

Chapter 1: *'Will they give me the chair? Or lethal injection, or swing from a rope if you dare? Ah, nobody knows, all the trouble I've seen'* My Chemical Romance (Iero F, Way G, et al 2004)

Peppard grinned through the blood running from his nose and mouth before the next blow to his face and kick to his ribs. He laughed out loud as he rolled from the kick, unsettling his assailants. 'You're gonna fucking die, Peppard, *we're beating ya to death!*' roared the obvious ringleader of the group of men ranged around Peppard's stricken body. They all wore blue overalls and the ground was the yard of an inner courtyard in a concrete edifice that rose high, but sank even lower into the earth. Peppard continued laughing, blood bubbling from his mouth and nose, a wheeze as he breathed, some of his ribs bruised or fractured where he had been kicked. There was a boot shaped stain on his grey overalls.

Inside Peppard's brain some inorganic circuitry initiated subroutines and algorithms, taking control of key aspects of his mind and body. He suddenly rolled and flipped up, meanwhile his laughter ceased. Before the leading assailant knew what was happening Peppard had swivelled and kicked at his right knee, meanwhile bringing his fist and lower arm down on the leader's dropping head as his knee gave way to the prior blow. Another punch to the side of the leader's head and he was no longer keen on any beatings, to death or otherwise. The other five men were momentarily paralysed by surprise, which was a significant mistake as Peppard took out two more of the men closest to him with various rapid moves they hardly registered, but they certainly felt their impact as they grunted and went down into a pile. One more took an upgoing palm of a hand to his nose, snapping his head back and ceasing his consciousness.

The remaining two speedily backed away before turning and running to one of the exits from the yard. A crowd of blue uniformed men had encircled the action with either interest or bloodlust, baying and screaming various obscenities. Peppard surveyed the fallen men with clear intent to continue fighting, but a limiter attached to the cerebral circuitry ordered his fighting mode to shutdown, returning control to his organic mind. He straightened, taking a deep breath, wheezing far less evident as ten other men entered, with orange uniforms, pointing cattle prod-like devices, an array of items on their belts jangling as they ran. They circled Peppard aiming their prods at him menacingly. He held up his hands, exposing his wrists as a sign he was no threat, a resigned posture implying he was used to what would follow.

'So your machine friend is still working in there, *Peppard?*' asked a huge man with an orange suit and obvious presence that screamed he was in charge while he nonchalantly strolled into the yard, hands in pockets. The man pushed through the encircling orange guards with a dismissive wave of his right hand and up to the tall figure in the middle. Peppard grinned, 'Well, sir, I'm kinda glad it's working, limiter is a pain in the ass,' he replied, in a level and slightly growly voice. 'Well, we don't want you *killing anyone*, now, Peppard, that's *not allowed*, and there's a lot of admin, too,' the leader retorted with an amused tone. Meanwhile, the orange suited guards had stationed themselves against the watching crowd. 'Mr Anwar, why would I be going doing something like that now?' Peppard questioned sarcastically.

Anwar pressed a stud on a device embedded in his left sleeve, Peppard dropping to his knees, grimacing, but not making any sound. 'Peppard, you're a total fucking pain, and my life would be so much easier if you just didn't exist, but it seems it's your lucky day!' Still on his knees, in obvious pain, Peppard narrowed his eyes with a brutal look at Anwar. 'Why?' was all he responded with between tight lips, and then he was evidently free from the pain and restriction as he managed to stand, a breath whistling out. 'Some people would like to meet you, they have a, let's say, a *proposal* that you won't be able to refuse,' and he chuckled loudly. He looked to the orange suited men and three of them grabbed Peppard, magnetically manacled his arms together behind his back. Anwar, Peppard and the three guards left the yard as all the other men in blue were prodded to other exits. The four assailants still lay on the floor, unconscious. Peppard gave a backwards glance at them as he exited, a satisfied smile on his face.