

THE MYSTERY OF STADFORD HILL

— *Part - 1* —
Cases of the FCO

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Chapter 1

One day Lazer X and Zoro were having a chat at Head Quarters. Sans started to spy on them out of suspicion. Suddenly Sans turned around and when he looked back, they both were missing! Suddenly a tap came on Sans back and when he turned Zoro and Lazer were behind him.

“Would you ever stop your spying”, said Zoro

Yeah, I’m getting sick of it, said Lazer.

Oh! don’t worry said sans I was just making sure you were fine.

Zoro sighed and said, “anyway where’s Star gone?”

Just then Star entered with two bags of food.

There you are said Zoro, “have you got my sweets?”

Star sighed and said, “at this rate you’ll get diabetes before your promotion.”

Just then their emergency screen began to flick- “Looks like we got a new case finally” said Lazer.

They all pushed towards the big screen in the middle of the room.

It was a message from their leader, (no one has seen him before) they all called their leader Blaze.

Star opened the letter and it read:

Good day my fellow Spy's of the FCO (Forgotten cases organization) I have very interesting news for you'll). There was a murder at Stadford hill. I think it might have some connection with the fair incident last year. Hope to hear from you'll soon. Also, I suggest you'll carry your weapons as I have a feeling you'll will need it.

Regards

Blaze.

Chapter 2

“Whoa! Now that’s some news,” said Zoro
Yeah, it’s very interesting, said Star. Anyways, get your weapons we’ll be leaving in 20 minutes.

Wait said Laser, but how are we going to investigate? Cause we can’t show our faces.

Don’t worry I have spoken to the Sheriff, he will give us police uniforms, we’ll only need to use masks,” said Zoro.

“All right so it’s decided, see you’ll at 8:30pm.”

They then arrived at the hill using a bulky police van to blend in.

There was a scream of the dead guy’s mother.

“Poor old hag. He was too young to die.” “I want that money.” said Zoro cheekily. There was a horrible scene. A puddle of blood and that guy sleeping. Zoro and the others began their investigation and collected some evidence. They didn’t speak to each other on the way back to the HQ.

When they reached Star asked everyone to tell what they had found.

→ Zoro – bullet of sniper

→ Classic – photo of the shoe marks (of the killer)

→ Laser X – the dead guy diary

In the diary they read this:

I won a lottery...

“Oh! So, he won the lottery,” said Star.

“Maybe that’s a clue we can use,” said Zoro.

“Wow I never thought of that” said Sans sarcastically.

“Guys just cut it out ok we need to focus. Zoro go and check the bullet and find out which gun does it belong to.”

After some time Zoro returned.

“I have examined the gun. It belongs to a sniper S240, it is very expensive.”

“Wait, isn’t this sniper only found in Russia? And it has to be imported. But by who?” “Star said?”

There are only 3 shops in the country that sell these guns, one at Examburg, another at Cross Road, and finally the one near the state bank road.

“I think it’s the one at state bank road, as it’s the closest and it’s the only shop permitted to sell snipers,” said Laser.

“I think it’s owner is an old man, Goofer,” said Zoro.

“I will go and ask if anyone has purchased the gun, you’ll wait here.”

Star went to the shop and sure enough old man Goofer was there.

“Good day sir” said the old man “are you interested in any good old guns, eh?”

“I am looking for a sniper S240” said Star observing the shop.

“The S240? That gun is only found at the military base at Examburg, all gun shops are banned from selling it. Also it’s cost is \$140,000 dollars, so it’s too expensive.”

“Oh ok, no problem” said “Star” but I would like the Mig-600 pls.

“Sure,” said the old man. He went in the storage and got the gun.

Star paid him the money, brought food and lots of sweets for Zoro and returned to HQ in his top-notch sports car.

Chapter 3

Star reached the HQ and told the others what happened. They discussed it over food while Zoro ate 2 whole cakes!!! They decided to go to the crime scene tomorrow.

The next day they all went into a police van to examine the crime, while the others were searching, Zoro was busy having his burger with fries.

Can't you stop eating said 'Lazer' annoyed. This is just my snack said Zoro, I'll be having pancakes and doughnuts later on.

"Zoro we really need to get you tested for diabetes" said a voice as they all turned, they saw their old friend Ronald who worked with them on many cases.

"Bro said Zoro your so black we need to test you to make sure you are not mutated coal." Everyone stared at Zoro; he was known for being very racist towards anyone.

Guys cut it out ok said star we need to focus on the case.

After that they began searching. After some time Ronald said, "wait a minute why didn't you tell me that he won the lottery."

"Yes" said star he wrote it down in his diary.

"Where is the lottery ticket?" asked Ronald.

