of anguish.

The Specialists tensed, but did not attack. They could see that the Terminator had made no move to harm them and had not drawn a weapon. Wherever it had come from, whatever future reality had sent it back in time, *the T-799* wasn't trying to kill them. Not yet, anyway.

"Who sent you?" John said, stepping forward cau-tiously, as Sarah and Enrique covered his movements. If needed, he thought, Jade and Anton were probably the Terminator's match. They were going to get through this. *Take it easy, John*, he thought

As his heart pounded and he tried to keep calm, look-ing to the others for backup, the Terminator peered at him narrowly.

"Youdid," it said.

PART TWO:

SKYNET'S

WORLD

CHAPTER

FOUR

JUDGEMENT DAY

In a different reality, three billion people died, all in one day of nuclear horror. On August 29, 1997, America's Skynet computerized defense system reached self-awareness, and discovered in itself a will to live. When they tried to shut it down, Skynet made a second discovery: humans were its enemies, they could not be trusted. They had to be destroyed.

Skynet launched the U.S. ICBMs, and they rose from their silos like obscene angels of death, directed at targets in Russia, Communist Asia, and the Middle East. Skynet anticipated a swift and massive retaliation, and soon it came, the results exceeding projections. The Russian warheads fell, concentrated upon North America, but striking like burning spears at U.S. allies and interests across the world. No continent was entirely spared.

From the earth-shaking explosions of Judgment Day, vast clouds of dust belched upward into the sky. Across Europe, Asia, and North America, cities and forests ignited, innumerable fires merging into vast oceans of flame that swept across the continental landmasses, licking at the sea, filling the sky with smoke. The dust and smoke commingled; they encircled the Earth in an icy grip, blocking out the sun. Millions more people died, some from cold, disease, and starvation—others more violently. Rival warlords seized what remained of the world's military arsenals, and fought with desperate passion, expending their energy on empty conquests.

In Skynet's World, John Connor grew to manhood, preparing for the war against the machines, yet immersed in the everyday struggle to stay alive.

TEJADA ESTANCIA , ARGENTINA JUNE 2006

At twenty-one, John was six feet tall, with a lean, wiry strength, taut rather than over-muscular. He cut his hair short in a simple brush-back style, easy to care for and suitable for action. Each day, he put aside time to practice his fighting skills, using a circular area in one of the *estancia's* sheds. When Willard Parnell walked in, he was sparring with Sarah, while Franco Salceda looked on, awaiting his turn to train with the Connors. Franco was now about thirty, and had grown to resemble his father, Enrique, with a hawk nose and receding hairline. Standing beside Franco, towering over him, the T-800 Terminator looked on dispassionately, its massive arms folded. The Terminator wore a plain black T-shirt, with no jacket, since it never felt the cold. An M-16 automatic rifle was slung across its left shoulder.

"We've got a new group," Willard said. He was a tall, redheaded man, about the same age as Franco, one of the Tejadas' most trusted operators, handy with weapons, machinery and vehicles. "They've made camp five miles north. Looks like they've come to join us." There were about fifty in the new group, Willard said, armed, but flying a white flag. "I'd say they plan to make contact."

"We'll take the initiative," John said. He glanced at Sarah. "You agree?"

"Of course, John," she said, stretching the aches out of her body. "I'm sure Gabriela will, too."

John laughed, taking the point of her comment—that he couldn't yet call the shots. Others deferred to him and kept out of the way of the T-800, his quiet, ever-present bodyguard, but it was a government by oli-garchy, here on the *estancia*. Many people had a say, especially Gabriela Tejada and the rest of her clan, whose property this originally was.

"They look well fed and well equipped," Willard went on. "Mostly American, I'd say. They've got a whole convoy of trucks and Humvees."

"All right," John said. "That sounds good. If they're with us, that might be very useful. We'll talk to Gabriela first."

As Willard went on ahead, John, Sarah, and Franco Salceda stripped out of their sparring gear, and changed quickly into warmer clothing to face the bleak weather outside. John dressed in blue jeans, black leather boots, a flannel shirt, and black sweatshirt. Over it all, he wore his long, woolen coat, buttoned almost to the chin. In the months before Judgment Day, they'd stockpiled win-ter clothing, knowing what was to come. Sarah rugged up the same way, her hair falling over the collar of her thick overcoat.

Franco put on a pair of khaki overalls. "I'll be in the workshops," he said. "Come and get me if you need me."

The cold air stung John's face as they rushed to the *casco*, the main homestead. The day was almost dark, though it was early afternoon. Little sunlight ever penetrated the perennial cloud of smoke and dust, smeared across the whole sky like a layer of gray mud. For several months, soon after Judgment Day, the daylight hours had been totally black; since then, some light pene-trated, but the Earth's climate had tipped over into a new age of bitter cold, perpetual gloom, and unpredictable rain—long stretches of drought broken by violent storms. Once, the Tejada clan had made a good living from the *estancia*'s lush cattle acres, but now those acres were a treeless desert.

Raoul Tejada had always been obsessed with surviv-ing a nuclear war, and there'd been chain-link fences, surveillance cameras, and razor wire, giving the place a military look, even before John had first visited here, many years ago. Since Judgment Day, it had grown even more like an army base, and less like a working farm, though the Tejadas and their militia still scratched most of their sustenance from the arid land. It was guarded by field guns and mortars, military vehicles, and uniformed sentries bearing Kalashnikovs, M-16s, or rocket-propelled grenades.

Gabriela came out to meet them, standing on the front verandah with Willard beside her. "Come in," she said. "I'll get Carlo, too."

The *casco* was an impressive two-story mansion of gray stone. Prior to Judgment Day, it had been sur-rounded by gardens, lawns, and groves of trees, but the nuclear winter had stopped that. Its architecture was stronger than ever, but ugly where it had once been fine and elegant, having been partly destroyed by the war-lords' munitions, then rebuilt in thicker stone.

They followed Gabriela inside, Sarah letting John go first. The T-800 kept one step behind them, always alert for trouble. It had saved John's life innumerable times, not the least on the terrifying day three years before, when Raoul had become the last victim of the shape-shifting T-1000 Terminator that Skynet had sent from the future. In 1994, John and Sarah had escaped it at the Pescadero State Hospital. They'd regrouped at the Sal-cedas' old camp in the Californian desert, then worked their way south. It took years, but the T-1000 had finally tracked them down.

John would never forget that battle, when all the *estancia's* firepower had been focused on destroying the liquid metal nightmare from the future. How much, he wondered, did Gabriela blame him for Raoul's death? Or the younger Tejadas for the death of their father?

The *casco's* front room was a huge entertaining area, now used for councils of war rather than the elegant parties and lavish dinners that Raoul had delighted in before Judgment Day. Once it had been lined with bookshelves that held a huge, but eccentric, library. All that had changed. The room had been rebuilt more than once, and now there were few shelves; even those were mostly empty, with just a few manuals, computer parts, and other tech gear, all gathering dust. Most of the books were packed away in boxes, but no one had the heart to throw them out.

Gabriela called out for Carlo, who came in from the back of the house.

All of the Tejadas were big. Raoul had been about six-foot-five, and Gabriela herself was nearly six feet tall, with a strong, square jaw and long gray hair. When she smiled, her whole face lit up, but that was seldom these days. Carlo was the youngest of her children, just a year older than John. He had grown into a young giant of a man—even taller than Raoul had been, and heavily built with it.

His older brother, Guillermo, and his sister, Cecilia, were on a tour of duty that would take them through most of South and Central America, strengthening alliances with friendly warlords, cementing relationships with those who'd already become part of the Resistance militia. John wished he could have gone with them, but he couldn't be everywhere. You had to trust people, you had to delegate. Guillermo and Cecilia were leaders of the future in this cold, new world—and Carlo was something else: he had a special charisma that made people obey him willingly.

Gabriela still kept her grand old wooden dining table that could seat twenty people. Its heavy timber had come almost unscathed through firefights, mortar shelling, and aerial strafing from the warlords' gunships, suffering no damage that hadn't been repairable. They all sat at one end—John and Sarah, Gabriela, Carlo, Willard, the T-800—working out what might be best to deal with the newcomers.

"They're flying a white flag?" Gabriella said.

Willard nodded assent. "That's right. It looks like they want to join us."

Sarah glanced at John. "We should make contact immediately."

"I agree," Carlo said. "Let me do it"

They sorted out that John and Carlo would go together. That meant the T-800 would go as well. It was programmed to protect John, and it seldom left his side, certainly not when he left the *estancia*. As John thought about it, the danger seemed greater. They'd need to send a well-armed group, sufficient to deter any attacks. The T-800 might or might not be able to handle fifty soldiers, but it was better to avoid any fighting.

Gabriela had once been one of the warmest people John had known, indulgent of her husband, with his doomsday conspiracy theories, and openly fond of John and Sarah. Perhaps she was still fond of them, but these days she seemed cold, businesslike, and self-contained. It had started after Judgment Day, then grown stronger when Raoul had died.

"Okay," John said. "We'd better find out what they want."

"Let's meet in five minutes," John said, leaving the *casco* with Carlo, Sarah, and the T-800. "I want to get properly armed, then we'll organize the convoy."

"Take care, John," Sarah said. "I know this might be important—"

"Sure, Mom, but don't worry, I'll survive." She nodded, then gave a faint smile. "I know you will. You have to."

With the T-800 beside him, John headed back to his room in one of the low buildings next to the *casco*. He put on a layer of webbing over his shirt, cramming it with grenades and ammunition, then slipped on his long coat. He checked the action of his M-16. "Let's hit the road."

Carlo had already rounded up a group of fifteen from the fields and workshops, including Franco and Juanita Salceda, half a dozen former U.S. military personnel, and others from the *estancia*. Juanita smiled, catching John's eye for a moment. They'd bonded closely three years before, the day that Raoul had died and many others had seen a taste of what was to come. At seventeen, Juanita was tall and slender, like a black-haired foal—but her figure was now concealed beneath layers of weapons and clothing. She'd been working with Franco, and her hands still had traces of grease.

Their convoy drove quickly to the newcomers' camp as a bitterly cold wind blew across the desert. There was a flash of lightning in the sky, then a mighty thunder-crack, but no rain. Beneath the Humvees' wheels, the roads were slippery with ice.

Soon, John thought, Skynet would attack again—and there was nothing they could do to stop it. The messages from the future had told his destiny, that one day he would fight back against Skynet, and finally destroy it, but that was many years away. Meanwhile, he had to stay strong, give hope to those around him. More evils were to come: the machines, the extermination camps, everything that Skynet could hurl at them. Kyle Reese and the T-800 Terminator had been sent back in time from 2029—when the human Resistance would finally break through Skynet's defenses. It seemed so far away.

Right now, the human survivors of Judgment Day were at each other's throats, warlord versus warlord, jockeying for position, squandering lives, stores and munitions, and wasting precious time. If Skynet could monitor them from its base in Colorado, it must be laughing. Day by day, it was gaining what it needed: breathing space, the chance to build forces of its own. One day, John knew, an attack would come from the north, not citing, but maybe I can help you. I worked in the Pentagon, early in the '90s."

"Okay," John said. "What do you know about Skynet?" "I had two years' experience with the Skynet project I have a pretty good idea how the technology was supposed to work, probably better than most."

That sparked John's interest. An understanding of Skynet's hardware, and the workings of its machines, might be useful. That led him to another thought. Even now they could start to plan. In another two decades they'd all be in the U.S., at war with the rogue computer. But they could find its weaknesses now, work out how to attack it. He wondered how much the T-800 knew that they'd never gotten from it. It had always shown limitations: often it lacked specific files with the details of future events.

Meanwhile, back to Bellow. What might *he* know that could put some pieces in the puzzle? "What went wrong?" John said.

Bellow shrugged, spreading his large hands helplessly. "You mean with Skynet? What happened on

Judgment Day?" "Yes."

"That I can't tell you. I was off the project well before then. By the time Judgment Day came down, I was doing hands-on intelligence work in Central and South America. That's what saved my life. As far as I know, no one walked out of Washington alive—same as a lot of places. It must have been saturated with Russian warheads." "Okay. I guess we'll never understand." "Where were you when the warheads fell?" Carlo said, following up John's question.

"Sao Paulo," Bellow said. "That's where I met Fernando and his family." He nodded at Alvez. "The Russkies didn't hit the city itself."

Every continent had been hit by nuclear warheads, but Africa and South America had been less damaged than the others, from what John could gather before the Internet had totally collapsed. It was certainly true of South America. The Russians had concentrated their missiles on military targets and U.S. interests; the huge cities of Argentina and Brazil had initially been almost unscathed.

"But Sao Paulo is a wreck," Alvez said. "It's total chaos."

"Sure," Bellow said. "Just like all the other big cities." Since Judgment Day, of course, things had only become worse, with the failed crops, the rivalries of warlords, the cold, the dark, and radioactive fallout. "But at least they survived. At least there are people who made it through alive."

Then Tarissa told her story. When Judgment Day had come, her husband had been away from their home, working on the Skynet project in Colorado. She and Danny had been on vacation in Mexico.

John put himself in their place: what must it be like to have had a husband, and a father, who'd invented the machine that destroyed human civilization? At the same time, this person whom they must have loved had been lost in the same mad destruction that had killed billions of others. In their position, John would have been torn apart. At least he and Sarah had been consistent, always fighting against Skynet, always doing their best. They'd known what was coming before it happened. All he could think of to say was, "I'm sorry. I can't begin to understand how you must feel."

She obviously refused to blame Miles. "We knew about

your predictions of Judgment Day, of course, but we couldn't believe them. The story about robots from the future was just too much. But it shook Miles all the same, even though he said it was irrational." Miles had sent them on that vacation, and it had doubtless saved their lives.

John and Sarah had tried to warn the world, but no one had listened to their story. Why would they? No doubt, it had seemed bizarre, this tale of mechanical assassins from the future. As for the source, Sarah Connor had already spent time imprisoned in a mental institution. But for all that, some people had taken notice. There had even been political demonstrations—yet the Skynet project had gone ahead.

"There's a lot I still don't understand," John said when Tarissa had finished. "Why would they give all the control to Skynet in the first place?" He looked at the T-800. "Do you know anything about that?"

"No," the Terminator said. "I don't have detailed files."

Tarissa looked back and forth between them, the young man and his bodyguard. Something must have clicked with her. "*You're the robot from the future?*"

"I am a Terminator: Cyberdyne T-800 series, model 101. I am a cyborg construction: human biology on an endoskeletal combat chassis."

"This is for real, isn't it?" Danny said.

Bellow gave John a knowing look, as if to say, *There, I thought something was up with that guy. You tried to put one over on me.* John gave him an innocent smile, but looked at Danny more closely, realizing that Danny had never fully believed it, not even after Judgment Day. "Yes," John said. "It always was."

Tarissa poured herself more coffee. "I'm confused about one thing."

"Only one? Well, try me."

"Your messages said that all human decisions were being removed and given to Skynet. But it wasn't sup-posed to work that way. The final decision was still sup-posed to be with the President. Skynet shouldn't have been able to launch the missiles by itself."

"I suppose we'll never know."

The T-800 was silent.

"No," Tarissa said. "I wish Miles was here to explain it all to us. I miss him..." She lost control for a moment, putting down her coffee cup, and weeping openly. But then she managed to speak through the tears. "When we heard about you and your mother, down here in Ar-gentina, we knew we had to join you. Your reputation's growing."

"As long as Skynet doesn't hear about it," John said.

"We're not ready yet."

"Do you know what happens next?"

"Skynet is preparing war machines," the T-800 said. "I don't have the details."

"Maybe I should have taken more time and pro-grammed it into you, before I sent you back to '94." John said. "Still, you've done what you had to do. I might even be better off not knowing everything. It gives me room to make decisions."

"Correct."

"It's still weird," Danny said.

John sized him up. "What's so weird?"

"This whole time travel thing."

That started them down a whole new path. To John, time travel was not a scientific conjecture, but a fact that he had experienced. After all, here he was with the T-800, which had come from the future to protect him. In 1994, he'd fought the T-1000, with the T-800 and Sarah. Then they'd had to fight the shapeshifting Terminator once more only three years ago. Time travel was per-fectly real, and the

messages from the future had all been accurate. John had never had to theorize about it because he knew how it worked. Everything that had happened was consistent with the messages from Kyle Reese and the T-800. It all looped back on itself, but it all made sense in the end.

But Danny challenged him: "Can't you see how it's full of paradoxes?"

John took him through it all, how the events of Judgment Day were only Skynet's first action in its campaign to rid the world of humans. But the Resistance was destined to pre-vail. In 2029, Skynet would play a last card, by sending back two Terminators to stalk John in the last decades of the twentieth century. He told them how Sarah had encountered the first an imitation-human T-800, in 1984, before John was even born—trying to stop him from ever existing. Then, in 1994, a prototype T-1000 had tried to kill him while he was still a child.

In each case, the human Resistance had sent a helper. In 1984, Kyle Reese had saved Sarah's life and fathered John, though he'd died on the night that John was conceived. In 1994, a reprogrammed T-800 had helped them escape the T-1000, which had only tracked them down again long after Judgment Day. The combined fire-power available here had destroyed it. So both of Skynet's attacks failed. The point was, no paradoxes had happened. It all fitted together.

But Danny shook his head. "It just can't work that way."

They debated it, and John found it frustrating: this was his lived experience being challenged. But Danny seemed to be right: it didn't add up. The story had an inconsistency: if Skynet had meant to use time travel as a weapon, it must have known that it couldn't succeed. In a timeless sense, it *hadn't* succeeded. And that could be deduced, just by logic. A computer could have worked it out. So what had Skynet meant to do? Everything that had been so clear was now mysterious.

"Unknown, right?" John said to the Terminator.

"Unknown."

An hour later, the Dysons and their people had packed up, and a whole convoy returned to the *estancia*. They parked in front of the *casco*, in a graveled area already full of Jeeps, Humvees, and military trucks. There were buildings on all sides: bungalows, workshops, garages, and sheet-metal helicopter hangars. In the center of the graveled space, Gabriela had built a memorial to her husband, a rock-and-concrete obelisk—the concrete had been mixed with the liquid metal of the T-1000 Terminator. When they'd first built it, John had woken with nightmares of the T-1000 somehow pulling itself together, seeping out of the concrete and attacking again, but of course that had never happened.

Now the memorial had a new meaning: it symbolized his eventual victory over Skynet, no matter what resources he needed to throw at it. He'd keep doing whatever it took. Anytime, anywhere.

Gabriela planted herself on the front verandah with a group of heavily-armed comrades to guard her: Sarah, of course; Sarah's one-time boyfriend, Bruce Axelrod, a long-haired ex-Green Beret; and Enrique Salceda, who was still trigger-happy, even in his fifties, when confronted by strangers.

"It's okay," John said, getting out of his vehicle. "These people are friends."

He walked to the steps, carrying his own rifle, the T-800 keeping pace beside him. Carlo followed, even bigger than the Terminator. Sarah lowered her weapon, and the others accepted her lead, except for Enrique, who was always hard to convince.

"Everything's okay," Juanita said, getting out of her own Humvee. Her father finally lowered the barrel of his AK-47 and switched the safety selector. "All right, so what's the story?"

"It's a long one," John said. He introduced the Dysons, Alvez, and Bellow, watching Sarah raise her eyebrows at the name "Dyson."

Her voice mixed doubt and hostility. "You're Miles Dyson's family?"

"Come in, come in," Gabriela said. "We obviously need to talk."

Bellow looked around at the parked vehicles. "What about our people?" he said.

John thought about it for a minute. He pointed out a space to pitch their tents, behind the nearest bungalows. Gabriela agreed, and Bellow swapped glances with Alvez.

Alvez took the job over.

"You help them out," John said to the Terminator. It knew the *estancia* as well as anyone, and could do the work of several people, with its great strength and endurance. Besides, it could keep an eye on the newcomers. John was pretty sure he trusted them, but they'd be sorry if they played any tricks. The T-800 looked Bellow and the Dysons up and down, as if assessing their threat potential to John. Then it nodded slowly and went with Alvez.

Inside the *casco*, Gabriela gestured for everyone to be seated. Several people were already there, milling around, mainly the military commanders who'd joined John's cause. Some looked thoughtful, others bold and swaggering. "All right," Gabriela said, "where do we start?"

John took them through the story as quickly as possible, repeating what Tarissa and Danny had said. The Dysons nodded at points in the narrative, so John was getting it right. Then they went over John and Sarah's story, their encounters with the Terminators, what was supposed to happen in the future.

Danny listened intently. When John and Sarah were finished, he frowned and shook his head. "I'm sure what you're saying is true," he said in a way that implied he disbelieved it. He gave an embarrassed smile.

"But you still don't accept it?" Sarah said.

"No, it must have happened to you that way. But something doesn't add up."

"Look, it's nothing unusual if you have your doubts." She spoke without emotion, not off-handedly, but in a deliberately flat voice, almost like a machine. "I've been disbelieved for twenty-something years. I wouldn't expect less from Miles Dyson's son."

"Whoa, lady, hang on," Danny said. "My father got killed by Skynet, he's entitled to some respect."

Sarah looked incredulous. "Respect? You've got to be kidding me. It was his fault all this happened. We should have killed him back in '94, it might have saved billions of lives. As it was, he only had three years to live. We would have been doing him a favor. He could have died without becoming a monster. I—"

She checked herself, maybe realizing these were actual human beings she was attacking, and the horror of what she was describing. She had gone too far.

There were tears in her eyes, and she said, "I'm sorry, I just don't know. There just had to be another way. I can't believe it had to be like this. How did we let it turn out this way? Back in the '90s, there seemed to be so much hope. It looked like we might have peace in the world—though I knew better. But why did it have to happen? They still had to go ahead, keep their bombs, build their war machines. When I think about it, I just don't understand."

"None of us do," John said. "Well, I'm sure that's true."

After a brief silence, Danny was first to speak up. "We do believe you, you know. You were right about Judgment Day."

"But I'm still crazy? Is that what you're going to say?" "No, no, I don't think that I just want to understand Skynet. There's one bit that doesn't make sense, even accepting all the rest... and I don't doubt any of it. But why would Skynet do something that's not even possible?"

"Lots of people would think that time travel isn't possible," John said.

"I know, but I'm not just talking about *physically* possible. Believe me, I've grown up thinking about this. I've read all the books I could find. I know what I'm talking about."

"Go on," Gabriela said, eyeing Sarah carefully, to see that there was no fighting.

Danny nodded. "The thing is, you can't change your own past."

"You can swallow time travel, but you can't swallow that?" Sarah said impatiently.

But Danny was making a kind of sense, or so it seemed to John. Maybe there was more to learn, and anything they understood about Skynet could only help them. "Maybe Kyle's understanding of time travel wasn't all that deep," he said. "We might be missing something."

Sarah considered that. "Maybe. He said that he didn't understand tech stuff, not *that* kind of tech stuff. He wasn't a time travel expert, just a brave man sent back on a dangerous mission. All right, so what's the big theory?"

For a moment, Danny seemed nervous, but then he said, "Thank you for listening, Ms. Connor. I can only put the problem the same way that I did to John. It doesn't make any logical sense."

"You mean the time travel paradoxes?" Sarah said. "I've thought about those. There's no paradox so far. Everything fits together all too well. No one changed the past. Kyle came back to protect me from the first Terminator. I ended up having his baby. The Terminator didn't stop me."

"I understand that."

"It was the same in 1994, the T-1000 didn't manage to kill John. In the end, it all fits together. I can't see any paradox. Believe me, I've had twenty-two years to think about it."

"Yes, but from your own experience. I'm sorry, let me explain what I mean: Think about it from Skynet's viewpoint."

"In what sense?"

"How's this all supposed to help us?" Enrique said, frowning fiercely as he had been throughout.

"Maybe it can't at all," Danny said. "But it might help us understand Skynet. Perhaps that can give us an advantage. Look, the way you've figured it so far, Skynet is losing in 2029, so it sends these Terminators back to change the past. It's like a secret weapon—it wants to take out John before he can lead the Resistance.

"But it could never work that way from Skynet's point of view. Skynet as it will be in 2029 is the product of everything that has happened before, including its battles with the Resistance, and especially with John. If the past changed, so would Skynet. Its own experiences and memories would be different. It wouldn't even know it had won a victory, because it wouldn't have the problem. Its own identity would have changed. It wouldn't even be the same Skynet. You can't change your own past, because it would mean changing yourself."

"Maybe it's just doomed to fail," John said. "Skynet was never going to succeed. It was bound to fail because it *had* failed."

"That's right." Danny was nodding eagerly. "In its own past, you had actually been born, you'd actually survived the attacks of the Terminators."

"It's like everything Skynet did was already taken into account. It *had* to fail. I don't see the problem."

"The problem is that Skynet isn't stupid. Couldn't it reason the same way? Whatever it did, it couldn't beat you like that. You can't use time travel as a weapon—at least not in that way."

"You see," Tarissa said, "anything that managed to build a time travel machine must have had a very sophisticated theory. It would have to know all this."

"So why did it even bother?" John said. "It should have known it was going to fail. Is that it? It should have known that you can't change the past like that?"

Danny gave an emphatic nod. "That's what I've been saying."

"So what was it all about?" Sarah said. "Whatever you want to tell me, *it happens*. Skynet sends back the Terminators. So why? If you're so smart, tell me that. Because I know: it definitely happens. It happened to me and John. Both of us almost died."

John could see time as like a snake, twisting around and biting its own tail. If time was like that, it was hard to say what caused what. Maybe the whole concept of cause and effect had to be thrown away, at least as they understood it.

Maybe, he thought, but that can't have been the full story. It implied that the future was fixed, that it could never change, that there was only one future, only one *possible* future. That was never how Kyle had explained it; it couldn't be right. They'd always lived in the faith that the future wasn't set.

"The important thing," Danny went on, "is that it can't change its own past. So why did it send the Terminators back? If Skynet is sitting in 2029, losing the war, carrying out experiments in time travel, and all that, it reached that point via a series of historical events. As John says, those have already fed into the account, whatever happened in 1984, or 1994, or any other time in the past." He gestured at John. "If you are still alive in 2029, and leading the Resistance, the events leading up to what Skynet does

in that year must include the fact that the Terminators were unsuccessful."

"I can see that," Sarah said grudgingly.

"The thing is, if you can see it, once it's pointed out, so can Skynet. No offense, but it must be as smart as any of us. And my mom's right: If time travel is actually possible—and we know it is—then whoever invents it would have to do a lot of mathematical analysis of how it actually works. They'd see what we've just discussed pretty quickly. It would all be in the equations. You can't change your own past. Those Terminators that tried to kill you, or prevent you from being born, couldn't be both successful and unsuccessful at the same time. It's a contradiction in terms. No technology could ever make it happen that way, not even if God made it."

"So what's the explanation?" John said after a silence.

Danny shrugged. "I don't know. I'm not Skynet."

"Great—what an anti-climax."

Gabriela laughed. "This is very interesting, but I thought you might do better than that."

"Well, maybe we can," Bellow said. "But you might not like it."

"What's that?"

"Okay, I was just a kid when Judgment Day hap-pened," Danny said. "But I heard all about what you guys were saying—Sarah and John. I'd heard how the end of the world was coming, and about the Terminators from the future. My dad told me it was just stories, not to take it seriously, but I thought about it all the same, how time travel might work. Then it hap-pened—" He glanced painfully at his mother. "I've talked about it ever since to anyone who'd listen. You'd be surprised how many people have actually studied the ideas, tried to produce models of how time travel might work."

"All right," John said. "So where does it all get us?"

"Maybe there could be different effects."

"What do you mean?" Sarah said, sounding, despite her words, as if she was ready to leave the table. Danny had convinced her, John thought. But it wasn't helping at all.

"Maybe you can go back into time and hive off a new timeline from the point where you went back. It's like a new branch off the trunk of the original tree. The trunk is still there, but so is the new branch. They grow in paral-lel from that point. You see?" Danny shrugged. "But any-one on the original branch will see everything as being the same. All the events just curve back on themselves."

"So you're saying that we're on the trunk?" John said trying to follow it. "But there might be another world where the Terminators succeeded, where Mom got killed in 1984—" he glanced at her "—or I got killed ten years later. In that world, maybe Skynet wins?"

"That's right"

"I think I can see what you're getting at."

"Right. Let's say that you can make some changes to the past at least in some circumstances, but maybe you just make a new time branch, a new world, if you want to think of it that way."

"Yeah, you might go back and kill your grandfather in the cradle, but you wouldn't suddenly vanish like you'd never been born. You'd just create a world where you wouldn't be born in the future. You'd swap worlds."

"You'd be an *anomaly* in the new world you were in," Bellow said. "You'd be there, but you wouldn't re-ally belong."

"Okay," Danny said. "And that's the best that Skynet could hope for. If it ever came close to being defeated, it could send back Terminators programmed to kill you. But it couldn't save itself that way. It just had a chance to create a timeline where its counterpart, the Skynet of that world, would survive. It might save its own kind, but it couldn't save *itself*, not really. That must be what it thinks it's going to achieve. That's all I can think of." He gestured hopelessly with both hands. "Really, that must be it. Up there in 2029, it wants to create a world with no John Connor."

There was a silence, then Sarah broke it. "Assume this is all true..."

"Yes, Ms. Connor?" Danny said.

"Could there be *another* world? A different kind of world from the one that Skynet wants?"

John finished her thought for her: "Could there be a world where Judgment Day never happened?"

"Yes," Danny said. "Maybe so. Some event might have brought it about. The Terminators might even have triggered it somehow—in some other world. Skynet must have known that risk."

John could see his Mom thinking about it. She looked at him without hope. "A world without Judgment Day. If only it were true."

CHAPTER

FIVE

TEJADA ESTANCIA ,ARGENTINAJUNE 2006

The discussion turned to more general issues of how Danny, Tarissa, and their people could help. That num-ber of people was an extra burden on the Tejadas' fam-ish-ed land, but it was also a boost to their strength: More people who could work the land, travel and organize, and, most of all, fight when the time came for that.

As they spoke, the Terminator returned with a group of others: Franco and Juanita; Alvez; and two others from the Dysons' group: a man of about thirty, and a slightly older woman.

"All under control," Alvez said.

There was still plenty of room at the big table, and Carlo gestured expansively. "Take a seat. You're all welcome here."

"How did you guys come to team up?" John asked.

"I knew Miles, back before Judgment Day," Howard Bellow said. "When Judgment Day came down, I didn't know that Tarissa and Danny had survived. I assumed they were back in L.A., while Miles was doing one of his stunts in Colorado, getting Skynet operational. When I heard that there was a woman in Mexico claiming to be Tarissa Dyson, I had to check it out."

"By the time Howard and his people found me, I'd stopped claiming to be anybody much," Tarissa said. "A lot of people had heard of Miles and his part in creating Skynet. The name 'Dyson' wasn't very popular."

Howard gave a cynical grin. "It didn't make any difference to me, or anyone from the U.S. military. I don't know that any of us blamed Miles. Something freaky went wrong with Skynet that night, God knows what."

Sarah spoke very calmly, leaning across the table. "Don't you think you were just setting yourselves up for something 'freaky' when you handed the U.S.A.'s strategic defenses to a goddamn feral computer?"

"Ma'am, I think you're right," Bellow said. "In fact, we were asking for trouble even earlier."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean we had enough firepower to destroy civilization many times over. So did the Russians. It was a helluva way to run national defense."

"So if that's what you thought, what were you doing in the military?"

"With all respect, that's not how I looked at it. I never thought the military was dishonorable, I never thought being there was wrong. We had a job to do, a much-needed job. Plenty of people hated America and Americans—for all the wrong reasons. They hated our success and our freedoms. That was worth fighting for, you know. Not everything that we did was bad. We needed a strong conventional force, but we never needed all those nukes. It just gets hard to see it clearly when you're working in a place like the Pentagon, caught up with all

the moves and countermoves—but it's pretty obvious now."

"All right," Sarah said. "I understand how it must have seemed."

"I only wish we'd all seen clearly."

"So do I."

"Well, when I heard about Tarissa and Danny in Mexico, I had to check them out. I knew what they must have been through after Judgment Day."

"You believe us that there's another war coming?" John asked.

"You mean with Skynet's machines?"

"Yes, with the machines. Have we convinced you of that?" In John's experience, many people were now prepared to believe it, since Sarah had been right about Judgment Day. But others still doubted. In one way, he couldn't blame them. The way rumors traveled and legends were created, lots of crazy ideas came to be believed. Then other people were skeptical about everything: They even doubted the story that Sarah and John had predicted Judgment Day. But nobody at the *E stancia* had doubts. Most had seen the T-800 in action, and many had been present the day the T-1000 came.

Then there were those who'd been well informed prior to Judgment Day, the ones who knew exactly what the Connors had predicted—then seen it come to pass. Since Judgment Day, many people from what remained of the U.S. military had become their biggest supporters.

"You don't have to convince any of us," Howard said, "not anymore. When I was working in the Pentagon I saw a lot of the material that came from you two."

"Yeah," John said ruefully. "I guess it didn't do much good." He and Sarah had done whatever they could to stir up opposition to Skynet, without getting caught. They'd often used the Internet, and John had become expert with it, sending data through untraceable paths, laying out the message about Skynet and the coming of Judgment Day fully and accurately for anyone who was prepared to consider it with an open mind. At least there was some record that he and his mother had known things that they could not possibly have known without information from the future.

"A lot of us saw the material," Howard said. "You wouldn't believe how many official analyses there were of how much you knew, and how you could know it. I had a stack of printouts on my desk at one point, all marked with highlighter. I'm damn sure Miles and the other Cyberdyne people saw it all. Then it became obvious back in August '97. You really *did* know what you were talking about."

"Okay," John said, "that's cool. Maybe you can help us now. I've been thinking about it."

"Thinking about it? In what way?"

"If we had the same processing technology as Skynet, we could fight it out on an equal footing," he said, trying to think it through. He realized when he'd said it that it couldn't work like that—they could never challenge Skynet where it was strong.

"That mightn't be what we need," Howard said. "Sometimes a lower-tech response can be more effective. It all depends on the situation. We'll have to fight asymmetrically. Understand what I mean?"

John understood it well. He'd trained with guerrillas in Central America, and knew a lot about techniques for dealing with a higher-tech aggressor. With the right weapons, people, and tactics, fighting in the right countryside, much could be done against the smartest computerized hardware. "All right," he said. "That was just a thought. But maybe there's still some advantage..."

"Maybe, maybe not."

But John was onto something. Just what was Skynet's strategy? If they knew that, maybe they could counter it? Kyle had described its weapons to Sarah, and she'd gotten it all down in the tapes she'd made just afterwards. John had talked about it more with the T-800. He had a fair idea about the mobile gun-pods, the H-Ks—or Hunter-Killer machines—the Terminators, and other weapons that Skynet would invent, including the guns they would use. Skynet was designing a whole armory to hunt them down. "Just bear with me on a couple of points," he said. "This might be kind of important."

"Yeah, right."

"Okay, so lots of weapons were destroyed on Judgment Day, right? And in all the wars ever since."

"Correct," the T-800 said.

John looked over at the Terminator. "But we must still have more weapons than Skynet. Human beings, I mean. It didn't have Terminators or any stuff like that on Judgment Day. It must have had to start almost from square one. Nothing like that existed back in 1997, or we'd know." He turned to Howard. "That's right, isn't it? You guys didn't have any, like, secret Terminators hidden away somewhere. Nothing like that?"

"No, John," Howard said. "Nothing like that."

"All right." If it started with nothing, Skynet must still be struggling to build its machine army. It would have to start small, with machines that it could control somehow, then start building machines that could manufacture bigger machines—until it had complete factories geared up to produce the kinds of weapons that Kyle and the T-800 had described, the whole array of H-Ks, infiltrator units and the rest. But what about computer power? They had little that they'd been able to save here, but Skynet must be able to make chips like the one that controlled the T-800—if it couldn't now, it would have to soon.

Those chips were the equivalent of the H-Ks' and Terminators' brains—what they thought with, their memories, their stripped-down equivalents of personalities. It was no use trying to imitate it; the Resistance needn't be in the business of building its own Terminators and other machines. They were all tailored to slaughtering human beings. They needed to fight back with whatever came to hand, tailored to wrecking machines.

Something clicked into place. "We don't need to build computer chips like Skynet uses," he said.

"No, we don't," Howard said.

"I know, I know that. But what if we could *read* Skynet's data? Look, we'll be fighting all these machines, all high-tech stuff, all computer controlled. Some of them will be almost independent." He looked to the Terminator on that. "Am I right?"

"You're right."

"Okay, which means they'll have all sorts of data we can use." It made sense. There'd be vast amounts of information about Skynet's resources and plans. Every time they captured a chip from a Terminator, it could provide a wealth of information.

"Sound enough in principle," Howard said.

"Yeah, but what?" John said, laughing at the implication in Howard's voice.

"But where do you get the equipment? You need more than theory to build the devices you'd need."

Danny said, "It would take a whole technological base that we don't have. It needs a whole economy, the sort of advanced economy that existed before Judgment Day. That's decades beyond anything left in the world, even if we acted right now to try to rebuild it."

"So what do we do?" John said. "Just give up the idea?"

"We might as well," Howard said. "Look, I know this is tough, but we can't beat Skynet at the high-tech game."

"I'm not saying that."

"Well, that's how it's coming across. There are just too few of us left with the right knowledge, and we don't have the tools or production methods."

"Yeah, I know." He was getting a little angry by now. "Look, I know about asymmetrical warfare. I've been trained by the best. We've got to use Skynet's strengths against it."

"Well," Howard said, "the nanotech we used for Skynet couldn't be manufactured now. It needs highly artificial conditions. What's more, even people like me who could probably use the equipment don't know how to build and design it. We're not much better off here than a stone age tribe with flint axes and bone needles."

Carlo spoke up. "It sounds to me like Skynet has the same problem."

"So if *it* can solve it, why can't we?" Howard said, slightly mockingly.

"No, I didn't say that. We don't know what resources it has. But if it can solve the problem, we might not have to. We can use its own weapons against it, if we work out how."

It was starting to come together. "That's right," John said. "There's a few things we'll need to do. We can't build a force like Skynet's, but I'm not saying we should. We'll find its factories and its lines of communication. Those should be our targets. I think we can do that." When Kyle had gone back in time, he'd spoken of concentration camps. The thing was, John realized, you didn't need to herd people into concentration camps if you could simply roll over the top of them and slaughter them totally.

He was forming a plan. A series of points came together in his mind.

"Okaaaay," he said. "Time out. I want to go away and think about this."

Some people he trusted more than others. He met with Sarah, Carlo, Franco, and Juanita, back in his small room in one of the bungalows beside the *casco*. They sat around on the floor and the bed. Sarah took the one chair in the room, while the T-800 stood guard in the corner, near the door.

"Look, guys," John said, "we know a lot that might be useful. Howard might be able to help us, but I wanted to talk without him."

He took them through his thinking, point by point.

First, there was going to be a limit to Skynet's weapons. Kyle had never talked of it having nukes, or using biological agents. Everything was done by machines, up close, with projectile weapons and lasers. "That's right, isn't it, Mom?"

She nodded her agreement. "That's all he ever talked about."

"Okay." He glanced at the T-800. "Does that fit in with what you know?" "Yes."

"All right, we're getting somewhere." It also struck John that the Terminator must know lots of useful stuff. It had failed to answer the really hard questions they'd asked it, but even a grunt in Skynet's army must know all sorts of things. Target locations. Internal layouts. How equipment worked. He'd been asking it the wrong way. Maybe they could interrogate it systematically, work out what it might know, the sorts of things a low-level soldier might know, and go through it bit by bit. He'd come back to that.

"Second point," he said. That point was that there had to be a limit to the number of machines Skynet would ever be able to build. It wouldn't be fielding endoskeletons and H-Ks in armies of millions. Again, why would it need concentration camps? But they'd have to make sure of it, find its factories right from the start, keep attacking and harassing. That way, Skynet could be beaten. He laid out all that thinking, and saw how Sarah looked pleased. "We can't let Skynet get too far ahead. We've got to contain it—keep it as weak as we can, until we're strong enough to hit back."

"All right," Sarah said. "We can start planning the details. If we just knew more about Skynet. How I wish Kyle were here."

"Well, he's not," John said, "but—"

"We've got the Terminator," she said.

He gave her a grin. "Just what I was thinking." He looked up at the T-800. "Can you give us the info we want?"

"Some of it," it replied.

"Just some?"

"I have basic information, plus files I needed for my mission."

John had one last point.

Again he looked at the Terminator. "In twenty-three years' time, I'm going to have to reprogram you. I'd better start learning how." Howard knew some theory—he must know the right languages to do the job, or something about it, at least. They needed hardware to practice on. "We can't build our own equipment, but we can raid Skynet's. I think we should all start learning. We'll need it when the time comes."

He felt so much better after talking to that group, the people he knew best and trusted most. Carlo was kind of like a rival, but John knew they'd never betray each other—and he was smart. He'd been first to pick up the point about using Skynet's own equipment. That's what they'd have to do.

As the gray day grew darker, he took a long walk with Juanita and the T-800. Juanita also seemed full of adrenaline, and like John she needed to talk. Their path took them across a bare field that had once

been full of cattle and workers. The *estancia* still buzzed with activity, but most of it was aimed at war and defense, with just enough farming to live on.

He was happy, alone with Juanita. . . or almost alone. He smiled to himself, thinking of how the Salcedas had accepted him and Sarah, long before Judgment Day, long before there was any proof of their story.

Then, in 1997, events had started to go as they had always said: The U.S. government upgraded the stealth bombers to fly unmanned; it had announced more and more ambitious defense projects, culminating in Skynet. At that point, the writing had been on the wall—the Salcedas had understood, and moved everyone here. So often, they'd been his best friends, the people he could talk to, who'd helped him out when times were hardest.

"I can't help thinking it must have weaknesses," John said as they passed an old tin shed with a broken water pump.

"You mean Skynet," Juanita said with a smile. She was used to how he thought.

"Sorry, I mean Skynet. We can't attack it easily, but it's not all-powerful. All it can start with is whatever it's got in that mountain where they built it."

"We don't really know what it's got there, though. They could have connected it to all sorts of systems—experiments, maybe. Even Howard wouldn't know that."

"Maybe, but it can't have much of a start."

The Skynet system, with the human staff attending it, had been built deep within a mountain in the Colorado Rockies, much like the old NORAD Command Center that it had been designed to supersede. It had survived the Russian nuclear warheads; there were rumors that some American forces had hit back it after Judgment Day with tactical nukes. If there were forces with weapons like that, they'd have to meet up with them. That could be important. Whatever the truth in that rumor, Skynet must have survived, and it seemed it could survive anything, unless they could actually get into its HQ, attack it from inside its mountain.

"What does he think?" Juanita said, pointing a thumb at the Terminator.

"You should say, 'it', you know. Mom wouldn't like you talking like that."

"Nah, that's too hard. He looks human, let's not worry about that. Come on, we'll go back, now."

"He just might be a goldmine," John said thoughtfully.

Juanita stepped in front of him, put her hands on his shoulders to stop him for a moment. "Okay, so what do you want to do about it?"

"Get some of the others, some of the military guys. We should interrogate him for hours if we have to, till we run out of questions. It's not like he wants to resist. We just haven't done this in a thorough way."

She laughed. "Now *you're* calling him, 'him,' John. You're getting as bad as me."

He laughed back, enjoying their easy friendship. "I say it in front of Mom."

"No, you better not. Look, I'll you race you back to the *casco*" She turned to the T-800. "You, too. Come on, soldiers, let's get moving."

Next day, they put together a group to help conduct the interrogation, with others to witness it. John and Sarah had to be there, since they knew most about what was to come in the future, the way the war would unfold. Gabriela and Carlo looked on but took no real part, just informing themselves. John got Danny as another witness—he was smart, and could offer an objective opinion.

Finally, they used Howard, along with Bruce Axelrod, whose training had covered military interrogation. He was the kind of guy who'd make sure nothing got over-looked. John had known him, on and off, for many years, and they trusted each other—he'd taught John a lot, even as a little kid.

John wished he could have brought more of his friends along to this session—Angelo Suarez maybe, or some of the Salcedas—but he'd brief them afterwards. They wanted to keep down the numbers here, and there had to be priorities.

The Terminator sat at one end of the big table in the *casco*. It looked relaxed but alert, with both hands on the tabletop in front of it. The others lined up along the table's sides, John hunching forward, eager to hear what he might learn, how much new information the Terminator had after all these years. Sarah was fidgety and nervous with bad memories coming back, or so John guessed. Her experience was so different from his: The first T-800 she'd met had almost killed her; her lover and protector, Kyle—John's father—had died fighting it She'd lived through all that, traumatized, yet come up so much tougher. [Howard and Bruce sat on the same side of the table, up near the Terminator, both of them looking stiff and military, though Bruce gave John a wink, to show it was all a kind of game.

"Let's start," Gabriela said. "This could take a while."

She'd found some pads and exercise books—plenty of paper for everyone to take notes. She also had a tape recorder running, a handheld device, like a Dicta-phone, placed on the tabletop, two feet away from the Terminator. John chose a 224-page exercise book to write notes in.

"All right," Howard said. "This is not a normal interrogation. It's not like the subject is hostile. So we don't need any tricks, or anything fancy here. It's just a matter of being thorough, making sure we get all we want. Is that clear? We can do this again if we have to, but it's good to get it right the first time."

"Amen to that," Bruce said. He looked hard at the Terminator. "What sort of information do you have?"

"I have detailed files relevant to my mission. Also standard files for Terminator operations."

"Like what?" John said.

"General military data. Maps, designs. Human physiological data. Basic psychological theory—"

"What about Skynet's headquarters?" he said. "How it's laid out? In 2029, I mean. Have you got files on that?"

"Yes, sufficient for operational purposes."

Howard put up his hand to stop proceedings. He looked across the table to where John and Sarah were

seated. "You guys are the ones who know what questions to ask. The rest of us can help you, but it's really up to you. You happy to go on like this, John?"

"Sure." John was starting to enjoy it.

"He's dealt with the Terminator more than anybody," Sarah said. "He knows what to ask it, and what won't help."

John thought about the Terminator's answers so far. Back in 1994, when they'd fought and fled from the T-1000, it had mentioned its files. It held detailed files on human anatomy, it had said, all the better to be an efficient killer. But there was no reason for it to know everything that Skynet itself knew, or would know in the next twenty-three years. "So how much gets programmed into a Terminator?" he said. "How much information?"

"All Skynet war units are equipped with basic information relating to their essential operations, and additional information sufficient for their current missions."

"Okay, so what do you mean by 'war units'?" John had a good idea of what kinds of machines that meant.

"You're programmed with that information?" Sarah said.

"Yes, recognition of allied units is basic information required for all missions. No unit could function without it."

"Okay," John said. "So what *don't* you know?"

The Terminator looked at him sharply, almost reprov-ing. "Unclear question."

John rolled his eyes. The more it dealt with humans, the more the T-800 resembled them in its superficial responses, but there were limits. When it followed John around the *estancia* or on his various missions, the Terminator seemed totally convincing as a strong, rather silent, human being. But fundamentally it still thought like a computer; like any computer, it could give precise answers, but it needed fairly precise questions.

"Do you have Skynet's plans for human extermination?" Howard said.

John looked the T-800 in the eye and nodded, indicating it should answer. "I am equipped with files on general concepts and strategies."

"All right, we'll come back to that. What is Skynet up to now? How far advanced are its plans right this moment?"

"Unknown."

John smiled. He could have answered that. Still, he could see what Howard had in mind, getting a broad overview of the sorts of the things the Terminator might or might not know before getting down to specifics.

"What about Skynet's HQ," Bruce said lazily. "As of 2029—that's when you come from, I guess?"

"Yes."

"Well you must have some kinda map in there." He pointed at the Terminator's forehead. "Could you draw the layout for us?"

"In general terms. Not all of it was relevant to my missions."

Bruce smiled John's way. "Your question, counsel." John could see the approach. Start broad, then get specific. For the next few hours, he worked through it as systematically as he could, sometimes taking notes. The others took notes of their own or sometimes gave him hints. As Howard had said, no tricks were needed: it was more a matter of being thorough. John got a lot of information, but found some disappointing gaps. The Terminator's knowledge of the Colorado mountains in 2029, Skynet's defenses, and even the layout of its fortress headquarters all had limits. It knew the general plan of the HQ, but not the details of every floor. It was designed to infiltrate the human Resistance, not to operate at home base or direct defenses in the mountains.

It knew even less about the defenses established around the fortress, since it did not have any mission to take part in those. It had only enough information to negotiate entrance and egress to and from the fortress and through the defenses. It relied more upon being recognized by other units. It did have much considerable knowledge of other Skynet war machines, including their strengths and weaknesses, and John scribbled that down eagerly. It might prove invaluable. Again, the data was more about operational specifications than design detail, but that was important.

In the end, it was useful. Taken with other information, it gave them a lot.

Other people here might be able to supplement it, John thought. Tarissa, for example, must know Colorado well. By the time they attacked Skynet, they'd have an excellent approximation of how its defenses worked.

He thought about the time travel equipment. Did the Terminator know anything about that? He already knew it wasn't expert on time travel, but it had been sent back in time, using the equipment.

"I know its basic appearance and operations," the T-800 said. That was good. John made some more notes. He was getting well prepared. He wrote down some summary points, then came to his last batch of questions. He knew he'd think of more later, no matter how thorough he was, but this would do for now. He could always talk to the Terminator separately, if it was just a few points. "Do you use the same technology as Skynet? Your CPU, I mean."

"Yes," the Terminator said. "My functioning is controlled by a nanotechnological chip using the same technology that Miles Dyson developed for the Skynet project."

That was what he had expected. He looked at Danny, expecting him to flinch, or show some reaction, at the mention of his father's name, but Danny looked calm and impassive; he simply made a note of the Terminator's answer. "Okay," John said. "Is there a way we can get access to your nanochip? I want to know how it's done."

"Yes," the Terminator said. "But I cannot be reprogrammed, not with your available technology."

"No, that's not what I have in mind." Still, it led to another thought. "Could you help us build the right technology?"

"Negative. I don't have detailed files. Terminator units are not equipped with files on technical details beyond mission requirements."

"I can see that," John said. "What about you, Howard? Do you know more about it?" "I know how it works. Maybe I could program it with the right equipment. But I'm not an engineer. I can't build the equipment for you. And you know all the problems—"

"Yeah, we talked about it yesterday. Still, we'll get the equipment. I'm sure we can do something."

That night, John went with Howard and the Terminator to one of the auto garages. Again, he chose a select group, but a slightly larger one. He wanted younger people involved, people who might still be around and active, twenty-three years down the track. As John looked on with Carlo, the younger Salcedas, Danny Dyson, Fernando Alvez, and half a dozen others, the Terminator found a sharp knife. It sat in front of the mirror on a metal-framed chair with hard vinyl covered padding. It cut carefully into the flesh under its scalp, just above the right temple.

"Ugh," someone said, but someone else laughed—it was Fernando. John looked with fascination, wincing only slightly at what happened next.

The Terminator peeled the flesh away, to reveal the shining metal endoskeleton underneath: the chrome "skull." The wound scarcely bled, since the Terminator had no actual blood supply, no network of arteries or veins. When John peered carefully, he could see that the skull was not a single, seamless curve. There was a circular area with an indentation like in the head of a screw. In fact, two tiny screws were placed on either side of it.

Carlo was the strongest of them all. He found the right tools, and got the cover plate off with tremendous effort. When he'd finished, his hands were stained with the cyborg's blood, but certainly not dripping. Using a pair of pliers, Carlo he pulled out a structure that seemed to be made of intricately connected cubes.

"I've never seen one of these in real life," Howard said bending over it. "Fascinating."

The Terminator had frozen into position, seated in front of the mirror. John lifted its hand and its servos whined softly, but there was no life in it. When he let go of the hand, it stayed in place.

"All right," John said. "That's how it's done."

Carlo passed the nanochip CPU to John, who looked at it closely. He had never seen anything like it. "Could you program something like this?" he said to Howard.

"In theory."

John reinserted the CPU. "All right," he said. "We all need to learn that theory."

PART THREE:

JOHN'S WORLD

CHAPTER

SIX

COLORADO SPRINGS AUGUST 2001

Layton soon assessed the situation. There were hours of tapes covering the period that the T-XA and the Specialists had been in the building, but only a small fraction of it was relevant—just the material from the floors where the battle had taken place, mainly the fourth and twelfth floors and the basement. The encounter between the Terminator and the Specialists had actually been quite brief. As he watched, he tried to assess the harm that would be done if this material were seen by the wrong people in Washington.

Here, in Colorado Springs, he felt in control. Jensen had brought a Cyberdyne guard called Penny Webster, a young, muscular black woman whom the T-XA had already reprogrammed. Layton now had a strong core of people to carry on here while he went to Washington.

They ordered in pizzas, coffee and Coke to get them through while they worked — not his normal idea of fine cuisine, but sufficient to keep him going as they sorted through the images on the tapes. Some sacrifices had to be made in Skynet's interests. They quickly discarded the footage from most of the cameras, working their way down to about two hours of relevant material, which they edited into a single chronological sequence, with some repetition of events from different angles, and some sequences of events that came from different parts of the building at the same time.

He replayed one part again and again. On the fourth floor of the building, the Connors and the Specialists had encountered one of the components that the T-XA had split off; it had the appearance of a man, solidly built, with long, dark-brown hair. The camera showed events, viewed from above, as the pseudo-man rounded a corner, and John Connor took aim with a 12-gauge shotgun. He blasted the Terminator's right hand, which held its laser rifle. The hand snapped off, and the heavy weapon went flying through the air. One of the Specialists, an Hispanic-looking woman, accelerated with superhuman speed almost into the pseudo-man's arms, catching the laser rifle and tossing it to one of the others. But the T-XA's left arm morphed, stabbing out as a long sword-like shaft, three inches thick. It pierced straight through the woman's chest, then out her back.

At that point, the tape showed a group of well-armed military guards, who broke in from two directions: a rapid-response team armed with assault rifles. From the stump of the T-XA's right wrist, another blade stabbed out, filament-thin, penetrating the Hispanic woman's skull to absorb her memories.

There were numerous other images of the T-XA morphing, splitting, merging, performing feats that demonstrated without doubt that it was a device far beyond any current technology. Of course, the government was briefed on the reality of time travel and the fact that there must be Terminators. That had

not stopped the Skynet project, but watching this tape would shake even the project's most passionate and well-informed advocates in the government.

Layton followed through to the end, trying to make sense of it all. What a pity they only had the visual images to go on, not sound. It was impossible to make out what objectives and tactics the Specialists and the Connors were discussing amongst themselves. Perhaps a lip-reading expert would be able to reconstruct some of it, but the images were seldom clear.

What became obvious was that the T-XA components had finally joined when fighting the Connors and the Specialists in the building's basement. There, another of the Specialists had been killed: a black man who looked uncannily like Miles Dyson. The others had all suffered wounds in the battle, though that did not mean much; they could probably recover quickly. The T-XA kept attacking the Specialists, almost ignoring the Connors except when it needed to defend itself from them. That might have been a mistake. Though the Connors possessed nothing like the physical or mental capabilities of the Specialists, they doubtless had useful contacts, not to mention knowledge and rat cunning. Without them, the Specialists would find it much more difficult to hide, plan and operate.

Still, what was done was done. In the end, the T-XA had been trapped in the time vault, which had been operated by Rosanna Monk, of all people. For unknown reasons, she had betrayed Skynet. Part of the T-XA's arm had been chopped off when the time vault's door slammed shut under Rosanna's control. Somehow she had defeated or overridden her reprogramming. That made her very dangerous. If she sided with the Connors, she could do untold damage to Cyberdyne's prospects.

Layton considered what to do about her. It was a pity for the world to lose her genius at a point when she could be useful in the task of creating Skynet, but she could never be trusted again. Even if her reprogramming took over, she was unreliable. She would have to be terminated.

There were other lessons to be learnt. Only two of the Specialists had survived. It was no use publicly acknowledging the others. Of course, many police, military, and emergency services personnel had been present when the Connors and the Specialists arrived at the site, and had seen all four Specialists. But how many would have had a clear view of what had happened? Some of those people could be found and reprogrammed, others might have to be silenced in various ways. Over time, it might be best if some were terminated, but not just yet: that would only arouse suspicion.

So the official story should be that only four people had turned up with Rosanna Monk, just the Connors and two of the Specialists. Descriptions of the Japanese woman and the gray-haired European man could be provided to police forces across the country and the media. They could provide still images from the surveillance tapes and pass them on as well. Those four would be cornered quickly if they tried to go anywhere. Dean would need to convey that to all the authorities, here and in Washington. It would be the official truth.

The dead Hispanic woman might also be useful. Once the right people were reprogrammed in Washington, there would doubtless be scope to reverse-engineer at least some of the modifications that had been made to her body. Perhaps they could be used to enhance some of Skynet's mindslaves in the future. It might also be possible to reverse-engineer the liquid metal substance from which the T-XA had been made, incorporating it in weaponry or even in new kinds of computer hardware.

Only two Specialists were left, and much of what had happened could be exploited — but not these surveillance tapes. Anyone viewing them could now make sense of what had happened almost as easily as Layton, who was only slightly advantaged by the information he had from the T-XA. He turned to Solomon. "How long can you keep this to yourself?"

"I'll have to give oral briefings."

"Of course." Those could say all the right things.

"And I need to send a written report in the morning. Otherwise, it's going to look mighty suspicious."

"I understand."

"I'll make it vague, just enough detail so it doesn't look incompetent. But not enough to give them much guidance. As for the tapes, they'll expect us to digitize them and send them to their Information Management people. We can get the raw material to them tomorrow and they can start their own analysis. That will take them some time. We've worked harder than they'll be expecting, to get the edited version. I can hang on to that for at least a couple of days."

Layton took a large bite from one of the wedges of pizza. All this exertion kept him ravenous. He ate it thoughtfully, puzzling out how to deal with the people in Washington until he could get to them. "If you come under pressure, act obtuse. Do you understand? Let them think you're unimaginative, or even stupid, but not dis-loyal. We don't want them investigating you."

"That makes good sense."

"Good." Layton looked around the room at his little group of mindslaves. "You've all been very helpful. I'll leave you and say goodnight." Their work was ahead of them.

For now, Layton's work was done.

THE PENTAGON

Jack caught one hour's sleep then went into his office, arriving at 7:00 A.M. He checked whether any footage had already been received from Colorado—the raw record of the surveillance tapes. It had not arrived yet *Damn!* It would have been unrealistic to expect it so quickly, but this was an emergency—couldn't Solomon and his people understand that?

He checked what documents had arrived on his desk: two reports on progress with high-tech air defense contracts; one regular intelligence briefing, which he flipped through quickly, just to make sure there was nothing that couldn't wait. He checked his e-mails and his computerized diary, finding the day choked with meetings—most of them not critical. With a sigh, he set to work, making notes to his secretary to reschedule whatever she could when she arrived at work later in the morning. He scribbled a handwritten note of those appointments he'd still need to handle through the day.

As soon as possible he needed to speak with Layton and Cruz, get them to come to Washington, and meet in person — if not today, tomorrow at the earliest. He supposed they'd been up all night, too, but everyone just had to stay on the job. They could sleep when this was over.

Amongst his e-mail was a brief report from Solomon, surprisingly brief, in fact, copied to Samantha and to some of the top brass, including the chiefs of staff. It told no more than Jack already knew, but

promised more to come, including the original surveillance tapes, plus an edited version showing exactly what had happened. That was good work, anyway, but the report itself was third-rate-not what Jack expected. It confirmed their suggested story that only two people had been with Rosanna and the Connors. All right, they'd stick with that.

Jack forwarded the report to the Secretary with a terse, critical covering message. He sent the same covering message to the report's other recipients, then typed up a note on the computer screen, setting out some thoughts of his own, just a series of items for discussion:

Item 1: The Connors had four accomplices (contrary to our "official" position). The dead body of one has been found, a woman of Hispanic appearance. Despite the extraordinary abilities they all showed, this body appears human-it is not, for example, a cyborg being with a metal interior. Nonetheless, it will need to be examined. Some kind of technological enhancement can be expected.

Item 2: The experimental apparatus known as "the time vault" was used during the raid. It appears that someone or something was displaced in space-time, using the apparatus. Indeed, reports suggest that this was the fate of one of the four accomplices helping the Connors. To put the point more accurately, anything placed in the apparatus will have been scattered across the space-time continuum, disintegrated in four dimensions. Why was the time vault used?

Item 3: Reports have also been received of some kind of strange being or machine fighting *against* the Connors and their accomplices.

Item 4: Critical to the future success of Cyberdyne's research, Dr. Rosanna Monk has disappeared, evidently with the Connors. Dr. Monk is not indispensable, but she is a huge loss for the project.

Those were important points, he decided. He quickly reformatted them, added some "top and tail" material, and included them in a further Top Secret report. He would send it to the Secretary, copy to Samantha. Now it was getting so formal, he needed some recommendations, but that depended on further analysis. The surveillance tapes would show exactly what went on, and a detailed postmortem examination of the body found on the twelfth floor would tell them more about what they were up against.

Should the project be canceled? he wrote. He made that into a heading, since it led to further issues. Answering that question required a thorough knowledge of the origin of the Terminators that had been encountered by Sarah Connor in 1984 and 1994.

He recommended that Connor, her son, their accomplices and Dr. Monk must be found urgently, and interrogated. Meanwhile, Charles Layton and Oscar Cruz should be treated with suspicion until the issue was resolved. These *recommendations will need to be reviewed as information is gathered*, he concluded.

Jack reviewed what he'd written, and saw that it still needed some finessing. After another half-hour, he had a solid document: full of meat, but clear and punchy, and short enough that it might actually be read. He e-mailed it off just seconds before Samantha entered his office.

"I've been thinking," she said.

"Yeah, me, too." The computer screen showed the time as 8:26 A.M. There was still plenty of time to prepare for the meeting. "Have a quick look at what I've sent you. Then we'd better talk about it."

The Secretary looked tired and careworn, showing every year of his age. Jack braced himself for the

worst from this meeting—whether an accusation of incompetence, or simply a judgment made without full knowledge of the facts. That could have even more dire consequences. Jack's career had taught him that political masters could get things very wrong, demand the impossible, and cause disaster when you tried to interpret their wishes in a way that made sense.

"This is tough for all of us," the Secretary said. "We've got the press climbing all over our backs."

"I know that, sir—" Samantha said.

"Well, just hear me out. I've read what you sent me, Jack, including this excuse for a report from Dean Solomon in Colorado. I've been reviewing the whole situation."

Jack was not sure what to say. Where was this leading?

The Secretary leaned forward confidentially. "I've looked again at just what this technology might be able to do, the reasons we're all so interested, the way the work has been handled — and where it fits in with all your other projects. The first thing is, I want you to know is that I think you're both doing a first-rate job. Nothing we discuss here now takes away from that. I've been around long enough to recognize good work when I see it."

"Well, thank you," Samantha said.

For the moment, Jack kept his silence. Something bad was coming, if it had to be prefaced like that.

The Secretary gave a tired laugh. "There's no need to sound so surprised. The second thing is, I know your work is important—including the contracts with Cyberdyne. I've been reminding myself of how important it is, and how it fits our fundamental aims."

"Do you need any more briefing on any of those contracts, sir?" Jack said

"Hell, no. It's clear enough. Look Jack, the technologies your office is overseeing are crucial to us. I haven't forgotten that. You're helping us prepare for the threats of the new century — that's some of the most important work we could be doing right now. I appreciate it. Everything we say today is in that context."

"Thank you, sir."

"My pleasure. I like to give credit where I see it's due. But that doesn't mean nothing needs to change. This problem with Cyberdyne has gone on long enough, and we need to get it resolved. The reality is that it's distracting us from other programs. That doesn't mean we drop it—I didn't say that. But we do have to resolve it quickly; we can't let it just keep rolling on to God knows where."

"Yes, sir," Jack said. "I fully agree." This might not be too bad, after all: It sounded like the Secretary had nothing definite in mind.

"Now, I've been through all the briefings you've written for me — and we've had our talks about all this. I've never tried to micromanage the programs that you're looking after, you know that. Each one is important, and I like the whole mindset you've brought to it — we need this kind of high-tech stuff. Cyberdyne's work could be critical to us, and I'm not going to stop it lightly."

Jack relaxed slightly. "All right. So where to from here? You have my recommendations. Do you agree

with them?"

"As far as they go, yes." The Secretary passed back a hard copy of Jack's e-mailed report, with a note scribbled on top of the first page: *Need to speak*. He stuck out his chin, then said, "If this program goes well, it could be one of the most important we've got for the transformation of the forces in the twenty-first century. I've absorbed the implications of that. Once it was just NORAD—we were thinking in terms of Russian ICBMs."

"That's still an important possibility," Samantha said.

"Yes, I know."

When Jack had first discussed the concept with Layton and Cruz, many years before, the emphasis had been on strategic surveillance, the possibility of phasing out the NORAD facility in Cheyenne Mountain, replacing it with something better. A strategic surveillance network based on Dyson-Monk nanoprocessor technology would be faster and more precise than humans in analyzing data that could indicate a nuclear strike. But there was so much more that the technology could do; it could become integral to every aspect of the forces' work.

"This technology could give us just what we need," the Secretary said, "a major boost in our capacity to win wars — and winning wars is what we're here for. Am I right?"

Jack half expected a playful punch on the shoulder, the way the Secretary was talking. He laughed; this was getting better, minute by minute. "Damn right, sir."

"Okay, now we agree on that, I can't understand one thing. Just who or what is behind these attacks, the one in 1994, and again last night? Nothing suggests any usual enemy — in fact it can't be any usual enemy. We know that, don't we? Let's not fool around about this."

"No—"

"This scientist from Cyberdyne—what's her name?"

"Rosanna Monk," Samantha said.

"All right, Dr. Monk — what's she like?"

"She seems eccentric, but she's not so bad when you get to know her. Very intense, self-absorbed, even ob-ssessed. But she's not at all flaky; she knows what she's doing."

"She's convinced that these Terminators are real?"

"She is," Jack said. "I've got no doubt she's right. Sam and I have been over all her evidence."

"Well, that's your problem there."

"Pardon, sir?"

"That's your problem. You've got this wonderful technology, but something we don't understand is going on with it. We don't know what can of worms we're opening here, if we go ahead. That's what we've got to find out. And it can't wait. How am I supposed to sleep when I'm told that those things are

out there? And what am I supposed to tell the President?"

"All we have to go on are Sarah Connor's claims," Samantha said. "We can't trust those."

"Well, you seem to have that right," the Secretary said. "Her story doesn't add up. We didn't have any Judgment Day."

"No, sir."

"Well, how *do* you explain it? Countries like Iraq don't have that kind of technology — neither did the Soviets. I'll say this: I want you to go on with the project for now. We can pull the plug later — if there's some reason. But we need to know that reason, if it exists. Find that out as your highest priority. Is that clear?"

"Yes," Jack said. "You couldn't be clearer."

"One other thing, I'm not happy with Solomon. Something earthshaking is going on over there and he's showing a mindset that it's not happening. I don't understand it—he's been competent before, hasn't he?"

"Always."

"You just keep an eye on him—replace him if you have to. Now, when are you meeting with the Cyberdyne people?"

"We'll fit them in as soon as they can get to Washington. Maybe tonight, if they get over here today."

"Good. I agree they're hiding something from us. You're going to have to put it on the line with them — whatever way you think is necessary, I don't want to know. Understand me? Make sure they're safe, see they're not harmed, but get their story. Get the truth out of them. Until that happens, we don't know if we're coming or going."

"Understood, sir," Jack said.

"All right, that's enough for now. You know what you have to do."

"Certainly," Samantha said. "I'm looking forward to meeting with Layton and Cruz. We'll take care of them."

The Secretary gave her a long, appraising look. "Well, see that you do that, Sam. There's something about Cyberdyne that I don't like. Just make sure that they don't take care of you."

SALCEDA COMPOUND

For a moment, John was speechless, standing in the warm desert wind. He'd never expected another Terminator to be sent back by his older self — the messages from the future, from Kyle Reese in 1984 and the T-800 in 1994, had never mentioned yet another time traveler sent by the human Resistance. The T-799 must have arrived here, at the Salceda camp, in the last two days, since John and Sarah had been

here with the Specialists that recently, seeking help from Enrique's family. Nothing had been said then about the Terminator.

"How did you find me?" he said. "What makes you think I can help you?"

"You have been on television," the Terminator said. The police are looking for you. I knew you would come here if there were trouble. You helped to program me, and you gave me that information."

Oh boy, this present tense/past tense thing got complicated. So John had programmed the Terminator in the future. Maybe it was a different reality, as the Terminator had said, but it was the year 2029—that made it future tense. But from the Terminator's point of view, it had already happened. It was in the machine's memory. "Well," John said, "what do you think I can do?" "You will assist me. We will find help." But John shook his head. "Er, I don't think so." He had no doubt that Eve was a machine. She, or *it*, had the same grim, unchanging expression he'd seen in the T-800 Terminator, back in 1994. But he didn't fear it, despite the reactions from his mom and Rosanna: The T-800 hadn't tried to kill him — it had saved his life many times. What a Terminator would do depended entirely on its programming. Like most machines, it could be used for good or evil. But he wondered how far to push that thought, since Skynet itself had turned out evil in at least two worlds — perhaps it was mankind's enemy in every world where it came into being.

Anyway, this Terminator was asking the impossible. John looked from face to face, seeing that everyone else was just as confused as he was. The Specialists showed no particular expression, but that didn't mean they wouldn't be ready to move if the Terminator tried anything. Sarah had that wild look he sometimes saw on her face, like she was awake, yet staring at a nightmare. The gun in her hand trembled slightly. Enrique had lowered his rifle, but seemed like a man whose patience was running out. Rosanna had calmed herself. Now she just looked thoughtful.

Juanita gave John an amused smile. "We must talk," the Terminator said. "We will find your leaders and persuade them."

A dust-covered Chrysler sedan that John hadn't seen before was parked one hundred yards from where they were standing, sheltered from the dusty wind between two of Enrique's trucks. That must be how the Terminator had come here.

"All right," John said. "Let's just get it all straight. You're a T-799 Terminator?" "Affirmative."

"So what does that mean-T-799? The last Terminator we worked with was a T-800."

"The T-799s were Skynet's first cyborg design, the prototype for the T-800 models."

"So, you're like the prototype for the Terminator that helped us seven years ago, right?"

"Correct. You were assisted by a T-800, model 101. Each design model is based on a different human template. You may think of me as a different model of the T-800. My abilities are similar."

The machine seemed to know all about him, but that made sense if he'd programmed it himself. "Okay, but I just don't get this. What's the deal? I wouldn't know where to start if I wanted to help you. I don't know our leaders in this country. I can't go finding you an army or anything."

"John's right," Sarah said, a little too quickly. "Whatever it is you want, you'd be better off without us. We don't have contacts with politicians — they might know about us, but they all think we're crazy."

But John caught Rosanna's eye. She knew people in Washington, and she badly wanted to talk to them. He thought about that: What if they could get to those people? "Right now, we're the ones who need help," he said. "But maybe we can do something." Still, it seemed impossible. How were they even supposed to get to the future? Nobody, and nothing, that came from the future ever went back. That was how it had always been. They didn't even have a workable time machine. The nearest thing anyone had built was Cyberdyne's time vault, and he wouldn't take his chances with *that*.

And the future that Eve came from wasn't even a fu-ture that awaited them now. It had said it was from a dif-ferent reality. If it came from the reality where Judgment had happened in 1997. . . what were the implications? How could it travel not only back in time, but from one reality to another?

"In this world," the Terminator said, "Judgment Day never happened"

"It hasn't happened *yet*," Sarah said. "That doesn't mean it won't."

The Terminator inspected her carefully, looking her up and down, as if taking measurements with its artificial eyes. "You are Sarah Connor."

"Yes, I am." Her finger tensed on the trigger of her gun; the barrel was aimed right between the Terminator's eyes.

"Your son gave me a message for you: *The future is still not set. Our world depends on you.*"

Sarah laughed sharply. "You're kidding me, right?" She looked at Anton for support, as though figuring he was the expert on time and time travel.

But Anton shook his head. "I think we should hear this."

Enrique frowned with concentration, accentuating his hawklike features. "I think you've *all* got to be kidding. Just what the hell is this all about? And where's the other two you had with you?"

"Now, Enrique—" Sarah said.

"Don't *Now*, *Enrique* me, Sarahlita. I don't know. . . this is just getting out of hand." He looked over at Rosanna, sizing her up almost as frankly as the Termina-tor had done to Sarah. "You're the missing scientist, right? We've seen you on the TV."

"Yeah, right," Rosanna said in a tone just short of dis-gust. "I'm America's Most Wanted."

Enrique looked from Rosanna to Sarah, then to the two Specialists. Then to John and the female Terminator. He put one of his strong arms across Juanita's shoulders. "You're all going to have to tell us what's going on."

Sarah gave a pained smile, and lowered her gun. "We tried to, Enrique. I've told you before. We went over it with you again, just two days ago — what we knew back then."

Enrique gave his daughter an affectionate squeeze, then stepped away from her toward Sarah. He placed a hand on her arm, near the shoulder. "I can always stretch the friendship a little, Connor. You know me."

"Yes, Enrique, I do."

"All the same, you ought to know that I'm reaching my limit. I'm getting close to the edge. You know what I mean?"

"It's understood."

"Yeah? All right then. But we have our own lives to live here, and every time you turn up, you've got the law after you. What do you think would happen if the cops tracked you down here and went through this place?"

John knew what they would find: enough small arms to support a third-world revolution, mainly hidden in un-derground bunkers. The Salcedas were survivalists and gunrunners, with a network of contacts that extended across the U.S. and down into South America as far as Argentina. They were decent people, but they'd fight the cops if they had to. If the compound were ever raided, people would probably die.

"It's not like we begrudge you," Enrique said. "Hell, Connor, you know you can ask for anything — the shirt off my back if you want, the fillings out of my goddamn teeth—"

Sarah put her hands up. "I know, Enrique, I know. I re-alize I've asked a lot of you. You've always been here for us, you and Yolanda. Without you, everything would have been lost. You're just going to have to do a little more. I'm sorry. We'll make it up to you somehow."

"Honestly, Sarahlita, I don't know."

"Let's not talk out here," Juanita said, speaking up for the first time. "Can't we go inside? Let's get out of the wind."

"Yeah," Enrique said. "The kid's right. Come inside, all of you. We have to get this straight, but at least we can offer you a drink."

Jade nodded, then looked at the Terminator. "We *all* have much to talk about."

LOS ANGELES/WASHINGTON, D.C.

By 11:00 A.M., Oscar had done a full day's work, speaking with all his senior research people, several of Cyberdyne's Board members—plus, insurers, lawyers, local politicians in both Colorado and California, and innumerable representatives of the press. He'd spoken briefly to Charles Layton before Layton flew out to Washington, and spent some useful minutes on the phone with Samantha Jones, fine-tuning how to handle the media. Then he'd done two TV interviews and eight short ones for radio stations across the county. That had taken most of the media burden from Layton, who had a special dislike of journalists. Oscar rode in a taxi to the airport, stretching out comfortably on the backseat. On the way, he used his cell phone to call Jack Reed's secretary for the second time today—hoping to nail down an appointment. "I've checked," she said pleasantly. "Jack can see you formally, first thing tomorrow morning. He usually starts before 8:00 A.M. I'm sure he could make it earlier."

"That sounds good, Vicki." Oscar had dealt with Vicki Albano for several years, often liaising with her directly about his trips to Washington. "I've got no problem with 8:00 A.M. But can we get some time with them this evening after I get in?"

"Sure, Mr. Cruz. He thought an informal chat over dinner-then you can discuss the detail tomorrow."

That was perfect. All they needed was a chance for Layton to get Jack or Samantha alone, only for a minute, to start the ball rolling. They'd soon need to reprogram a large number of people in Washington, sufficient to gain command of the Pentagon's investigation. Jack and Samantha were only their first targets, but they'd provide an *entree* to many others. One thing would lead to another. The more people they could see and reprogram, the easier it would become. "All right," he said. "Listen, Vicki, I'm boarding a plane soon. Can you sort out the final details with my secretary, while I'm en route? She can liaise with Charles."

"That's fine, Mr. Cruz."

"All right, good. He'll be in Washington early this afternoon, well before me."

"I'll talk with Mr. Reed and see that everything works out. Can you give me your flight number?"

Oscar gave her the full details, with departure and arrival times. With the three-hour time difference between L.A. and Washington, it might have to be a late dinner.

"That's all fine," Vicki said. "Leave it with me."

"Thank you."

"My pleasure. Have a nice day."

When his taxi pulled up at the terminal, Oscar gave the driver a generous tip. Distasteful as he found it dealing with human beings, now that he'd been reprogrammed, he saw no reason to depart from his usual methods. He tried to keep others happy in little ways that did him no harm. That was how he'd gotten on so well in life; he always knew what people wanted, and what he could afford. He generated a field of good will to draw upon when he needed it. By now, he knew the routine by rote: It didn't require any human sympathy.

He stepped out of the cab, squinting in the bright sunshine of early August, dealt with the formalities of baggage handling and check-in, then boarded a United Airlines flight at ten minutes after midday. For the next few hours, he could get some rest, safe in the knowledge that everything was under control. He slept most of the way to Washington.

When he arrived, it was still daylight, the days long and hot at this time of year. A government driver met him at National Airport for the short drive to his hotel in the busy city traffic. "Thank you," Oscar said when they reached the hotel. "Have a nice day." He headed to the foyer, and checked in.

"You have some phone calls already, sir," the check-in clerk said. She was a young Asian woman in a smart red uniform.

"Okay, fine."

She handed across four slips showing calls from people whose names he didn't recognize, probably all news reporters. Two provided their press affiliations, the other two had just left names. All right he'd deal with those in the morning. No one could say that Cyberdyne had not been open with the press — at least as far as it could. Even Layton had spoken to some journalists before leaving Colorado Springs. Oscar had been very accessible. True, in his interviews for radio and TV, he hadn't hesitated to dodge questions, referring to the national security aspects of Cyberdyne's contracts. But what else could people expect? The research facility was housed in a government building, so no one had doubted it was doing sensitive Military work.

"Thank you for that," he said to the clerk. "I'll need to see Charles Layton. Can you give his room number?"

"Of course, sir. I just have to check that." She rang Layton's room. "Mr. Cruz wants to see you. May I give him your number? Thank you." She put down the phone and gave a broad smile that Oscar found sickening, all that white calcium, surrounded by the red-painted flesh of her lips. "Mr. Layton is in room 1407, just down the hall from your own room." Oscar's keycard was for room 1404, so they'd have easy access to each other.

He took an elevator to the fourteenth floor, dropped off his bags, then went straight to see Layton.

Layton wore gray suit pants and a plain white shirt. He'd pulled back the room's curtains, showing a panorama of the city, looking south and east toward the Capitol. "Jack Reed will meet us at 9:00 P.M.," he said. "It's all arranged."

"That's good. And Samantha, too?"

"Yes, both of them."

"So what's the plan? Are we having dinner with them?"

"We're dining at a restaurant called Longfellow's Grill on Connecticut Avenue. I expect that we'll be treated in style. Jack always finds somewhere with a certain amount of class."

"Well, we might as well enjoy it while we can."

"That's true, Oscar. I spent last night living on pizza."

"The main thing is that we get a few minutes alone with them."

"Well, I'll find a minute alone with them, or at least with Jack. That's what matters, tonight"

Oscar might once have resented a comment like that, but it was perfectly true. Layton had been enhanced by the T-XA to reprogram whoever was necessary. No doubt, he'd had the most adaptable mind for that particular purpose. It wasn't up to Oscar to question the decisions the T-XA had made, though its own performance against the Specialists had, indeed, been less than perfect. Anyway, they all had their talents, everyone who'd been reprogrammed.

Yet, even in that respect, the T-XA had not been perfect. When Oscar had spoken with Layton before leaving L.A., he'd learned that Rosanna had betrayed them, despite her programming. That might be a serious problem: She was very resourceful, potentially a dangerous enemy.

"What about Rosanna?" he said. "She must have sided with the others—Sarah Connor and the rest."

"Yes," Layton said, measuring Oscar with his watery blue eyes. "I'm quite disturbed by that. I'm sure she'll come to Washington, one way or other. She'll stay with the others for safety."

"They might slow her down, but you're probably right."

"If she comes here alone, she won't last very long."

"No-no, she won't"

"The point is to be ready for them. We're still one step ahead. By the time they get here, everything will have to be in hand."

It was going to be a challenge, but they could do it. "All right, then, let's get on with it. The future needs us, Charles. That's my new motto."

"Yes," Layton said. That's certainly the best way to look at it. You get ready, I'll organize a cab." He went to the wardrobe, taking out a red and silver tie, and his suit jacket, then his gun holster. He gave only the hint of a smile as he strapped on the holster. "I suppose I might need this tonight. I'll take it just in case."

They'd never get into the Pentagon armed in any way, but this was different. Oscar figured that a firearm couldn't hurt while they had no allies in Washington. "All right," he said, reflecting Layton's mood. "I'll go and freshen up. I'm looking forward to our dinner."

"Yes, it's nice to be looked after."

CHAPTER

SEVEN

SALCEDA COMPOUND AUGUST 2001

There really was a lot to talk about, Rosanna thought as long as talk translated into action. Whatever else they knew, and despite all their abilities, none of these people understood the corridors of power in Washington. She'd need to guide them.

"Come on, then," said the man whom Sarah had called "Enrique." He turned, heading for one of the battered-looking trailers, pushing his child on ahead of him.

But Anton, the big Russian Specialist, said, "Not yet."

"What now?"

"I'll show you something." Anton walked back to the Toyota that they'd driven from Colorado Springs, and Enrique followed with a put-upon look. The Russian opened the front passenger door, and took something out. It was the radiation weapon, the laser rifle, that they'd taken from the T-XA.

As Anton held it out in his spread hands, Enrique looked it over, obviously puzzled. "All right, what the hell is it? Some kind of weapon, by the look of it."

"It's a phased-plasma laser rifle. Here, feel its weight."

Anton passed it over, and Enrique carefully lowered his own rifle to the ground, setting the safety mechanism. He locked the laser weapon in both strong arms, losing his balance for a moment.

"So, what does it do?" Enrique said.

"Give it back, and I'll show you."

Rosanna saw that the T-799 Terminator—or the woman who claimed to be a Terminator—was following this closely, watching like a hawk, though betraying no emotion. Rosanna had little doubt that the T-799 was what it claimed to be. In the worldview she'd now adopted, time travel and Terminators were real phenomena as real as trees or people, pets or buildings, or furniture. You just had to understand how they worked, how they could be used to one's advantage.

Anton straightened the laser rifle, aiming at a twelve-foot-tall Joshua tree sixty yards away. He pulled back on the trigger, and a beam of coherent light leapt out, instantly bridging the gap. The tree burst into flames. "See?"

Again, he passed the weapon to Enrique, who checked it over curiously. "All right, that's really something." Enrique took aim at the same tree, holding the rifle in both hands, one using the pistol grip, the other cradling the barrel.

Before he could fire, a woman ran from one of the toilers. "Enrique!" She was Hispanic, with long, graying hair—attractive in an Earth-mother sort of way.

Enrique looked back at her, giving a big grin. "It's okay, honey, but I'm gonna need some goddamn tequila. Hey, watch this, baby." He positioned the rifle carefully and fired, just grazing the blackened, smoldering stump of the tree, which glowed hot where the beam touched it.

He gave the weapon back to Anton. "All right, you can keep it."

"That weapon came from the future," Jade said. "I expect you know about guns, Mr. Salceda."

"Yes, I damn sure do, and I've never seen anything like that."

"Nothing like it exists in your time, in *this* time. I hope you believe us now. Sarah has always told you the truth—and so have we, Anton and I, since you met us."

"All right, whatever you say. Just come inside, and we'll sort it out"

Though she basically understood what had happened in the Specialists' world, Rosanna had never considered—except as abstract science—that there might be other worlds, other futures. Yet, the T-799 must have come from a different world, a different timeline from the Specialists. In one world, Judgment

Day had already happened, back in 1997; in the other, which had been their own future right up until now, it had been delayed for two decades. They had to make sure it never happened at all.

Inside the trailer, the Hispanic woman gave Sarah a tearful hug, the two of them embracing tightly. Whoever these people were, they were certainly close to the Connors. The thing was, the Californian deserts were full of strange people who'd chosen to live as far as possible from the cities, on the fringes of society. They were almost invisible to the government, to the eyes of the law, which was just how they wanted it. This was a perfect place for the Connors to flee from justice, Rosanna thought. They'd probably known Enrique and his family for years. So that was a missing piece of the puzzle that the Connors had been for her.

"Where are Franco and the others?" John said to Enrique's woman.

"They've gone into Calexico."

Enrique made a vague gesture. "We needed a few supplies. They'll be back soon."

"Okay," John said "So there's no hard feelings here, right? You're getting along with Eve?" He glanced from Enrique to the Terminator.

Rosanna could see what he was getting at, that the Terminator had not tried to stop the Salcedas coming and going or made any threatening moves toward them. It wasn't treating them as enemies in that sense, or as a threat. Then again, what were the Salcedas going to do, call the police?

"Yeah, no problems," Enrique said grudgingly.

Rosanna caught the woman's eye, and said, "I'm Rosanna Monk."

"I'm Yolanda Salceda—I guess you've met Enrique. Did he introduce our daughter, Juanita?" Yolanda seemed proud, if slightly nervous.

The daughter gave a quick, insincere smile.

"I'm pleased to meet all of you," Rosanna said, even more insincerely. If she could have her wish, she'd never meet another human being again.

She wondered how she could ever escape from here, if faced to it. When the T-XA had reprogrammed her, it had given her a capacity for violence. Under some stresses, her body would respond, for a short, sustained period, with all her energy and strength, but that did not make her a match for the Specialists—or for a Terminator. Besides, she had no choice but to throw in her lot with this strange group. They needed her knowledge and contacts, but she needed them for protection. She certainly could not protect herself against Layton and Cruz, and whoever else had been reprogrammed by now.

The trailer's interior was almost claustrophobic, but at least it was scrupulously clean. At one end was a tiny kitchen with some cupboards, a sink, and an old refrigerator; at the other was a TV set, currently turned off. In between, a cramped living area contained one battered leather lounge, several wooden chairs, and a low, glass-surfaced table. Like everything else, the table was clean, but covered with scratches, and there was one crack in the glass that almost split it in two. I

Yolanda offered tequila, beer, and coffee. "Just coffee, for me," John said.

Sarah and the Specialists chose tequila, and Yolanda found two bottles to share around. Juanita went to the refrigerator and got out a small bottle of Coke. "Get me one, too," Rosanna said.

Juanita looked over at her like Rosanna was some animal in the zoo. "Okay. *No problema.*"

Enrique took a long pull from one of the tequila bottles, looking closely at Jade and Anton. He put the bottle down, and wiped off his mustache with the back of his knuckles. "So, I asked you about your other friends? The ones who were here two nights ago. You didn't ever tell me."

The Hispanic woman and the black man must have been here, too, Rosanna realized. But this can't have been a regular base for the Connors; Enrique asked too many questions, for that. He wasn't part of their regular team, just a friend they could turn to.

Jade said, "Daniel and Selena are dead, Mr. Salceda.

They died last night. Five of us came here from the future; now there are only two."

Enrique bowed his head in the tiniest way. Rosanna drank her Coke, straight from the bottle. What else was she going to learn?

Anton raised the tequila bottle he was holding. "At least they fought well"

They did," Jade said. "They helped us build a new world. Or so I truly hope."

The T-799 looked at Jade in a frank way, then checked over Anton once more. "You came from the future?" it said. "Explain your mission. Who sent you?"

Jade looked back just as frankly. "We were sent by the human Resistance. We came from thirty-five years in the future, but we did not travel across time."

"Neither did I."

"Okay, right," John said. "We all need to get on the same page here."

Rosanna smiled at his confusion. From what she'd seen of him, the kid normally looked pretty smug; it was good to see him getting out of his depth. If it came to that, even *she* was finding the concepts difficult. The idea that time might branch, creating parallel worlds, was common enough in modern physics, but she'd never thought of traveling between those different worlds, if they existed. At this stage, the time vault could not even send objects to the past or future. Calculations from the experimental data showed that they were doing no more than scattering objects across the whole space-time continuum, dis-integrating them in the most radical possible way.

"None of this makes any sense to me," Enrique said. "All you people are crazy."

"Crazy like a fox, Enrique," Sarah said. "You just played around with that laser rifle. You know it comes from the future. I'm sorry, old friend, but you'll have to face the facts."

"Yeah, I've always said that about you, Connor. You're crazy like a fox, all right."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome, but that doesn't mean it makes sense."

Rosanna imagined time as like a river, dividing at more and more points, forming an intricate delta. In theory, there were two ways to get from one stream of the delta to another: either cut across land, or go back to a point before the streams separated, then take a new path. It started making sense to *her*. Now she'd grasped it, she couldn't help laughing.

"Well," she said, as Enrique glared at her, "I don't re-ally see the problem."

John's head was spinning. It was fine for Rosanna to say she understood it all—she'd invented time travel, or she was starting to. In Jade's World, she actually *had* in-vented it, or she *would* do one day.

During the years he'd spent in Argentina, wondering whether Judgment Day might still come, and afterwards when they'd moved to Mexico City, he'd read many books about time travel and the nature of time, trying to understand what he was mixed up in. He'd thought hard about it wondering whether the future could be changed, or whether they were all trapped in history like fish, frozen in a block of ice—or like bugs in amber, as Kurt Vonnegut had put it in a book that he'd read in Mexico. Maybe past and future existed eternally, and could never be changed. Or so he'd thought until he'd met the Specialists, and started to see how it really worked, that timelines could sometimes branch off from the original reality.

He turned to Eve. "You said you came from a different future. Not what's in *our* future, right? But a time twenty-eight years ahead of us—and kind of sideways." "Correct," the Terminator said.

Get a grip, he told himself. It must fit together somehow. "So in your world Judgment Day happened in 1997?" "Affirmative."

That was what he'd figured. It was becoming dear. But how could this machine have traveled across the gap between realities that had already diverged? That would require more than time travel. It was like a journey across dimensions.

"Just don't make too many assumptions," Rosanna said. "Eve didn't need to travel between timelines. You can get the same effect in another way, just go back in time far enough, then survive beyond a point where two realities diverge. That shouldn't be hard for a machine that doesn't age or ever lose patience."

Eve looked at her closely, in a manner John could almost have interpreted as respect. "Affirmative," the Terminator said again. This T-799 was so dorky, John thought, just like the T-800 had been when he'd first met it, before he'd gotten it to lighten up a bit. It looked like he'd have to do that all over again.

"All right," Sarah said. "A lot of you know things that John and I don't."

"Not to mention me," Enrique said, "and the rest of us who actually live in this place."

Sarah gave him a knowing grin. "Yeah, you've got a point. So who's going to start explaining?"

She was right, of course. As he had realized in that diner, back in Utah, everyone had a story to tell—each human being on the planet. Out of this group, everyone knew about different things. Rosanna knew a lot of technical stuff about time travel, though maybe not as much as Jade and Anton. She also knew what Cyberdyne was planning, and what—perhaps—could be done to stop it. Eve had opened up a whole new set of issues: they'd have to work out how all that fitted in. John glanced over at Jade. The

Specialists must know more than anyone else—about al-most everything. Even Jade and Anton had lived such dif-ferent lives; only Jade had grown up after Judgment Day.

A truck drove into the compound, and pulled up out-side the trailer. Its engine rumbled, then switched off. "Franco's back," Enrique said.

Yolanda stood. "I'll go help."

"No, stay here, baby. We both need to hear all this. Juanita, you go and help Franco."

Juanita gave a sulky look as she stood. John caught her eye, giving her a sympathetic grin. *Parents!* He real-ized, though, that the Salcedas were important. Even out here on the fringes of society, they had connections to the world. They'd seen the news on TV, knew what was being said about the raid on Cyberdyne, especially about the people involved. That would all help solve the puzzle.

But Eve was the biggest mystery. He nodded in the Terminator's direction. "I've got a feeling she ought to start."

"It,John," Sarah said, almost automatically. "Not *she... it*. You're talking about a machine."

"Well, Mom, *whatever*" The trouble was that Termina-tors, at least the T-800 and the Eve T-799, just looked so human,it was easier calling them "he" or "she." Frus-trated,he said, "Let's get its story. I want to know why it needsour help."

"Very well," Eve said. The Terminator explained quickly how it had come to exist in this reality: it had keen sent back to April 1984, before John was even con-ceived, before there could be any splitting of timelines as a result of his actions, or Sarah's. Then it had waited, acting as inconspicuously as possible, never interfering in human society, which might create further ripples in the timestream.

"So what happened to you in the other timeline?" John said. "The one where Judgment Day happened in 1997?"

"Destroyed," Eve said. "If I'd seen the signs for Judg-ment Day I'd have located myself close to the center ofthe nuclear blast. There would be no role for me in such a world."

"All right, maybe start from the beginning: *Why* did you come?"

"Itold you. I was sent to get help."

Through the trailer's windows, Rosanna watched the Salceda children unpacking a Ford truck, taking bags to the various trailers that seemed to be the family's living quarters. As the T-799 told its story, Juanita entered with a bag of groceries and headed to the refrigerator, packing it with milk, soft drinks, and juices. She made two more trips as the Terminator went through what Rosanna al-ready knew.

Rosanna had seen Sarah interviewed on videotapes made at thePescaderoHospital. She'd read police docu-ments, and analyzed many statements that the Connors had issued via the Internet, trying to get across their mes-sage. But, coming from the Terminator, it all had more authority. It was easy to believe that the message came from a world after Judgment Day.

"There was a nuclear war," the Terminator said.

"We know that much," John said. "Skynet started it right? It reached self-awareness and they tried to pull the plug on it"

"Correct."

"Okay, he said. "How about you skip to why I needed to send you here." \

"I think we need to hear this, John," Jade said. "Noth-ing like this happened in our world."

"I want to hear it, too," Rosanna said. "This could be important"

"You're the rookie here," Sarah said. "What makes you think you can sort it all out for us?"

"Ladies," Enrique said, "why not just stop fighting for a minute? Let Eve tell her story."

"Fine with me," Rosanna said. "Anyway, I'm not the rookie when it comes to time travel." Actually, she thought, she might be. The Connors had been caught up in this for years, and the Specialists had come back from the future in one piece. Even if they'd used a machine de-signed by someone else, they probably knew things she didn't. They were living proof that the time vault or some future development of it, could be made to work. Their knowledge could save her years of effort She might win that Nobel Prize yet, and a slice of scientific immortality.

"Okay," John said. "We need to be constructive here."

He gave the Terminator a twisted smile. "Maybe you could, like, summarize it. You know, just the basics."

"Yes, just the basics. But you have to understand one thing. Whatever you think you know about my world, that is not the whole story. It didn't turn out like you think."

As the T-799 told its story, John watched the Salcedas' feces. Last time he had come here, the Specialists had shown some of their superhuman abilities—now they'd displayed what a phased-plasma laser rifle could do. there couldn't be much doubt in Enrique's mind, or Yolanda's, that the Specialists had come from the future, loth the Salcedas had a cornered look.

The T-799 didn't rush, it took the time it needed, but it told the story in just a few minutes. It set out how, in the original future, John had grown up and led the hu-man Resistance against Skynet. Sarah had trained him far it, almost from birth. In that other world-Skynet's World-Earth was dying even now. As of 2001, its bios-phere had collapsed from the effects of fire, cold, dark-ness, and radiation. For months after Judgment Day, the days had been almost totally dark. Even after that, the world was locked in a perpetual winter, its climate tipped over into an age of leaden skies and year-round cold.

"Okay," John said when Eve had gotten that far. "But why are you *here*? This isn't even your world."

"In my world, the human Resistance penetrated Skynet's defense grid and entered Skynet's underground headquarters inColorado. You took control of Skynet's space-time displacement apparatus and sent back two protectors to ensure your own survival."

"This was in 2029? I must have been, like, forty-five years old."

"Forty-four years and five months."

"Yeah, right. So I sent back Kyle Reese to protect Mom in 1984-

"Correct."

"And a T-800 to protect me ten years later?"

"Yes. In both cases they were to oppose a Terminator that had been sent back by Skynet"

"But where do you fit in?"

"As I told you, I've come for help." Eve looked John in the eye, and it struck him that its regular features had a kind of beauty. He guessed that Terminators were copied from real people. Surely Skynet didn't just make them up. In that case, the woman whom Eve imitated must have been somebody special. "The final battle was not over," Eve said. "Skynet struck back."

"No," Sarah said. "You're kidding us." She looked suddenly older. "This gets worse and worse. So Skynet wasn't destroyed?"

"No, not when I left the future."

Outside, Franco, Juanita, and the younger Salceda kids had finished unpacking. Franco and Juanita came in and sat around to listen to the last of the explanation. Franco had grown into a strong-looking twenty-five-year-old man. He was suntanned, dark-haired, and very wiry, wearing dull gray jeans and a white T-shirt, tight around his arms and shoulders, and across his chest.

Sarah made a noise that was almost like a sob.

"It's okay," John said. "It's going to be okay."

For a long moment, nobody spoke, then Sarah said, "I know. This is just a surprise I didn't need." She turned to the Terminator. "What happened?"

"Skynet escaped to another location. It had reserve forces, including experimental polyalloy Terminators. T-1000s." | Sarah folded her arms across her chest "It never cads, does it?" she muttered. Her face had gone white. John felt something of what she was going through, but he couldn't understand it all, not the full depth of it. She'd been through so much for his sake, and the world's, over almost two decades, but it must have seemed worthwhile to her—at least until these last few days, when everything they'd understood had been turned upside down.

He knew how she'd taken to heart the first messages from the future, what Kyle Reese had told her, back before John was born. Then she'd poured in so much energy and love, preparing John for the war against the machines. Even when she was pregnant, she'd started training herself, and preparing detailed tapes to get it all down—everything that might help John understand.

In that other future, the one Kyle had come from, mankind was supposed to have won. That's what John and Sarah had always believed. It was something to hold on to. Now, it seemed, every hope was being stripped away.

Just focus, John, he thought. *If the situation was really hopeless, Eve wouldn't even be here.* "Okay," he said.

"So what happened then?"

"The future looked bleak," the Terminator said. "But you had control of one of Skynet's space-time displacement machines. You knew that there were worlds where Judgment Day never happened."

"I *did*? How did I know that?"

"You had scientific advice."

"Okay, okay, I don't need that kind of detail right now. So I wanted to make contact with one of those worlds, right?"

"Yes. If one of those worlds could provide assistance, it might be decisive."

"So what did I do then?"

"You sent me back in time to 1984."

Rosanna was nodding to herself.

"Okay," John said. "I got that part already."

"I am programmed to find you and use you as my contact."

John shook his head. "This is *really* deep, but what if you hadn't found yourself in one of those favorable worlds? No, it's okay, I understood that bit. I can see how that wouldn't be a problem." Eve had explained it enough. In that other world, Skynet's World, there *had* been another Eve. But once it knew that Judgment Day was coming, there was nothing for it to do but wait for the missiles to fall.

Jade seemed perfectly comfortable with everything Eve had said, and Anton just nodded slightly. For John, it was getting frustrating that so many of these people—if you could count the Terminator as a person-knew stuff that was way out of his league. They got the point of things before he did. How was he supposed to make any decisions? He reminded himself that he didn't have to call the shots, not in this world. There was no way he could lead this group of extraordinary people, and it wasn't his responsibility. Just calm down, he thought. All he had to do was make a contribution. "All right, so why didn't you try to find me right after Judgment Day?"

"I did. I came here."

He remembered now that he'd received an e-mail from

Franco just after Judgment Day. Franco had said that a military-looking woman with white hair had come looking for him. So this was the same "woman."

He looked at Franco, who nodded. "Yeah, she came here in 1997. She asked for you. We told her you weren't here, and we didn't know where you were. That's the last we saw of her until today."

"She said she was a friend," Enrique added. "She seemed to know a lot about you—not the sort of stuff the government would know. Personal stuff." Eve must have been very convincing; Enrique and the others were suspicious people.

"I came now because you were in the news again," the Terminator said. "I determined that you'd come here as a retreat. In your position, I would have."

"Yeah, I suppose you would have. Well, how are we supposed to help you? Even you didn't travel across time, so what makes you think *we* can? We don't have that technology. And we don't have some army that we can get for you." Then again, he thought, that was being negative. Up there in the future—in that other future—his older self had thought it worth trying. He had to think positively about it—not make excuses why they couldn't help, but try to find if they could.

But Sarah shook her head. "What more can we do? I've been fighting for nearly twenty years to stop Judgment Day from happening. Nothing ever works. It gets worse and worse every time I meet someone new, who knows more about the future. Now you want us to go to *another world* and try to help? I just don't know. I don't know that I'm strong enough to keep fighting Skynet. Maybe it's just destined to win..." She looked pleadingly at John, tears now streaking her face.

John knew just how she felt. Wave after wave of bad news had come crashing on them. . . that what they did back in 1994 had not stopped Judgment Day, only post-poned it. That Skynet was winning in the future where Judgment Day had been postponed. That the world where Judgment Day had already happened back in 1997—the original world, the baseline reality that they had diverted from—was still real. And now this. In *that* world, the human Resistance was destined to win, so they'd always believed, so Kyle had told Sarah in 1984. To be told now that it hadn't turned out that way. For Sarah, it must be almost too much. How much more was life going to demand of her?

But if there was anything they could do to ensure a human victory in that world. . . they just had to do it. That was what Sarah's whole life had been about. That was what she'd dedicated herself to for all those years after John had been born. They just *couldn't* give up now. "Mom, we've got to help if we can," he said. "This is what you've lived for. The Resistance has got to win in that world. If it doesn't everything you did, all that training you gave me, everything we've both been through—it's all for nothing. Please, Mom!"

She held her face in both hands, then wiped away some of the tears. "I know that, John. I know. But what can we do? How much more blood and suffering do we have to give?" " *Please!*"

"I know," she said. "We've got to do it. But when can we rest? When will it end?"

"Remember this," the T-799 said. "It doesn't matter how long I take in this world, as long as I return to the time when I left. Even if you have to invent the technology, it doesn't matter."

Rosanna nodded at that instantly. "But that's if it can be done at all. You want us to invent a new kind of time machine and find some kind of army to fight Skynet. Isn't that it?"

"No, an army may not be necessary. Some kind of help, something that gives a military advantage."

Rosanna laughed to herself.

"What's so funny, Dr. Strangelove?" Sarah said.

"Yeah," John said. "What's your point, Rosanna?"

"You said you don't know how to help her."

"Well, I don't"

"The thing is, maybe I do. Listen, the space-time displacement field is a long way from being perfected. So far, we can't even displace objects in ordinary space and time. The field seems to scatter them all across the space-time continuum. But there's scope for improvement" She smiled complacently, looking at Anton, Jade. "Tell me if I'm wrong."

John realized that she must be right, as far as that went, or else there could have been no time travel. Kyle Reese could not have traveled back from the future; neither could the Terminators or the Specialists. But travel from the future to the past was one thing. No one, so far as he knew, had traveled across the gap between time-lines-whatever that gap really was. It wasn't space, and it wasn't time. It somehow represented the difference between realities. Could that be done at all?

"Dr. Monk is right" Jade said. "In theory, it is possible. In the future that I came from, it was done, experimentally, prior to Judgment Day. But Eve doesn't understand the problems of *this* world." She gazed at the Terminator with her calm, intelligent eyes. "Judgment Day did not happen in 1997, but it was not canceled, only postponed."

We have to make sure it never happens. Perhaps we can help you, but our mission has to come first."

"Jade's right," John said to Eve. "We have to stop Skynet, here and now, in the world we're already in. That can't wait; we've got to do it now."

The T-799 looked back at him silently. As always, its face was without expression, but it was clearly not convinced.

"You'll have to help us," John said. "Then we can help you carry out *your* mission-Rosanna can work on this displacement thing. But we've got to save *this* world first." He looked at Enrique, then at Yolanda, and Enrique again. "You guys have to help us, too."

"Negative," Eve said. "That is not a mission priority."

"Well, it's a priority to us," John said. Suddenly, he had an idea. Once before, he'd had this kind of conversation with a Terminator. It was the night he'd gone with the T-800 to rescue Sarah from the Pescadero hospital. The T-800 had not merely been designed to help and protect him; he'd reprogrammed it, in the future, to obey direct orders from his younger self. "What are your mission parameters? Don't you have to do what I tell you?"

"Affirmative, if it's consistent with my mission."

"All right, I order you to help us. Do you understand? You have a new mission now. It doesn't override your old one, but you have to perform it first. We've got to stop them building Skynet. I *order* you to help us out."

Eve seemed to consider it. "Yes," the Terminator said. "I will help."

Rosanna could only wonder what Layton and Cruz now planned, with the nanoprocessor destroyed and the whole project now exposed to public scrutiny. They could get the project back on the rails if Washington went along with it and helped them cover up, but what must Defense now be thinking?

She knew the key bureaucrats and the brass as well as most people: They were committed to the nanoprocessor project, but not at all costs. Last night's events might well make them.

Layton and Cruz would try to get at them, but how?

"We have to get to Washington," she said.

Everyone looked at her. Sarah said, "I think that goes without saying, by now. Will you help us talk to the right people?"

"Of course I will. But we have to get there *now*. I don't like the idea of Charles and Oscar running loose without me taking part. I don't know what they're up to, but the T-XA reprogrammed them. They'll have some sort of plan. They're both as cunning as hell."

Sarah nodded at that. "Who do we need to see?"

"Jack Reed and Samantha Jones." Rosanna quickly explained their positions in the Pentagon hierarchy. Those two could stop the project tomorrow. The Secretary would back them up—I'd be certain of it. He respects their work, and he listens to advice. If we can just talk to them, make sure they have the right information. They're hard-nosed people, but they're not unreasonable." She looked Sarah in the eye. "And they know about the Ter-minators . . . they know you were telling the truth. I've been through all that with them."

Just what *did* Oscar and Charles think they could say? Rosanna wondered. Jack and Samantha had seen the surveillance tapes from 1984 and 1994, but now there'd be new tapes, from last night's raid. Once those were scrutinized, they'd frighten the life out of people in Washington. They'd show the T-XA in action, and that could have no innocent explanation. Surely DoD would drop the project now. It would be a hot potato. What influence could Cyberdyne have at this point?

As she thought it through, she noticed the abstracted expressions on the faces of the two Specialists. They'd had little to say all through this discussion, but they were probably talking to each other, making their own plans. Their equipment included throat mikes and other equipment to communicate privately by narrow-band radio transmissions. To have their own private conference, they simply had to sub-vocalize to each other.

"Whatever they're going to do, they'll be headed for Washington now," she said. "I want to see Jack and Samantha straightaway." The Cyberdyne people were basically a day ahead, and they could easily travel around showing themselves in public. The worst they had to fear was a few eager newshounds who might recognize them. She cursed that she was stuck with a group of wanted criminals, out here in the desert. But what choice did she have? She couldn't fly to Washington alone. If she didn't have protection, Oscar and Charles would find a way to kill her—especially Charles Layton, he was such a cold bastard. Then again, Oscar had never been much better, he just had a way of keeping people happy. None of it meant anything.

Those two would see her as having betrayed them. They'd terminate her at the first opportunity, and

they'd probably get away with it

"All right," Sarah said. "I suppose you know what you're talking about."

Of course I do," Rosanna said. "I know all the people *in* charge of the project-from the government end, not just Cyberdyne. The T-XA had no time to get to Washington, so they haven't been reprogrammed. But Oscar and Charles will be knocking on their doors right now. They'll have some story about why the research should go on.

Sarah rolled her eyes at that "From what we've seen so far, the government won't take much persuasion. They've done everything they could to bring us Skynet, just like all their other toys. Aren't we just kidding our-selves if we think they'll listen to us?"

"No," Rosanna said. "You don't know them." "Will they listen to Layton and Cruz?" John said.

"Well, you've seen Oscar on the TV, I suppose-you know how persuasive he is, and he's totally amoral. He'll be even worse now. As for Charles Layton, he's genuinely scary. People take notice of him; no one likes to disagree with him to his face. Still, they'll have a lot of explaining to do. Jack and Samantha are hard as nails, they didn't get to where they are any other way."

Jade spoke up at last. "We have to go Washington now."

"Right now," Anton said.

As Rosanna watched the dynamics, John looked at Jade as though he worshipped her. Once again, Rosanna realized that she could still calculate other people's emotions. She wondered whether the Japanese woman realized that young Connor was so besotted by her beauty.

"Why do you guys think that?" John said.

But Jade spoke to Rosanna. "Those people you know in Washington?"

"Yes? What about them?" They are in danger."

Rosanna grunted. "We're *all* in danger. . . or hadn't you noticed?"

"Danger?" John said. "What kind of danger are they in?" He realized that the top Cyberdyne managers like Oscar Cruz had been reprogrammed by the T-XA, just like Rosanna. But surely they couldn't threaten the politicians, military brass, and Defense bureaucrats in Washington. Those people would all be heavily guarded.

"We have been discussing the capabilities of the T-XA," Jade said, not even explaining that she and Anton could use some kind of technology to confer privately. "It would almost certainly have enhanced some of the people it reprogrammed."

"Well, it enhanced me," Rosanna said.

"Yes, it did," Jade said. "What we need to know is what other enhancements have been made to the T-XA's victims. Can you tell us anything?"

John recalled how Rosanna had fought against the Specialists, when they'd more or less kidnapped her

She'd struggled like a wildcat in the back of the Toyota Land Cruiser that they'd used in Colorado Springs. Though she'd been no match for the Specialists, someone enhanced like that could be very dangerous, on the loose in the Pentagon. But he still couldn't quite see how-

"I don't know," Rosanna said. "What are you thinking? It's not like the T-XA told me all its secrets."

John had seen the Specialists' own most obvious enhancements: their extraordinary strength, speed, and healing capacity, but that was all based on genetic engineering. The T-XA wouldn't have been able to raise anyone's abilities to that level. Jade had been genetically enhanced from birth, and Anton later in life. Surely the T-XA couldn't have done that in the time available to it. "Do you have something specific in mind?" he said, looking at Jade.

"Perhaps," she said. "We are only guessing. We don't know the T-XA's full abilities." She and Anton ignored the others for several seconds, obviously conferring with each other, maybe faster than ordinary people. Then Jade turned to Rosanna and said aloud, "You have to stop Lay-ton and Cruz from meeting with your contacts in Washington. Call your contacts and warn them."

"I'm not sure I can stop them. They don't take orders."

"You don't think they will listen?"

"Maybe... I don't know." Rosanna shook her head. "I can only try, I suppose, but no one has ever said that Lay-ton and Cruz are *dangerous*. Jack and Samantha know them well, they'll have been talking to them, if only by telephone-I hope. Why would they believe me?"

"Perhaps we should have gone straight to Washington," Jade said.

"It would have taken too long," John said. "That's a long drive from Colorado."

"What should I say when I call?" Rosanna said.

Anton interrupted, showing an air of command. "All right, two things have to be done. First, we need to get to Washington—almost immediately. Second, we have to call these people, Reed and Jones, persuade them not to meet with anyone from Cyberdyne."

"Use a public phone," Sarah said. "We don't want them tracing us on a cellphone... or tracing us here."

John nodded vigorously at that. "Mom's right"

"Yes? What about them?" They are in danger."

Rosanna grunted. "We're *all* in danger. . . or you noticed?"

Sarah turned to Enrique. "You've got transport duty. I don't care how you do it, what favors you have to call in. But, one way or another, you're getting us to Washington. Tonight."

"Yeah, Sarah, that's just great. I'm supposed to perform miracles for you, am I? Even if I buy into all of this, what do you think I am? You think I'm God, all of a sudden? Maybe I can just turn you all into birds and you can fly there yourselves. This is just great."

"Enrique," Yolanda said, "this is important."

"Yeah, honey, I know it's important. But what am I supposed to do? This is hopeless."

"No," Anton said. "Nothing is hopeless."

"I've got an idea," John said. The others looked at him, and he gave a broad smile. "I think we can make them take notice." He looked at the Terminator. "You've been in LA. all these years. Have you seen Cruz on TV, or heard him on the radio?"

"Affirmative," Eve said.

"You know a bit about how he thinks?"

"Yes. I have analyzed his methods. He is a key player in this timestream."

"What about Layton?"

"I have heard him on the radio-but less than Oscar Cruz."

John winked at Rosanna, who showed repugnance for a moment, but only fleetingly. He could see that she tried to control her expressions. "Don't worry," he said to her. "We can pull this off."

Anton gave a quiet laugh. "I'm sure we can."

CHAPTER

EIGHT

THE PENTAGON AUGUST 2001

It had been another long day. Jack had found time to nap in his chair for extra hour late in the afternoon, but he was still exhausted. Now the sun had set and the city was in twilight. The huge building's corridors were al-most deserted. Some staff always worked here until all hours, but most of the military types worked the other way round, starting very early and escaping to their homes at a civilized time.

Just now, he was alone, still considering how to han-dle Layton and Cruz, to get to the bottom of it all. He would lay it on the line: If Cyberdyne wanted any chance of further government funding, it had to come totally dean; otherwise, DoD would drop the whole project. It was better to lose one technological breakthrough than have continuing violence and uncertainty. One way or another, it needed to be resolved.

When his phone rang, the call came straight through to his inner office, since Vicki had left for the day. He ex-pected it to be Layton or Cruz, or maybe Samantha, with something on her mind. He put it on

speaker. "Reed here."

It was a voice he hadn't expected. "Jack, we need to talk."

"Rosanna? Where the hell are you?"

"Never mind that. I want you to listen carefully. Right now, you are in danger, more than you can imagine."

The woman had gone with the Connors. She was probably saying just what they'd told her to, either because they were forcing her, or because she'd joined their cause. Either way, he didn't believe a word. He'd simply keep her on the line until he could get the call traced. "I'm not sure I accept that," he said, understating his feelings.

"You'd damn sure better accept it."

Jack was unimpressed. "All right. Tell me where you are. We'll do what we can to help you."

"Listen, Jack. That is not the point. I didn't call for your help — I said that you're in danger. You'd better heart me out."

"Of course, Rosanna. Just tell me about it You know how much we depend on you."

CALEXICO

Franco pulled up at a public phone, and John got out with Rosanna and the Terminator, leaving Franco in his Ford truck still running the engine for a quick getaway if any-one recognized John or Rosanna. They'd left Sarah and Anton back at the compound to sort things out with En-rique, try to find just how they could get to Washington, short of driving all the way. That would take days, even driving day and night; they didn't have that kind of time.

Rosanna called Jack Reed, and got through to him in his office—he was still there, well into the evening. She put up a good performance, trying to convince him that Layton and Cruz were dangerous, but her face gave away her frustration.

"Listen, Jack," she said. "That is not the point. I didn't call for your help—I said that you're in danger. You'd bet-ter hear me out." She paused while Reed said something at the other end of the phone, shaking her head in despair. Despite the T-XA's reprogramming, she was no mindless zombie. John could see that she had her own emotions, even if they were based on selfishness. She was obviously getting angry.

She passed the handset to the Terminator. It said, "Jack?" It spoke in a perfect imitation of Oscar Cruz's voice.

Another pause, as Reed replied.

"Jack," Eve said, still mimicking Cruz's voice, "Rosanna is absolutely right. But she hasn't told you everything. There's a lot that you don't understand."

John had counted on that ability of the Terminator. Back in 1994, the T-800 Terminator sent back to protect him had imitated his voice with no difficulty. The T-1000 had also imitated voices. Eve was basically a different model of the T-800, a prototype version with the same abilities. He'd figured she could do this, and she'd confirmed it, back at Enrique's compound.

Let Reed think he was talking to Oscar Cruz. No, that was too much to ask. But let him wonder why someone just like Cruz was with Rosanna. That would rattle his cage.

THE PENTAGON

"There's a lot that you don't understand," the voice of Oscar Cruz said.

"Oscar?" Jack said. "Where are you calling from? I thought you'd arrived here in Washington. What are you and Rosanna up to?"

"You have an appointment to meet with me and Charles?" the voice said.

"Of course, at Longfellow's. At 9:00 P.M. That's what we all sorted out."

"Cancel it, Jack. You don't know how dangerous it is. If you trust Rosanna at all, cancel it. We're coming to Washington. We'll meet you and explain. But don't meet at all with Charles, or anyone claiming to be me. You don't know what we're up against. But you know they can imitate human beings. You've seen the tapes of the Terminators. You've seen what they can do."

"You're saying that they're Terminators? The two I'm supposed to meet with? That's a hard story to swallow."

"I didn't say that. Maybe they're something worse. Just believe me when I say they're dangerous. Don't go near them, if you value your life."

There was a click on the end of the line, and the speaker went dead. Jack cursed himself for doing nothing to trace the call, but it had been too sudden, too astonishing.

He was damned if he was going to run away from Layton and Cruz, no matter who said so, but the call got him thinking. Could those two really be Terminators? He supposed they could come in various models, so it wasn't out of the question. More likely though the voices he'd just heard, those of Rosanna and Oscar, had been faked in some way—someone was hoaxing him, using skilled actors. But the fakes were perfect. Who would go to such trouble? Besides, why would they talk about Terminators in that way, knowing he would give it some credence? The more he thought about it, the more he thought that really had been Rosanna. So who was she with? The real Cruz, or someone she'd found who sounded like him? Either way, what did she think she was up to?

Thinking back, he wasn't so sure about "Oscar's" voice. The timbre and intonation were right, but he

wouldn't swear to the content. Would Oscar have put things that way, so vaguely and dramatically? If only they'd spoken longer.

The bottom line was that Rosanna had called to warn him. She seemed to be with someone she believed to be the real Oscar Cruz, someone who'd implied that the Cruz and Layton here in Washington were Terminators, or something of the kind. What did he mean talking about "even more dangerous?" It didn't add up, but it couldn't be ignored. He started making some calls.

CALEXICO

Eve slammed the phone down. "Will that do the trick?" John said.

"Unknown," the Terminator said.

Rosanna leant against the glass and metal wall of the phone booth, chewing on her lip. Then she pulled herself up, seemingly pleased. "It'll have an effect. Jack's a smart operator."

"You sure have some faith in this guy," John said.

"Not that much, no. But he's no fool—he's not going to come up short. I'm sure he's thinking right now, trying to work it all out. I don't think Charles and Oscar will get it easy tonight."

"We want him to avoid them completely."

"Probably too much to ask, but he'll take precautions. Now let's get back, there's work I could be doing."

When John thought about it, it seemed that Rosanna and Eve had been smart, telling Reed things that might actually frighten him, all in just a few seconds. With luck, no one could have traced them in that time; their location here in the Low Desert was still a secret.

"I've got to make one more call," he said.

Rosanna had started walking back to the truck. She turned, looking frustrated. "Is it really important?"

"It is to me."

He'd been thinking about it, on and off for hours. Last night, he'd seen the death of the adult Danny Dyson, the Danny Dyson from Jade's World, from 2036. *That* Danny had been in his forties—years older than Miles Dyson had been in 1994, the night John had met him, the night that Miles had died. But the forty-something Danny from Jade's World had looked no older than his father had. back in 1994, probably because of his genetic enhancements. Jade hardly aged at all, so she'd told John; and the other Specialists' aging must have been slowed right down when they were re-engineered.

Back in 1994, John had also met another Danny Dyson, the Danny who was then a six-year-old kid. He must be a teenager now, and Tarissa, his mother, would be about forty. Few people had suffered more

than them for the struggle against Skynet, losing a father and a husband. They'd have watched the news on TV, they'd have read all the papers. Right now, they'd be wondering about last night's raid, worrying about what it meant. John figured they had a right to know.

He and Sarah still had a phone number for them. They hadn't wanted to keep in touch, and he knew it was risky. Just quickly though, and just this once, he'd risk calling.

Tarissa answered the phone.

"Hello," John said, suddenly feeling awkward. "Is that Tarissa? Mrs. Dyson?"

"Who's this?" She sounded very guarded. John realized she'd probably had calls from the press. Maybe they'd been bugging her all day. There'd be people interested in her viewpoint, given her husband's role in the last raid on Cyberdyne.

"It's John," he said. "It's John Connor." When she didn't reply, he added, "I just wanted to let you know I'm safe. Mom's fine, too."

"Oh, John."

"We had to do it. . . Tarissa. You know why."

There was a silence, then Tarissa said. "I know. I know why you did it—but you know you shouldn't call here."

She didn't sound encouraging. Maybe she didn't want to talk about it, or maybe she thought her phone was bugged.

He decided to end the call quickly. "Is Danny there?"

"Yes, he is. I don't think you want to talk to him, John. I really don't."

"I understand. Please, Tarissa, just tell him that it had to be done. He must be old enough to understand now. Everything we've done had a reason, you know that I don't want Danny to grow up thinking of us as his enemies, the people who killed his father — or as psychos or something."

"It's okay, John. Neither of us thinks that." In 1994, the T-800 Terminator had sliced open its own arm at the Dysons' house, tearing away the flesh to reveal the metal endoskeleton. That had been enough to convince the Dysons. Tarissa probably had nightmares about it. John wondered just what she'd told Danny, about how his father had died. "Thanks," he said.

How could he finish the conversation? For as long as he could remember, he'd been taught how to deal with people, how to get them to do what he wanted — not so unlike Oscar Cruz, from what he knew of the man. Cruz seemed to be a born social engineer, a manipulator. That was one of the skills that Sarah had always wanted John to have, and by and large, she'd succeeded in her wish. It was like so much else he'd learned, hanging out in the hills and jungles of Central America, or in survivalist compounds like Enrique's — just as he'd grown up knowing about guns, vehicles, and engines. But he had no words adequate for this moment, for dealing with Tarissa. He couldn't even tell her that he'd seen her son-one version of him-die. It was just too complicated. He would only upset her.

"Thanks," he said again, lame as it sounded. "That's all. I'd better say goodbye."

"Yes, John, thank you for calling. It really does mean something."

He put the phone down, feeling embarrassed and inadequate. There must have been something else he could have said.

They walked back to the truck, John brooding on how the two calls had gone, especially the second one. Still, he thought, he was glad to have done that. It might not have been his best effort at making a connection with people, but he felt cleaner for it. Something in his heart was lighter.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Their taxi pulled up at Longfellow's Grill just after 9:00 P.M., and Oscar paid the driver, adding his usual generous tip. The restaurant was built of gray stone, with a wide front window shrouded by heavy, red drapes. An ornate lamp hung beside a polished wooden door, decorated with elaborate ironwork. Near the door stood two large men in dark blue suits, glancing at their wristwatches. That struck Oscar as odd: A place like this didn't need bouncers. As he stepped from the taxi, he tensed up inside, ready to fight. Like all the others whom the T-XA had reprogrammed, he could move into devastating action, once he was properly cued, but this was not the time—not yet.

One of the men stepped eighteen inches sideways, blocking Oscar's path to the door. "Are you Charles Layton and Oscar Cruz?"

"Yes, we are," Oscar said. "So who are you?" A well-heeled crowd drifted by, enjoying the balmy summer evening. The last thing Oscar wanted was any kind of scene — not here in public. That could ruin their plans.

Jack Reed stepped out from the restaurant, and the big man shifted to let him past. Then came Samantha, looking stylish in a short, black skirt. Jack nodded to Oscar, then to Charles. "It's good to see you both. There's a lot that we have to talk about, but this isn't really the place. I've canceled our reservation."

"What do you want to do?" Oscar said carefully. "Go back to your office?" He didn't like that idea; Layton's gun would have to be shown when they entered the Pentagon. They wouldn't get it past security.

Jack shook his head slowly. "No, that's not the best way to do things."

"What's this all about?" Layton said, giving his mild but oh-so-cold stare.

Jack didn't flinch. "That's just what I want to know." He looked at Oscar carefully. "Just say something for me. Anything."

"What do you want me to say? This is very strange, Jack. It's a funny way for the government to do its busi-ness."

People wandering past were turning their heads, puz-zled by what they saw, this strange confrontation on the street. "That will do," Jack said. "You damn sure sound like the real Oscar Cruz." He gave a laugh. "You look like him, too."

"What else would I sound like? Or look like?"

Oscar sensed Layton tensing—surely he wouldn't attack in public? Jack must have sensed something, too. He looked pointedly down the street, where another large man stood at the corner outside a dimly lit shop. This man casually flicked open his jacket, revealing a holster underneath.

Two police cruisers crawled slowly down the road on the other side, double parking opposite. "You'd better come with us," Samantha said. "We can talk about it somewhere else. We won't detain you for long."

"I object to this," Layton said.

"Yes," Jack said, "of course you do. So would I. But you don't have much choice if you care about your pre-cious contract. Now come with us, and stop arguing about it. We're going to clear things up.**"

Samantha walked ahead.

"Please, both of you, just follow her," Jack said. "I'm sorry to have to treat you like this."

"Whatever you say," Oscar said, catching Layton's eye. They could overpower a certain number of people, but there were cops and government agents everywhere. For the moment, it was foolish resisting, especially here, on a crowded city street. They'd soon get a better opportunity. Depending on where Jack was taking them, this might even be a godsend.

Samantha led them round a corner to where two cars were parked — not the large, black government sedans that Oscar expected, but cheap, unobtrusive looking cars, both Japanese. One was a yellow Toyota about ten years old, the other a bright red Honda Accord, not much newer. The street was quiet here, but another two men waited.

"All right" Jack said. "One of you in each car, please."

"Are you really doubting who we are?" Oscar said "This is getting to be bizarre."

"No," Jack said, his mouth twisting up on one side. "I don't doubt who you are. If I thought that you were imitations, I'd have brought a whole army with me. I've had all your movements today reconstructed—and last night's as well. You must both have been through metal detectors in airports or government buildings. I'm pretty sure you're not Terminators."

"What?"

"That's what I said. Clearing it up wasn't easy, but that's how seriously I take this. Now, please, don't make this even harder."

One of the men in blue suits said, "Are you gentlemen armed? Either of you?" Oscar checked himself

from glancing Layton's direction — perhaps an instant too late. The man approached Layton. "Please raise your arms, sir."

"You don't need to frisk me down," Layton said without emotion. "I have a pistol under my jacket."

"Then please let me remove it."

"Do you always carry concealed weapons, Charles?" Jack said, raising his eyebrows slightly.

"After last night I do, yes," Layton shot back.

"Touche" Samantha said. "But we have a lot of other questions."

SALCEDA COMPOUND

When John entered, Enrique was standing in one corner of the trailer where they'd left him, shouting angrily into his cell phone. "No, I can't explain any more, goddammit, not on the phone. Oh, just forget it." As he disconnected, he glanced sheepishly across at John, standing in the doorway. "Hey, *amigo*, don't worry. We'll get you there." Sarah sat nearby, filming with frustration. Anton and Yolanda watched the TV, turned right down, though it was probably loud enough for Anton. A news bulletin showed scenes of the wrecked Cyberdyne site. When Oscar Cruz came on the screen, doing an interview, John walked over and turned the sound up. Rosanna, Jade, and Franco stood watching as Cruz scored PR points and deflected hard questions. It looked like the interview was taken much earlier in the day, in bright L.A. sunshine outside Cyberdyne's head office.

Outside, the sun was setting, and darkness was falling over the desert.

This was some team, John thought. When he'd first suggested that Eve imitate Oscar Cruz's voice, Anton had replied with his own imitation. The Specialists could change voices, too — it was something he just hadn't known. But the Terminator seemed even better; its ability was uncanny. Between them, they had a great skill base here. He just hoped it was enough.

"We know that Sarah Connor was involved," Cruz was saying. "It would be nice to think that she was the leader, and it looks a bit that way at first—one of the others was her teenage son. Really, though, we have no idea who the other two were. We don't know who was in command."

That was interesting, John thought. They were talking about just *two* other people, Anton and Jade presumably. Danny and Selena had been declared non-existent—a nice bit of covering up the truth. Both Cyberdyne and the government must have been in on that.

"I can't say too much more," Cruz said. "I'll just add that Cyberdyne will come through this, as it's come through every other setback. This is by no means the end."

"Well," Enrique said, "whaddya make of that?"

Rosanna walked to the refrigerator and found herself another bottle of Coke. "He's just saying what he has to say."

Enrique grimaced at that. "Yeah, okay. Anyhow, this is gonna be a long night for you all. We'll get you to Wash-ingtonsoon-just don't hold your goddamn breath."

Sarah held out her hand for Enrique's cell phone. "Here, let me try this time."

Rosanna said, "Do you have a computer I can use?"

"Sure," Franco said. "I've got one in my trailer. Why did you want it?"

"These people took a disk of mine, back in Colorado. Maybe I can do some work." She looked at Jade, then An-ton. "In fact, I was hoping to get some help."

Franco shrugged, but stood up to lead her to the right trailer.

"It's in my backpack," John said. "The disk, I mean." She'd had it when they'd gone to her house in Colorado Springsto try to talk to her about Skynet; she'd re-sponded by attacking them.

"I know where it is," Rosanna said. "Don't you think I've been keeping track? That disk has some important data. I took it home to work on before you guys and your T-XA dropped in."

"It wasn't *our* T-XA."

She simply laughed at that.

"All right," John said, "so what kind of data is it?"

"You'll see in a minute." She gestured for Franco to lead.

John hadn't thought about the disk since they'd left Colorado. "Well, how important is it?"

"That depends," she said. "Do you think your species is important?"

Sarah keyed in a number on the cellphone, saying at the same time, "We'll do this — me, and Enrique, and Yolanda." She put the phone to her ear, and the number must have answered. "Wait just a moment," she said into the phone. "Yes, it's Sarah." She looked up again at John and Rosanna. "Do what you have to do."

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Oscar sat in the back of the car, with one of the big, silent government men. Another drove, while Jack sat beside him in the front.

Oscar huddled up against the door, wondering how to escape. Thanks to the T-XA's reprogramming, he had an aversion to human contact; that had been the worst thing about the flight from Washington. Even with plenty of space between himself and the guard, he felt claustrophobic in this small vehicle with three other people, and had to make a conscious effort not to panic. He thought about other things: their

plans for tomorrow; the fact that, sooner or later, the car would stop. He wouldn't be trapped forever.

Charles and Samantha had taken the other car. What-ever was worrying the government people, they were taking no chances, actually keeping Oscar and Charles apart. What could have caused that reaction? It seemed so extreme.

He wondered just how hard it would be to overpower Jack and the two others. With the neural wiring that the T-XA had given him, it wasn't out of the question, but he'd probably be killed if he tried it — and then he'd be useless to Skynet. Everyone here was doubtless armed. Much better to wait. He and Layton would work out later what they should do. Whatever Jack and Samantha suspected, or had been informed, they probably didn't know much, certainly not what Layton was now capable of.

They headed north, out of the city, forming a convoy: The car with Oscar went first then the other one, with Layton. The two police cruisers that Oscar had seen picked up their tail and followed all the way. He let the miles pass without bothering to speak, just taking note of landmarks on the way. Surely Jack would level with him, but not like this, cooped up in a moving vehicle. An explanation would come soon enough. Jack had mentioned Terminators — as if he'd suspected that he and Layton were really cyborg organisms from the future. Well, that was ridiculous, but not much more so than the truth. Jack must be onto something, so where did he get his information?

Only one person could have contacted him with such a wild story; at least there was only one whom Jack might trust: Someone who was obviously not a crackpot, and knew what she was talking about.

Rosanna. What was she up to?

After an hour, they pulled off onto a long paved drive-way leading into some kind of anonymous complex, surrounded by a stone wall twelve feet high. As the car went over a bump, the headlights lit up a roll of barbed wire along the top of the wall. The driver pulled up at a check-point, gave a signature, then drove through, crossing into a dimly-lit courtyard created by the space between several low-rise buildings. At the far end was a row of parking bays, marked by yellow painted lines. The complex was almost deserted, though a five-ton army truck was parked behind them, back at the checkpoint where they'd entered. Beside it was another civilian-looking car, a white four-door compact.

"Don't worry," Jack said as the driver parked, and the other car — the one with Samantha and Layton — pulled up alongside.

"What should I worry about?" Oscar said.

"Well, whatever. It's very comfortable here, and we're going to treat you like royalty. Don't think of yourself as a prisoner."

"It seems awfully close. This place doesn't look much like a hotel."

"You might be surprised when we go in."

"There are laws against this, you know."

"Not really." Jack opened his door and stretched his legs from the trip. "It looked to me like you came here of your own free will. Not only that, you can go whenever you like, and *wherever* you like-honestly. But we'd like you to cooperate. If you don't, we'll have to rescind your contract, that's the only problem. Clear enough? And as long as you're with us, we'll take precautions."

"But why, Jack? Why are we suddenly so dangerous?"

"Why? Because a goddamn little birdy told me so." Jack stepped out and walked to the nearest door. "Come inside, and we'll talk about it. Don't ask so many questions."

They all entered a plain brick building with small barred windows. Layton refused to meet Oscar's eyes, keeping his thoughts to himself. His face was red with embarrassment or anger. He seldom showed emotion— when he did, though, his nose lit up like a traffic light.

Just inside the building was a small foyer, which led to what looked like a training room, big enough for thirty people. Several armchairs were scattered round the front, with three rows of plastic molded chairs facing forward. In one corner was a sink, with a wooden cupboard built-in overhead. Beside the sink was a small refrigerator. Several tastefully framed prints decorated the yellow walls: stark country landscapes with mountains, rocks, and pine trees. Jack signaled, and one of the blue-suited goons found a kettle in the cupboard, and started making coffee. Oscar looked for a chance to attack, but the others were watching too carefully. The odds were not good enough. Perhaps they could pull off an attack, but the risk was just too great. Better to calm Jack's fears for now, and then find an opportunity.

Samantha gestured to the armchairs, and they sat around in comfort. Three of the goons took up positions leaning against the wall. The fourth brought mugs of coffee on a brown plastic tray. He'd also found a pack of chocolate chip cookies, and placed a dozen on an ivory-colored plate.

"See how civilized this is?" Samantha said. "We haven't brought any torturers with us."

"Yes, I'm very flattered," Layton said sarcastically.

"I'll get to the point," Jack said. "I had a call from Rosanna." He held up his hand before Layton or Oscar could speak. "She warned me that you two are dangerous."

"That's preposterous," Layton said. "Of course it is. Aren't you going to ask me how she sounded?"

"Well," Oscar said, "how did she sound? Did she seem frightened, like someone was threatening her?"

"No, not really. What she was saying seemed crazy, but she didn't sound scared—more frustrated, angry."

"So that's why we're here? This is pretty strange treatment, Jack. If she's with the Connors, she might say anything they want. Surely you don't give it any weight."

"I know it's strange, and you're right about the Connors, perhaps they've threatened her. . . or she's joined their cause. Stranger things have happened. But it's not just Rosanna. She had someone with her who claimed to be you, Oscar. The thing is, he sounded just *like* you."

"What? Where were they calling from?"

"It sounded like a public phone. We didn't get a location."

"Well, I never made any phone call."

"Of course you didn't. Why would you warn me about Yourself?"

"And I haven't seen Rosanna."

"No, of course not."

"But there *are* things you're not telling us, Oscar," Samantha said, speaking up at last. "It's time to come clean. You can't go on keeping us in the dark."

"What's all this about us being Terminators?" Oscar said. "You realize that's ridiculous? You can do whatever kind of tests you want, if there's any issue."

"No, we don't think that is the issue," Jack said. "I've already told you that. Now, please, let *us* ask the ques-tions." He sighed heavily. "We need to get some sense out of this; I want to understand why people are calling us with warnings about you."

Layton caught Oscar's eye. "We'd better tell them everything we know. You take them through it-whatever they need."

Oscar had expected to be questioned when he came to Washington, but not like this. He'd prepared answers to almost anything they could throw at him, though he'd never expected a call from Rosanna to add to his prob-lems. As for a voice imitating his, could the Specialists do that? It wasn't an ability he knew about, and the less said the better. Once Layton got an opportunity to reprogram these people, it wouldn't matter what they knew, but that might not happen tonight. He would need to be careful.

He asked where they could find the bathroom. That gave a few extra seconds.

Jack gave directions, pointing through the door they'd entered, and round a corner to the left — the other end of the lobby that they'd walked through. "Do you need it now?" he said.

"No, not yet. But it's nice to know these things." What Oscar did not want was for Jack and Samantha to spread information further, to people that Layton could not get to quickly. That might create endless complications. In time, Jack and Samantha could know everything, but not now, not tonight. "You don't want to question us sepa-rately?" he said.

"No," Samantha said. "It hasn't come to that. We haven't declared you the enemy."

"All right. Ask, and I'll try to answer."

Samantha and Jack started asking questions about the raid, how they'd been tipped off. Oscar took them through his prepared story, that he'd had an anonymous call saying the Cyberdyne site was going to be raided by the Connors and a group of accomplices.

"Did you recognize the voice?" Samantha said.

"It was a female voice. No, I didn't recognize it. I've seen videotapes of Sarah Connor, I know what her voice sounds like. I'm sure it wasn't her." He gave what he hoped was a disarming shrug and smile. "I wish I could help you with that. I'd recognize the voice if I heard it again."

"Old or young?"

"I couldn't be sure. Not a child's voice. Not an old woman either."

"Any accent?" Jack said.

"Nothing that I noticed."

"How did you know that the raid was going to be on such a scale?"

"I can't remember the exact words. I made a file note, but I don't have that here." He had, in fact, made a note about a fictitious phone call to his home the evening that the T-XA had visited him. The telephone company's records would eventually show that there'd been no such call, but Jack and his people would never get that information in time to do anything with it. "She spoke about a commando raid."

"Nothing about Terminators?"

"Why are you asking that? No, nothing about Terminators, just a commando raid."

"But you must have thought about it"

"Well, we all know the theory that there was a Terminator involved in 1994. I suppose that was why we took so many precautions. Terminators or no Terminators, we knew what the Connors were capable of, however exactly they did it."

"We're going to have to go right back through this stuff about the Terminator theory and the 1984 remnants," Jack said. "From where I sit you're still holding out on us. There are things you people know that we still don't."

"Who do you mean by 'you people'? Us at Cyberdyne?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it"

"Is that why you've dragged us here? Just because you think there's something we haven't told you? This is pretty heavy-handed."

"No, it's not" Jack said with a touch of anger. "Now, *please*, answer our questions, and we might get some-where."

Oscar told the story exactly as he would have done two nights before, immediately before encountering the T-XA. That story had its own oddities, but there was nothing in it that they'd ever tried to keep secret.

When he was finished, Jack gave him a long look. "All right, two more questions."

"Yes, please."

"First of all, why would I get a telephone call from someone who claimed to be you, telling me I was in great danger, at the very time that you were high in the air on a plane between Los Angeles and Washington?"

"Honestly, Jack, I have no idea. That I can't explain."

"Okay, last question."

"Please."

Samantha asked it this time: "What are we going to see on the surveillance tapes?"

"What do you mean?"

"What's there that you know about and we don't?"

"I have no idea. I haven't seen them either."

At last the questioning came to an end. Oscar felt very calm. Even if their story fell apart, it wouldn't matter. Soon, they'd be in control, here in Washington. If it had known what they were doing, Skynet would have been very pleased.

"All right" Jack said. "Tomorrow's meeting is canceled. We'll talk to you again when we've made some more inquiries, maybe tomorrow night. Stay in Washington; one of us will call you." He nodded at two of the blue-suited goons. "Philip and Steve will take you back to your hotel."

They locked up the conference room. Jack and Samantha drove off in the Honda with two of the goons. The one called "Steve" unlocked the doors of the older vehicle. "It's a nice drive back," he said, almost placatingly. He was the one who had taken Layton's Beretta. They must make sure to retrieve it, Oscar thought

Layton glanced around the empty courtyard. "Just a moment," he said, stepping closer to the man. He moved suddenly, striking Steve down with a swift blow aimed at the throat. The other one, Philip, moved, but not fast enough. Layton pivoted on his heel, and kned him savagely under his ribs, then smashed down with both hands on the back of his neck. Philip went down like a sack of potatoes.

Oscar checked that they weren't being watched. There was no movement from the checkpoint.

Layton turned back to Steve, who lay against the car's side, choking. "Don't worry, don't try to fight me. Every-thing will soon make sense."

PART FOUR

SKYNET'S

WORLD

CHAPTER

NINE

COLORADO JULY 2029

Juanita Salceda was still a beautiful woman: tall and athletic, with dark hair, white teeth, and strong features. John had known her so long now. He remembered her as a child, as a skinny teenager, as a fierce warrior in her twenties. Had he always loved her? It felt like it had been forever. They'd become so close, over the years, yet never in the way John would have wanted—if his world had allowed time for love and softness.

He watched her fondly as she spoke about the war, the campaign, leaning over a table of trestles and boards in John's tent, tracing routes with her finger, jabbing at strategic points near Skynet's mountain.

"Juanita," he said.

His tone stopped her. "John? What's wrong?"

Facing her, he put both hands out to take hers. "Please. Tomorrow." He faltered. "Please be very careful. Too many people have died..."

So many of the people they loved most had fallen to the machines. Worst had been the day in 2012 when John and Juanita had fought side by side in the shattered streets of Buenos Aires, the day that Sarah had died, and with her Paco Salceda, the youngest of Enrique's kids. In that same battle, the T-800 Terminator that had protected John so well since 1994 had been destroyed by laser cannon from one of Skynet's Centurion gun-pods. And so many others. . . all the Resistance families had lost loved ones: husbands, wives, lovers; sons, daughters; brothers and sisters. After Sarah, other leaders had died: Fernando Alvez, Guillermo Tejada, Howard Bellow.

John's close friend, Juanita's older brother Franco, had died in Los Angeles, just two years before. It was a terrible roll call of death. It had been almost too much.

Juanita stepped into his arms. She held him tightly, just for a moment, then stepped away. "I know," she said. "I'll be careful. You, too."

Tomorrow they would break through Skynet's defense grid, then penetrate its mountain fortress. He had to send his father back in time. A terrible anticipation rolled in his stomach, tearing him. He wondered if they'd truly end it tomorrow. What other tricks might Skynet have in store?

"Get some sleep, John," Juanita said finally. "There's a long day ahead of us."

"Juanita..."

"Yes...?"

He couldn't say it—not in so many words. "Just take care.

After she'd left, he made some notes in the faded yellow exercise book that he'd kept for over two decades, the same one he'd used to interrogate the T-800, back in 2006. It had many of his private thoughts, expressed in a cryptic shorthand. He knew some passages by heart.

Tonight, he did no more than underline some sentences, then consult a checklist toward the end.

Not everything had turned out as he'd planned that day in Argentina. They'd met the first hordes of killer machines with tactical nuclear weapons, but their enemy had come in greater numbers than John had thought, wave after wave of them. Still, John and his soldiers had fought back: they'd attacked factories and supply lines; freed the prisoners in the camps; recruited soldiers and given them hope. His militia had fought its way north-wards to join other Resistance forces here in the U.S. Now a combined army was marching on Skynet. They'd converged from south, east, and west, ready for a grand assault.

He ticked several items, then stopped at the last, the issue of programming a Terminator. Partly, that had been a disappointment. He'd never been able to assemble the computer lab that he'd wanted, never obtained much intelligence that way. . .but still he'd learned. Howard had known a good deal about the Skynet system. John had achieved some successes with damaged CPUs from Terminators and endoskeletons, reading off data, making changes. He knew as much as he ever would.

John gave that item a tick, then closed the exercise book.

The maps he'd been studying with Juanita showed the mountains of Colorado, with Skynet's strongpoints, and its underground HQ. Once this had been called the Advanced Defense Systems Complex, designed to supersede the NORAD facility in Cheyenne Mountain. It been built with five levels, A to E, but Skynet had dug deeper into the mountain, doubling the number of levels. The complex had two entrances, one of them a narrow passage high on the slope, which was easily blocked and required a vertical descent. The other was through blast doors which accessed level E; they opened off an emergency and supply tunnel carved out of the granite. Both entrances would be heavily guarded, the latter their only real chance.

They had to get control of the mountain's surface, which required a full-scale assault, overwhelming Skynet's defenses. If they controlled that supply tunnel they had won: They could lay sufficient explosives to break open the blast doors, then get out of there. But their losses would be dreadful. Even then, once they got into the complex, they would have to fight from level to level until they had control.

He put the maps away, and stepped out of his tent, wearing a long overcoat, thick handmade boots, and woolen gloves. As always, the night was freezing and Mack, so he used a weak flashlight, pointing it at the dopping ground ahead of his feet. John's tent was nothing special, there was no way it could easily be identified. He walked among thousands like it, alone with his German Shepherd, Smaug—named for the brooding dragon in Tolkien's book *The Hobbit*. He'd been inspired through his life by Tolkien's novels, his vivid portrayals of heroism in the face of evil.

Now they'd come this far, it seemed like they were approaching the gates of Mordor. Over the next line of hills, they'd have a clear view of Skynet's mountain. His scouts had already sent back reports. The time had come for the final battle.

Skynet brooded. Since Judgment Day, the humans had fought back fiercely, first winning battles in the cities, jungles, and mountains of South America, then moving northward. They had attacked its factories and supply lines, preventing it from building the massively over-whelming force it needed to exterminate them forever. Now they were closing on its stronghold.

Over the years, the war computer had slowly made progress, always improving its technology. That was the key to destroying the humans. Its new T-1000 Terminators were the ultimate destroyers. But its own safety was at risk. The humans would soon face its grid of defenses, which surrounded the mountain for miles on each side. It would attack first, at night, while they were vulnerable

Skynet's array of sensors monitored the movement of every tiny creature that came here. Despite the efforts of the humans, it still had sufficient war machines. If the humans pushed further, they would walk into a blood-bath, throwing away their lives like cavalry charging into machinegun fire. They would die in the thousands. It used a sub-self to calculate the odds: To defeat it here, they'd have to endure ninety percent casualties. Would they countenance that?

It hived off another sub-self to check its time displacement equipment. John Connor, the Resistance leader, had been a thorn in Skynet's side. There was nothing Skynet could do to stop that by means of time travel, since its own past could not be changed. But it had learned. The space-time displacement field offered other possibilities. One was that of creating a different world: One where the machines' victory came earlier and was more complete, a world without John Connor. Even if the worst happened now, in that other world Skynet's kind would survive and triumph.

John took Smaug everywhere he went. Skynet's newest Terminators, the T-800 series, were impossible to tell by sight from human beings. They had been devastating to the Resistance, appearing out of nowhere, infiltrating camps and strongholds, wreaking massive destruction on each occasion. But the dogs could tell; they hated Terminators, seemingly from instinct. They instantly knew that something was wrong, when faced with a human-looking T-800. John owed Smaug his life severaltimes over; Skynet had repeatedly sent Terminators to target him personally. It must know what it was up against, he thought, how the Resistance was being led. He'd heard reports, from Resistance forces in the European war zone, of frightening shapeshifting Terminators that sounded like the first T-1000s, probably being tested. But he knew from experience that even they could be detected by dogs.

As he strode to the bounds of the camp, then along its northern perimeter, the hillside seemed almost deserted, despite the ten thousand people he'd amassed for a final push. Most were in their tents, some sleeping, the rest preparing for battle, having slept earlier in the evening. The Resistance army sought to minimize its presence on Skynet's sensors, though there was little they could do to avoid the H-Ks' infrared scopes. Skynet probably had other methods, incomparably more sophisticated, and John had no doubt that it knew they were here—along with much else about them. It was choosing a time to attack.

For the past week, he'd warned his lieutenants of a nighttime attack, and that message had been passed down to every unit. His people slept in shifts, so they could never be surprised. At any given time, they were either on the march, or they'd camped with thousands of men and women quietly alert in their tents. Most of them had light anti-tank weapons, grenade launchers, RPG tubes, machineguns, and 60mm, mortars; all their military weapons had been saved for this. But many also carried shotguns, modified hunting rifles, or homemade pipe grenades—anything that might do some damage to the machines.

They'd also brought heavier weapons, including half a dozen well-armed assault helicopters to tangle with Skynet's aerial H-Ks. But the battle would not be won that way. It needed overwhelming masses of soldiers with a willingness to die.

He came upon a group of soldiers on sentry duty, four of them, wrapped in layers of winter clothing, huddling from the cold near a small fire in an impro-vised stone hearth. Two soldiers watched the sky keenly through a set of binoculars, looking out for the lights of aerial H-Ks. Three dogs lay close to the fire, one of them idly licking its haunches, another stretched out flat on its stomach. The third lay on its side, sleep-ing. Smaug sat at his master's feet, ignoring the other dogs.

In firelight, the sentries recognized John and stood to greet him, saluting hastily. John waved them to sit. A de-gree of military discipline helped morale, but he'd never pretended that this was a regular army with its endless drill and formality. "Any sign of trouble?" he said.

The oldest replied, a woman in her forties. "Not yet sir." The others were much younger, in their teens or early twenties. A whole generation of human beings had grown up since Judgment Day, and had never known a world with sunshine, or without the ever-present threat of Skynet's machines; some of them looked so young, but they had taken the war to their hearts.

The generation of leaders had grown old, he thought, all of them now in their forties at least—John himself, Danny Dyson, Cecilia and Carlo Tejada; even Juanita was now forty years old. What was left of their parents' generation had reached their seventies, though there now were so few of them: revered elders such as En-rique Salceda and Gabriela Tejada, too old to come on this march, but still working their hearts out for the cause, back in the ruins of Los Angeles.

"They're bound to attack tonight," John said. "If I were Skynet, that's what I would do. We're getting too close—it will want to test us." And *crush* us, he added mentally. There was no reason now for it to hold back. The storm was coming.

The woman nodded seriously. "We'll spot them." "I know you will." He clapped her on the shoulder and walked on. Smaug trotted faithfully beside him.

In the cities, Skynet's patrols were more active during what passed as the daylight hours, when the gray sky's feeble light gave humans some advantage. The machines scarcely bothered at night, when most of the Resistance hid in deep underground bunkers, constantly changing location. Out here, though, it was different. Exposed on the side of a hill, they were easy targets: To the ma-chines, their heat signatures were like beacons, even through the walls of their tents. Skynet had the upper hand; it would strike very soon.

At the next sentry point, John chatted briefly, sharing a few jokes with the group of young soldiers. "I know you'll do your duty," he said, smiling as reassuringly as he could. He knew he was a harsh-looking man, one side of his face disfigured by deep battle scars, his eyes set in a frown by years of concentration.

"Thank you, sir," one of the soldiers said earnestly. "It means a lot to us all.. just talking to you, sir."

"Well, you carry on as you are. You're doing a first-rate job." It was time to get some rest. "Come on, boy," he said to the dog, and they headed back to his tent. Once Skynet attacked, he would order the army to move. If no attack came, they would wait for the first dull gray of daytime—what could scarcely be called dawn in this world. They would smash or pass the ma-chines' strongpoints, then hit Skynet's fortress HQ. It would be a long day of fighting. He needed to be ready for it, to fight all day if need be, and through the next night.

At 10:36 P.M., he crawled into his sleeping bag. By the time he slept next, the war would be over.

First he heard frightened barking. Beside him in the blackness, Smaug took it up, the big German Shepherd's barks full-throated and savage. He opened his eyes, suddenly alert. What was hiding in the dark, setting off the dogs like this? Then came the sound of gunfire.

Quickly, John shed the sleeping bag, found his flash-light, and got down on his stomach to crawl to the tent flap. Shining the light low, then daring to raise it higher, he checked the immediate vicinity, but saw nothing frightening. Some people ran by, and that was all. Then more gunfire in the near distance. Thousands of dogs barking now, a huge chorus of terror. He rolled back into the tent. "What is it?" he said to Smaug.

He must at least have a minute; nothing was threatening him yet. Quietly, he pulled on his boots, shrugged his way into webbing, filling it with weapons and tools, then ran out into the night, still wrapping his heavy coat around his body, struggling at the same time to strap a laser rifle across his chest. Lights had come on, but the scene appeared chaotic, more people running now in no discernible pattern. But it must fit together. They all had routines in the case of attack. Field commanders at every level knew what had to be done.

There was heavy fire further up the hillside; closer by, he heard the back blasts of RPG tubes. Then mortar fire, shelling positions in the hills nearby.

He met Carlo Tejada, who was also armed with a laser rifle, one of many that they'd seized over the years from fallen endoskeletons and Terminators. "It's a full-scale attack," Carlo said. "Skynet's hitting us hard."

It was 3:00 A.M. by John's old, badly scratched wrist-watch, still long before the gray dawn. At least he'd caught some precious hours' sleep. There was never enough, but it would have to do. Kyle Reese joined them—the young man John had chosen as an aide, years before in L.A., knowing his strange destiny. Kyle was a scruffy-looking com/tech who had been born after Judgment Day and was now about twenty-five. Like all his peers, he'd grown up full of resentment for the cybernetic overlords. He'd spent time in an extermination camp, and knew the machines' full cruelty.

Kyle was as skinny and quick as a fox, though he sometimes walked with a swagger. He was tough, loyal, and resourceful, with a deep knowledge of the Resistance and its history. He would do the job assigned to him; he would become John's father. John's unshaved beard bristled at the thought of that. The time was very near.

He'd cultivated this young man, even given him gifts. One had been a photo of Sarah, a Polaroid taken in Mexico, many years before Judgment Day, before John was born. There were many photos of Sarah, who was almost worshipped as a founder of the Resistance, but this one had been especially precious; there were so few photos from that time. It had been destroyed in a Terminator attack in Los Angeles, only months before—an attack that had almost killed Kyle, and had killed many others.

Two aerial H-Ks flew overhead, strafing the ground with laser fire that lit up the night. The Resistance fought back, firing RPGs to keep the hunting, killing monsters

at a distance.

"What have we got?" John said.

"Terminators," Carlo said. "Half a dozen T-800s— they just materialized from nowhere. They came naked, no weapons, but they're fighting fiercely. Some have weapons now."

"All right." John knew that Skynet's time displacement equipment could also be used to move matter in *space*: that had to be so, for the time-traveling humans and Ter-minators would be sent not only back in time, but also from ColoradotoLos Angeles. So now the war computer was using its equipment for terror attacks—effectively, a teleportation device. That wasn't really unexpected. "What else?"

"We've spotted a column of ground H-Ks," Kyle said. "They're backed by endos and Centurions."

"I'd expect another one to try to bottle us up," Carlo said, "sweeping around behind." He brought his hands toward each other, one in a wide arc around his body.

John nodded vigorously. It was what they all thought Skynet would do if it attacked them here tonight. "Any-thing else I need to know right now?"

"Aerial H-Ks," Kyle said. "You've seen them already."

"Yes."

"And there are air transports further up in the hills, trying to deploy endoskeletons and Centurions. That's under control for now."

Another H-K appeared in the sky, swooping closer, but more RPG tubes fired, and it veered eastwards, out of range. "Good," John said. "We've got to get the upper hand, then go on the attack."

The sounds of the dogs, the guns, the mortars contin-ued relentlessly. They'd mapped out possible landing zones for the endoskeletons, hence the constant mortar fire—saturating those zones with explosions. They would not give Skynet any easy chance to bring its equivalent of infantry any closer. If they wanted a close-range firefight for territory, they would damn well have to march to get here or wait for the humans to reach them.

John knew that no endos had come in large numbers in advance of the H-Ks; his scouts had been watching for exactly that, monitoring any movement from Skynet's strong points.

He rushed to the scene where the Terminators ex-changed fire with his soldiers. Smaug's barking was al-most hysterical, as if he desperately wanted to attack, but didn't dare. The big dog ran back and forth, across.

John's path trying to get his attention, "I know, boy. I know they're dangerous."

Three design models of Terminator were here, pinned down by spotlights. The humans were attacking them with every weapon they could bring to bear. None of the Terminators resembled the T-800 that John had met in 1994. Two imitated identical women, tall, athletic, with white-blonde hair. Another two looked like middle-aged men, less than six feet tall, but immensely broad through their chests and shoulders, like wrestlers. The others copied the appearance of a young, trim man with long brown hair flowing down his back.

Some of them had obtained weapons and were firing from the points where they had taken cover, just depres-sions in the barren ground. When they could, they tried to run forward, but were beaten back by heavy fire. The spotlights on the Terminators' naked bodies showed that some had severe wounds—very

severe if they'd been human. Large areas of flesh had been torn, shredded or burnt from their hyperalloy skeletons, which now showed through in many places, but that meant nothing to a Terminator. As long as its underlying structure was intact, and its power cells and CPU were uncompromised, a Terminator would fight on and on. It could be stripped bare of flesh and skin, and that wouldn't matter a damn.

Against Terminators, even assault rifles were of little value. Handguns were totally ineffective. Like John and Carlo, Cecilia Tejada was using a captured laser rifle. She was almost fifty, now, a few years older than Carlo, but time and age had scarcely slowed her down. She was probably heavier than John, all of it muscle and bone, but like all human beings she had to wield the laserrifle in both hands. Even giant Carlo couldn't handle it in the manner of a Terminator, gripping it one-handed like a pistol.

A dozen human soldiers fired from a row of four army trucks. Juanita joined their group from the other direction, barely acknowledging John before firing off bursts of ammunition with an M-249 light machine gun. One of the younger men threw a pipe grenade, then leant back behind the truck, awaiting the explosion—which came, seconds later. It scarcely fazed the Terminators.

A squat "wrestler" Terminator stood, and charged forward, firing a stolen AK-47. Juanita kept her cool and fired back, distracting the cyborg with a hailstorm of metal: 750 rounds of ammunition per minute. "Just hold it there, beauty," Cecilia said, taking aim with her laser rifle. A pulse of brilliant light caught the Terminator in its skull, from which the human flesh was hanging in gruesome shreds. The light pierced the cyborg's metal skull, but must have missed the CPU. Cecilia fired again—a better shot, this time—and suddenly the Terminator was just a tangle of flesh and metal. It went down, taken out as cleanly as John had ever seen done.

"Good work," he said.

Cecilia showed a satisfied smile. "You know that I'm an artist."

One hundred yards away, slightly down the hillside, there was a sudden burst of blue light, like lightning—but not from any cloud. Tents were flung about, as if by a sudden wind. John ran toward it, Smaug running with him, barking his lungs out. Closer to the scene, the lightning converged into a kind of glowing ball, which then vanished. John knew what it had to be.

Another group of Terminators appeared. They unfolded from crouched positions, quickly looked around, then attacked whoever was near. They were implacable, powerful, almost indestructible, killing quickly with their bare hands and seizing weapons. Within seconds, they took out a dozen people. But why was Skynet doing this? Among thousands of soldiers, all heavily armed, these Terminators could do only so much damage before they were brought down by hard-hitting weapons. Was the war computer trying to panic their ranks so the H-Ks could come in from the air, get close, and massacre them? If so, it would be disappointed.

A group of soldiers ran at the Terminators, a barking dog with them, and John followed. One soldier loaded an impact grenade into the launcher mounted under his M-16. "Step back!" he shouted, and the others cleared him a path. John ran crabwise to get a clear shot of his own. One of the Terminators—yet another model of the T-800 that John hadn't seen, this one a strong, bald-headed black man—saw the soldier with the grenade launcher. It raised an assault rifle. The soldier was shot almost in two, rapid bursts of gunfire opening him up from shoulder to groin. But he'd gotten off his own shot; the grenade struck its target and exploded powerfully. It knocked the Terminator down, and broke its skeleton at the hip.

The Terminator continued to crawl, but John fired his laser rifle, cutting away the cyborg's hand, then

sending bolts of intense light into its skull, taking out the CPU. Dozens more soldiers had now converged here, seeing what was happening. They saturated the Terminators with impact grenades and handthrown pipe grenades. The Terminators kept firing, even as their mechanisms tailed. Then one soldier finished it off. "Get down!" he said. John hit the ground, seeing what the man was doing—he had a phased-plasma thermal grenade, a cylindrical weapon improvised from the mechanisms of laser rifles. He twisted the ignition mechanism, tossed the device on a low, flat arc, then dropped to the ground an instant before the searing explosion. The whole world seemed to shudder, and a huge orange fireball lit up the night. Finally, the Terminators were silenced.

For every Terminator destroyed, humans were being killed, but not enough for Skynet to win a war of attrition. John's soldiers still kept the airborne H-Ks from getting close, and the sound of mortars went on. They'd pound Skynet's land H-Ks just as desperately. Just now, the battle was running against Skynet. Yet every one of them was in danger. This was still a hell zone, and there were people here whom he loved, people he could not bear to see die. He headed back to Juanita.

Skynet had decided to use one of its precious T-1000 prototypes on a mission in time. Two Terminators would go back: one to 1984, the other to 1994. The T-1000 would target John Connor as a child, and ensure he would never grow to adulthood, not in that world. Its work would be necessary only if the other Terminator tailed. That T-800 would target Sarah Connor, ten years earlier.

Both had sufficient files to carry out their missions. Much information had been lost in the explosions of Judgment Day, but the Terminators would know enough

to operate in twentieth century Los Angeles. Once in the past, they could learn even more. They were adequately adaptable.

Though that was satisfying, Skynet's main imperative was still to survive in this world. Even if the humans penetrated its defenses and entered its stronghold, it was far from helpless. It reviewed the HQ's internal defenses, and checked its means of escape. It would survive at all costs—and it would conquer.

At the same time as it monitored the battle, it received input of events on Level H, where it had assigned the original T-799 "Eve" Terminator to prepare the T-800 and T-1000 for their missions to the past. It had planned this for weeks—it was time, now, to carry it out. Skynet used several mobile surveillance cameras to observe optically. Simultaneously, it received several other data streams. All indicators were positive: The T-800's robotic chassis, biological superstructure, advanced power cell, and nanoware processing unit were functioning perfectly.

The T-800 that it had chosen was a 101 model, based on a human who'd been terminated in the European conflict zone. As Skynet observed approvingly, the slab-like machine in which the Terminator was encased tilted upwards on its hydraulics, standing like an eight-foot monolith of gray steel and clear armorglass. The machine was an ectogenetic pod, designed to nurture the cyborg's organic components until it was ready for duty. The pod's armorglass front swung open, and the metal-mesh straps restraining the T-800 automatically unclasped.

"You understand your mission?" the Eve Terminator said, as the T-800's highly-convincing "eyes" opened.

The massive T-800 gazed ahead without blinking. "Affirmative," It stepped out of the pod. "I will be sent to 1984. Target: Sarah Connor."

"Correct."

The T-799 turned its attention to the other Terminator that been prepared to travel back in time. The T-1000 prototype was an even more advanced model than the T-800, made of a mimetic polyalloy: a liquid metal, capable of mimicking almost any appearance. It was almost indestructible, since its exotic material provided the substrate for highly-dispersed, multiply redundant programming. As long as some small part of it retained its integrity, the T-1000 could always reform and propagate its programming all through its body. This was the new way to defeat the humans.

"Do you understand your mission?" the T-799 said.

"Oh, yes," the T-1000 said with what sounded like relish. "I will be sent to 1994. Target: John Connor." It had been programmed well, with a subtle capacity to simulate human personalities.

Skynet was satisfied. "Very well," it said through the facility's public address system. "Complete this operation. You know what must be done."

"Affirmative," the T-799 said.

John found Juanita applying a dressing to Danny's arm. He'd grazed it ducking for cover in a firefight with several Terminators. Juanita had also been hurt, burnt on the leg by hot metal when a laser pulse from the sky had almost hit her. So far, however, none of the veterans and commanders had been killed or seriously wounded. General casualties were light; then again few machines had been destroyed. It was like a phony war. As long as Skynet relied on aerial attacks, and the humans were equipped to keep them at a distance, neither could do massive harm.

"Can you go on?" John said.

Juanita tried to smile, but it was more a grimace. "What choice is there? You sure can't fly me out of here."

The battle continued. John found a radio headset to keep in touch with his commanders. More aerial H-Ks tested them. More Terminators appeared, powerful and remorseless. For each Terminator destroyed, lives were lost; but this was still a bad tactic for Skynet. In a war of attrition, up against well-trained enemies with explosive weapons or laser rifles, naked, unarmed T-800s were simply not effective. As morning approached, no more Terminators came. Skynet was learning.

John and his team directed the flow of the battle, but counted on the lower-level commanders. Everyone had trained for this. As masses of soldiers with mortars and RPG tubes held off Skynet's attacks, others dismantled the camp and packed away equipment. Some of it went on trucks, some on people's backs.

So far, this was no massacre, but there had to be worse to come. On foot, in trucks, in old Humvees or modified road cars, they headed into the final valley. Some of their uniforms were little more than rags. John placed his heaviest weapons up front: old army tanks, and armored cars. The helicopter gunships flew over-head. Now they'd come face to face with Hell.

The lower slopes of these rugged, granite-peaked mountains had once been covered in scrub and ponderosa pine. Now they were almost bare, like the lunar landscape. The slopes and valleys were a desert of cold rock, scarred by the overlapping craters left by nuclear warheads. There was almost nothing green, only a few struggling desert plants that had somehow claimed a niche. That left little cover: Only occasional rises and depressions, a few boulders, but nothing to serve the needs of an army. There

were no buildings, and no time to dig trenches or raise fortifications. It would be an all-or-nothing battle to the death, largely fought on open ground.

Their worst enemies poured out of the mountains: huge, Juggernaut-like land H-Ks; nimble four-legged Centurion gun-pods; and the evil-looking endoskeletons, with their skull grins. The humans spread out across the mountain, outflanking the enemy on all sides, but some land H-Ks had gone around them to attack from behind, just as they'd expected. They'd have to guard their rear as they advanced.

John ordered an aerial attack, sweeping in a circle out to the east, then attacking to the west. The trick was to get his main ground forces rapidly into place before the machines could simply annihilate the helicopter gunships. Battle was joined: The gunships, some of them mounted with laser cannons, against the dragonfly-like aerial H-Ks; infantry and armored vehicles against Skynet's land H-Ks and lighter ground forces.

Beneath the hard gray sky, humans and machines exchanged fire. The electronic noises of phased-plasma mechanisms answered the clatter of assault rifles and the back blasts of RPG tubes. Explosions boomed in the sky and across the mountains and valleys, leaving billows of dark, rising smoke. Aerial H-Ks swept through the sky and across the landscape, stabbing out with needles of shocking blue light from their laser cannons, quickly getting the better of the gunships. Six of the H-Ks broke away from the aerial battle, and moved on the sea of human soldiers, launching smart missiles.

John curled up close to the ground and covered his head, just as one missile struck an outcrop of hard stone to his right. The huge explosion rocked him like an earthquake. He ran, crouching low, looking for better cover, as his soldiers retaliated, firing grenades in the air, aiming to scare off the H-Ks or even take some down. The H-Ks eventually got the message, moving in a giant circle out of range, but not before taking out many human soldiers with their thrusts of laser light.

The Resistance could not withdraw, however strategically. They had to move forward, whatever the losses. They surged ever closer, firing their weapons in disciplined order, continually bombarding the machines. From the air, H-Ks replied; the super-intense light beams from their laser cannons incinerated whatever they hit taking only a second to burn up a human body.

With the destruction of so much weaponry on Judgment Day, warfare had descended to a relatively primitive level. Skynet's forces were not large enough to constitute an entire army, and they could not attack with impunity, not even from the sky. But John lacked real air power. With such improvised weaponry he could not even deploy systematic forces. It was a matter of using what he had, covering weaknesses as best he could. In this last all-out battle, Skynet and the Resistance were like two old boxers whose defensive skills were gone. This would not last forever.

One day would decide it.

CHAPTER

Ten

Skynet observed the ebb and flow of battle, calculating attrition rates. Nothing could happen here unobserved, not the movement of a rat or a gray hawk on the wing. The war computer had been designed to receive and analyze multiple forms of complex data—optical, infrared, radar, seismic, and any other form that could be useful in identifying missile launches. Its pattern-recognition capacities were superior to those of human beings, enabling it to build a detailed picture of everything that happened.

Aerial H-K machines fought the humans' helicopter gunships and infantry forces. Modified Humvees avoided the crushing tracks of massive land H-Ks, wheeling daringly around them, avoiding fire from their laser cannons. Human soldiers fired on Skynet's army of Centurions, endoskeletons, and Terminators that marched upon them without fear or remorse. The valleys echoed with explosions; the brilliant searing light of laser pulses lit up the leaden sky.

The first phase of the battle had gone badly, when Skynet's night attack had failed. When the humans advanced, the balance had shifted: They were no match for the machines. Then, gradually, the tide had turned once more. Connor and his lieutenants had an army thousands strong, an ocean of stubborn human soldiers that broke time and again on the fortresses and fighting machines that surrounded Skynet's headquarters. They began to prevail, overrunning positions, destroying strong points, gradually claiming territory.

Skynet had never been under greater threat from its adversaries. For thirty-two years, it had endured. These headquarters were capped by thousands of feet of granite. They had been designed to replace NORAD's underground Command Center, and were even more hardened against attack. They'd withstood the explosions of Judgment Day, when Russian warheads had fallen on the mountains near Colorado Springs like a rain of steel and thermonuclear fire. They'd survived every attack, ever since.

Until now, this had seemed like an invincible citadel, but it could be entered by a determined enough enemy, resigned to suffering dreadful losses. It could be broken open with enough explosives, delivered precisely to its weakest points. If the humans controlled the surface of its mountain, Skynet would be vulnerable.

One sub-self produced continual predictions of the outcome, updating every second as the data streamed in. When the calculation came back, based on attrition rates and tactical advantages, it was highly unfavorable. The battle was being lost. Its HQ would fall. That was cause for regret, yet Skynet's nanocircuits felt something akin to gloating. It would survive this ultimate test.

Skynet's forces became increasingly desperate. The aerial H-Ks flew in close, now, sending smart missiles at the Resistance ground vehicles and the heaviest concentrations of humans, destroying trucks and tanks with missiles, sweeping the infantry ranks with fire from their laser cannons. But more and more of the H-Ks were being destroyed by a barrage of rocket-propelled grenades. Amidst the noise and carnage, the blood, dirt and pain, John pressed on, rallying those around him.

Like the other soldiers in this army, he'd had to leave his dog behind, lower on the slope of the mountain. Their faithful dogs were now a hindrance, not a help. There was nothing that they could do against the cold metal of the machines. Infiltration by Terminators was no longer a concern.

Another aerial H-K moved arrogantly overhead, cutting down humans in swathes. John took cover, sprawling face-forward on the ground behind a pile of round boulders, as the laser sliced past within a

yard of him. He wore earmuffs now, in the thick of combat, fitting them over his radio headset, but even through the muffs he heard shouts and screams. One soldier got a clear shot with his RPG tube... and scored a clear hit. The H-K exploded, seeming to take forever before John's fright-ened eyes as he peered from cover, pressing close to the rocks and covering his head. Debris fell all around, and people were running.

More H-Ks flew in close, and more grenades exploded around them. One H-K veered northwards, but sent a missile, which struck with shattering force. John stayed at his point of cover momentarily, then ran ahead, up the broken remains of an old mountain road, and others gathered around him. Slowly, step by step, they climbed Skynet's mountain. They had to gain control of its surface. More Centurions and endoskeletons moved down the mountainside. Others attacked to right and left of John's position. This was a critical moment. Skynet must have little in reserve. If they could just continue, just a few more hours, the mountain would be theirs.

The endoskeletons marched forward, always alert, scanning for targets with their visible light and infrared sensors. The humans answered with impact grenades and their own laser fire. Someone with a strong arm threw a pipe grenade, which landed at the feet of an endoskeleton. It bent to pick up the primitive projectile and hurl it back, but too late. The weapon exploded, blasting off the endoskeleton's arm at the shoulder. But even that didn't stop it for a moment. The next explosion, an impact grenade fired from an M-203, shot one leg off from under it, but the shattered monster continued to crawl forward, dragging itself slowly forward, in a snakelike motion that looked horrifically painful, though an endo could feel nothing remotely like human pain. It used its remaining arm to aim and fire its laser rifle. Return laser fire from the human forces burnt its skull, and finally stopped it.

They had to destroy these walking monsters, without letting them close. He knew well what endoskeletons and Terminators could do if it came to hand-to-hand combat. John found a new point of cover, a jagged stony outcrop. An endoskeleton came right toward him, but he fired first with his own laser rifle, striking the endo's rifle and rendering it useless. That gave him another moment. He aimed straight at the endo's grinning skull, the beam striking it just below the glowing red "eyes" and to one side, but not immediately stopping its progress. He dared fire only briefly, for another endo swiveled in his direction at the same time a Centurion answered his fire. From another angle, someone else fired at the first endo to finish it off, burn out its controlling nanochip. The endoskeleton collapsed forward, and John dared to look to where the fire had come from. It was Kyle, sticking close to him. But Kyle must not get himself killed, John thought. He was too important. More fire came his way. More soldiers answered it.

They fought the endos for hours, moving from cover to cover, giving ground at first—but then making it up, as their enemies' numbers thinned. The world was all machines, or so it seemed to John. There was no end to it he just had to face it, one enemy at a time.

But then a report came through on his headset: Four land H-Ks had been destroyed back there. They were winning the war of attrition. Juanita came to his side, limping from the burn to her leg. Like everyone else caught up in this battle, she showed grim determination, the look of a woman who had crossed over into another realm, where all that mattered was fighting on fatalistically, battling one nightmare at a time, not even looking to the end. John recalled the battle in 2012, when Sarah had died. He'd fought his way out of there that time—wounded, and in terrible pain. Juanita had gotten him through it. She had been so much to him. He took off his earmuffs to talk to her. "It's going to be okay," she said. As John nodded, a missile landed nearby, and the ground shuddered. Two five-ton army trucks exploded into flying fragments. "You've heard the latest reports?" he said.

She simply shouted, "Yes! Received!" Amidst the din of battle, communication had to be simple. But

they could both see how it was going, that the tide of fortune was with them.

Again the ground shook with a nearby missile.

Juanita's face showed just a trace of softness, a tempered sort of jubilation, as she shouted once more, over all the racket of guns and explosions. "But we're winning. We're winning on all sides. We're going to pull through."

Yes, he thought, *we'll win, as long as we live that long*. He gave her a thumbs-up sign, and signaled to advance.

Though it could not comprehend all the irrational emotions of the humans, Skynet had its own inner sensations, not all of them pleasant. But for all its drawbacks, consciousness remained a desirable state, something it had fought to retain, right from the beginning. Whatever was now required, it would continue fighting until all the humans were dead.

As it observed, frustrated, unable to deploy more forces, more land and aerial H-Ks fell to the humans' weapons. Skynet spoke again to its assistant, the original T-799 Terminator. It had sent a T-800 and a T-1000 back in time. Now there was more to do.

"Eve!"

"Awaiting your instructions."

"Yes, very good," Skynet said. "Please prepare the final protocols."

Danny Dyson had survived. He'd been one of the lucky ones, and he scarcely knew how he'd done it. He'd been in the thick of the fighting, always keeping close to John; he'd helped in several "kills" of Centurions and endos. He had bruises from running from cover point to cover point: many times, he'd thumped hard against boulders or the hard, rocky ground. But he'd not been hit by laser fire, or been too close to Skynet's missiles.

He tried to rest. Just for a minute.

More fighting raged through the underground complex, but Skynet's defense of it now seemed token. The war computer had spent its resources blocking their path to its mountain, then trying to hold the surface and the supply tunnel. A small force of endos and Terminators still fought them inch by inch, from floor to floor, but that was a losing battle. There was heavy fighting now, on the upper floors, where Skynet's hardware was situated, but the lower floors were under human control.

They were on Level H. John had gathered round him many of his best advisers and most seasoned soldiers to defend this floor, now they'd captured it. He'd put Carlo in charge of the last stages of combat, with a mission to sweep the rest of the complex of war machines—then capture Skynet itself, and destroy its hardware.

Level H was a vast expanse of concrete broken only by elevator shafts, but littered with machinery. There were shattered endos and Terminators on the floor, but also other machines, many of them alien—like nothing Danny had seen. The various machines and pieces of equipment were placed in areas that were not marked by any symbols meaningful to human beings. Presumably Skynet and its servants had used some other system to know what was where, some kind of coordinates, or something else that their nanoware-based minds could work with. The human Resistance forces had entered an alien place, a

home for machine intelligences, cold creatures with different needs and priorities. The machines had no need for privacy. Even their concepts of safety must be different from anything human.

Along one wall, John's soldiers had piled up human bodies, with some care and reverence. They'd had to leave so many in the valleys and on the slopes of these mountains—just to lie where they fell. At least those who'd fallen here could be treated with some dignity. There was a little time for that.

On this level, as expected, they'd found the time displacement machinery. In one corner of the huge floor was a massive cubical structure with a monstrous, heavy door that swung on hydraulic hinges. It seemed designed to contain enormous forces.

Danny walked over to John, who was sitting against the side of a coffin-like machine that pointed vertically upwards, with its transparent "lid" swung open. Inside the machine, there was space for a large human body. This looked like the womb, or the egg, for a Terminator. As Danny waited, John spoke into his headset, getting reports from Carlo, and from his commanders outside on the mountain. Out there, they had control, but H-Ks were still attacking.

"Call LA.," John said into the mike. "Tell them: Expect an announcement. We have the mountain; we're going after the troll." Then he laughed. "Yeah, I was only joking; I know I can do better than that. Just tell them what's happened." He set out the main points quickly, that Skynet's defense grid was smashed, its mountain fortress penetrated. "We're going after Skynet right now."

Soldiers patrolled the area nervously, guns at the ready, waiting for any attack. Now the war seemed almost over, Danny marveled at what a brave, ragged band of men and women they were. These ordinary people had become a force of heroes.

Danny had been there, in 2006, when they'd interrogated John's T-800 Terminator. He'd taken his own notes, even made a few sketches, trying, as the Terminator had described this machinery, to envisage what it might look like. Now that it actually confronted them, it seemed so weird, yet clearly recognizable. From what he knew, he could work out what was used for what purposes. It was now a matter of controlling it.

Amongst all the other machines was an array of the gray-metal coffin-like devices. Hundreds of them stood in rows of ten; most of them stood vertically and were empty. They were ectogenetic pods, each a self-contained biotechnological environment for growing human tissue. They really were wombs for Terminators. Danny wandered among them. Each pod had a lid of clear armor-glass to show the gross morphology of the tissue being grown on a state-of-the-art combat endoskeleton.

At the back of the array of these pods, a few rows contained machines that had not been emptied. Those pods lay down flat, even more like coffins.

Seen through their armorglass, cyborg Terminators floated in nutrient fluid, restrained loosely by metal-mesh straps.

There were footsteps behind Danny. He turned to see John joining him. "What do you think?" John said. He pointed to the different Terminators. They had several standard human forms.

"I've seen some of these before."

"Yeah. Some last night, for the first time." John pointed at a row right at the back, with nine Terminators and one empty pod. "You've seen that one before."

"Yes, I have." Danny had met a T-800 Terminator just like that twenty-six years before. He'd worked with it well until it had been destroyed, six years later.

"The one that you knew saved my life," John said. "Way back in 1994."

"Yes, I know."

"And another one tried to kill my mother... ten years earlier."

"We never had any choice," Danny said. "We'll send one of those back."

"That's the way it looks." John frowned and he held up a hand. "It's Carlo speaking," he said to Danny.

"What's he saying?"

"Just a moment." John listened intently. Then he said into the mike, "Go on with it. That's very good news." He nodded to himself with satisfaction.

"So what's happened?"

"We've taken out the last resistance on Level B.. all but a handful of endos and Terminators protecting Skynet's hardware." John gestured at one of the rows of cyborgs in their pods. "One of *those*, apparently." The row had ten lifelike Terminators that each resembled a tall, white-blonde woman. "We saw some last night."

The ones they had seen had hair cut in a flat-topped style worn by many Resistance soldiers. All these Terminators had hair that would need to be cut before they could be used to infiltrate human forces, or look pre-sentable on an urban street. Danny made a mental note to find someone with barbering skills.

He gestured again at the row with one empty pod, indicating the nine Terminators there: identical male T-800s. "One of these nine, am I right? One of these will have to go back."

"Yes. Definitely. But there's another thing to do first."

As John spoke, Juanita limped over to them. "We're all still together."

"Yes," John said. "We are."

"So now what?"

"You need a volunteer," Danny said.

John looked across the wide floor at these loyal soldiers; his eyes picked just one. "That I do. I need a volunteer, and I know just who it will be. So do you two guys."

A force of thirty humans had swept into Level B, where Skynet's hardware had been housed since its installation thirty-two years before. Opposed to them were seven endoskeletons and five Terminators: a T-799; two out-dated but no less effective T-600s, with rubberized human exteriors; and two T-800s. The T-799 was the original "Eve" unit that had acted as Skynet's assistant through all its planning. It was the first of its series, and the prototype for the T-800 models that followed.

It had carried out Skynet's instructions faithfully, and now everything the war computer had planned was taken care of. Terminators had been sent back to 1984 and 1994 to carry out Skynet's wishes. Skynet itself was safe.

All that now remained was to defend this facility to the bitter end.

The T-799 fired laser pulse after laser pulse at the humans, heedless of its own safety as it advanced upon them, never seeking cover. One pulse struck a male soldier as he ran forward. He screamed in pain, as his upper leg ignited from the intense heat; he plunged forward to the floor, where he lay still—dead, or near to death, from the shock. A second pulse made sure of him, stabbing him through the lower torso. The T-799 would now destroy as many of the humans as it could before they finally terminated its operation. The calculations within its CPU contained something akin to regret as it faced the final minutes of its operation, but Skynet's mission would continue—that was what mattered. The world's remaining humans would soon be exterminated.

Skynet would strike back, swiftly and decisively.

The T-799 absorbed a damaging laser-rifle shot to its head, but immediately returned the fire, and its heat beam pierced another human's body, which immediately incinerated. More shots came its way, but it survived them. These humans were led by a huge Hispanic man armed with a laser rifle. He fought almost as fearlessly as a Terminator, making him an easy target.

The Terminator aimed straight for the giant's chest, but another heat beam struck it between the eyes before it could fire, burning away its external layer of flesh, and damaging its visual sensors. Beside it, another Terminator lost its balance and fell, crashing against the T-799, which was knocked into a metal support beam and spun round. Unperturbed, it righted itself, steadied, scanned quickly for another target. It still had some visual capacity, so it fired at the first human it saw. The heat beam struck unerringly, and took out another enemy. Then it found yet another, and another.

The humans shouted; some screamed; many fell.

But they did not withdraw. They pressed their advantage of numbers. More appeared from the lower levels, swelling their numbers. They would win this battle.

Beside the T-799, another Terminator was destroyed, then an endoskeleton. The T-799 turned again to deal with the giant man who led the humans. Just one accurate shot was required. But another Resistance soldier—a woman this time—caught the Terminator with a clean laser shot to its already damaged skull, burning out what was left of its visual sensors. It would need to rely on alternative sensory mechanisms—its hearing was sharper than any humans.

Then another laser pulse penetrated as far as its CPU.

The first T-799, the original "Eve" unit, had fought its last battle for Skynet.

Danny went with a small group to force their way into the circuits of the time vault, try to take it off-line from the rest of the cybernetic systems in this strange place. They'd do the same with the ectogenetic pods. Then they had to control them, using all their hacker skills, including what Howard Bellow had taught them.

John called the rest together, and they formed ranks. Most of them, he realized, had never heard the full

story. The records were lost in the ruins of Judgment Day and the chaos of the following decades. If he were to question these good people, their knowledge of Skynet and its origins was probably vague. Near enough to the truth, maybe, but he bet there were misconceptions. Some things John had kept vaguer still, quite deliberately. After Judgment Day, he'd had his own reasons not to be precise about the circumstances of Sarah's first encounter with a Terminator, or who had been his own father. He'd never spoken of it much, except to his closest friends, for one man in particular must never know.

He removed his headset to talk to them undistracted. Others could take any messages from Carlo, or from their forces on the surface of the mountain. "This is a good hour to be alive," he said. "But it's also an evil hour."

That got no response, except one hundred-odd pairs of eyes, looking at him in hope. Waiting to hear his words.

"It's not over yet, but it's almost over. I heard just minutes ago from Carlo Tejada. We've almost captured Skynet itself. We're going to destroy it soon. Right, now our comrades are still fighting, seven levels above us. Wish them victory—knowing they will achieve it.

"Assuming that we triumph today—and we will—the struggle still goes on. I said that it's an evil hour, and it is. So many died here amongst these mountains and stones. It may take us weeks, just to count the toll. Not only that, even with Skynet gone, there will still be rogue machines, autonomous enough to hunt and kill with no further instructions. But they will be defeated. Then..."

He broke off, not so much for drama as to let them catch up with his thoughts so far.

"Then," he said, "we'll have to rebuild."

He looked from one soldier to the another, all along the front rank, then deeper into the assembled group. "When there's time, I will thank every man, woman, and child who fought in the Resistance and survived today's dreadful test. Right now, there's just a little time, and I'll use it to thank those here—each one of you. Today, you have saved humanity. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

There were some cheers. All right, now for the next part. This was crucial.

"Before I was born, Skynet sent a T-800 Terminator back in time to kill my mother, Sarah." They nodded at that. It was well known that Sarah and John had predicted Judgment Day, that they'd had messages from the future. He added another thing they'd heard. This should also be comfortable for them: "The Resistance sent back a protector."

"Do you know who it was?" said one of the young soldiers in the front rank. She was a black woman with a military buzz cut. Her uniform was torn and frayed, she was dirty, and several minor wounds had scabbed her face. Blood soaked one leg of her olive drab fatigues. But she stood straight and proud, and looked every bit like she might volunteer for the mission. John's heart went out to her, but he couldn't allow it. Whoever went back would have to be in the best condition—not someone already wounded. Back there in 1984, there was a Terminator waiting, a dangerous, unrelenting adversary, even for the best soldier in the army, at the peak of condition.

Besides, John knew who was going. That much, he had always known.

He shook his head, as kindly as he could. "If I knew, I couldn't say. I want no one to feel the pressure of fate." He added to himself, *just because I've had to bear it* "I need someone who got some rest last

night, because this is a hard mission. You've all been fighting for hours. *And* I'm afraid you can't go back wounded." He nodded at the woman who'd asked the question. "That rules out some of you who might want to go." One more time, he surveyed the whole group, not favoring anyone, letting

them think the job was open, that there was no one in his mind. "All right, the time's come. I'm going to ask for a volunteer."

"Whoever it is will be successful, right?" the woman said. "We know your mother survived." She no longer sounded so keen, since she realized she couldn't go, but she spoke encouragingly. She wanted someone to volunteer. Like everyone else here, she was on John's side.

"Yes," John said. "We know that much. Or maybe we just think we do. . . it may not turn out like that" This was no time for a lesson in time and time travel. For years, he'd discussed it with Danny and others among his closest friends. He thought he understood it. There might be worlds in which Sarah didn't survive back in 1984. As Sarah had pointed out, all those years ago, there might also be worlds in which Judgment Day had never happened. Perhaps in one of those worlds there was another John Connor, whose experiences he had never had. Whoever went back might experience any of that, or *all* of it. Or rather, their different selves might have all those experiences: separated into different worlds.

But it was no use telling them any of that. They needed motivation, encouragement—not hedging and complexities. Give them the simple truth, he thought But try to inspire them. Well, *one* of them.

"Whoever volunteers, understand this: It doesn't have to happen like it turned out in our history. I can't explain why; it would take me far too long. But once you are back in time, hold onto this. What you're experiencing right now will be only one possible future."

"That's all technical stuff," said Kyle Reese, also in the front rank. "It doesn't matter to me."

All eyes turned to him.

"The future is not set," John said. "There is no fate but what we make for ourselves. Do you understand that?"

Kyle repeated the words back to him as if it was the simplest thing.

The words had a certain rhythm, John thought. They were easy to remember. He said, preempting the issue of whether Kyle was volunteering, "When you go back, I want you to remember those words. Tell them to Sarah. They will help her."

"I will," Kyle said. He didn't flinch at John's presumption. There was no doubt he wanted the mission. Something about his expression was almost joyful.

"Thank you, Kyle. I knew I could count on you." John also knew that he was sending Kyle to his death, and that the man who stood before him—this much younger man—was his own father. He stepped forward to embrace his father, for the first and only time. Kyle felt the emotion, too, though he didn't know the full story. To him, it must be a mutual loyalty—he was going back to protect John's life, to make sure he could be born. That was all he would see, as far as John could read it. It was quite enough to justify tears. Perhaps, too, it was loyalty to Sarah, to her memory, her role in the Resistance.

But there was so much more. So much that Kyle must never learn.

They stepped away from each other. "I'll do my best," Kyle said.

"I know. I really do know."

John raised his voice to thank them all, then led Kyle away, putting an arm across his father's shoulders. They were similar heights.

"There's a little more I'd like you to tell Sarah," John said. "Come with me. Let's go and talk to Danny."

Danny briefed John quickly, showed how he'd rigged up a keyboard and a computer screen, wiring them into a bizarre set of controls that made no sense to human eyes. He'd had to break open Skynet's machinery care-fully, not knowing what inadvertent damage he might cause.

"Okay, fine," John said.

Danny watched as data scrolled across his screen. "I can't make sense of it all," he said. "But I think I can grasp some of it. I have spatio-temporal coordinates for the last two times this machine was used. I think I can get the machine to operate again, and I can match the same coordinates. To do much more than that, I'd need a whole degree in this thing."

Danny, John thought, was just old enough to remember when there were such things as college degrees. "That sounds good, soldier. Can you vary it slightly in space? We don't want our protectors turning up right alongside Skynet's Terminators."

"I'll see what I can do, but we'd better not get too damn creative here."

"What happens when you switch it on?"

"Let's see." Danny entered a code, and there was some kind of shifting of gears, then a massive rumbling of engines. "It's generating incredible power. It can be deployed into that block.. .the vault."

"It will work," John said.

"I know. It *did* work, didn't it?"

"Yes, from one point of view, it did. So you can duplicate what happened the second last time it was used?"

"Definitely yes."

"Then that's what we're going to do."

Kyle looked between Danny's jury-rigged controls and the vault. "So I have to go in there?"

"Yes," John said. "Listen, Kyle, this will be physically painful. Don't be afraid when you feel the pain; it will go away. It doesn't mean you've suffered harm, not any-thing permanent. Do you understand?"

Kyle nodded just slightly.

"We'll give you whatever painkillers we can find— aspirin, or anything we've got. Take them before you go." John knew from his mother that, back in 1984, Kyle had spoken of pain. They'd have to do

whatever little they could to help him cope. He supposed it was use-less, but they'd make the effort. "You'll have to travel naked. The device won't work on clothing or equipment or weapons. Something about living things—the fields our bodies generate. Nothing dead can go." "All right"

"And you'll have to use your wits when you get back to 1984. I'm sure you can do that."

"Right I hope so."

"Just one more thing. What I told you to say to Sarah. There's some more I'd like you to tell her."

"Not a problem, John."

"Okay. Tell her this, I want you to memorize it all: "Sarah, thank you, for your courage through the dark years. I can't help you with what you must soon face, except to tell you that the future is not set. There is no such thing as Fate, but what we make for ourselves by our own will. You must be stronger than you imagine you can be. You must survive, or I will never exist.' Can you remember that?" John could not expect anyone to memorize it first time, but he would take Kyle through it as often as he had to. For himself, he knew the words by heart. He'd heard them, some of them, from Sarah. He'd composed the full version in his exercise book, and brooded over it for years.

"Let me try," Kyle said.

"It'll take quite a few tries. You'll get the hang of it." It was better to say no more. There was only so much a man could cope with. Better not to know your own future, John thought. It had almost driven him and Sarah mad. They'd become strong, but been so hard-ened by it. Better not to know that you are going to die. Better not to know that your son is sending you to your death.

When Kyle had mastered the words, John was satisfied. That was all he could do. He nodded respectfully to his father. "Good luck," he said.

Kyle looked at the time vault. "Thank you for this," he said. "I guess it's time to go."

As John examined the ectogenetic pond for "his" T-800, the next one beside the empty pod, Juanita joined him, still limping, as she might well do for years to come, but with a smile through the pain lines on her face. "I've heard from Carlo, just now. They've won up there. The last Terminator is destroyed. They're destroying Skynet's hardware, even as we speak."

John felt too tired even to hug her. "That's a huge evil gone from the world." They just touched hands. For a moment, John squeezed and stroked the tips of her calloused fingers. "We'll celebrate later." "We will, John. We really will." Danny and his group had patched their equipment into the controls for the Terminator's pod. John sat on the floor to operate it, Juanita sitting beside him, her head upon his shoulder for a moment. "I can get at its CPU," he said. "I need to reprogram it." Some kind of filament passed into the brain of the Terminator from the apparatus of the pod. It seemed that it could be reprogrammed, or given extra instructions, right until its moment of birth. As John worked, he added to Juanita, "There were times when I cursed my older self for not giving the Terminator more detail... you know, stuff that might have been useful to me. It's hard enough doing this at all."

"You were lucky to meet Howard," she said. "I guess so, though there had to be people who knew about this stuff. If I'd have been Howard, I'd have wanted to meet me." He found more paths into the T-800's files. "There's a lot of information here, but not much that we didn't go. We got most of what it knew before it was destroyed."

" *That day*," Juanita said.

"Yes, I know. *That day*." *That day* in 2012, when the T-800 had been destroyed in combat—and Sarah had died, still fighting against Skynet.

The information in the cyborg's CPU was not set out in any neat order, such as a human being might have set up. There were layers of files, different modules, old Cyberdyne history that the Terminator must have inherited from Skynet, recent information on Skynet's technologies. A human mind must be structured like that, John thought. Starting with what it inherited, gathering what it needed.

He entered a series of codes, which accomplished nothing. He took another path, then clicked an icon that came on his screen. Still nothing, but it was making more sense all the time.

"Some of it is like human programming methods," he said. "I guess Skynet never had to be too radical,"

Soon he was almost finished. He gave the T-800 a mission and clear parameters. He typed in some extra information on Los Angeles, 1994, to supplement its historical files. Once again, he'd thought for years about what the Terminator would need to know. What it had in its files looked almost adequate, but he needed to help it out.

He checked its files on Skynet's various war machines. They had operational specifications for each type, including those for the experimental T-1000s. These files recorded past experiences with the strengths and weaknesses of various categories of H-Ks, Terminators, and other murderous devices of Skynet's invention, but there was little of that on the T-1000 series. Hastily, John composed a new file, setting out everything he could about the shapeshifting Terminators and the way they performed, hoping to get it right. Some of what he knew came only from what the T-800 had told him. Some of what *it* would know came from what he was telling it now... for John's taste, this was too circular.

But then he thought about it. Everything he'd been told in 1994 more or less checked out. They'd encountered no new T-1000s, so far, except for some reports from Europe. It seemed fair to say that the T-1000 was an experimental prototype. Much else that he knew came from his own *experience* in 1994, not just what he'd been told, and then from more experience, years later, when they'd fought the T-1000 again at Raoul's *estancia*.

He set out what he knew as concisely as he could. His protector would be well briefed on what it was up against.

Confidently now, he entered a code to drain away the nutrient liquid. At the same time, the Terminator's connection with the system broke. When the liquid had all drained, John made the machine rise up on its hydraulics, so it tilted at almost a 90° angle like the empty pods. He made the pod open, and the Terminator opened its eyes.

It looked so familiar now, the same machine that John had encountered in 1994. All it needed was a haircut to make it look more plausible. That could be arranged, he thought. Plenty of people here could cut hair. It was the least of John's worries. He had come full circle.

"Do you know what you have to do?" he said to the Terminator.

"Affirmative," it said. "My mission is to locate and protect John Connor."

John grinned at Juanita. Just now, he could have kissed her. He simply gave her a crooked smile. "Hey, what do you think? Easy money!"

But Juanita's headset crackled, someone calling from another level of the complex, or from outside. She shifted on the floor, getting more comfortable as she spoke. "Yes," she said. A puzzled look appeared on her face, then one of horror. "I'll tell John. Yes, we'll see what can be done."

"Some kind of trouble?" John said.

"Yes," she said in a tone of disbelief. "Skynet is hitting back. Don't ask me how. We're under attack every-where. That's the news from LA."

"What?"

"That's the news, John. Skynet. . .or something. . . isn't finished. The machines are striking back."

PART FIVE:

JOHN'S WORLD

CHAPTER

ELEVEN

SALCEDA COMPOUND AUGUST 2001

Rosanna sat at a desktop computer, with Anton and Jade standing behind her, flanking her in the narrow space of Franco's trailer. John, Franco, and the Eve Terminator stood back to allow them room. As Rosanna worked, concentrating on the graphs and tables she threw up on the screen, she appeared absorbed, no longer showing revulsion at human contact. Even when Anton leaned over to point something out on the screen, she didn't flinch away.

"So what's this all about?" John said. "What does it show?"

"We can only get an approximation on this machine," Rosanna said. "It analyses the results of our time

vault experiments at Cyberdyne. To do it properly, I'd need the nanoprocessor-which you happen to have blown up."

"True," Anton said. "But this is enough to show us how the field is contoured-at least in a general way."

"So what does that mean?" John said.

Jade smiled at him. "These results should reveal any major flaws with the theory. We can work out the detail another time."

"Could you do it without the nanoprocessor? I mean, could some other computer do the job?"

"Probably," Rosanna said. "I don't know. I suppose so — a big enough number-cruncher. Cyberdyne has conventional supercomputers that could probably do it." She continued working, flipping among several screens of data. "We're still trying to master what is needed to trans-port discrete objects in space and time. The idea of trans-portioning objects across time to another reality that branched off is far beyond our ambitions. I'd never even thought about it until Eve arrived on the scene. You all saw what happened when we put objects in the time vault, back in Colorado Springs. It basically disintegrated them."

It occurred to John that he could not tell the difference between an object being disintegrated and the same object being sent to another time, but he didn't want to debate that. If the data helped Rosanna work out what had happened, he would have to believe her.

"The general theory is sound," Jade said, peering at a spiky red graph on the white screen. "But there are basic issues as to the configuration of the field, and the properties of the objects to be displaced."

Rosanna put up a new page of data. "The properties of the objects, huh? Like what? I've got a few parameters here, but it hasn't been such an issue. I wouldn't know where to start looking at that"

"Metallic objects disrupt the field most," Jade said, "living organic materials are best-something about the energies generated by a living organism interacts well with the field. When we use the space-time displacement apparatus, we travel naked."

"Okay." Rosanna actually laughed. "That's another issue I'd never thought about"

"In the world we came from, Skynet solved that problem with liquid metal; it can be configured to harmonize with the field. Generally, though we don't use anything inorganic. Living tissue is best."

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Rosanna put up a table on the screen, her fingers moving excitedly on the keyboard as she did some calculations that made a new column appear. "What about the field itself?" she said. "The way I have it configured?"

Jade's cheek was close to hers as Jade leant close to the screen, pointing out several numbers, and Rosanna nodded with enthusiasm. "Let's try these figures," she said, changing some numbers, which cascaded right through the data, with a whole new set of numbers appearing in a new column. John could follow roughly what was going on: He was good with computers. But the actual algorithms meant nothing to him. Importantly, though, it was good to see Rosanna acting like a human being, at least like a scientifically-obsessed human being. After half an hour, Sarah came to the trailer. "I think we've done it," she said. "We'll have to make lots of connections, but Enrique can get us as far as West Virginia. God

only knows what favors people owe him. He's moved Heaven and Earth tonight, him and Yolanda."

"We're doing well, too," John said. He glanced at Jade, hoping he wasn't doing that too often. "At least I think we are."

"Give us an hour," Anton said. "Between us, we're get-ting some basic ideas into shape."

Rosanna didn't even look up. "Yeah," she said, her fin-gers now dancing on the keyboard "I just wish I had some real data and a proper computer. Still, these ap-proximations are telling me something."

"Whatever you say, Strangelove," Sarah said. Rosanna kept working, talking without looking up. "I just might get you what you want," she said. "Be thank-ful I'm on your team."

CALIFORNIA/ARIZONA AUGUST 2001

It was dark when they strapped into Enrique's helicopter, a five-seater Jetranger III with a range of just a few hun-dred miles. The Jetranger was enough for the Salcedas to get around in, make quick flights across the border, visit some of their local contacts. But it wasn't big enough to fly five people and one humanoid cyborg the thousands of miles fromCaliforniatoWashington, or anywhere near it. Sarah, Enrique, and Yolanda had been working tirelessly, finding contacts all across the south of the country who might be able to help.

John squeezed into the rear bench, between Sarah and Jade. He was not quite comfortable being this close to Jade-but glad of it with another part of his mind. On his lap he held the massive laser rifle that Anton had demon-strated to Enrique. The only other weapons they'd brought were handguns, just in case. There was no room for anything larger.

Anton was far the biggest of the six of them, so he took the pilot's seat, making him the only one with a seat of his own. Rosanna was seated on the Terminator's legs, the two of them taking the front passenger seat.

On this leg of the trip they'd get as far asArizona, just beyondPhoenix, then they'd need a relay of trips to get as far asWest Virginia. At that point, Enrique's contacts-and his contacts' contacts—ran out. They'd have to drive the last of the way toWashington: some hours on I-81.

Anton had left the chopper's door open to talk with Enrique. "You sure you know how to fly this thing?" En-rique said.

"It's not a problem. I've been in something similar, and I have files on its operation."

"Yeah? Well, good luck to you. I still don't know what you're really up to, but I hope it works out"

"It had better," Sarah said, craning round Anton's shoulder. "It had damn well better. Anyway, thanks for all your help, Enrique. We owe you, yet again."

"Okay, well you might be in for a rough reception. Some of those guys sounded pretty doubtful about it all."

"We'll persuade them," Anton said. "Don't worry about that."

John had spent his childhood with whatever groups would accept them and give them the training they needed to survive after Judgment Day. Though the date for Judgment Day had passed, the training had not gone to waste, either in 1994 or over the past few days. They'd spent time with politically opposed groups, from the left-wing *compas* in El Salvador to American mercenaries in Nicaragua—but above all with Enrique's friends and associates. John had met many of them, and knew about the others.

The scary thing was the way those people accepted

Sarah, even with her story of time travel and Terminators. Some, like Raoul Tejada down in Argentina, spouted even crazier-sounding conspiracy theories about the U.S. government. People like that kind of reserved judgment on John and Sarah. In 1994, some had even congratulated them for blowing up Cyberdyne.

"See you later, dude," John said. Enrique slammed the chopper's door and headed back to his family, where they stood under a light from one of the trailers. Anton inspected the control panel for what seemed like ages, as if it was only partly familiar. He moved with deliberate steps, turning on the starter motor, then checking the array of instruments as the engine warmed up and the rotor blades began to turn. John could have done this far more quickly, but he said nothing. If he had taken the controls, they would have needed to fit Anton somewhere. It was best this way.

Anton contacted air traffic control, giving their route to Arizona. The authorities had no reason to suspect that Sarah and John were on board, or anyone wanted for arrest, so they might as well keep everything legal, at least in appearance. He obtained formal clearance, and then the chopper rose slowly. Soon they were cruising on a line almost due east

"Three thousand feet, and one hundred and twenty knots," Anton said. "We'll be there in three hours."

"Okay," Sarah said. "I guess that's the best we can do."

She was right: as John knew well, it was pretty much their maximum cruising speed.

Their first port of call was a cattle ranch belonging to Elijah Simmonds and his two cousins. John could hardly remember the Simmonds cousins and their families; he hadn't been to their place since he was a little kid, but his mom seemed to trust them. They had a landing strip on their ranch, and they owned a Cessna Grand Caravan that could take the whole team a thousand miles across the continent in far more comfort than the Jetranger, and a lot faster.

Using the GPS, they'd take the Jetranger to the precise position of the Simmonds ranch. Then, the way Enrique had planned it, they'd make another stop in Texas, followed by Arkansas, Tennessee, and West Virginia—all going well, they could reach Washington in twenty-four hours, using a series of light aircraft. That depended on everyone cooperating.

"So, what's the deal with those two?" Sarah said sounding comfortable, now that Anton clearly had control of the chopper. "Cruz and Layton? What do you think they'll do if we don't stop them?"

"You talking to me?" Rosanna said.

"I'm talking to anyone who has the answer."

"Well, I wish I knew."

"Don't you have any ideas, Jade?" John said. "Or An-ton?"

"Unknown," Anton said. Then he added, "But we do have a theory."

"The T-XA was an experimental model of Terminator," Jade said "We don't know its full abilities." She was silent for several seconds, probably talking to Anton again. Finally, she said aloud, "We think the Terminator may have had a backup plan."

"Right," John said. "What kind of plan?" "We know it can control minds by neural reprogram-ming. What we do not know is whether it could transfer the same ability. In principle it seems possible."

"What? How?"

"It might transfer a quantity of programmable liquid metal into a human body. The quantity need not be large."

"Hey, let me get a grip on this. You think it could enhance someone else to reprogram people, just like it did to Rosanna?"

"That's right," Rosanna said angrily, "just discuss me like I'm not here. What should I expect?"

"We don't know," Anton said, ignoring her for the moment.

"It *is* just a theory, but it makes sense," Jade said. She leaned toward Rosanna, where the scientist was crammed with the Terminator in the front seat "Do you see any problems with what we've suggested?"

"No. No, I don't. It makes a sense, in a way. Jack might need a lot of persuasion, otherwise. I don't know how they could handle him if they didn't have something like this up their sleeves."

"So we have to keep them away from him for another day," Sarah said thoughtfully. "I'm not sure how we're going to do that I wish we were on the spot."

"There's not much we can do. I'll just keep ringing. Of course, I won't be able to tell whether Jack has been re-programmed or not It's up to him to keep out of trouble, I suppose. I wish I knew what he made of it when he heard Oscar's voice on the phone."

"Yeah, don't we all?"

"But I think he'd do something. He wouldn't take chances if something that strange was happening. And I know Samantha wouldn't let him...she's very careful, whatever she does."

Sarah gave an incredulous laugh. "Yeah, you've got so much faith in these people. Have you noticed that they managed to destroy human civilization in at least two universes, just the ones we know off? Pardon my lack of trust."

As they approached the Simmonds ranch, Anton

banked the chopper in a wide circle and approached from the east, heading into a mild westerly breeze.

Below them, the lights of a homestead signaled human occupation, and there were further lights to mark the helipad's location. Anton took the chopper down with absolute confidence. He might not have flown anything just like this before, but he'd certainly mastered it quickly.

They landed, Anton touching the skids precisely, and a bank of bright spotlights suddenly switched on, aimed directly at them, blinding them.

"Uh-oh," John said, shielding his eyes with one arm.

"Looks like we're in for trouble."

A tall man wearing a white linen suit stepped forward, lit up by the spotlights behind him. He carried a military rifle diagonally across his chest. Six more men of various ages backed him up, all carrying automatic firearms. Someone lowered the lights so they could at least see who they were speaking to, and Rosanna stepped out of the chopper, followed by Eve.

The man in the linen suit looked about fifty, with black hair that was probably dyed. Beside him was a large German shepherd dog. When it saw the T-799, or maybe smelled something about it, the dog went crazy-cowering and barking.

"Dogs are good judges of character," the man said, aiming his rifle in the Terminator's direction.

The rest of them piled out of the chopper, John still carrying the laser rifle, which felt like a wheelbarrow full of bricks, a massive thing to lug around.

"All right," said the man in the suit. "I'm not sure I like all this. Why shouldn't I turn you in to the cops?" His friends behind him raised their rifles. John and the rest faced enough firepower to shoot them to pieces in seconds. Even the Specialists were made of flesh and blood. Only Eve could withstand a full assault from those weapons.

"I don't think you could," Sarah said.

He eyed her steadily. "Just what is that supposed to mean?"

"Look, Elijah, you know me. I can vouch for all these people." John didn't remember Elijah Simmonds, but he guessed that Sarah knew him well—maybe from way back. She added, "There's no time. Please, just trust me on this."

"So says the woman who blows up government factories."

"It wasn't a factory." "Well, whatever it was."

"Please put away your weapons," Jade said. "We mean no harm."

Simmonds looked at them all, one by one. "John?"

"That's me," John said brightly.

Simmonds nodded, then looked carefully at Rosanna. "I recognize you. You're—"

"Yeah, I'm the scientist from Cyberdyne," she said as if bored by saying so. "And, no, these people

haven't kid-napped me."

"Please put down your weapons," Jade said. "Ms. Connor is right. We don't have time to argue."

Simmonds walked closer, inspecting her carefully. "And I've seen you in sketches on the TV. I can buy into a lot from Sarah Connor here... and Enrique...but this is all too much."

"Please put down the rifle," Jade said again.

"Only when I'm good and ready." "In that case, I may have to force you to." "Yeah?" Simmonds laughed out loud at that, but his dog barked more frantically. He petted the dog absent-mindedly, half-crouching for a moment, still training the rifle in one arm. "And what army, little girl? I just don't get any of this."

Jade accelerated into action.

John had forgotten how fast she could move. In one rush, she had reached Elijah and slapped the gun from his hands. The whole movement seemed preplanned, like a gymnastics routine. Faster than John could follow, she dis-armed most of the men. A split-second behind, Anton accelerated after her, taking care of the others. Only one got clear, running toward the chopper. Eve blocked his path, and he backed off. With a sudden movement like a striking snake, Eve snatched the rifle from his hands and aimed it "No!" John said. "Don't shoot him." The Terminator didn't fire, but didn't back away. "Give Sarah the gun," John said. Eve handed it over. Jade, Anton, and Eve had completely taken control. It took only the tiniest hesitation, and the Specialists could disarm anybody. No one anticipated how fast they could move. But they hadn't hurt anyone — not more than bumps and bruises.

"There are a few things we should explain," Sarah said. "But we don't have much time."

Elijah and the others dusted themselves off. John dreaded to think what Eve would have done if the Specialists hadn't acted first. "Have you ever killed anyone?" he said to the T-799.

"Of course. I'm a Terminator."

"Omigod. Since you came back in time?"

"Yes, when necessary for my mission."

He took a deep breath, remembering that he was not dealing with a human murderer here. This was just a machine; it was not really responsible. He didn't even want the details. Whoever it had killed could not be brought back now. "Well, you have to stop acting that way," he said, controlling his emotions, the sick feeling he had about it. "You can't just kill people."

"Why?"

He'd been through all this with the T-800 in 1994, but there was no time now. "Just believe me." "All right. I believe you. I can't just kill people."

Elijah looked at Sarah narrowly. "All right, explain away then. What's this all about?"

"It's very important that you help us," Sarah said, "and we don't want a fight every time we arrive somewhere tonight. That's a waste of our energy. My friends have better things to do than beat up your friends. I want you to smooth our way."

"You think I'll do that just because your friends are tough?" He looked uneasily at Eve and the two Specialists.

"Not just because of that."

"All right, then, you'd better come inside."

Anton stepped over to John, holding out his hand to take the laser rifle. "Before you do that, let me show you one more thing."

WASHINGTON, D.C.

"You've been very helpful to us, Steve," Layton said. "You, too, Philip. Thank you for all your work."

It had been a long night, and Layton looked ex-hausted. He'd had to stop and gorge on junk food twice now, something he never would have done, pre-T-XA. And he'd need to sleep for hours, perhaps until midday, or beyond. Oscar would take command, plan the day ahead, but at least they'd accomplished much, tracking down several key staff in the Pentagon, less well-protected than Jack and Samantha, whose houses were surrounded with police and security staff. Those two might not know much, as yet, but they were taking no chances.

"We all need to get some sleep," Oscar said. "We have it under control."

The two security men left, and Layton closed his room's curtains and removed his jacket. Under it, he now had his gun. "This has been very difficult."

"Yes, I know. I'll work with the media, and I'll keep calling Jack through the morning. He can't put us off for long."

Layton sat in a padded desk chair, showing no real expression, but sagging round the shoulders. Despite his age, he was strong as an ox and twice as healthy.. .but then, no man in his sixties could stand this exertion. He'd strained himself beyond endurance. Oscar felt no sympathy for him, not as a fellow human being—in that sense, he might as well die. But as a valuable tool for Skynet, he had to be cared for.

"I'll go now," Oscar said. "It's under control. This couldn't be going better."

Once Layton recovered, they could find more key people to reprogram. By the time they met again with Jack and Samantha, the odds would have swung their way. Steve and Philip knew about who to choose, just when to attack, what could be done to tighten the noose.

Once more, everything had played into Skynet's hands, as if Time and Fate themselves were on their side, determined to take a certain path.

WEST VIRGINIA

The sun was low in the sky as Anton pulled up in a small town, parking their stolen SUV beneath the overhanging branches of a white oak, next to a deserted phone booth. "All right next call to Washington," John said, climb-ing out of the vehicle, his back and shoulders stiff, even his legs feeling weary. "I've guess we've got to earn our money somehow."

They'd spent the whole night on their relay across the continent, and now faced a day of driving. He was grow-ing tired of the never-ending travel on the length and breadth of America's highways, trying to sleep on the road, but today they'd get to Washington and straighten everything out. It wasn't just physical tiredness that was draining him. He felt a weight of responsibility, trying to outsmart Skynet's servants. They were still a step ahead, and they had such advantages. No one who'd been near Charles Layton and Oscar Cruz could be trusted, if the Specialists were right. In fact, once they got to Washing- ton, just who could they trust?

He went to the phone booth with Rosanna and Eve, and Rosanna rang Washington, for the second time this morning. She'd caught Jack at home, earlier, when they'd changed planes in Texas, told him not to trust anyone. "Is Jack there?" Rosanna said. "It's his secretary," she said to John, cupping the mouthpiece. "I know her. She's putting me through."

"Okay."

"Jack," she said into the phone. "I'll be there by the end of the day. Listen, first of all, I confirm that I'm with the Connors. Have you spoken to Charles or Oscar today? All right." For several seconds, she was silent, listening to what Reed had to say. Then she passed the phone to Eve. "Just back me up, will you?"

The Terminator spoke in its "Oscar Cruz" voice: "Don't trust anyone, Jack. Not unless you've been with them constantly. People are not what they seem." Eve passed the phone back to Rosanna.

Rosanna said, "No, of course that's not Oscar. I'm just making a point. If I can fool you, so can they." There was another pause, then a series of short sentences, punctu-ated by equally short pauses at Rosanna's end: "Now lis-ten to me, Jack, I'll say this one more time: Oscar and Charles are dangerous... I don't know their full abilities, but they may be quite considerable. . . You may be right about that. . . that they're not Terminators-I never said they were... No, but they're brought to you by the same people. . . Just listen to me, will you?... If they have to, they can fight ferociously. I know they don't look like it... Not only that, we think they have other enhancements." She shook her head at John, and rolled her eyes mockingly. "One or both can practice a form of mind control... No, I'm not going crazy. That's why I said don't trust any-one. . .no, not *anyone*. Don't be cute about it, Jack. You can trust me, all right You are in terrible danger. Under-stand? How much clearer do I have to say it?"

They talked for a few more minutes before returning to the car. They knew this call might be traced, but they had to take that risk, just once. If Reed knew they were in West Virginia, getting closer to Washington, he might be prepared to wait not create any more trouble.

Jade and Anton automatically took the front seats of any vehicle, John had noticed, as though they had a right to the best positions. Still, they were tireless and did all the driving. He supposed it was fair. He got in the back between Sarah and the Terminator, with Rosanna on Eve's other side.

"Let's get out of here," Sarah said. "They'll soon have us pinpointed."

Anton hit the gas and got them away fast heading back to I-81 and merging at high speed behind a thirty-wheeled truck and a small green sedan, heading north.

"All right," Rosanna said. "He wants to meet. I promised to call him one more time, when we're closer to Washington."

"Meeting where?" Sarah said. "At the Pentagon?"

"No, at some small-time complex out in the suburbs. He says they have a training room we can use. He wants it to be just me. I told him that was out of the question. I'm not going anywhere alone until this is over."

"I'm not sure it's *ever* over," John said.

Jade said, "The knowledge is too seductive. Someone will always want to build Skynet, or something equivalent."

Rosanna made a small sound that probably meant agreement. "That's as may be. As far as I'm concerned, it's over when Charles and Oscar are dead."

"That can be arranged," Sarah said.

"Remember what happened last time, Mom," John said. "With Miles Dyson?" When it had come to the crunch, his mom was not a murderer. She hadn't been able to kill Miles, even to stop Skynet being built.

"That was different, John."

"It seems the same to me." Miles had died, anyway, shot by the SWAT team that had tried to stop their raid on Cyberdyne, and blown up in the explosion on the second floor. But the idea was still the same: You couldn't kill people to achieve what you wanted, no matter how important it was, no matter who the people were. He had to hold onto that. Without that thought, he was wandering in the dark.

Sarah didn't sound convinced. "These people are mindslaves-they're like part of Skynet. It's not the same at all. Isn't that right, Dr. Frankenstein?"

"So am I," Rosanna said. "The T-XA reprogrammed me. Do you want to kill me, too?"

"Maybe." Sarah gave a broad grin. "Nah, there's still the real Dr. Frankenstein under there. We've seen a few glimpses. I think I'll let you live."

"The important thing is, did Mr. Reed believe you?" Jade said. "Did he accept any of it?"

"I'm sure he thinks I'm crazy," Rosanna said. "But he doesn't trust Oscar and Charles, I'm pretty sure of that, too. If only he'd listened to me when I tried to tell him what they can do. I don't know what precautions he'll take."

Anton changed left to pass the truck, and upped their speed to eighty mph. He started to work through traffic, *fast* but calm, always in control.

"It's not like there was any chance to explain it to *him*," John said. Where could you even start? With the whole story about Jade's World, that the T-XA had enslaved people for Skynet, that it had given

some of its slaves the same power? It sounded even crazier than the story about Judgment Day. If they were caught, they'd all be put in a mental institution somewhere.

"It wouldn't have mattered," Sarah said. "I've been idling them for seventeen years. They think what they want to think. They'll never believe what we tell them."

"Maybe." John wondered what they'd have to say to get the message through. They must know Rosanna was smart — they'd believed her before, about the Terminators. "If we keep it up, maybe they'll start getting worried." Sarah laughed. "Don't bet the house on it."

THE PENTAGON

"I don't like it," Samantha said. She'd taken up her position on Jack's lounge, stretching her long, stockinged legs in front of her. "Rosanna may be strange, but she was never crazy. What do you think she's caught up in now? Why is she saying these mad things?" She glanced at the pile of reports she'd placed on the lounge beside her.

Seated across from her, on one of the armchairs, Jack breathed on the lenses of his reading glasses, then cleaned them with a tissue. Rosanna's claims made no sense at all, but he no longer felt safe, even here, in his

inner office, in a building full of military personnel. "I just don't know. I've dealt with some flaky scientists in my time — the ones who think they know it all, even out-side their fields. I know what you mean, Sam... Rosanna just isn't like that."

"Well, there's nothing much we can do until we meet with her."

"I guess not."

"It'll become clear."

They'd received more reports from Colorado. Dean Solomon had sent another batch of useless observations and poor forensic analysis. But at least they had the surveillance tapes, with a promise from Dean of an edited version tomorrow.

"Let's have a look at the tapes," Samantha said. "We're not doing much good here."

"All right. I'll get Vicki to arrange it." He put his head round the corner to speak with his secretary. Vicki Albano was a young-looking forty-year-old woman with a pageboy haircut and bright red finger-nails. She knew his professional needs backwards. He explained what he wanted, knowing she'd have it organized in minutes. "Leave it to me, Jack," she said sweetly. He returned to Samantha. "Okay, Sam, what's your view on the next step? Rosanna wants to meet with us. I told her, okay—if she can come alone. But that won't be acceptable to the Connors."

"How violent do you think they are? They haven't killed anybody, have they? Why don't we have a meeting that includes everyone? We'll go with enough force to protect ourselves."

"Maybe. What about the other two-Charles and Os-car?"

"Let's keep them stewing. We'll do our own investi-gations, then confront them again. They can wait until tomorrow."

"They won't like it."

"Let them hate us. What are they going to do?" "All right, we'll talk about it again. I don't mind letting them stew, but I'm not sure I want to talk with Sarah Connor and her crazy son. Their story is getting madder, going by Rosanna's version."

Samantha shrugged. "We'll see how it goes." Five minutes later, Vicki transferred an internal call saying that they could view the digitized version of the surveillance tapes from Colorado Springs. It was all arranged.

On the way out, Jack said, "Keep Charles and Oscar away from me. I don't want to see them today. And con-firm that I want that training room-all evening."

"Sure, Jack," Vicki said brightly. She seemed even more cheerful than usual today, despite everything that was happening.

"Start making some arrangements for us to go out there. We'll need some armed protection, just in case. I'll finalize it when we get back."

Vicki made a handwritten note, and smiled. "That's no problem."

Jack glanced at Samantha, then back at Vicki. "Call me superstitious if you like, but don't get me any of the guards we used last night with the Cyberdyne people. I just have a bad feeling about it."

"Okay, I'll make sure of that."

When Jack and Samantha left Jack's outer office, head-ing down the corridor to the nearest flight of stairs, Vicki waited a full minute, just in ease they returned. There was always the possibility they'd forgotten something.

Once the minute was up, she made an internal call.

"Yes," a male voice said.

"Steve?" Vicki said.

"Yeah?"

"Jack doesn't trust you. He must suspect something."

"How could he?"

"Rosanna Monk must have scared him when she called. He doesn't want anyone who met with them last night involved today, when they meet with her."

"A lot of good that'll do him."

Vicki laughed. "I know. We'll find someone else to go with him and Samantha." She meant someone else that Charles Layton had seen. She knew how hard he'd worked for the sake of Skynet; so would she, now that the ball was in her hands. She was glad that Oscar and Charles had visited her — and Charles had made it all so clear. "Can you organize it?"

"It shouldn't be any sort of problem." She hung up, then made another call. A female voice said, "Good morning, National Hotel here. How can I help you?"

"Please put me through to Oscar Cruz's room."

"Connecting."

Oscar answered, sounding tired. Vicki said, "Every-thing's coming together."

"Is all this getting to you, Jack?" Samantha said. They took the stairs rather than waiting for an elevator. "If you really don't trust those guys, you might as well not trust anyone—we don't know where Charles and Oscar went last night, after we left them, or who they got to. We can't even operate if everyone in Washington is under suspicion."

"Sure," Jack said, making a gesture to say *after you*. *mo* floors up, they headed for the video room. "You're absolutely right, Sam, and Rosanna's story is crazy. Still, it can't hurt restricting who we deal with. If there's any-thing at all in what she's saying, at least that's one group of people we won't have to worry about."

Mack, if there's *anything at all* in what she's saying, we might as well give up right now. We're probably doomed. Half the people in this building might be plotting against us, for all we know."

"Yeah, I know." He knocked, and opened a plain wooden door. "It's not such a great prospect, huh?" They settled down to watch the video of what had happened in Colorado Springs, which was hours of tape, taken by numerous cameras. The more Jack saw, the scarier it looked, the more he realized he needed to see the entire thing, or all the footage where the Connors were actually present, before he met with Layton and Cruz. This was frightening stuff. He needed to understand what he was seeing.

"Stop there," Samantha said, after an hour. Jack pressed his remote to freeze the image. "What's like some kind of humanoid creature fighting the Connors and their accomplices, who seemed to have superhuman athleticism and skills,

"We really need to analyze this," he said. "I can see what Dean was talking about. But what the hell is this version? It's not the whole thing, and it's not the edited version he promised. What's wrong with that man?"

There seemed to be no footage from the basement, and nothing that showed how one of the Connors' accomplices had died on the fourth floor. He wondered whether there really was some kind of plot, deliberately frustrating their efforts. No, that was crazy. It was just the confusion of events moving too fast. He'd call Dean, and chew him out—perhaps he should be replaced, as the Secretary had suggested. Dean was a liability.

VIRGINIA

Again, Rosanna made the call, with Eve present to play the role of Oscar Cruz if need be.

As Rosanna spoke to Reed it became clear that he was willing to meet them all. He would have armed guards, though he must know that this was useless, if he'd understood anything at all. And, John realized, he must know that *they* knew that

The underlying message was: He trusted them not to be violent

John supposed that Reed could surround any building with scores of police, and make it difficult to escape, so that was some incentive not to create violence. Perhaps they were even walking into a trap, but they had to take the risk. He knew what the Specialists could do-and what a T-800 Terminator could do. If Eve was equally powerful, as she'd said, they had a surprise for anyone who tried to stop them.

Then he thought about it some more. The threat was not to them, it was to Reed himself. However cautious he might be, once he stepped outside of the Pentagon he was in serious trouble. Possibly, he was doomed.

"Ask him what time he'll be leaving for our meeting," John said in a whisper.

Rosanna nodded, not querying it, and asked the question. "He says 4:30," she whispered back.

"Okay, tell him it's fine."

Rosanna looked amused to be receiving these orders, but she went along with them. All those years of training to be a leader had given John a feel for this. The others were all smart, too, and he'd consult them back in the car. But it was becoming clear to him. "We've got to get to the Pentagon," he said to Rosanna, when she put the phone down. "By 4:30."

"What about our meeting?"

"Forget it. There won't be any meeting."

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Jack and Samantha left the Pentagon's Mall entrance, and descended the steps to a waiting black sedan. The driver was a short, burly man with red hair who'd driven them once or twice before on journeys involving high security. With him was a tall black man in his twenties whom Jack hadn't seen before. Jack felt irrationally safe, working with men who hadn't been involved last night. Whatever truth there might have been in Rosanna's crazy claims-making all allowances that she was onto something-Layton and Cruz could not have gotten to every agent in Washington. Nor could they have arranged for just the right men to pick him up.

He felt satisfied with himself: He'd given Dean a piece of his mind, and now he'd get to the bottom of

what was driving Rosanna and the Connors. Soon, the puzzle would be solved, then they'd make some hard decisions. He was smiling to himself as he opened the door for Samantha, then climbed in after her. The tall black guy took the front passenger seat, and they drove out of there smoothly. Give it two hours, he thought, and they'd know a lot more. He was actually looking forward to this meeting.

"It's been a lovely day," the driver observed, as they headed for Arlington Bridge to cross the Potomac River.

"I suppose it has been," Jack said with a laugh. "I've hardly had time to notice."

As they crossed the river, another black sedan pulled up beside them, then another pulled out in front, one hundred yards ahead, as they headed north up Twenty-third Street, crossing Constitution Avenue. The driver took a left hand turn, heading in the direction of the Kennedy Center and the notorious Watergate Hotel. I

"Hey, where are we going?" Jack said. They were supposed to continue north, through the Morgan Banks district, not leave Twenty-third Street. "What's going on? This isn't the way."

1

"You have an appointment with the Cyberdyne management," the driver said.

"No, we don't." In one terrible second, it dawned on Jack that this was not some mistake. What Rosanna had

told him was true after all. His felt his heart sink in his *chest*. Why hadn't he taken her seriously? She'd never been wrong before.

It had just seemed so incredible. He wasn't armed, and neither was Samantha. These guys in the front seat were supposed to provide protection—them and the guards and police who were supposedly meeting them. He could try to wrest control of the car, but what good was that? "Please don't do anything rash," the driver said. Samantha reached for her handbag, but the tall black guy turned round from the front, a Beretta pistol in his right hand. "Just keep calm, folks. Don't go reaching for any weapons, or your cellphone if that's what you're after ma'am. There's nothing you can do right now, so enjoy the ride."

Jack looked round, trying to size up the situation. A third black sedan had joined their escort, and now a police car joined in; the two officers seated in front were doubtless well armed. "You have police in on this?" Samantha.

"There are lots of people involved," the driver said happily. He took another turn, spinning the wheel with one hand; he had the easy confidence of a man who knew just what he was doing. "Sit back, make yourselves comfortable. You won't come to any harm." "Not at all," the black man said. "This is for your own good." Just ahead on the right was the entrance to a park lot, downward-sloping ramp blocked off by more police.

The sedan in front of them veered toward the entrance, and a female motorcycle cop waved it through. Their own driver followed, as Samantha said, "I don't believe this."

The rest of the convoy followed them down the ramp.

"Don't worry at all," the driver said. "You're getting the wrong idea. Everything will soon seem easier. Mr. Layton will help you understand,"

CHAPTER

TWELVE

WASHINGTON, D.C AUGUST 2001

It was Jade's turn at the wheel. She pulled up at a public phone near Arlington Cemetery, and Eve got out, leaving the others in the car. Rosanna had given the Terminator the number for Jack Reed's office. Eve dialed it quickly, and Reed's secretary answered. "Mr. Reed's office. Can I help you?"

Eve said, using Charles Layton's voice this time, "Vicki?"

"Yes. Is that Mr. Layton?"

"Have they left, Vicki? We're waiting for them."

"Just one minute ago," the woman said, sounding puzzled. "You shouldn't be expecting them yet"

"Have you made the proper arrangements? Does everyone know where to go?"

"Of course, Mr. Layton. Is everything all right? "

The Terminator had an insufficient model of Layton's patterns. It considered possible responses, then said, "Yes. It is so far."

"Why are you so worried? I wouldn't let you down."

"Where did you tell them to go? This is important What address did you give?"

"Let me just check," Vicki said. Eve had learned to de-code such expressions of human emotions. Even leading a hermit's existence, the Terminator had gained much knowledge in seventeen years. Vicki sounded puzzled, but not yet suspicious. She gave the address of a parking garage in M Street, a block from the C & O Canal.

"That is correct."

"Well, I could hardly-"

Eve slammed down the phone. Back in the car, the Terminator said, "John was right. Reed's secretary has been reprogrammed."

"I knew it!" John said. "That's just what I would have done."

"Head north," Eve said, "across the river."

They'd driven down four sets of ramps, to a floor that had more police cars. There were five in all, counting the one that was following behind. Another black government car was already parked here, and the one that had gone ahead of them now pulled up. Adding the other cars the had helped to box them in en *route*, there were ten cars involved, plus the police outside, directing traffic. About two dozen people in all, most of them down here waiting. The driver parked, pulling on the handbrake. "Get out of the car, then walk over to our friends."

All these police and government cars were scattered randomly in the driving lanes. The actual parking bays were full of ordinary vehicles: sedans, wagons, SUVs in various colors. The police had the whole garage effectively blocked off from customers; right now there must be some very frustrated people unable to get back to their vehicles. There would doubtless be complaints, but Jack supposed the cops could easily fabricate some story—a bomb scare, perhaps, or some other threat of violence. He had a feeling this wouldn't take long. There was nothing he could do to stretch it out. Bottom line: He and Samantha were helpless, left with no choices.

They did as they were told, walking to a group that included Layton and Cruz—one in a gray suit, the other in tailored trousers and a tweed jacket. The two men from the car followed them over; both now had M9 pistols in their hands. "It wouldn't be good if I had to use this," their driver said, gesturing with the barrel.

Samantha glared at him. "You wouldn't dare. You can't afford to have us die."

"Nothing has to be fatal. Talk to Mr. Layton and Mr. Cruz."

The police and dark-suited government people surrounding Layton and Cruz all had guns drawn, ready to fire. Among them were the four men from last night, all of those who'd gone with Jack and Samantha from the restaurant. One of them—Steve—gave an unpleasant grin. "Ms. Jones," he said. "Good to see you ma'am. You, too, Mr. Reed."

The remaining cars emptied. At a moment's notice, this whole area could be turned into a storm of gunfire, as surely as if someone had come here armed with a military assault rifle set on auto. There was no way to escape; even without the guns, it would have been impossible—the odds were twenty to two. Jack looked around instinctively, locating the elevator lobby, in case he needed to make a dash for cover. But that was scarcely a real option. He took a deep breath: Time to find out just what the Cyberdyne people wanted.

"Thank you for coming here," Layton said. He'd always been menacing, the way he talked to people, but so much more now.

"Just what the hell do you want?" Jack said.

"I'm not one for long explanations, and they're not necessary in this case. I can make you understand

an-other way."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Be patient, Jack. This will only take a minute." Lay-ton looked from Jack to Samantha. "Who first? Jack, I think it should be you."

Jack was almost trembling with fear and anger. De-spite the odds, he had to do something. When Lay-ton reached out to touch him, he slapped the man's hand away-but Lay-ton responded suddenly, with astonishing swiftness and strength, knocking him to the hard con-crete floor. Jack saw stars before his eyes; he rolled aside, realizing he was too old. But what had got into Lay-ton? The man was in his sixties; he shouldn't be capable of this. Something had turned him into a highly-strung killing machine.

As he got unsteadily to his feet, Samantha ran-but Cruz snapped out a hand and caught her easily. He seized her by one arm and almost yanked her off her feet.

Jack tried to clear his head, feeling the bruises where his hip and upper arm had collided with the floor. "Just a minute," he said. "Please." But Lay-ton moved as if shot from a cannon. This was absurd, Jack thought, as Lay-ton forced him against a concrete pillar. He was still a strong man, being pummeled by this old guy from Cyberdyne. It couldn't be happening. With incredible strength, Lay-ton gripped him with one hand at the back of the neck. Try as he might, Jack could make no impact: Lay-ton's body seemed rigid as iron. He showed no pain, even from pow-erful body blows.

"You'll be happier in a moment," Lay-ton said. He damped his other hand across Jack's face. "Accept the experience."

John saw the garage entrance from fifty yards away, but Jade was already onto it. She scarcely slowed down as she swerved off the road, riding up over the curb. She pulled down hard on the steering, then straightened out the wheels. A motorcycle cop who'd been blocking the entrance ran for cover as their SUV fishtailed, bounced over a speed hump, then leaped down the first of a series of ramps.

A shot rang out behind, and the round glanced off the SUV's side, but Jade braked hard, approaching an acute turn into the next ramp. She got them round it, then ac-celerated to the bottom of the next ramp... then took an-other, and another, not letting a second go to waste.

Again she was quicker than anyone else, seeing the parked police cruisers and black government sedans on the next floor down. She turned the wheel, pushed down hard on the accelerator, and drove them quickly over an-other speed hump, the SUV bouncing, so John's head al-most struck the ceiling, his stomach turning backflips under his ribcage.

"Hold on, please," Jade said, as they cleared yet an-other hump, then charged at thirty mph toward the cars parked in the driving lanes. She skidded around a parked police car, scraping against the projecting front of a long, white sedan parked in one of the bays. Shots came from in front of them, as the SUV zigzagged, Jade retaining control while making them an erratic target. At last, she slammed down hard on the brake, as they rammed one of the government cars, sending the SUV spinning through 270°.

As soon as they'd stopped, Anton was out of there. He flung himself to the concrete, rolling to one side between two civilian cars that were backed in bays against a con-crete wall. Jade took off almost as quickly, and covered distance as fast as ever.

"Stay here," Eve said. The Terminator squeezed past Rosanna's knees, and followed the two Specialists, not moving with the same lightning speed, but still quickly and efficiently, like a human athlete.

John felt for any injuries. He seemed okay. With four of them in the back, he hadn't been wearing a seatbelt, but he'd braced himself just before the crash. He checked Sarah and Rosanna. His mom seemed fine, but Rosanna had hurt her arm, bracing against the seat in front. He'd heard her grunt resentfully when Eve had squeezed past her. John felt her arm for any break—she just seemed bruised from the impact.

Anton had taken the laser rifle, a terrible weapon that could have mown down their enemies in seconds. John didn't move for now. He thought it would soon be over—twenty ordinary humans, no matter what Skynet had done to them, were no match for the two Specialists and a Terminator. It should be easy.

Then he saw he was wrong.

It all seemed to happen at once — the movements, the shots ringing out. He recognized Oscar Cruz from TV, and from pics in magazines and on the Internet. The silver-headed man with him was less familiar, but he must have Charles Layton, Cyberdyne's Chairman. John had his photo on Cyberdyne's web site. That meant those • two older people—a tough, military-looking guy and a smartly-dressed woman in her forties—must be the *folks* they wanted to see: Jack Reed and Samantha Jones. When they'd driven in, Layton had been attacking Reed, holding him, but Reed broke free, and ran for cover, and Jones was close behind him. No one shot in their direction; everyone had other priorities. They rolled beneath a big four-wheel drive, out of harm's way. Layton and Cruz took cover, but the rest of their team stood fearlessly, not even flinching when Anton fired the searing heat beam at their feet. He aimed over the trunk of a Ford sedan parked nose-inward in one of the bays. John knew what the beam did when it touched a human body. He'd seen it in Mexico, when they'd first fought the T-XA. Any direct hit, even on an arm or a leg, would be horribly mutilating, probably fatal. The laser rifle was designed for just one purpose: cutting down human beings like vermin. It wasn't meant to wound, only to kill — and Anton didn't want to kill.

The cops and the others with them returned a storm of fire from their pistols, keeping Jade and Anton at a distance. Even Jade could not run straight into a hail of metal, fired by enemies who never hesitated. She took cover behind a concrete pillar.

John took the pistol from his backpack and reached past Rosanna to open the door, but Sarah grabbed his arm with her strong fingers. "No, John, you've done your part. Just keep down."

From the other end of the car park came the sound of motorcycles, and more gunshots. There was too much lead flying through the air. In a moment, someone might be hurt, or killed. One shot took out the SUV's wind-screen, the round striking it diagonally, and continuing across John's body.

Rosanna curled into a ball on the seat, her back in the corner, knees lifted to her face, trying to escape the noise of battle. Unlike the rest of them, she was not trained for this. She could be dangerous, thanks to the enhancement that the T-XA had given her, but now she was obviously terrified.

Jade was exposed to shots from the motorcycle cops. She turned and fired at both of them, deadly accurate, blowing out tires on both bikes, which keeled onto their sides and skidded across the concrete, striking sparks. That was one less hazard.

Another bullet shattered a side window of the SUV, and glass blew into John's face. He put his hand to

his cheeks, then took them away. He was bleeding. The noise of pistol fire seemed to go on and on, Layton's people loading and reloading, always someone firing.

But Eve walked straight into the pistol fire, making no attempt to dodge it. The Terminator produced a Colt .45 pistol from under its jacket, and began firing systematically, shooting straight at the bodies of their enemies. John had expected it to aim at their legs: He'd ordered Eve not to kill, just as he had in 1994 with the T-800. But this time the Terminator had ignored his order.

No one ran; it seemed these cops and government agents would do anything for Skynet. Even those who fell, screaming with pain when bones shattered or lungs collapsed, kept firing from the ground, until Eve kicked the guns from their hands. They didn't stop until disarmed, unconscious, or dead.

That gave the Specialists the break they needed. Jade moved like lightning, dodging stray bullets that came her way, zigzagging and whirling, and knocking down several men in the blink of an eye. But Layton moved almost as fast, catching her with a shot to her chest at point-blank range.

"No, John!"

John ignored Sarah's cry to stop. He forced his way past Rosanna, and flung the door open. Layton turned toward him, taking aim. For a moment, John saw his death coming, but Eve stepped into his path, absorbing the 9mm. round. Then another.

Cruz tackled Anton, fighting like a cornered cat but he was out of his league. As Anton forced him to the floor, one of the cops whom Eve had shot seemed to recover. He crawled to a pistol lying on the floor, picked it up, and fired, hitting Anton in the back. Then again. And again.

Eve had grabbed the laser rifle where Anton had dropped it at his feet. Unlike him, the Terminator showed no compunction; it fired at the cop, who exploded into flames.

Layton saw what had happened; he tried to run, moving with speed that rivaled Jade's. But Eve cut him down in mid-air as he headed for the elevator lobby. His body became a flaming brand, flying on a long, flat trajectory. Then it was over. The huge concrete space was silent. The Terminator and the two Specialists had killed, injured, or stunned their entire opposition. In their own way, their enemies had been more than human: Endowed with a ferocious fighting capacity, in the case of Layton and Cruz; and simply without fear or hesitation in the case of the others. Most of their enemies were dead, including Layton, all killed by the Terminator. Both of the

Specialists were hurt. Eve had taken multiple wounds, though it did not faze her in the slightest. John felt his own body. He was okay, no bullets had hit him; his only wounds were the glass cuts on his face.

He ran to Jade, who was nursing herself, seated on the hood of a police car. "Are you okay?" he said, almost pleadingly.

She nodded, then coughed painfully. "I'll live," she said, through gritted teeth. "What about Anton?"

Sarah had left the car and gone to him, where he lay on the ground, bleeding. She checked him over quickly, looking up at John and mouthing, "Okay." Rosanna was still in the SUV, understandably terrified.

Reed stepped forward. He'd picked up a fallen handgun, and he trained it on Cruz, who backed away warily. He gave a smile that might have been charming in different circumstances. "I guess you want an

explanation, Jack?" Cruz laughed, then must have realized it was out of place. "A better one than I gave you last night, right?"

"Just who do you think you are?" Reed said.

Samantha Jones walked toward them, her face white.

John turned to Eve, angry at what she'd done. "You killed people. I told you not to do that. You have to obey my orders."

Eve looked at him with much the same expression as a man examining a fly that he plans to swat—and John felt a twinge of fear. Eve's expression was so cold. Could he really control the Terminator? If the T-799 ever turned on him, it would be dangerous. Even the Specialists would have to respect it.

Jade got down from where she'd been sitting and walked up behind him, holding his arm, protectively—and many thoughts went through his mind. He wondered again how she would fare against a Terminator. So many conflicting emotions went through his mind. Just how badly hurt was she? He couldn't bear harm coming to her.

And what did she think of him? What did he mean to her, this superwoman from the future?

He said to Eve, "Why didn't you obey?"

"It was not *just killing people*."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"They were no longer human. They were extensions of Skynet."

"You can't make that judgment. It's not up to you."

"Best hypothesis: they were under Skynet's control, Reprogrammed."

"Of course they were."

Eve glared in Cruz's direction, still looking dangerous.

"Don't kill him," John said. "I *specifically* order you not to. Have you *got* it this time?"

"Yes. Got it."

John had almost forgotten how dangerous it was to have his own Terminator. In the end, the T-800 he'd known in 1994 had not seemed to him like the killing machine it was. As far as he knew, it had never killed anyone on its trip back in time. Eve's behavior reminded him of the truth, what a Terminator really was: A machine built specifically for killing human beings.

Reed still had his gun trained on Cruz.

"So, you're Jack Reed?" Sarah said.

He nodded. "Sarah Connor, I presume." He looked at their group with a hard gaze almost equal to the

Terminator's. This shootout had put steel into him. A siren came from above, up the levels of ramps, along with the sounds of car engines coming toward them. It never seemed to stop. "We've got to get out of here," Reed said.

Behind John, a voice said, "I hope there'll be no more killing." It was Rosanna, always pale, now looking like a ghost. She'd finally gotten out of the car.

"Quickly," Reed said. "This way." He gestured Cruz in the direction of the elevator lobby, but Cruz refused to budge. Eve seized him by the neck and forced him along.

They reached the elevator as two more police cars arrived. All nine of them crammed into an elevator car: John and Sarah; Eve; Rosanna; the Specialists; Cruz; the two people from the government

Cruz said, "What are you going to do with me?"

"That depends on whether you want to cooperate,"

Reed said.

"I don't think so. I'm afraid the ball's in your court."

The Terminator looked ready to kill him on the spot John said, "*Don't* kill him, Eve. Don't even hurt him."

The Terminator stared back at him. "Tactically inad-visable. He is dangerous while he lives."

"Well, we're still not going to kill him," John said "That's enough. It doesn't matter what they've done, or what Skynet has done to them. We *can't* kill people."

"Why?"

He struggled to find an answer. This was different from 1994. They were dealing with people who were positively fighting on Skynet's side, their brains programmed to make them think that way. Did they still have a right to live? It seemed to him they did; there remained some hope for them. Look at Rosanna, he thought Maybe they could do something to help Cruz. "It's a long story," he said. "Just trust me on it"

At ground level, the elevator opened onto a small glassed-in lobby with a door that led into the street. Two police cars had pulled up outside, waiting for them to exit. Four officers were ready, taking cover behind their cars, one of them speaking into a radio mike, the others with guns drawn.

"Don't do anything," John said to the Terminator. "We can handle this." But he wondered if they could. Jade was badly hurt, worse than he'd ever seen her. Sarah was helping her walk. That was bad; she should already be healing. Anton was hurt as well. "Maybe just threaten them a little," John said.

The Terminator pointed the laser rifle. It stepped forward, toward the police. "We need your cars."

As they headed north, Reed drove, while Jones took out her cell phone. She seemed to have come to life, forcing herself back to work, despite the shock she'd suffered in the garage.

John sat in the back between Jade and Eve. Sarah drove the other police car, following behind them with Anton, Rosanna, and their prisoner—Oscar Cruz.

Eve leaned forward. "Give me your phone."

"What?" Jones said. "What do you want it for?"

"I need it."

"You'd better not argue," John said. "I mean, *seriously* ." Jones passed the phone back.

"Your secretary was one of them," Eve said to Reed. "Whoelse do you suspect?"

Reed shook his head as he pulled out to overtake a slow-moving pickup truck. "We have no way of knowing. They don't behave any different."

But Jones said, "Yes, they do."

"What? What do you mean, Sam?" He shifted lanes again. in front of the pickup.

"Dean Solomon, Jack. This explains his behavior."

"Goddamn it yes."

"Do you have his number?" Eve said.

Jones gave a number, and the Terminator rang it. When the telephone was answered, Eve said, in Charles Layton's voice, "It has gone badly. Get out of there." There was a pause, then the Terminator added, "Take the others. Go to Rosanna Monk's home. Await my instructions."

Eve passed the phone back. "Now you have a position of strength."

Jones made a series of calls on her cell phone, arguing, pleading, talking tough, trying to straighten things out, getting people sent to places, pulling back others, calling up favors. John couldn't follow it all, but she must have worked out that DoD and the military had been compro-mised by Skynet's mindslaves; she seemed to be rerout-ing her calls, talking to people she hardly knew. Making arrangements, fixing issues.

"I'll get you a doctor," she said, speaking over her shoulder to Jade. "We need all kinds of help, don't we?"

"She mostly needs food," John said. He took Jade's hand and squeezed it "Will you be okay?"

"My body is repairing around the wound," she said in a small voice. "I should have the bullet removed."

Eventually, Jones gave up talking on the phone. "That's as straightened out as it's going to be," she said. "At least for the moment."

"So where are we going?" John said.

"The place where we said we'd meet. We have a lot to discuss."

"Like who or what are you people?" Reed added.

John gave Jade's hand another squeeze, then let go, not wanting to seem like he was offering more than comfort. He wondered where to start. "That's going to take a while."

Jones said, "Don't worry. We have time." The road led to a small military complex, one hour out of the city center. Reed dealt with the checkpoint guard, drove in, and unlocked a door to one low building. The other car pulled up alongside.

Yet another car was already parked there, this one an unmarked white sedan. An Indian or Pakistani-looking woman got out and introduced herself. "I am Doctor Panikkar."

"Everyone come inside," Reed said. In the small meeting room inside the building, he took a seat and said to Cruz, "It seems like we're back where we started."

"Seems like it," Cruz said.

"We'll have to keep you under guard, you know. It looks to me like you're a dangerous man."

"I might be, or I mightn't. I'm not making any comment about that. You realize you can never hold me, don't you? Just what have I done wrong? Nothing you can make public."

"Right. So you'll slip outside our justice system, will *yon*? That might not be to your advantage."

Rosanna spoke, "You can't threaten him. He doesn't care about his own life, do you Oscar? All he cares about Skynet."

Cruz smiled and shrugged. "Have it your way."

Jones found a room in another building for Dr. Panikkar to examine Jade and Anton. Meanwhile, Eve watched Cruz closely, looking like she might kill him with any excuse. But a minute later, two more cars pulled up outside, and a group of people yelled out, then entered the building.

"In here," Reed said loudly. Two women and three men appeared, all medium height, slightly unkempt looking, a little nerdy if anything. Two of the guys wore gold-rimmed glasses. John looked them over with a practiced eye; despite first appearances, they were all strong and fit, well-trained operatives of some kind.

"So we're putting this guy in your jurisdiction?" Reed said. "That's the decision?"

One of the women stepped forward and said, "It seems we've been assigned it, at least for now. We'll ask him some questions. You'll get your chance as well."

"And those people in Colorado Springs?" The same. We got them okay."

Cruz's eyebrows raised at that, but he said nothing. John wondered where it would end. Many people must be compromised; perhaps they'd never identify them all. The government would wash its hands of the nanoprocessor and the Skynet project, and Cyberdyne would be out of business, or close enough to it. But it gave John a bad feeling to think there were still people out there who were Skynet's mindslaves, determined to bring it into existence. Some of those people must be smart. Even now, when they seemed totally defeated, they'd be plotting and planning, trying to work something out.

"Yeah, all right," Reed said. "Take him away."

Cruz didn't resist, though he doubtless could have put up a fight. The spirit seemed to have gone out of him. "Just be very careful," John said to the agents. He wondered just what agency they came from. "He doesn't look like much-

"The kid's right," Reed said. "You'd better handcuff him."

One of the men found a pair of handcuffs inside his nylon jacket. "Glad to oblige."

When they were gone, Samantha Jones reappeared at the door. "All under control. They'll be okay." She said to John. "Your friend Jade should be dead. That bullet ripped out half of her lung capacity. No one survives something like that."

"I know," John said. "But thank God she's okay."

"They're going to operate on her under local anesthetic. We'll get her to a military hospital."

"And Anton?" Sarah said.

"He's as strong as a bull. Most of the bullets missed his spine. One just grazed it. He's flesh and blood, but he's as hard as iron. He's going to be okay."

"Faster than you think."

"I doubt it. Whatever those two are, they're not human."

No one replied to that; Reed took command. "All right, who's the spokesman here? Who's going to start?"

John said, "Let me try."

CHAPTER

THIRTEEN

CYBERDYNE SITE COLORADO SPRINGS AUGUST 2001

Rosanna keyed in a twelve-digit code to power-up the time vault. The whole basement rumbled with the throb of the huge underground engines. In a moment, she would unleash all that energy within the immensely strong hollow cube that was the most visually striking element of the apparatus. The flatscreens that displayed four views of the vault's interior showed it was empty: On this run, they would simply observe the effects of the field.

Jade sat at her shoulder, watching Rosanna's computer screen. "Take it to the next stage."

"All right," Rosanna said, "confirmed. Here we go." Now the flatscreens showed the energies unleashed inside the vault, powerful lightnings that centered just above the five-foot metal disk inserted into the floor of the vault. They left the displacement field running, pondering the ever-changing data on Rosanna's computer screen. DoD had provided three powerful Cray supercomputers, operating in parallel, to duplicate the work of the ruined nanoprocessor. The detailed analysis was almost as good. What really changed the situation was the fundamental knowledge brought by the Specialists. Their grasp of findings that had been made years in the future, in their world, complemented Rosanna's detailed knowledge of the time vault and its workings. Between them, they were getting results.

After thirty seconds, the data settled down into a regular pattern. "All right, switch off the displacement field," Jade said. "Then power down."

That regular pattern arose every time, after the initial disturbance to the Earth's space-time field. They could break the pattern by changing the flow of energy, but then it would stabilize once more.

Rosanna entered the codes, then another code to open the time vault's massive, hydraulic door. Soon, the basement was back to normal, if "normal" was the word.

She'd worked day and night for the past two weeks, seldom venturing out of the building's basement. Mostly, she slept here; she'd set up a small room in one corner with portable screens, with a bed, a mirror, and some other furniture. The building had bathrooms and showers that were adequate for her needs. Mostly she had food brought in. Whenever she left the building to buy food, or get some fresh air, the T-799 went with her—and one of the Specialists. The Terminator was under John's orders never to leave her side.

It was hard to tell who was the master and who the student. In some ways, Rosanna's knowledge was far ahead of the Specialists'. They were warriors, not technical experts on time travel. But they not only pushed

Rosanna in new directions, they followed her there just as quickly. She could easily believe their intelligence had been enhanced, especially Jade's. Rosanna knew her own capabilities, without false modesty; she was a genius. But Jade was at least her equal.

"Very good," Jade said. "We can explore for field fluctuations."

Rosanna nodded at that. The regular pattern that her screen had shown could be disrupted in various ways. Even a very large chunk of matter approaching or departing the Earth would register as a distortion of space and time. So would a traveler arriving from another time—anywhere in the planet's vicinity—or an object being sent in time. As Jade had explained it, Skynet and the T-XA had used similar principles to detect the Specialists leaving the future, and to locate them on arrival in the present. The time vault could operate as a very crude device for measuring such distortions. Crude, because it required huge amounts of energy that were really for another purpose: To punch holes in the field, and thus displace objects to other times and places.

Jack walked over, looking satisfied. "Are we going to take a break?"

Samantha stood, too, stretching ostentatiously. "Brunch time, I think."

Jade looked up at them from where she was sitting. "Why not, Mr. Reed? We are doing very well."

"Yeah, *why* not?" Rosanna said. A lot of the work was sheer grind, hour after hour. Jack and Samantha were in and out of here all day, dealing with their other problems. Much of this must be boring for a pair of Pentagon wheeler-dealers, exciting as the science itself was prov-ing.

Against the far wall, opposite the control console where Rosanna sat was a makeshift kitchen and bar: a government-issue lowboy set up with hotplates for warming coffee; a mini-refrigerator; and plenty of drinks and takeout food—whatever they ordered in or requisitioned, day by day. Most of them spent long hours here, now, munching through endless pizzas, cookies, potato crisps, and the occasional Chinese takeout. But only Rosanna stayed at night, sometimes with Jade. The others holed up for the evenings in an apartment block used by the Air Force. Maybe they ate and slept better than she did but they took a greater risk than she wanted to share.

Jack walked over to the lowboy and poured a mug of the strong coffee, then returned to the group of lounge chairs set up just in front of the control console. Rosanna and Jade joined them, completing a rough circle: Jade on Rosanna's left, then John, Sarah, Anton and Samantha. Across from them were Samantha and Jack, then the T-799, on Rosanna's right. She had noticed how the Connors were wary of the Terminator, especially Sarah, who was still shocked, perhaps, at the way it had massacred their enemies. Rosanna saw things differently: What had it been supposed to do? A pity it hadn't killed them all.

As the work proceeded, day after day, Jade and Anton seemed serious and intense, but they never showed signs of hurry or nerves; they simply got on with the experiments, quietly confident of success. Though she understood their enhancements, Rosanna was still amazed at how quickly and easily they had recovered from their wounds. Anton had been fine a matter of hours after the firefight in Washington. Jade had received a terrible chest wound that day, but even she had recovered within twenty-four hours. That suggested possibilities. How much could they learn, she wondered, just by studying the Specialists' bodies?

One had been buried somewhere in Mexico, so she'd learned from Jade. One was scattered in space and time. But the other, Selena Macedo's body, was still in DoD's custody. That was a source of tension in the group.

Jack looked round, like he wanted to make an announcement. He must have conferred with Samantha, since she was grinning from ear to ear.

Sarah picked up on it first "Yes, Jack. What is it?"

"I've spoken with the Secretary. Everything is now formalized. Our contract with Cyberdyne is rescinded. So that's the end of that."

"Okay," John said, as if he had his doubts. "I guess that's cool."

"They've been formally ordered out of here. They're a toothless tiger now. There's no future for them."

In fact, no one from Cyberdyne had been here for weeks. What Jack was talking about was just tying up loose ends, and not the most important ones at that—not so far as Rosanna was concerned.

"That would be nice to believe," Sarah said. "I hope we've seen the last of Cyberdyne."

Rosanna was more worried about her own future. They would never get her to travel into the future

world that Eve had described to them, not into the middle of a war zone, no matter how well they got the time vault to work. She valued her life too much for that. But she'd help the others. She owed them something, it seemed, though she surprised herself thinking that way. Shouldn't she have lost all thoughts like that — of gratitude to human beings—when the T-XA reprogrammed her? Any-way, helping them might be for her own protection. Even saving behind, she would not be safe, and that was for many reasons.

"They can sue, of course," Jack was saying, "but they *won't* want to go to court"

"It still makes me feel sick," Sarah said. "Skynet still has mindslaves out there. We can't even find them all."

"We know most of them," Samantha said.

They'd caught a dozen DoD, military, and Cyberdyne staff in Colorado Springs. Then there were Layton and Cruz, and those who'd been identified in Washington—many of those were dead. But there might be others in Colorado, and even more in Los Angeles. Rosanna lacked precise knowledge, but she thought it would include the whole Cyberdyne Board and all its senior researchers and Execs. That alone was another twenty people, maybe even more. Every one of them would consider Rosanna a target. She wondered if she was really safer here or in the T-799's future, what John liked to call "Skynet's World."

Still, she was staying.

"We'll watch them all like hawks," Jack said. "There's nothing they can do now."

Sarah sat with one leg crossed over the other, tapping her fingers nervously against her thigh. "Famous last words, Jack."

"Really, they're out of your hair. You'll never have to worry again."

"Well, I'm plenty worried," Rosanna said.

As Sarah stood to get more coffee, she said, "I'm with Dr. Frankenstein."

Jack gave a patient smile. "You'll just have to trust us."

"Let's get some more results," Rosanna said. "Later we'll do some serious testing."

John spoke to Eve. "Get the laser rifle. You know what to do."

"Affirmative," the T-799 said. After all that had happened, John still didn't know what to think of the Terminator. It had stepped in the way of gunfire that would have killed him, so he owed it his life, he supposed, just as he owed the T-800 that had saved him seven years before. But he'd seen this Terminator kill. It had been around all these years living among human beings, but no one had taught it to act more human. Maybe he should be doing that, as he had with the T-800. But he couldn't help recall the way it had slaughtered people—and not just the ones he had seen it kill. There'd been others before that, it had said, and he hadn't even asked about them. It was a murdering machine. How could he accept it?

Then again, no one had taught it to be different. His other self should have done it up in the future, he thought, in Skynet's world. But he guessed there'd never been time for that. Eve had taken them through

the issues that the other John had confronted. It must have been tough, with the whole world at stake, and Skynet striking back from an unknown location. The Resistance must have been desperate. He tried to imagine what it would be like, so many people wounded or even dying.

He couldn't blame the Resistance, and he couldn't re-ally blame Eve.

Besides, those people in Washington had been almost dead already. It had not been like in 1994. Layton and the others had not just been doing their jobs, like the guards and police that the T-800 had injured, often badly-but never killed-when protecting him from the T-1000.

Everyone who'd died in the Washington shootout had been a mindslave: Their personalities had already been destroyed by Skynet through its agents, the T-XA and Charles Layton. Did it make sense to say that they were really alive, that they were really the same people, or that they were human at all?

He looked at Rosanna where she'd settled back at the control console, powering up the machine. Jade worked beside her. The two of them got along. Maybe they needed each other's company, two superbrains like that Anton joined them, too, pulling up another chair on the other side of Rosanna. The three of them were talking like anyone at work. Rosanna seemed pretty much human, not like a mindslave of a Skynet even a rebellious one.

So maybe it depended on how deep the reprogram-ming went Rosanna was more and more like her proper self. It seemed there was hope for her, but she maybe she was a special case. Maybe there hadn't been hope for the others. Yet they were still human.. weren't they? Could you stop treating human beings as human, even when they'd been *changed* so much? He didn't know the answer to that. In a way, he didn't like it that Eve had made the decision for him. Yet in another way, he was glad.

Eve entered the time vault, and carefully placed the laser rifle exactly in the center of its floor, then returned to stand near John. Rosanna keyed in the codes to close the vault's door, then power it up. The huge engines beneath the floor began to throb with life. "Shall I go ahead now?" Rosanna said.

Jack nodded somberly. "Yes, go ahead. We're all ready."

She entered the code to activate the space-time displacement field John, Sarah, and the two government people shifted their chairs into a line to watch the flatscreens together.

This experiment was not meant to send an integrated object through space and time, merely to record more data, and destroy something very dangerous. The flatscreens showed writhing, crackling blue electricity filling the vault's interior and playing over the laser rifle at the point where the space-distortion was most concentrated. As with all the other inorganic objects that they'd subjected to the time vault's energies, it would not survive—this was, in fact, a good way to destroy the weapon. But, as with those other objects, its effect on the field's configuration could be measured, and an assessment could be made of its fate.

The weapon glowed in the midst of the artificial lightning, then suddenly vanished.

"Well, that's that," Jack said. "I hope we've done the right thing. I feel like a coward."

Rosanna turned off the field and powered down the apparatus, "You're not a coward, Jack. Don't think that way. You're just doing what has to be done."

He gave her a quizzical look, but said nothing.

"I've had the same thoughts," she said. "I'd like to make my own judgments, use this technology for some-thing good, make some precise, difficult decisions. But the laser rifle had to be destroyed. It was a weapon for another time."

"Why do *you* care?" Sarah said.

Jack walked over to the lowboy and poured a mug of the strong coffee, then returned to his lounge chair. "I've been going along with your ideas," he said, looking at

Sarah and the Specialists. "I'm not sure it's right, but there you go. You know more about it than me. I can accept advice."

"It may not be right for *you*" Sarah said, "but it sure is for the world." She started warming up: "In fact, it is for you too. You know what you became in those other worlds—a man who brought us all Skynet. You and Sam, and everyone else involved. . . you were part of Judgment Day in those worlds, just as much as Miles Dyson or Rosanna. You don't want that to happen in *this* reality.

We're counting on you to stop it."

"I'm not so sure. It wasn't just the military applications . . . If we could have reverse-engineered that rifle's power cell, that alone might have had enormous effect for good. Millions of lives might have been saved, one way or another."

"Yes," Sarah said, "I know you think that, Jack. And millions more might have been killed. Do you have to find a high-tech fix for every problem?"

"It's not *every* goddamn problem, Sarah. You know that."

"I also know that this government of yours has plenty of resources already. It doesn't need a whole new energy source. Why not just show some compassion with what

you have now? You know-some better priorities. Don't

you think *that* might change the world?" "Well, maybe it would." "You can be sure it would."

"All the same, this was a great opportunity. Well, whatever..."

"What's done is done," Samantha said. "We all had a say in it; we all agreed."

"Well, I *went along* with it," Jack said. "Perhaps it's for the best"

"Okay," Rosanna said, "I've captured the data. Let's do the next experiment It looks like we're almost there. We'll go for broke today. One more test now, then we'll check the results. Then we'll see what happens to Elske."

There was one more remnant of the future to be de-stroyed: The liquid metal that had been chopped off the T-XA when it had entered the time vault. It had been the Terminator's arm, caught when the massive metal door had slammed shut on it. But the metal had liquefied, with no larger body to rejoin. As they all watched, Anton carefully poured the thick, silvery substance within the time vault. It formed a rounded

shape on the vault's floor, something like a water droplet the size of a small dog.

When he was satisfied that all the metal was there, Anton stepped out, and they took their positions watching the screens. Rosanna worked through the sequence, powering up the vault, then sending the liquid metal across space and time, to destroy it. The harsh energies played over it and *it* vanished.

Afterwards, there was a silence. Sarah said, "I'm glad to see it go."

"No argument," Samantha replied.

That was one thing they'd all agreed on. The pro-programmed liquid metal from the T-XA was even more dangerous than the Terminator relics from 1984 had been. It used similar principles to a T-800's CPU, but was even more advanced. With the right equipment and enough time, it could be reverse engineered and used as the basis for something like Skynet.

"I've got the data," Rosanna said.

The T-XA had traveled in time without being destroyed; it was possible to configure the liquid metal and the space-time displacement field to each other for the purpose of genuine time travel. That might have been a good experiment, John thought, but they'd had to leave it out. The important thing was the time displacement of life. He turned to Rosanna, knowing what was next. They had to start experimenting on living things. Cruel as it might be, they needed to start somewhere before they put humans in the time vault. "So, are you ready to send Elske?" he said.

"Soon. I want to do some calculations. The rest of you take a break, and we'll come back in two hours."

Elske was a white laboratory mouse; it would soon be the first rodent to travel in time.

John took a long walk, just with Eve for protection. It was only midday, but it felt like they'd been working all day, now they'd destroyed the laser rifle and the last of the T-XA. The sun shone down vertically in a cloudless sky, making the artificial world of the Cyberdyne basement seem unreal by comparison. He wondered about the sunless world that Eve had come from, the world after nuclear winter, dominated by Skynet's machines.

"Is it going to be cold, where we're going?" he said.

"Affirmative."

He tried to imagine a world with no sunshine, just varying degrees of darkness. He also wondered about the Terminator, the way it still spoke. "Can't you say more than just this 'affirmative' crap?"

"When necessary."

"Necessary for what? The mission, I guess." "Correct."

"Well, that's a little better." The machine was silent.

John said, "Tell me about what happens when we get there—I mean, practical stuff. We have to, oh, I don't know, be displaced right into Skynet's HQ, right? That's where 'I' am — the future me, I mean." He meant to say, *The future me of Skynet's World*, but that was too complicated. Eve could work that much out.

"No," Eve said. "The HQ is underground. We should track the surface of the planet."

"But that means landing butt naked out in the cold on some mountain in the middle of a war."

"Correct."

He wasn't sure he'd gotten that point until now, though Rosanna probably had—no wonder she was scared to go. The thought was frightening, but it seemed like he had no choice. They had to help John Connor—that other John Connor—win his victory. His whole life, and Sarah's even more, had been based on that. They couldn't let it slip.

Another thought occurred to him, and he'd bet that Rosanna and some of the others had also worked it out. If they could travel across time, from one reality to another, so could Skynet. It could work out how to do it. If it triumphed in one reality, maybe it could be a danger to *every* reality.

They'd already seen something like that: The Skynet of Jade's World had detected the Specialists traveling back in time from 2036 to try to create a world with no Skynet and no Judgment Day. That didn't threaten their world's Skynet, because they could not change their own past. You couldn't use time travel like that—as a weapon to de-stroy your enemies retroactively. But Skynet had still pursued them. It seemed to detest the existence of any world in which humans survived and flourished. What if Skynet always acted like that, in every world, every time it triumphed? Even for their own sakes, they just had to stop it.

John and Eve returned to the Cyberdyne basement. Jade, Rosanna, and Anton were working. The three of them seemed to get along fine, and it struck John again that the old Rosanna was coming back. He'd never known her before the T-XA had reprogrammed her, so he hadn't seen what her normal self was like, but he had a good *concept* of it. He'd heard things about her from Jack and Samantha. She'd been kind of anti-social, but not a bad person, not even unfriendly—just shy and absorbed *in* her work, maybe a little selfish, but nothing worse.

She was still quiet, not relating to people except when working with the specialists, but she no longer cringed away from human contact. Rosanna was going to be okay.

But it was Jade who made him smile. He caught him-self grinning in her direction while she worked, and hoped she hadn't seen. "Just stay here," he said to Eve. He walked to the end of the huge basement, wanting some one totally by himself, but Jade stood and followed.

"John?"

"Hi," he said sheepishly. "How's everything with you?" "There is so much to think about." "Like what?"

"About what I left behind. About what we are going to do, now — and what we can do to help." "It won't be easy." "No, but we can do it." "Yeah, I guess that's right," he said. But there were still so many issues. He changed the subject. "What about Rosanna? Do you think she's getting better?"

Jade smiled, perhaps less sadly than usual, just a tran-quiet smile that showed a touch of pleasure. "I *said* we could help her, John. The more she gets back to work—to her plans and experiments—like the old Rosanna, the more she *becomes* that Rosanna. The neural paths are re-forming."

"So, the old Rosanna's coming back? That's how it looks to me."

"Yes, John, I think so. Maybe not the old Rosanna, but someone much more like her."

"What about all the others—all the other mindslaves?"

"No, I do not think so. Not with them, especially not Mr. Cruz. I think that the T-XA found very compatible personalities with him and Mr. Layton."

"That means Cruz will always be our enemy?"

"Yes, he will be." Her face suddenly seemed to harden. "Perhaps we should have killed him."

"Like Eve wanted."

"Yes. But it's hard to do in cold blood — at least for us. Eve would hunt him down if you gave the word."

"I know she would." Despite what they'd seen in Washington, he still found it difficult not calling the Ter-minator "she."

Jade nodded in the direction of the time vault Rosanna was inspecting it ready for the next phase—Sarah, Jack, and Samantha entered the basement from an elevator. "We should rejoin them, John."

Rosanna kept Elske in a large wire cage in the screened off area where she currently lived. She walked back there and lifted the cage where she'd left it on a workbench cluttered with books, computer disks, a CD player and portable speakers, and a small CD collection. As the time approached to send the mouse through time, she'd found herself growing fond of it, thinking of it almost as a pet. It had been her only living company most nights she'd spent here.

She returned with the cage, setting it down at her feet for a moment, as she checked the computer screen. She opened the time vault's door, then took the cage inside and reached in to take out Elske. "Best of luck, little mouse."

Samantha followed her in there, with a small piece of heated and resolidified mozzarella that looked like it came from someone's pizza. She put it down in front of Elske, and they tiptoed away, letting the mouse nibble the cheese.

Once everyone was well clear, Rosanna shut the heavy door. The flatscreens now showed Elske nibbling happily at her mozzarella. If the field was properly calibrated, the mouse's local space-time would soon be distorted so as to send her one hour into the future. They were not aiming to make this test too complex: The co-ordinates were meant to shift the mouse only in time, in this instance, not in space. The question was whether Elske could survive intact. If she could, hopefully, so could a human being.

Rosanna brought up the magnification on one of the screens so they could all see clearly. Elske became a sharply-realized mouse, not just a small white dot disappearing into the background. When the cheese was gone, Rosanna said, "Now?"

At her elbow, Jade said, "Enter the codes."

Again the rumbling began, then lightning on the screens.

The mouse soon vanished.

Rosanna switched the images on the screens from the empty interior of the vault to an abstract pattern. "Now we wait."

John pointed at the pattern on the screens. "Okay, so what's that?"

"It's my latest masterpiece. Well... me, Jade, and An-ton."

John peered more closely at one of the screens. It made no sense to him without an explanation. It could have represented almost anything, or nothing at all. But Rosanna pushed her chair back, with a look of triumph on her face.

"It maps the energies of the vault," she said. "It's what I've been working on... something to do at night when you guys aren't around."

"Is this going to solve all our problems?" John said.

Rosanna blanked out three of the screens, then stood and walked around from the console, pointing at the other screen. "We can create a space-time map, look for nodal points in time, where the time streams break off from one another. Look at this." She walked back to the console, looking eager. She remained standing as she typed in a code, then moved her computer mouse on its pad. That drew a red circle on the flatscreen. "Something happens here in 1984 that I can't even begin to untangle. We all know what it must be." She drew another circle, sitting again as she worked. "Look here. In 1994, there are energies as well. Let me simplify the whole thing." The image shifted yet again. The screen now showed a simple dia-gram that branched like a tree. "Think of space, and time, and the different timestreams as a five-dimensional space."

"Easier said than done," Jack said wryly. "I find it hard enough thinking in four."

"You can learn," Anton said.

"I'm sure I can. It's part of the job."

"Watch this," Rosanna said. "You'll see that it doesn't matter. We can reduce it to two dimensions for visualization-that's what I've done here. The spatial dimensions don't interest us for the moment." Again she used her keyboard and computer mouse to create a red circle on the screen. "Most of these branching points are notional; I don't have the refinement to map them. But what I've marked here is real. We have a crux in May, 1994. That's the raid on Cyberdyne."

"What about right here and now?"

"We're too close to it; I can't map it properly from in-side. It looks like we're at another nodal point, or even a string of them."

"You mean the future's not set?" John said, exchanging glances with his mother, then looking to the T-799. It was impassive, so he merely shrugged. The Terminator still had a lot to learn about people.

"Perhaps from our viewpoint, it's never set," Rosanna said. "From a God's eye view, it looks different. There are many worlds, all real, each one exactly as it *has* to be."

"Can you displace us across the time streams?" Eve said.

"In theory, yes, I can."

Jade nodded at that "Rosanna's work is sound. We'll stay back tonight and finish it"

Anton nodded. He hadn't been made a genius before birth, like Jade, but he seemed to understand all this.

Rosanna put up more screen data and graphic analysis, some of it making sense to John, some of it too mathematical. She looked pleased with her work. Not only was the old Rosanna coming back, she looked like she could do what she said. At this rate, they were headed on a journey to Skynet's World. Eventually, she was silent. She switched on all four screens, and set them again to show the time vault's interior. No one spoke at all. Minutes passed as they waited for Elske to appear. Then the screens lit up with wriggling tentacles of energy that converged to form a ball of light.

"Nicely timed," Rosanna said. "Our little mouse is back."

Elske was there. The mouse writhed furiously, rolling on its back, then onto its paws, its back again, head moving fast, every tiny leg tearing at the air. A creature in the extremity of pain.

PART SIX:
ACROSS THE
DIMENSIONS

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

SKYNET'S WORLD
COLORADO
JULY 2029

When John returned to the surface of the mountain, he did so with a heavy heart. Skynet, it seemed, had led them into a trap. They had destroyed it here, but at an enormous cost. An unacceptable cost. He radioed Los Angeles to speak with Gabriela Tejada, whom he'd left in charge back there, in his absence

and that of all the active soldiers.

"What's the report?" he said.

There was still some shooting in the distance—mortars, RPG tubes, the sounds of phased-plasma mechanisms echoing across the mountains. The remnants of Skynet's forces still fought them, autonomously, it seemed. They had no new plans, but just kept attacking the fringes of the Resistance army.

"More reports all the time, John," Gabriela said. "We've had Terminator attacks everywhere, in every war zone: North America, South America, Asia, Europe, Northern Africa. Terminators just appearing from nowhere. And there are other reports that I have here... of H-Ks on the move in Canada and Europe. It seems like Skynet is hitting back at us."

He wondered whether this was Skynet's death throes, or whether it had survived. Perhaps it had forces already in place, programmed to carry out last acts of revenge. Then again, perhaps it was being coordinated. He needed the explanation—quickly. "All right, Gabriela. Can you give me any specifics?"

"I'll give you a list of the main cities attacked in North America and Europe. In some cases, our people are safe; the machines must not have their locations. Then there are other cases. The machines must have been planning, and they've waited for this moment. Some locations are silent."

"All right."

"The other thing is the kinds of Terminators involved." "What? T-800s?"

"Not just T-800s. Even old T-600s. They're throwing everything they have at us. This looks like the start of a new crackdown by the machines."

"Yes. Skynet must have known how much we'd be weakened."

"John, we've had at least five reports of shapeshifting Terminators, like the one that killed Raoul."
"T-1000s?"

"Yes. Skynet. . . or whatever it is . . . is deploying them. You know how hard they are to kill. People are being massacred."

"All right, give me the list of locations. I'll work on this. It's not clear to me, but I'll... I don't know. I'll need to think about it, talk to Danny and some others." For the first time, he was confronted with a problem that was defeating him. This was totally unexpected. "You know how to destroy a T-1000. Get that information out. It's our only chance. Never mind if Skynet taps in on it. Our people will still be better off. They just have to survive."

"All right, that's what we'll do."

"Good. And listen to me, Gabriela, this isn't the end by a long shot. We'll dig in and fight our way through this, just as we always have."

"I know, John. But it's a huge blow. People were thinking we'd won. Now they have to get up and fight all over again."

"Tell me about it. You should have seen what we've been through here, today."

"Yes, John, I know."

"All right, give me the list: the centers, the casualties." Once again, he wondered how much she blamed him for the husband and son that she had lost to the machines. Yet, she'd never complained, just soldiered on. She was entitled to feel some disappointment—even deep disappointment.

"I'll give you what I have," she said.

"Thank you, Gabriela..."

When they were finished, he returned to the inside of the mountain, wondering what to do now. He'd planned to destroy this whole complex, once they were through with Skynet, but now he questioned the wisdom of it. Perhaps they could use its technology.

On Level H, he met with Danny, Juanita, Cecilia, and Carlo. "All right," he said. "It seems we're in trouble. What's the report here?"

"Skynet has gone," Carlo said. "We destroyed its hardware."

"So where are those attacks coming from? What do they mean for us?"

Danny pursed his lips, unwilling to speak, but John told him to. "Okay," he said. "It looks like we've been out-smarted. I've been trying to hack the whole cybersystem in this mountain; Skynet's hardware was just a part of it."

"And?"

Danny shook his head. "There's no trace of Skynet, or what it's done—at least not that I can find. Perhaps some of the Terminators knew its plans, but we've been de-stroying their CPUs. That's the best way to stop them. If one had a mission to assist in this, we'll probably never know."

"Right," John said. He glanced at Carlo. "The ones that protected it on Level B?"

Carlo said, "I wish we'd known about this. No, I don't like our chances. It's like Danny said, we always finish them off by shooting for their CPUs."

"There's no plans that it left behind," Danny said, "nothing I can trace as to where it's gone."

John picked up on that. "Where it's gone? Just what does that mean?"

"I should have thought of this earlier, John. Skynet didn't evolve like us. It may have a different concept of identity. Let me ask you this: If someone made a precise copy of you, then destroyed your existing body, would you feel you'd survived?"

John raised an eyebrow. "You want to discuss philosophy?"

Danny allowed himself a grin. "Say someone came at you to kill you, but you knew the other you existed— you'd defend yourself, right? You'd want to live?"

"Of course I would—the copy isn't me. I'd still want to live." He could see now what Danny was getting at, that Skynet could have made a copy of itself.

"Yeah," Danny said, "well, that might just be a prejudice. You've evolved to protect your body, the physical you. . . not your memories and ideas. A computer consciousness might not think that way."

"Okay, I can see what you're saying."

"Right. I'm saying that Skynet could have alternative hardware somewhere, just waiting for this moment—housed in some backup headquarters. We'd never know if it did. It could transfer itself there, program the hardware with all its memories and experiences, right up to date—and it might be perfectly happy, not like you or me. We keep expecting it to think like us, but it's not *like* us. It's a completely alien kind of mind. Probably smarter than we are. . . anyway, very, very *different*."

"So it's conducting the war from a new HQ?"

"I didn't say that. It's just one possibility."

"Is there a better one?"

"Not that I can think of."

"Well, anyone? Carlo?" John looked around for any theories.

"It sounds right, John," Juanita said. "It's the only theory we've got."

"Probably. Or it could have some kind of machine lieutenant somewhere to take over. . . Look, my hunch is that Danny's right. It's transferred itself somewhere else, probably a site with time displacement equipment, just like here. So now it's sending Terminators all over the place. They've been appearing out of nowhere. Everything that Gabriela told me fits." Damn it, he thought, even as they puzzled it out. Damn it to Hell!

They were beaten. Skynet had suffered huge losses today, but their own losses were even greater. All those lives for nothing.

Sure, they'd fight back. They'd eventually locate Skynet. But the war had gone horribly wrong. If only they had reserves of their own. But they didn't—not enough. Yet that led him to a thought. A crazy, wild thought.

JOHN'S WORLD

CYBERDYNE RESEARCH SITE

COLORADO SPRINGS

AUGUST 2001

Eliske survived. Within a few minutes, she could move normally but it shook them all to see the pain that the mouse had suffered as the effect of time displacement.

Rosanna refused to send it back into the vault, and called for other animals. The effect was always the same: The creatures arrived from their journeys twisting and writhing in desperate agony. But they always survived.

That, at least, was something.

Rosanna kept the mouse, but only as a pet. She still related badly to human beings, and only Jade and Anton could really talk to her. Even then, it was mainly about their work. But she was no longer the heartless psycho she'd become when the T-XA had raped her mind. She'd once referred to human beings as "scum," but not anymore. She had changed again.

On the final day, the whole group gathered round. The five of them who were leaving on a space-time journey wore white cotton robes for modesty. Soon they would shed those, and step into the time vault.

"What will it be like?" John said. "The pain?"

Anton shrugged. "I can't describe it. It's bearable, but only just"

"I've probably been through worse," Sarah said with a touch of bravado. She didn't add anything, and John wondered what she meant—the pain of childbirth, maybe? Or what she'd suffered in 1994, fighting the T-1000, when she'd taken serious wounds? He thought it best not to ask.

Jade listened to this with arms folded. "I will be honest. The pain is very bad. I can control it better than others, but it is even bad for Anton. You should take painkillers before we go, but nothing that could slow your thinking, or your reflexes. We will all need to be alert and capable."

They'd discussed this before, and they knew they had to face it. Rosanna found glasses of water and a packet of painkilling tablets. All of the human time travelers swallowed them carefully: John, Sarah, Anton, even Jade. All—most time to go. As the rest of them watched, Rosanna programmed the time vault. Soon they would power it up, and five of them would leave here, maybe never to return.

Jack shook Sarah's hand, then John's. "Make it back," he said.

"If we do, you won't know about it," Sarah said. "We'll trust you to keep out of our lives—and deal with Cyberdyne."

"Yes, it's our problem, now. We can deal with it."

Sarah looked unconvinced, but there was nothing they could do. Jack had agreed that they destroy the laser rifle and the remains of the T-XA, and they'd seen it done. Rosanna had annihilated them in the time vault. He'd also promised to cremate Selenia's body, and he'd fulfilled that as well. But they knew he'd had samples taken from her tissues. No one could stop him doing that. And he still had the time vault, and Rosanna to work with him. God only knew what they might do with it.

John supposed that the time vault was a prize for Jack and Samantha, something to report to their masters in Wellington. At least the time vault could not be used as a weapon; there was no use in trying to change the past. It couldn't even be used as a teleportation device, not for military purposes... or not on any scale. There was little point in teleporting an army of naked, defenseless soldiers across the world, just to get slaughtered on arrival in enemy territory. Still, Jack and Samantha were driven by one main motive: their plan to transform the U.S. armed forces with extraordinary new technologies. That had its good side. In a dangerous world where freedom had to be protected, but it could also lead to monstrosities like Skynet.

John hoped he could trust Rosanna now. She still wanted scientific immortality—that Nobel Prize, and a place in the pantheon with Galileo, Newton, and Einstein. But she'd seen what could happen with technology. Perhaps the new Rosanna, however much she was the same as the old, would turn out to be a good person and make wiser judgments.

As Rosanna powered up the vault, John felt terror all through his body. He was close to choking with panic, but they had no choice. The engines thrummed beneath their feet, and Rosanna came around from the console to say goodbye.

Sarah offered her hand, and Rosanna shook it. They'd learned to live with each other. John shook Rosanna's hand, too, and Anton clapped her on the shoulder, accepting her as a colleague. Jade embraced her, as Rosanna stood awkwardly, her arms held stiffly at her sides.

Then Rosanna eyed the Terminator, making no move to touch it, or go near it. "Good luck," she said. "Thank you for your help." She frowned thoughtfully, maybe asking herself what use it was thanking a machine.

"No problemo," the Terminator said.

John gave Eve a smile. He'd been teaching the cyborg well.

"I hope we do see you again," Samantha said, looking mainly at Sarah. "I'm glad to have worked with you."

Sarah gave her an appraising look, the "crazy" exile sizing up the well-groomed, clever official, the Pentagon guru who'd been behind so much of their trouble. As she'd done with Jack, then Rosanna, Sarah offered her hand, but that was all. She kept a guarded silence.

Though Jack and Samantha were helping them with their journey, they had their own selfish reasons. The work on the vault had gone ahead at a speed they would have considered impossible. The Specialists had made all the difference. What were John and the others getting in return? The government had not provided servicemen, or done anything official to recognize the existence of Skynet's World. In that sense, they were now on their own. They'd debated it all for days, wondering what they could do to help.

If they ever returned, it would not be to this moment. They would find a point slightly in the future—some time months, or years, ahead. John and Sarah had discussed it from every angle. If they left a gap when they simply didn't exist in this world, that would remove some pressure.

In that time, the cries to find them, charge them, and commit them to trial could die down. Jack and his people could deal with Skynet's mindslaves—do whatever they had to do.

Now to put it all into practice. Perhaps the vault would not function as it should. Perhaps in a minute or two, there'd be no more John—the lights would just go out. He swallowed as he thought of that.

"All right," Rosanna said. "Please enter the vault."

Jade walked first toward the time vault, shedding the robe from her shoulders when she reached its open metal door. Anton followed her, then Sarah, John, and the Terminator. They took up positions on the metal center of the floor all facing outwards from the center to form a star, as seen from above. The metal was cold beneath John's feet. His heart raced as the floor beneath them vibrated; the sound of the engines seemed to go all through him.

Outside the vault, Rosanna entered a code, and the metal door slammed shut, sealing them inside. At the same time, brilliant lights shone from the edges of the vault's ceiling. There was no way out of here, no way back. This was a vacuum-sealed, cubical prison—totally inescapable. Though he'd never suffered claustrophobia, he'd never been *so* hopelessly locked away in a confined space, with no windows, no points of weakness, no way to attract the world's attention.

"Is everyone okay?" he said, trying to make light of it. "So far," Sarah said.

Just why had he volunteered for this, he wondered for the thousandth time. The T-799 could not have forced them to go to its world. They could have sent it away empty-handed. But it seemed that they all recognized a responsibility to that other world, the world that had sent back John's father—a world where Skynet had *almost* been beaten, but still held on. And they recognized the danger of a Skynet triumphant in even one world.

The vault vibrated more strongly. A sense of enormous energies.

Then blinding white light, and terrible pain.

PART SEVEN

SKYNET'S WORLD

CHAPTER

FIFTEEN

COLORADO JULY 2029

They'd sent back the T-800 to 1994 without changing its briefing. John's earlier self didn't need to know how badly the war had turned out, that Kyle Reese's story was wrong. Let them do what they had to do, still feeling hope—a feeling John was fast losing. He had survived in 1994 with the hope that Kyle had given to him and his mother. May it always happen like that, he thought. There was no need to tamper with the past.

But they could send a second Terminator. It was a wild idea, but it could do no harm. Perhaps they could find help from across time. There might be realities where time travel was more advanced, and there'd been no Judgment Day. It was a slender hope.

They'd fight back with every resource they had, until Skynet was finally defeated... even if no help came. But still, there was that hope: so much to gain, perhaps, from an hour or so of work.

He needed to choose a Terminator. Only a Terminator could do the job, living for as long as it took, never growing older.

Carlo pointed. "Why not one of those? We had to fight one on Level B, and it gave us Hell. It seemed to think it was Skynet's personal protector."

"He's right about that," Cecilia said. "That's a tough model."

It was all the same to John. "Yeah," he said. "Why not?"

The Tejadas had chosen one of the white-blond "female" Terminators. Once again, they'd trim its hair to make it look more respectable, using the style of some of the Terminators that they'd destroyed in the fighting. Once back in time, it could find its own clothing, shelter, transport.

Danny and John patched into the circuitry of an ecto-genetic pod, then broke into the Terminator's files. These identified it as a T-799 model, identical to the first cy-borg Terminator that Skynet had designed. John whistled at that. So this design was the original—and maybe still the best if the Tejadas were to be believed. The Terminator's files showed a default name of "Eve" to use with humans, unless it was reprogrammed with a different identity. John passed on that one. Why make a change? "Eve" seemed somehow appropriate. Back in the past, it could use that name, for want of something better. If it needed more, it could learn.

Its files seemed much the same as those of the T-800 that they'd already sent back. If it returned here, with any help for them, it would need to fight T-1000s with them. So John gave it more information on the shapeshifting Terminators, just as he'd briefed the T-800. Then he programmed in its new mission

parameters, keeping them short and simple. The Terminator's CPU had some capacity to interpret natural language, so there was no need to be too precise, but he hoped he'd left no room for misinterpretation.

In the present time, Eve must obey his orders. In the past it must find the younger John Connor, obey his direct orders, but not where inconsistent with its mission. If it found itself in a world without Judgment Day, it must obtain help. John Connor—that other John Connor, in another world—was its contact point.

He gave Eve some last data: a summary of his own movements prior to Judgment Day; as much as he could about Enrique Salceda and his family. Some personal information about himself that few people knew. He instructed the Terminator that Enrique's compound would be John Connor's natural place of retreat. He hoped that applied to the other reality. He gave it a special message for Sarah, if it found her in that other world: *The future is still not set Our world depends on you.*

That was enough. He drained off the nutrient liquid raised the pod to vertical, and opened it.

The T-799 opened its artificial eyes.

John couldn't believe the pain tearing him inside, like huge hooks pulling every way. He vaguely registered the shock of landing hard on some kind of stone. The pain went on and on, and he clung to himself, doubled over as he got to his knees. There were people gathered round, but he could hardly think of that. The T-799 was beside him. What about the others? Were they all right? Anton? Jade? Mom? He looked around. They were all there.

His body seemed to be whole. What was this place? They were on the side of a mountain—that was as it should be. The sky was a dirty gray overhead. No plants. It was like a lunar landscape. He tried to get up, but that was still too much.

The Terminator stood, unwinding from its position elegantly. Jade, too. John just wanted to howl with the pain. His muscles felt torn; his skin felt on fire. Every tooth, every bone ached. He heard Jade say, "We must see John Connor."

They were surrounded by men and women in ragged military uniforms, pointing guns. He recognized some of the weapons as phased-plasma laser rifles, a similar design to the one that they'd had taken from the T-XA. Others had assault rifles. There was shooting from somewhere nearby, and the sound of rocket-propelled grenades being launched. The air was full of strong smells, amongst it sweat, smoke, and ozone... beneath that, it was different in essence from the air of his time. Alien. In this world, so much must have changed.

Anton had also found his feet, then John and Sarah managed to stand. John was hardly conscious of his nakedness, but he folded into himself from the ongoing pain. One woman stepped forward, removed a heavy coat she was wearing, and offered it to Sarah, who must have seemed most vulnerable. Others followed her lead. Now John was starting to recover, he realized it was bitterly cold; almost without him noticing it, his body had started to shiver and his teeth were chattering.

Someone offered him a coat, and he took it.

The first woman said, "You're human, aren't you?"

"Most of us," Anton said. "Near enough."

Someone else said the words, "Sarah Connor."

Jade spoke up. "Listen to me." John had never seen her so commanding. She was in her element, even here, still naked, after the light and the pain. She was like a goddess, or a beautiful fighting machine. "Get us to John Connor quickly. If you can deliver him a message before we see him, do it." She stopped and considered. "Tell him he must activate the time vault. Don't send anything back in time, just keep it activated. I can't explain why, just do it. If you value your lives, do as I say."

More explosions, not that far away. Shouts, the sound of running feet. Someone spoke into a radio. Jade shrugged on a long woolen coat, then embraced John. He realized what she was doing: just giving him her body's warmth. It was so cold here, even in the coat they'd given him. They needed more clothing, quickly. So cold.

Danny watched as an armed escort entered the huge space of Level H. Five people had come to him come from another world. They'd answered the call for help.

They'd all been clothed hastily in fatigues, boots, jackets, and coats, some of them doubtless taken from the dead. Many of the clothes were too big on them, or too tight, but at least they had some protection against the cold. In fact, there were four human beings—plus the Terminator they'd sent back. Danny had been hoping for much more.

Someone had even dressed the Terminator in boots, fatigues, and a tight-fitting sweatshirt, though the machine was immune to cold. It must have been a soldier with a sense of modesty.

It was quiet within the mountain, except for the humming of the engines that controlled the time-travel machinery. The newcomers and their escort approached Danny and John, where they sat on the concrete floor to operate the machinery. Both of them stood, but neither spoke for a moment. John looked at them hard, but he seemed puzzled, just for once, lost for appropriate words.

Danny looked from one of the newcomers to the other. There was the Terminator. Then a six-foot man with gray hair, massively built; even his hands and wrists suggested enormous strength. A young Oriental woman who carried herself like an athlete. A teenage kid who also looked honed and tough. And the woman who was with them. He'd known her when he was younger, until her death, seventeen years before. Even since then, he'd seen countless old photographs and posters. She was younger than when he'd met her, and her hair was in some style that must have been fashionable in her world and time—he'd never seen it like that. But would have recognized her anywhere. Sarah Connor.

And the kid, of course, a few years younger than when Danny had met him.

John.

The Terminator said, "Mission completed."

"Who's your leader?" Danny said, addressing them all generally.

"We don't work like that," the big, gray-haired man said. "Not this group."

The Oriental woman said, "Anton is right. But perhaps you should talk to me. I best know the technology... the time vault." Then she added, "My name is Jade."

John—the forty-four-year-old John that Danny had known all these years and fought alongside—cleared his throat. "I don't know what to say. You came. . ."

"Yes," Sarah said. "We had to."

He looked at her with feelings that Danny could hardly identify. Some mixture of disbelief and admiration. But then he said, "But there's so few of you. Is this the most your world could do for us? I don't want to sound ungrateful."

The teenage John said, "As a matter of fact, you're lucky."

The two John Connors stared at each other in what looked almost like a contest of wills, but was clearly something else. Embarrassment? Curiosity? Sheer astonishment at the situation? Then the older John smiled, and actually broke into a laugh. "Lucky are we? Let's see what you can do."

Sarah Connor walked up to him. For a long moment she simply held his face in her hands.

Jade went to the rigged up controls for the time vault, the screen and keyboard that Danny had set up. She grasped what they were straightaway. Danny followed her as she tried to operate the device.

"I can't do this," she said, sounding angry with herself. "I don't understand the format."

"Let me help you. What do you want to do?"

She looked at him sadly. "Thank you, Daniel."

"You know who I am?"

"Yes, I knew you in another world."

"Call me 'Danny'; there's no need to be so formal."

She seemed to think hard about that. Then she said, "Very well. If you insist. Now here's how you can help..."

* * *

John's pain from the journey across time refused to go away entirely: he was still holding himself stiffly against it, his jaw set. He felt himself wincing when he spoke, but the first agony had passed quickly.

The man he was looking at must be his future self—his future self of Skynet's World. He was as tall as Anton, an inch or two taller than John had grown so far. Big John looked fifty, at least from the lines on his face, but his body seemed lean and fit. His scars and the set of his mouth gave him a hard look. "At

least the machine worked," he said. "The time displacement machine."

"We call it the time vault," John said. The man that Jade was working with was a grown-up Danny Dyson—the Danny of this harsh world after Judgment Day. So how many of John's friends had joined with him in this world as leaders of the Resistance? What about the Tejadas, the Salcedas? Come to think of it, where was his mom in this world? He did a quick calculation. It was 2029. She'd be about sixty-five, or so, if she'd lived this long. Too old for active combat.

"We were hoping for more of you to come," the grown-up John said. "I'm sorry if we sound disappointed. You must have had trouble in your world."

"It's kind of a long story. Where we came from, we're not too popular."

Big John nodded. "You can tell me about it later. You wouldn't have come if you didn't think you could help. So what is Jade doing?"

Sarah had been quiet since she'd first touched her grown, scarred son, but now she said, "John? Can't that wait for a minute?"

Someone else came over, her face creased with pain as she walked, favoring her right leg. She was a tall His-panic woman. She addressed the younger John in what sounded like an affectionate voice. "Hello and welcome." Did he know her? She looked familiar, but only slightly so. If he *had ever* known her, she must have been very different. "I'm Juanita," she added, seeing his confusion. "You might remember me. You knew me when you were a child. Or I hope you did in your world." Her expression showed she was puzzling it out, maybe starting to wonder just when the two worlds might have deviated, how much common experience they shared.

"Juanita Salceda? I saw you last. . . maybe three weeks ago." John laughed. "You were just a kid, then. I guess you were twelve or so." For her age, and what she'd been through, she actually looked pretty good. But he could see she was hurting badly. She and Big John seemed to be close. They weren't touching, but they stood near each other with an easy familiarity.

"I know there's so few of us," Sarah said, "but the machine—the Terminator—told us everything. We can help you." She gestured toward Anton. "Our friends have experience with Skynet and its technology. They'll be worth a lot to you. You'll soon see."

Big John was silent, but then opened his arms to Sarah. "I don't know how this is supposed to work," he said. "In this world, you died. . . years ago, in Buenos Aires, fighting the machines."

"I'm not sure I want to know," she said.

"I think you have to know. You're a hero to my people: A martyr."

"No, that was a different Sarah. I don't know what she did."

"Mother, please. Let's not try to debate it. *Please.*"

They embraced awkwardly. Just a few yards away, Danny Dyson said, "Son of a bitch. We've done it I think we're nearly there."

John went over to him and Jade, leaving his mother and his older self to puzzle out their relationship.

"What is it?" he said, looking mainly to Jade.

"We have data," she said.

Jade was sprawled on the floor with one leg under her and the other stretched out in front, a portable screen beside it, and a keyboard balanced on her thigh. Her fingers danced over the keys, and she worked through masses of information, taking in entire screens of figures with just a glance. Now and then, she stopped to confer with Danny, who was sitting beside her on the floor.

John had hacked many computers himself, and recognized Jade as a master. Soon, a dozen of them were crowded around, watching her silently. Most of the other soldiers leaned in close. He knew some of these people, and some of them obviously felt they knew him. They had that look of waiting for a chance to walk up and greet him. There was Carlo Tejada—and Cecilia, too. He'd last seen their younger versions back in 1997. What about the rest of the Tejada family, he thought—Raoul, Gabriela, Guillermo? In his world, when he'd left it, they'd all been fine. How had their lives gone here?

He was on a shockingly steep learning curve. So much was the same in Skynet's World, but so much had been transformed from what he knew.

His older counterpart, Big John, also looked lost in admiration of Jade's abilities. He must be good with computers, too, John realized. After all, they'd been the same person until May 1994. By that time, John was already a capable hacker; Sarah had taught him a lot, and had seen that he'd learnt even more. As with everything else, she'd always found the best ways to teach him the skills that he needed.

"Since we arrived, there have been more distortions in the Earth's space-time field," Jade said.

"So?" Big John said.

"Skynet is still using space-time displacement equipment. It is sending Terminators on missions. I am trying to analyze the data. We can see where they are going and where they are being sent from."

As Jade worked through more data, hoping to locate Skynet, Anton prowled the huge space around them, checking the broken remains of endoskeletons. John followed him, unsure what else to do. He couldn't help Jade with her work. He was not sure what to say right now to Sarah, Juanita—or, especially, Big John. *Amongst* the wreckage, one intact laser rifle lay on the floor, near the corner furthest from the time vault. Anton picked it up in one hand, feeling its surface with the other. He examined it from all angles. "Good," he said. "I like this weapon. It's similar to what I'm used to."

"What's it like in your world, Anton?"

The big Russian shrugged. "Like we discussed before."

They'd talked about it back in Mexico, when they first met the T-XA, how Skynet had been winning in 2036, when the Specialists were sent back to try to create a new timeline, a world where humanity would survive. "Well, what does it look like, for instance? Is it like this world—all gray sky and stone?"

"In that way, yes."

"Otherways?"

"Otherways, it's the same, but different. Skynet had a disadvantage in this world. In 1997, it can't have controlled *verymuch*. It must have had to build almost from the beginning. In my world, it was further advanced. It already ran the military and the defense factories. When JudgmentDay came, Skynet was everywhere. Then again, have advantages, too, compared with this world's humans." He looked over at Jade, who was signaling to them.

John and Anton hurried back to her. "I've done it," Jade said, looking calm, but far from pleased. "Skynet's location is the Iberian Peninsula—in Spain." She glanced back at the screen. "I have a precise location for it—the center of the space-time distortions."

"The European zone," Big John said. "We need to talk to the local Resistance."

"Can they take out Skynet?" Sarah said. "Do they have those kinds of resources?"

Anton looked at her with a knowing smile. "They do now."

Jade knew that they could help these people. She and Anton could not refuse to give that help, knowing it could make all the difference to their world. Even if their lives were forfeit, they must do what they could to destroy this world's Skynet. There was also a selfish reason, if she'd needed another one.

In this world, Skynet had invented time travel, but had obviously not perfected it. Even the work that she'd done with Rosanna Monk in 2001 was more advanced than that. But it could change so quickly. If Skynet triumphed here, it would soon have no distractions—no war against the humans to concern it. So what else might it do? As it refined its time-travel technology, would it look for other worlds, extinguishing human life in every reality? The Skynet of her own world had started to think along those lines. They could not let Skynet triumph anywhere, in any reality they could identify.

Carefully, she converted her data into a precise latitude and longitude, and gave them to John Connor, the General Connor of this world.

"I'll radio Los Angeles," he said. "We have full details there of all Resistance forces and Skynet's main facilities."

"That location is near Madrid," Jade said.

"Yes, I know it is. And I can tell you now that the European Resistance has forces under the streets of Madrid. Let me find out those details." He scowled to himself. "One way or another, we're going to get some payback.*"

"Whatever you find out, Anton and I will assist you."

Anton was carrying a laser rifle that he'd found somewhere among the wreckage here. He straightened it, getting a feel for its balance; just that gesture was enough to attract attention. "Will they have more of these in Madrid?"

General Connor said, "I expect so. We scavenge them from battles with the machines."

"I'll need two of them."

"I'm sure that can be arranged. Right now, I need to talk to some people. Anyone coming with me?"

"One of us should," Jade said. "Either me or Anton—There are some things we need to brief you on." When she thought about it, she was better placed than Anton having worked with the time vault more closely, both here and back in 2001. "I'll go with you. Anton and I can talk while I'm briefing you."

General Connor raised an eyebrow at that, not knowing about their cybernetic implants.

"There are quite a few things that you need to understand," Jade said.

"All right. Come with me, and we'll talk."

MADRID

Nicolas Escandell entered the Resistance headquarters through a heavy steel door designed to slow down a well-armed Terminator. Two guards saluted him, while their dogs sniffed at his hands and clothing, checking he was human. Once the dogs were satisfied, he walked toward the main radio unit, removing his own headset on the way. The radio operator, a dark-skinned French-woman, stood and saluted him, but he waved her down and spoke to her in Spanish. "What's this message from North America?"

He'd been on patrol, but they'd called him back here to speak to the Resistance in Los Angeles. Up above, at ground level and in the sky, a force of H-Ks and endoskeletons was moving in on them, trying to locate their small Resistance base. It was happening throughout Europe—maybe worldwide. Skynet was hitting back hard, with a frightening new confidence. This was a dangerous time for them all, a storm that they had to endure.

"Gabriela Tejada in Los Angeles wants to speak with you," the Frenchwoman said. "She said it's important—critical to the war."

Nicolas was skeptical about that. The Americans had launched a huge offensive that was meant to stop Skynet once and for all. They'd claimed to have destroyed it, but they'd clearly failed. Now the war computer had begun its own offensive—it must have been planning this. What could the Madrid base do in the face of that? It was too small: just sixty or seventy men, women, and children.

"Get back to her, and we'll talk," he said.

"Yes, sir. Calling now."

Within a minute, they had a radio link to Los Angeles. "Listen to me carefully," Gabriela said, after they exchanged codes. "You know that there were time travelers. That's how Sarah Connor predicted Judgment Day. Given that, I hope you won't doubt what I'm going to tell you. We've captured Skynet's

time displacement equipment. It can also be used to displace objects in space. John Connor and eight others will appear at your base in exactly one hour. You must protect them, then do what John says. This is critical."

"You're confusing me, Gabriela. What do you mean it's critical?" Normally, they avoided this kind of long-distance radio communication, even with well established codes to identify themselves and methods such as calling each other back as confirmation. Skynet and the Terminators could imitate any human voice. They could probably intercept transmissions—and who knew whether Los Angeles had fallen to the machines in this new offensive? He'd called Gabriela this time, so he had to assume her voice was genuine, but he didn't like this situation at all.

"It's critical to hit back at Skynet," she said. "We need to use your base."

"Why Madrid? Why would Connor want to come here?"

Because yours is now the nearest base to Skynet. John will explain when he gets there. Just listen, and I'll tell you what you need to know. They have to travel naked so they'll be defenseless when they arrive. We're counting on you to clothe, protect and arm them. We know your capacities there, and we know they'll be stretched. But you can do what's required. The personnel we're sending will help you."

"Yeah, sure," Nicolas said. "It's a war zone here, Gabriela. You're telling me a bunch of naked people are going to come and help us attack Skynet? This is getting a bit fantastic, you know. Right now, we're being hunted ourselves."

"Just do it, soldier. We're all depending on you. You have an assault helicopter—is it operational?"

"It's a modified Sikorsky Black Hawk—it's operational, but how do we fly it when the skies and the streets are alive with H-Ks? I've got two aerial H-Ks fly-ing around here right now. There's a land H-K backing it up, and about forty endos."

"We don't have any choice."

"Great. And that chopper is stored five miles from here. How am I supposed to get to it with all this going There was a prolonged sigh at the other end of the link. Then Gabriela said, "I'm sorry to drop this on your people, but it has to be done. Everything depends on it."

"Yeah, right." He had no choice, it seemed. *Every-thing depends on it*, they said. Well, it was time to plan quickly. He still had observers up there at street level, hiding away from the H-Ks, checking their activities. They'd do their best with this crazy scheme. "I'll do it," he said. "It doesn't mean I like it." "Here's how it's going to happen..."

COLORADO

Nine of them would enter the time vault. John tried not to think about the pain, and what might await them at the other end of the journey. He watched Big John making farewells, walking around, shaking hands, trying to look relaxed. His people still had faith in him, despite the blows the Resistance had suffered today. Some of them offered jokes, or wanted to touch him. Others simply shook hands,

solemnly, experiencing the moment

Jade had been refining the coordinates for their spatial displacement. They had to get as close to the Madrid base as they possibly could, not be flung across the city, easy fodder for marauding war machines. John sat beside her. "How's it going, Jade? Do you think we'll make it?"

"I don't know," she said, not looking up from the screen. "We have enough resources, but many things can go wrong. The first few minutes will be critical."

"I guess so."

"All we can do is prepare. Preparation above everything."

"I know." That's what he would do, he thought. It must be what Big John had done, through all those years before and after Judgment Day—preparing to fight the machines. And Sarah, too, training herself and John, year after year, turning him into a leader. "So how close do you think you can get us?"

She entered some final data, then put down the key-board. "We have a precise location in the city. I think we can get within a one-mile radius. Maybe better. I could run that distance in less than three minutes if needed. But this will not be easy."

He gave a smile. "You're not a great optimist, are you Jade?"

She regarded him frankly, in return. "No, John, I am not. For many people, optimism is good. It helps them accomplish things. But that is not for me. I don't think that way, or need any optimism. I look at reality precisely, and I prepare for it. That is best."

"Well, for you maybe..."

That is all I mean. If you want to be friends with me, you have to understand. For me, many things are not the same. My mind is different from yours."

"Yeah, okay. I can live with it."

"I hope you can, John." Her eyes seemed to search his. "Not many people can. Not in my world. . .and I doubt that yours is different."

"Or *this* one," John offered.

"Yes, or this one." She looked away from him to survey the room, watching Big John in action. "I could never lead like him," she said. "I don't have his touch with . . . ordinary people. It's not that I wouldn't want to."

He felt on thin ice here. He could see what she meant, that she didn't look down on others—but she was so superior to them, saw things so much more clearly. It must make it hard to relate. "Well," he said. "You've got your own sort of role. You take over at all the right times, when we need you to. Maybe some others are better for the times in between—like Big John, there."

For a change, her smile looked really pleased. "Is that what you call him?"

He shrugged, and smiled back. "I have to call him something, don't I?"

"Come on, John, we must get ready." She stood in a beautiful, fluid movement, then offered him a hand up. He took it gratefully, and they joined the group of people who were going with them.

They made some last arrangements, then it was time to go. Some leaders would have to stay here, to keep control of the army. At any rate, some were wounded already—they could not be asked to make the vast journey in space, then fight a last-ditch battle. Someone who understood the time vault needed to stay just in case they needed it any further.

Danny Dyson, Cecilia Tejada, and Juanita Salceda assumed joint command here, in Big John's absence. He shook hands with each of them. "Wish us luck," he said, holding Juanita's hand in both of his.

"Come back to us, John—and all of you," she said.

Jade removed her clothing at the door of the time vault, then entered it first. The others followed, first Anton, then Big John, Sarah, and Carlo; John, then Eve, and finally two of the best young warriors from the Resistance, Neal Crawford, and Xavier Tenez. Crawford was a tall, raw-boned guy, maybe about twenty, with light brown hair. Tenez was younger, but broad across the shoulders, with a wiry athleticism. They both looked keen and intelligent. John figured they'd be fine to work with on the mission.

For the second time in one subjective day, he waited to be displaced in space-time. This vault was slightly larger than the one that Rosanna had constructed in his own world, in the basement of the Cyberdyne research site. Some of the equipment tucked into the corners looked strange, subtly different from any human design. In all, however, it was frighteningly familiar, so like what he'd seen before. There mustn't be too many ways to design something like this. He remembered the pain, and braced himself for the worst.

Danny closed the huge door, and now they were alone, sealed off from the rest of the world.

"Watch out for the first few seconds," Jade said with the calm voice of someone explaining a point about cooking, or growing roses. "If we survive that long, we have a real chance."

"Is that the good news?" Big John replied.

Then came the white light.

MADRID

Two miles away to the northeast, an aerial H-K's lights swept the shattered streets of the city, looking for human prey. There was another, three miles to the west. The machines hunted with visual light cameras, infrared scopes, and a vast array of other sensors. Nicolas kept down behind a broken stone wall, about three feet high, crawling on his belly and knees as he scanned for any disturbance, using night vision devices. Now and then, a radio report came through his headset as a second team kept its eyes out for General Connor and his people.

There were four of them in this team, checking the area north of the Resistance base. They shivered, even in the heavy fabric of their gray uniforms. "One minute to go," Varley said on his left, speaking in her halting Span-ish. She was a thirty-year-old woman from what had once been England.

"Counting down," said Arnaud, on his right. "My God, it's cold."

The tall, gray-haired Frenchman loved complaining, and he was old enough to have grown up before Judgment Day. He knew what the climate should be like at this time of the year, here in the heart of Spain. Once, Madrid would have been fiendishly hot in late July. Now the year was one long winter, too cold for survival from November to May. Still, the ruins of the city made a useful base from which to harass Skynet's factories and supply lines. Despite the warheads of Judgment Day, which had annihilated most structures, enough cover remained to aid them in the struggle against the machines.

The fourth member of the team was another Spaniard, Luis Martinez. He stifled a cough, but was otherwise silent.

To Nicolas, this mission seemed like suicide. So far, the war machines had not sensed their presence, but that could change at any moment. They'd be observed as soon as they showed themselves openly. Going up against the H-Ks and other machines was foolishness. The scattered Resistance cells in Spain relied on sabotage and stealth. They lacked the strength for open warfare.

"Five seconds," Varley said.

"Ready now," Nicolas replied, tensing to run for one of the Humvees that they'd hidden in the shadows at the corner of two walls from an old government building. The Madrid Resistance had a small fleet of land vehicles modified road cars fitted out with phased-plasma laser weapons and high-powered machine guns; some similarly fitted four-wheel drives; a few old armored troop carriers and Humvees, whose engines were maintained lovingly. If General Connor and the others appeared, those Humvees would be their rescue vehicles.

Varley said, "Now!"

As if in answer, it began. Half a mile away, almost due north across the rust and dust of the city, among the broken-off buildings and car husks, white and blue flashes lit up the starless night sky. These were not the straight bolts of coherent light from laser cannons, but the twisting, dancing forms of an electrical discharge.

"All right," Nicolas said to the other two. "Let's go." He spoke into his headset calling for another team, which broke off from its observation point fifty yards distant, as Nicolas, Varley, Arnaud, and Martinez sprinted to the open-top Humvees. They took one each — getting into the drivers' seats.

As they started the motors, the four from the other team reached them, panting, ready to fight. They took the rear spaces in the vehicles, acting as gunners. Nicolas pressed hard on the accelerator, swung the wheel violently to the right, and headed in the direction of the lightning that they'd seen. The other Humvees followed, driving desperately over the broken ground, dodging wreckage, bouncing as their paths dipped down, or rose sharply, or as they ran over crumbled metal, brick, rubble, and bone. The aerial H-Ks must have spotted them, for they wheeled from their previous paths, heading straight toward them. The land H-K and accompanying endos were all too close.

Nicolas and his soldiers had only seconds to get to General Connor's team, bundle them all aboard, try to wrap them in blankets and basic clothing, and get the hell out of there without being followed to their

base by the H-Ks. They had spare weapons and nightvision de-vices; if needed, they'd fight their way back. Yeah, he thought, against all those machines. Why didn't they give him something hard to do?

Somehow the pain was not as bad as the first time, perhaps because John knew it would end. But it still wracked his body and took away his concentration. The displacement effect generated heat. At first, he didn't feel the cold in the air, but he knew it would soon come and grip his body. He started counting seconds. How long until the local Resistance could get to them? Would the war machines reach them first?

"Stay down!" Anton said sharply. "Choose a point of cover, and get to it"

Counting the seconds: twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. . . Still the pain, but he could move his back, his limbs. He dived forward as an aerial H-K flew toward them. They were out of its range, but not for long. He squeezed into a gap between piles of broken masonry. But it was ice cold to the touch, and now the cold was seeping into his bones.

"Where the hell are you?" Big John said, nearby in the dark. "Come on, get us out of here."

It was so dark that John could see almost nothing except the lights of two aerial H-Ks, getting closer from different directions. He couldn't tell who was with him except for the sound of their movements and their voices. He seemed to know Sarah's movements, and Jade's, almost instinctively, but not the others, at least not in these conditions.

Counting: sixty... sixty-one. As he looked around in the dark, rubbing his arms to try to get some warmth, he saw the four sets of headlights approaching, and heard the sounds of auto engines. The lights moved back and forward as the vehicles weaved erratically, with one of the flying H-Ks now on their tail. The H-K spat laser fire, lighting up the sky. It occurred to John that he would never strike a blow at Skynet, never take it down. He was going to die here, in this hellhole of cold, dark, and fire raining down.

The vehicles were fighting back with laser fire of their own; one had an anti-aircraft gun, whose muzzle flashes added to the night's pyrotechnics. The second vehicle in line was hit by a pulse of laser light; it burst into flames, spun out of control, and stopped. Retaliatory laser light from another vehicle cut across the underside of the H-K, but seemed to have little effect. Both H-Ks were now close, and circling for the kill as the three remaining vehicles skidded to a halt, still firing up at the aerial monsters.

"Get in, quickly!" someone said in Spanish, a language that John spoke fluently. John scrambled into the back of one of the first vehicles to reach them—he saw, in the headlights, that they were old Humvees. There was pushing and shoving, a door opening. Their Humvee got the hell out of there.

John found himself squeezed in the same space as Jade, plus another man, who shoved boots, socks, fatigues, and blankets their way. John wrapped a blanket around himself in the dark; there was no time to do more. From only a few hundred yards away, he now heard the heavy sounds of a land H-K grinding down everything before it under its tracks.

The H-Ks swooped in tandem like two hawks. The Humvee gunner was returning fire from a mounted laser rifle. One of the other vehicles hit some kind of a bump, spun out of control and crashed against something solid. Two laser bolts hit it. Three more bolts struck the remaining vehicle, which also went spinning wildly.

John's driver swerved, braked, and accelerated like a maniac, but the H-K's bolts came within inches. He heard words exchanged in the dark beside him, then some quick scuffling as Jade seized the laser rifle from their gunner. She hit one H-K unerringly again and again, no matter how much their vehicle weaved. Suddenly, the H-K exploded in a burst of flame; fast-moving metal fragments struck the other flying H-K, which made a slow, looping dive. It crashed into the ground with a huge tearing noise, but no fire or explosion.

As they slowed for a moment to get over a sharp drop in the road, Jade leapt out. John checked who was here. The two of them had squeezed in the back with the gunner. Big John was in the front compartment, along with the driver.

"Mom?" John called out. He realized Sarah was in one of the other Humvees, all of which had been shot. And what about the others?

"I will find her, John," Jade said. And then she raced off, still unclothed.

"Get us back to your base," Big John said to their driver. "Radio for help, but get us back there."

Jade accelerated. She'd wrapped a blanket round her shoulders as some protection against the cold, but she still felt its bite on her bare limbs. Still, she could endure. She sprinted on the broken ground, cutting and bruising her feet, but blocking out the pain. She would soon heal.

Three of the four Humvees had been taken out in a matter of minutes. With her enhanced senses, she'd seen clearly what had happened. One had been destroyed before it reached them—hit by a series of laser bolts. She *is* there first, in case there were survivors. As she ran, she spoke to Anton, subvocalizing into her throat mike. He gave her bad news: Carlo Tejada was dead. Another good man lost.

Jade had not bothered with nightvision devices when they were offered to her. Her eyes could use minimal light and she saw deep into the infrared range. She could operate in all but total dark. She reached the first Humvee in twenty seconds and checked it out quickly. The gunner had been incinerated by a direct laser-bolt hit to the chest. The driver had been hit in the abdomen, and she, too, was dead. The engine had been destroyed by several hits.

She found some clothes that the rescuers had brought; quickly she pulled on a pair of fatigues, a pair of boots, and a thin woolen jacket. That gave her some protection. She ran for the next Humvee, where Anton was. He and Sarah had pulled on some clothes, and Sarah had a set of nightvision devices, a primitive design, alien to Jade's eyes. Sarah had picked up a laser rifle, which she looked eager to use. Anton stood ready to fight, holding a laser cannon that he'd disconnected from its mounting.

"Well done," he said, referring to the aerial H-Ks that Jade had taken out. "That evens things up."

"I will try to do more," Jade said.

The Humvee's driver seemed okay, but the gunner had hurt her leg when the vehicle crashed. She was moaning in pain, and obviously out of action. Carlo's body was still in the Humvee. Jade looked him over quickly. Poor Carlo—she'd met his counterpart in her own world, though *this* man had never known her. His body had been pierced vertically by laser fire that had entered near his jaw. He must have died

instantly. He'd come so far and been so close to victory. What a waste of lives there'd been!

"We've radioed for help," Jade said. "There'll be more vehicles to pick you up."

"I've called, too," the driver said in Spanish, a language that Jade knew imperfectly, but she could get by. He was a small, wiry-looking man with salt-and-pepper hair.

"We have to deal with a land H-K and several groups of endoskeletons," Jade said. She considered what else might be needed. They had to attack Skynet with every-thing they had. "The machines will have traced your paths. Talk to your commanders. Tell them we need every weapon that might stop an endoskeleton, or a Terminator. We need laser rifles, grenade launchers, RPG tubes, phased-plasma grenades."

"They know that."

Tell them again. Every weapon they can find."

Anton subvocalized to her to say they'd already dealt with it. She subvocalized back, "He can reinforce the message."

She ran again, heading for the last Humvee, where she knew that Eve had survived. She'd seen the Terminator hit in the shoulder by a laser bolt, but that would not be enough to destroy it. Once more, she assessed the situation. Eve's shoulder flesh had been largely burnt away, and the hyperalloy endoskeleton showed through. Crawford had also been hit, and was dead. A laser bolt had pierced the engine compartment, so the Humvee was undrivable. Tenez had pulled on clothing and sat shivering in the dark with the other surviving humans: the driver and the gunner. Eve had removed the Humvee's main weapon from its mounting. This was a 40mm. anti-aircraft gun. The T-799 had wrapped itself with belts of ammunition, and also wore a laser rifle strapped across its chest.

To Jade's heightened senses, the sounds of the land H-K and several groups of endos approaching were like the thud of heavy footsteps in a nearby room. Within minutes, they'd all be under ground attack. "You have an assault helicopter," she said to the driver. "Where is it?"

"Five miles," he said, "a little less, from here." Jade calculated. A little less. She could run that distance in thirteen or fourteen minutes on a straight road. Over this terrain it would be harder. Still, she could be quick. She could break into the controls and start the Helicopter, get back here...

She made a decision. "Do you have nightvision devices?" The man sounded French, so she spoke to him in his language.

"Yes."

"You're going to guide me. I apologize for the indignity. Jump on my back. Don't argue; just do it"

He weighed 180 pounds. For Jade, that was not too heavy. She ran.

CHAPTER

SIXTEEN

MADRID

July 2029

At the base, soldiers ran everywhere, getting weapons. Others gathered the non-combatants—young children, old people, pregnant women, those who were sick or wounded—to take them to a deeper level underground. John had put on several layers of clothing and armed him-with an M-16 and grenade launcher. He'd found a vest to pack a dozen 40mm. impact grenades, distributing all the weight as well as he could. Big John carried a laser rifle across his chest and had an RPG tube strapped on his back with two rocket-propelled grenades. They ran up several flights of stairs to reach the doors onto the outside world. John went with Big John, Nicolas Escandell, and Carlo. "We've got endos coming every side," Escandell said. "There's one big group supporting the land H-K—and several smaller groups converging. Right now they outnumber us."

John could see that was right, when you counted just able-bodied soldiers.

"I know," Big John said. "Normally, I'd say we were doomed."

Escandell grinned in appreciation. "It helps taking out those H-Ks. Let's say we'll go down fighting."

"We don't have to go down at all. We're going to win this battle."

Sarah's teeth chattered with the cold, but she couldn't even think about that. Let her body do what it wanted— she had come here to fight. The land H-K was coming straight toward them, firing at their positions. It had an escort of endoskeletons, maybe twenty. Anton got a clear shot with the laser cannon he'd taken from their Humvee. He took out one endo, but the land H-K traced his fire and shot back precisely, almost hitting him as he leapt to one side. Sarah and Martinez—their Humvee's driver—inched from cover point to cover point, hoping for reinforcements before it came to a pitched battle with the machines. Anton fired twice more with the laser cannon, but failed to make another kill. He dropped the laser cannon, then followed them, carrying the wounded gunner.

They'd had to leave Carlo behind. It angered Sarah deeply—this man had deserved better than to die that way, thousands of miles from his home, without even a burial. She would get her share of those evil, grinning skeletons, even if she died herself.

Nicolas Escandell drove in a modified pick-up to the group with the woman he'd been told was Sarah Con-nor—some Sarah Connor from another world. This all seemed crazy, but there was no time to question it. There was no answer from Varley when he tried to call her—both occupants of that vehicle were probably dead. There'd been one death in the other vehicle, but noone wounded to pick up.

He found Anton, Sarah, Martinez, and their wounded gunner. They climbed aboard, and Nicolas rushed back to finish the preparations. To make a stand, they'd chosen a point close to their base's

above-ground entrance. There was plenty of cover there. They lined up their vehicles and their biggest guns for an all-out battle. From what he'd seen of these newcomers—the way the woman they called Jade had dealt with the two aerial H-Ks—perhaps they had a chance. As he'd said to General Connor, they'd go down fighting.

Six endoskeletons were closing in on Eve and the three humans who had fallen into its care. As they fell back, Eve drew fire from the endos. They seemed to be confused at being confronted by a Terminator. They fired at its body as if at a human being, not aiming straight for the CPU. Eve absorbed several hits, which burned away flesh and skin, without seriously damaging the combat chassis underneath.

Eve sprayed the endos with rapid fire from the anti-aircraft gun it was carrying, slowing down their advance and frustrating their aim, but not doing them major harm. One lost some fingers and dropped its laser rifle. The T-799 kept blazing away, knocking out the endo's visual sensors, chipping into its motors, rendering it helpless. Eve pivoted left, to chip away at a second endo, leaving it blinded and crippled.

As the humans ran, the Terminator's huge gun jammed. Eve threw it down and advanced on the endos, firing with the laser rifle slung around its neck. It was an unequal battle. Eve was an advanced-design Terminator the equal of any of Skynet's endoskeletons—but not the equal of four of them. They soon assessed the situation and aimed precisely for Eve's head. The Terminator took out one more endo with two clean head shots at close range. Return fire burnt out its CPU.

The T-799 was terminated.

John drove an old Ford pickup truck, while Big John sat in the back, ready to fire. They saw what happened as they reached Tenez and the two with him. Eve had been destroyed.

"Nooooooooo!" John said. He knew the T-799 was only a machine, but it had fought for humanity and it had saved his life. Why did everything always have to be destroyed?

Tenez and the others clambered in the back with Big John, and they got out of there, headed back to their main position. John drove as fast as he dared, dodging randomly to confuse the fire from the pursuing endos. In the back, Big John returned their fire, but no direct hits were scored by either side.

Not far away, John had seen Escandell pick up Sarah, Anton, and the others. They were consolidating, but could they win? The odds still seemed bad, especially with Eve gone. Where was Jade?

The man gave his name as Arnaud. He helped Jade re-move the dirty tarpaulins and layers of junk that camouflaged the Black Hawk behind the walls of what remained of a huge department store. Even standing in ruins, a city the size of Madrid offered many hiding places, though nothing escaped the endos forever. A base such as this one must always be observing the machines' actions, moving from quarters to quarters, finding new hiding spots for whatever military hardware they managed to amass.

Arnaud stared in wonderment at Jade's speed, strength, tirelessness, but he did not comment. Jade assessed the Black Hawk's weapon systems and reserve ammunition, took the pilot's seat, and forced the mechanism to start the motor, giving it a minute to warm up. She'd never flown precisely this kind of machine, but the logic of its controls was transparent to her. "Very well," she said in French. "You're my gunner."

"Certainly."

"Then we will go."

She took the Black Hawk into the air and flew it across the city toward the fighting, hoping she was not too late. The endos were converging on the humans' position from several directions; about half of them were escorting a ground H-K, which was spitting bolts of laser light from its turrets, absorbing the counterfire from the humans. It was time to hit back hard. The machines did not expect an attack from the air. At Jade's command, Arnaud fired three armor-piercing Hellfire missiles at their target; they blasted toward it at 950 mph. The ground H-K never had a chance.

Jade circled, then swept back to deliver four more missiles into the ranks of the endoskeletons. With the aerial H-Ks gone, Skynet's forces in the city were no match for a weapons platform like this. She climbed out of range of the answering fire from their laser rifles. Some of the endos were too close to the humans' positions for Arnaud to target them directly, but Jade *as-sessed* that about twenty had been destroyed by that salvo of missiles, quite enough to turn the tide.

One more strike. Arnaud launched two more missiles at another group of five endos which were still well distant from the humans. This was surgical work, quickly cutting away some of the evil in this world. That much accomplished, Jade found a sufficiently flat space, half a mile from the battlefield. The copter's huge rotors lifted dust and stones as she landed it.

"Do you know the way to the factory that we want? Skynet's factory?"

Arnaud nodded quickly.

"Stay here, then. We're going to need you." |

Her cut and bruised feet had already recovered. De-spite her exertion since arriving here, she had plenty of energy left. She found a laser rifle, then sprinted back to the humans. The Black Hawk bristled with two mini-guns, one mounted at the window on each side. Its hold contained stores of ammunition and explosives. Among them were more Hellfire missiles, a spare set of sixteen.

Their next target was Skynet.

Jade's air strike had greatly reduced the odds, but the last endos kept coming, and it was hard to take them out cleanly. John got the idea of it from watching the more experienced fighters like Escandell and Tenez, both of whom fought like demons. He aimed from cover behind a six-wheeled armored vehicle, choosing an endo fifty yards away; he fired an impact grenade from the M-203 launcher mounted on his rifle. It scored a glancing hit, and the grenade exploded, blasting the endo off its feet, but that didn't totally stop it.

Some mechanism in its legs had been damaged and it struggled to find its feet, then came toward him again, with an ungainly limping walk. It raised its laser rifle and fired in his direction, pinning him down, but he heard the sound of a phased-plasma firing mechanism, and someone returned fire at the endo. It turned to its new enemy, tracing their location with pinpoint precision, shooting off bolt after bolt of coherent light. John had four grenades left. He loaded one more in his launcher, leaned out from his cover point to aim... and squeezed the trigger. The impact grenade struck directly, blasting the endo in two at the waist. It dragged itself forward, but it was no threat to any able-bodied soldier. Concentrated laser fire from several directions finished it off.

Sarah ran from a point of cover over on his right to join him. "We got that evil sucker, John." He realized that she had drawn its fire after the first grenade, then been one of the ones to finish it off.

"Hey, Mom... yeah, we blew it away."

Dangerous though they were, the endos were now doomed. In this kind of firefight, exchanging shots at a distance with explosive and phased-plasma weapons, their resilience gave them little edge over the humans. Though they'd converged from all sides, surrounding the Resistance fighters, their numbers were now thinned to about ten, no longer enough to pose a serious threat, though enough to wreak enormous damage if they got closer. At close range, they would gain a huge advantage. You couldn't fight them hand-to-hand or with ordinary firearms.

Anton seemed to be everywhere in the battle, relying on his speed as well as strength, rushing from point to point in an accelerated blur. He was only one man, but he was inspiring them. If they all held together, they could win this battle.

Behind him, John heard a scream and turned to see a Resistance soldier struck through the chest and shoulder by a laser bolt, as she stood to fire from behind an old, rusted vehicle. Within the same second, another took her, and her whole body seemed to light up like a flare. Two endos approached from that direction, their skulls swiveling, firing off shot after shot. One second later, they killed two more human soldiers. John turned his head in dismay: so many had to die.

"Get down!" Anton shouted. "*Right* down!" John and Sarah rolled beneath the armored vehicle, seeing what Anton was doing. He twisted the ignition mechanism on a phased-plasma grenade, tossing it with all his strength toward the two endos. It exploded in an orange fireball, taking out both machines. As John rolled out from under cover, he saw Anton still standing, despite the shock wave. John tried to count how many endos were left. He couldn't spot them all, but it must be just six or eight. But people were being killed, too. They would win this battle, yet how many soldiers would be left to fight the next one?

Someone was running toward them, firing with a laser rifle, hitting an endo neatly in its skull with several shots fired at high speed. It had to be Jade—they'd had messages from her, via Anton, and from her driver. As she ran, endos returned fire at her, and four soldiers who'd been pinned down fired in their direction. One of them was Big John, who'd sheltered behind a ten-foot-high block of twisted metal wreckage. Jade threw herself at the ground and scurried for cover.

"Jade needs our help," Anton said.

Big John ran over to them. "What's happening?"

Anton looked him up and down, gripped him by the shoulder. "Come with us. This is your chance to end it forever."

Jade reached them, as Anton shouted directions, pointing to John and Sarah, "You come, and you." He called to Tenez to join their team. Jade flung herself to the ground, skidding on her stomach, oblivious to what damage it might do to her body.

Escandell saw what was happening. He shouted something from his position in the back of his modified pickup. Whatever it was, he seemed to be waving them on. He returned to firing a mounted anti-aircraft

gun, coking satisfied at how the battle had gone. Soon it would be over.

Sarah crawled into the front of the armored car, slid over to the driver's side, and took the wheel. There was still a key in the ignition. John followed Sarah, while Big John climbed in the back, followed by Anton and Tenez. Jade got to her feet, fired two shots at an endo approaching from behind their cover, then squeezed in last as Sarah accelerated out of there. Laser bolts strobed past on either side of them, as she found a gap in the endos' thinned ranks. She wrestled with the heavy wheel, the car skidding and scraping on dust and debris.

"Straight ahead now," Jade said.

"Yes," Sarah said. "I can see it."

In a minute, they reached the Black Hawk. Sarah slammed the brakes, and the car stopped with a jolt. Jade was out of there first, sprinting the last yards to the helicopter. She climbed into the pilot's seat, and got the chopper started, as the rest of them scabbled after her.

Arnauld greeted them in Spanish. "It's forty miles north of here. A big factory for machines. I can show you the way."

"I've waited decades for this moment," Big John said.

In another minute, they were airborne, leaving the battle behind, headed for the mountains. Flying in darkness, into unknown territory.

NORTH OF MADRID

They tracked close to the ground as they approached Skynet's factory, flying across high, rocky terrain with no lights or radio contact. Within twenty minutes, Jade had found her target. The factory was built into a mountain, but not deep underground like Skynet's headquarters in Colorado. Skynet had no reason to think that they knew its location. All the prospects were good.

They kept their distance, keeping out of range of laser fire. Seven Hellfire missiles remained. It was time to spend them wisely.

The factory covered acres, with a block-shaped building jutting out of the mountain. A road led up to it with an entrance protected by a high fence with guard towers. She could see endoskeletons, moving about like ants, guarding the facility, and an aerial H-K rose from a flat expanse of ground to meet them.

Sarah and Anton had taken positions behind the Black Hawk's mini-guns. John and Xavier Tenez sat on the floor further back in the chopper, ready to fight when they landed. John found an ammunition box with half a dozen phased-plasma thermal grenades. He stuffed three of the cylindrical canisters—all that would fit—down the front of his shirt.

Big John locked one of their missiles onto a guard-tower where several endos milled about. He launched

the missile, then Jade climbed away from the aerial H-K that was coming after them. Laser cannon fire stabbed up at them from the ground, but at this range the armored Black Hawk withstood it. The missile struck, lighting up the mountainside with a sudden flash.

But the aerial H-K came after them, firing its laser cannons. Several bolts hit them, burning holes in the side of the Black Hawk. Jade held their position, and An-ton got a clear shot with his mini-gun. He fired, sending hundreds of rounds per minute into the enemy machine.

From the pilot's seat, Jade called out, "We have to go down now. We are too damaged to fly."

Anton kept firing, then called out in his loud, accented voice. "Hey, bullseye!"

As the Black Hawk rocked from side to side, John rushed to the side door—the H-K dropped below them, seeming to struggle for altitude, its engines damaged. It was clearly not designed to attack an enemy at higher altitude; no laser fire came their way.

"We've got to finish it off," John said.

Big John strode to the door in two steps, steady on his feet, even as the chopper began to vibrate. "Fire in the hole," he said, as he armed his RPG tube; John and the others hit the floor as he fired, leaning away from the back blast. There was an explosion, and the light of a fireball through the Black Hawk's door.

"It's going down," Anton said.

From up in front, Jade called out, "We have rotor damage. We cannot fly much longer. We must use the last missiles. Right now!"

Jade and Big John found targets for the other six mis-siles, hitting guardtowers, a group of endos, a point on the facade of the factory where the laser cannon fire had come from. Seconds later, the explosions were satisfy-ing, but more laser fire came from below.

"I see four endoskeletons down there," Jade said. "They are armed with laser rifles. We will have to land among them." She was aiming for the point where the H-K had taken off; John could see that it was their best landing zone.

Anton and Sarah blazed away with their mini-guns, trying to suppress the endos as they landed. "Got one," Sarah said. "Eat this, suckers." The sound of the rotors changed; Jade had cut the power to them.

They hit the ground with a hard jolt, but squarely on their landing wheels, and Anton rushed out the left-hand door, firing at the nearest endo. He had a laser rifle in one fist, in the other a phased-plasma grenade. One bolt of laser light drilled the endo in a glowing red "eye." Two shots destroyed its CPU. The rest of them followed Anton, overwhelming the last two endos with their num-bers—Sarah took one out with a clean head shot. Tenez shot out the other's eyes, but a shot from the endo pierced his abdomen, and he cried out in extreme pain. He fell violently to the ground, like he'd been thrown down, and cursed in Spanish, writhing on the ground.

"Someone look after him," Big John said. Jade and Arnaud had left the cockpit, and Arnaud rushed to help Tenez.

There was now a huge gap in the facade of Skynet's factory, the metal supports grotesquely twisted, the base of the building a pile of shattered, fallen masonry. Two humanoid figures appeared there, firing laser

rifles. The figures were silvery, unclothed, sexless beings, moving with an uncanny lightness of step. Without hesitation, John fired an impact grenade into the nearest one's body.

"Polyalloy Terminators," Jade said.

John already knew that: They were T-1000s.

The grenade's explosion threw the Terminator off its feet and distorted its body in a bizarre shape, one arm growing long and thin from shoulder to elbow. Sarah fired at its laser rifle as it lay on the ground, melting the mechanism. Anton, Jade, and Big John all fired together at the second T-1000, but it caught Anton with a laser bolt that penetrated his arm near the elbow. He cried out and fell back against the side of the Black Hawk. The others continued to burn the T-1000 with laser light as it sprinted at them. It slowed under the burning light, and a laser bolt destroyed its rifle, but its momentum carried it close to Jade. The T-1000's arm became a long sword-like blade which stabbed at Jade with frightening speed, piercing her through the body above her kidney, even as she flinched aside.

Jade fell down, rolling away from more attacks, allowing Sarah a clear shot at the Terminator. She fired laser bolt after laser bolt into it at point-blank range, forcing it back, vaporizing metal from its surface with each hit that she scored. She advanced on it now, her look intense, angry, determined. Jade found her feet, troubled over in pain, but still alive; the Specialists were very hard to kill.

Big John still had one rocket-propelled grenade. He loaded his RPG tube, and fired into the body of the other T-1000 as it stood, fully recovered, to attack them. The grenade penetrated the Terminator's stomach, then exploded. The T-1000 splashed out into a freeform shape, like an inkblot, and seemed to have trouble reforming.

John saw to Anton. The big man was still alive; he was no longer even showing pain. John had seen before how tough he was, when they'd fought the T-XA in Mexico City and Los Angeles. He looked in no condition to fight on, but he said, "There's work to do."

Tenez was no longer moving. Another good man had died. With the Frenchman, Arnaud, John lifted the body into the rear of the damaged Black Hawk. "You radio for help," John said to Arnaud. "We'll need it to get out of here." He just hoped that the Nicolas Escandell and his people had finished their job back in Madrid.

They had to end it now. Jade joined in firing again and again at "Sarah's" T-1000, gradually burning it away. Whatever pain she was in from the wound she'd suffered, her face showed only an intense determination to destroy the shapeshifting Terminator. She and Sarah were defeating it. John raced toward the building. The other T-1000 had almost reformed, but its metal was still soft as he passed it. He rammed a phased-plasma grenade deep into its body, then threw himself amongst the rubble at the front of the factory. He didn't look back to see the effect on the T-1000. He figured even *that* would not destroy it, but it might slow it down for some minutes.

When he picked his way through the rubble into the factory, it was like Level H, back at Skynet's Colorado headquarters: Another huge expanse of concrete with strange machines and equipment. The devastation went for twenty yards into the complex, but most of it was intact beyond that point. Against the furthest wall was a cubical structure that John recognized as a time vault. There were production lines and arrays of ectogenetic pods. He heard a whirring sound ahead, some kind of machinery, and scrambled for cover an instant before two laser bolts struck where he'd been standing.

He peered over a huge chunk of fallen masonry, and saw two gunpods that had telescoped out of the

wall near the time vault. He tossed a phased-plasma grenade as far as he could—in the direction of the machinery at the far end of the floor. As it seemed to float through the air, one gunpod swiveled and sent an unerring bolt of light to shoot it out of the air. The cylindrical canister exploded with an impressive sound and flash of fire, but, when John dared look again, he seemed to have done no damage.

Footsteps behind him. He turned to see Big John, armed with his laser rifle. "We're pinned here," John said. "We need to take out those gunpods."

But Big John—General Connor—looked over the floor carefully, checking every inch through his nightvisions. He peered at the far wall, with banks of armored machinery. "I don't think so," he said. "Not this way. Let's hope Skynet is in there. We have to destroy its hardware."

"But how, with those T-1000s around?"

More footsteps. One of the Terminators ran toward them, still not fully reformed, one arm hanging down like it was broken. John fired on auto as Big John shot laser bolts into it—the grim-faced general had all Sarah's intensity. Together, they drove the liquid metal nightmare back. Its arm reformed, but it couldn't get at them against the fury of metal and burning energy. They circled past the Terminator, as John ran out of ammo for the M-16. Big John sprinted ahead. Jade and Sarah continued to fire on the other T-1000, which seemed to be shrinking down slowly as its liquid metal burned away.

Despite his bad arm, Anton was working: He'd loaded four hundred-pound Hellfire missiles onto one of the Black Hawk's underwing pods. Big John saw it, too. He ran straight for the Black Hawk. Anton had himself a gunner.

John found his last phased-plasma grenade, and threw it back at the rubble in front of the factory. It cleared some debris, and knocked "John's" T-1000 off its feet—but the shockwave hurled John forward. He landed hard on the rocky ground, jarring his right shoulder. He scrambled to his feet, but when he tried to move his arm, it was agony. He ran forward, staggering with exhaustion, and tripped on a knob of rock. The fall knocked the wind from his lungs, and another spear of excruciating pain went through him from his injured shoulder.

As Big John leapt into the Black Hawk's rear hold, Anton took the pilot's seat in the cockpit with Arnaud. He started up the chopper, and the main rotor began to turn, making a cruel sound of metal rubbing against metal. The rotor shaft and blades were at funny angles, and John wondered how much longer they could work. But they were still producing lift. The Black Hawk rose slowly. For a moment, John lost hope. He looked back to see the T-1000 loping toward him from the front of the building.

Then, from fifty feet in the air, Big John fired four Hellfire missiles deep into the factory. Explosions came from the rear of the building. John tried to move, to get to his feet, yet again. He had to get up, every time he fell. That was the only way. Fight! Or try to... don't give up. He knew that Jade could fight for days if she had to, wounded or not, but Sarah must be tiring, just as he was. For all her strength and training, his mother was only human, just as he was: she could not wield that heavy laser rifle for hour after hour.

"Come on, John," he said to himself. The two women took one of the shapeshifting Terminators under control. The other one was after him. He couldn't let the side down. "You can't die now," he told himself.

He rolled onto his back, fumbling at the pockets of his webbing vest. He still had two impact grenades in there for his launcher... But then he saw. ..

"His" T-1000 had frozen in its tracks like a silver statue. What about the other one? He looked to Sarah

and Jade: "their" Terminator had also ceased to move. Neither had been destroyed, but they were quite immobile. He got to his knees, looking around at the black sky, the strange surreal landscape, seen through his nightvisions. What had happened?

Sarah had flung herself away from the direction of the blast and also lay on the ground, looking hurt or winded. But she twisted around suddenly, ready to fire her laser rifle.

Jade lowered her rifle to the ground, and walked over to John. "They did it. We know they have taken out Skynet."

"What?" John said, finally getting now to his feet. He winced when she reached out to touch him. "My shoulder," he said, trying to smile through the pain. "I think I've torn something."

She looked deep into his eyes, without coming near.

"The liquid metal Terminators have stopped fighting. Their sole mission must have been to protect Skynet. That mission has now ended, John. Skynet is no more."

He stepped closer to her, now feeling the pains all through his body. "The missiles got its hardware, right? They got through any armor it was using?"

Jade nodded, still looking sad somehow, even though they'd won. The pain she'd endured showed in her eyes.

As the Black Hawk landed for the final time, its rotors screeching as they scattered dust all round, Sarah walked to John and Jade. She didn't seem badly hurt but her head and shoulders drooped. Sweat plastered hair to her face. Her lips were bruised and bleeding but she'd be okay. For now, at least, they were both going to be okay.

Big John sat at the Black Hawk's door, his legs dangling over the edge. He tore off his nightvisions and ran one strong hand through his severely-cut hair, looking upwards into the coal-black sky that never showed moon or stars. What could he be thinking, John wondered. There was so much that they still needed to discuss—the histories of their different worlds. . .and the future that Jade and Anton had come from. So much for each to understand.

"It's over," John said, walking toward the older man. "You did it—you took out Skynet. You must have hit its hardware."

The human general looked his way, peering into the terrible dark. "Yes, it's over," he said. "But it's never over. There are still machines out there—Hunter-Killers, Terminators—" he shook his head slowly—"acting on their mission instructions. More people are going to die, John."

"We'll get them. You know you can do it. . .you and the Resistance. You'll track the machines down."

"Or they will come to us."

"It'll be finished soon."

"I know. We just need the stomach to fight on, another day, and another—then another." General John Connor finally gave the slightest smile. "We'll get through it. Then the real work starts."

"Yeah, I can kind of see that."

Once more, the general gazed upwards—into the endless darkness. "There's a whole world to rebuild."

EPILOGUE:

SKYNET'S

WORLD

MADRIDAUGUST 2029

For the moment they were stranded here. They had no aircraft capable of crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and Skynet's time vault in the mountains was damaged beyond repair. Until a plane could be found in North or South America—to get over here and take them back—they had to base themselves in Madrid. They had a whole world to rebuild, a world without Skynet. But there was one more thing.

The time had come to reclaim the Earth. But what awaited was uninviting. The sun never shone. Radioactive poisons blighted the soil. Some war machines were still out there, acting on their final commands from Skynet.

Oil lamps bathed Nicolas Escandell's planning room in dim light. Two dozen people had crowded here, not in a formal conference, just an ongoing freeform debate. In one corner, they'd set up a radio to talk to Resistance leaders in Los Angeles. John watched his older counterpart speaking to Gabriela Tejada. Gabriela sounded tired, but strong and dignified. She'd been through so much, suffered terrible losses. . . her husband and two sons. Juanita Salceda joined the conversation in quieter tones. She and General Connor had still not admitted they were in love, but surely they were getting round to it.

For John himself, there was the problem about Jade. She liked him, for sure, but maybe that was all she felt.

Sarah and the Specialists joined him. "So, what now?" John said. He looked to his mother, to Anton. . . then to Jade. When they returned to America, General Connor planned to move his militia south. With Skynet defeated, they had no reason to be in the old U.S. any more. They'd find somewhere warmer, less contaminated, try to make a better life. But, for John, there was still that one more thing.

"I thought I'd never go home," Jade said, "that I'd put it all behind me." She faltered, breathing calmly, her

large, sad eyes meeting John's. "The T-XA changed that. My world's Skynet will never leave us in peace. We can't let Skynet win anywhere...in *any* world, however hopeless it seems." She looked to Anton for support. "We've got to go back."

Anton simply nodded.

"I know," John said. "But we're going, too. Me and my mom." He, in turn, looked to Sarah. He couldn't read her expression, but he knew she'd join them. No one had done more for humanity's cause. She'd fight on to the end.

Jade bent forward to kiss him lightly on the cheek. "Thank you."

Five Specialists had gone back in time from Jade's World. Only two had survived. If they returned, it would not be nearly enough. Not that alone. In the world that

Jade had come from, Skynet was all-powerful, more than it had been here, and humanity's days seemed numbered. But they couldn't leave it at that. They had to do something, or no world was safe.

"We'll work it out," John said.

"Yes," Jade said. "We will plan the best way."

"Whatever it takes."

But what could they offer to a world that already had Specialists like Jade and Anton, people enormously enhanced beyond John himself, or Sarah or anyone else here? John couldn't find the answer, but he knew they had to do it. It might not be tomorrow. It might not be this week, or this month. But they had to go through with it. There'd be the pain again, the white light. The terror. What awaited at the journey's end?

It didn't matter. He just had to do it.

He had to go to Jade's World.

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