Wait a minute said Star didn't Zoro say "I want that money" before we found out the guy won the lottery.

Everyone looked at Zoro and raised their weapons "you're not the real Zoro" said Star "because the real one has a scar under his eye and you don't!!!"

"Zoro smiled" but not any smile a smile he showed the evil in him. "Yes" he said I'm not Zoro he said changing his voice in electrolytes."

Everyone fired their guns but then something happened which made all their blood run cold. A sniper bullet came whooshing down and hit Lazer right in the head!!! Everyone rushed towards him. At that time the clone Zoro escaped but later was found dead because of his injuries.

After rushing to the hospital Lazer was immediately taken to the "ICU". At the same time a familiar voice behind them said "guys is that you?" It was Zoro the real one with the scar, his head was bandaged and he looked pale and weak. Star went toward him and hugged him. "Oh Zoro! Thank God your safe. What actually happened to you?"

Zoro explained that as they were getting ready to go to—

Crime scene from the first time, electricity suddenly struck him hard, hit Zoro with a wood rod on the head and tied him down the house. When I woke up I was here, I heard your voices and came here, anyways why your weapons?

Star said with his voice shaking "That's Lazer he got shot in the head while we were fighting the Clone Zoro then the sniper was out." You need to worry, he said your friend will be ok the bullet missed his brain luckily so he should be fine in a few days.

"So whole world's said sans?" that's a loose end off the case who knows what will happen till it ends.

“Did sorry” said Ronald for all that he said of Zoro and Zoro.
“I’ll make sure to keep you posted on all case developments.”

So after saying bye Ronald went back out while the others decided to stay back at the hospital. After some it became night the went to a nearby hotel and booked a suite for 2 nights. As they were walking they saw their friend villain saved. Shockingly they all took back and after a hearty dinner generously bought by villain they all went to sleep.

Chapter 4

The next morning sunlight leaked through the hotel curtains as Star was the first to wake up. He noticed something strange immediately, Zoro's bed was empty.

"Zoro?" Star whispered.

No response.

Suddenly the TV turned on by itself. Silence filled the room before a weird image appeared. A masked figure stood in front of a burning symbol—the same symbol found at the crime scene.

"Good morning, Forgotten Case Organization," the voice said calmly. "You may have stopped one of my clones.... but the system that created him is still alive."

Laser sat up instantly, holding his head. "That voice... it's the Sniper."

The screen zoomed in. "Meet me at Stadford Hill tonight. Come unarmed. Or Zoro dies."

The screen went black.

Villain clenched his fists. "So, he was taken after all."

"No," said Star slowly. "Zoro left on his own."

They found a note on the table, written in Zoro's handwriting:

If Blaze is really back, this ends tonight. Don't follow me.

Stadford Hill was silent except for the wind. Broken lights flickered as the team spread out, hiding behind abandoned police cars.

Then a slow clap echoed.

"So predictable," said Blaze, stepping out of the shadows. For the first time ever, they saw him clearly, tall, calm, and smiling.

Behind him, Zoro was tied to a chair but awake. A fresh scar was visible under his eye.

"You wanted forgotten cases?" Blaze said. "I am the reason they exist."

Laser aimed his weapon. "You shot me. You set all this up."

Blaze nodded. "Sacrifices are necessary for truth."

Suddenly alarms blared—police sirens everywhere.

Ronald's voice echoed from a megaphone. "Blaze, it's over."

Blaze laughed. "No. This is just the beginning."

He pressed a button.

The ground beneath Stadford Hill began to collapse.

Star ran straight toward Zoro as Willaim tackled Blaze. Laser covered them despite his injury.

Zoro shouted, "Star don't—"

Too late.

The floor cracked, but Willaim pulled Blaze down with him, cuffing him just before backup arrived.

As dawn broke, Blaze was finally arrested. Zoro was freed.

Ronald approached the team. “The sniper network is dismantled. Every forgotten case... reopened.”

Star looked at his team. Bruised. Tired. Alive.

“So,” Zoro said weakly, smirking, “who’s buying breakfast?”

Laser groaned. “If you say pancakes—”

“I’m saying pancakes.”

Everyone laughed.

Chapter 5

But the laughter didn't last long.
A sharp ring cut through the air.

Star's phone vibrated in his hand. He frowned at the screen.

"Guys... this just came in."

Ronald turned back. "From who?"

Star swallowed. "Unknown sender."

The message contained only a single image.

A hospital room. A familiar one.

Laser's smile faded. "That's... that's my ICU room."

Before anyone could speak, another message arrived.

Unknown: You reopened the cases. Now you reopen old wounds.

Suddenly, Zoro's expression changed. He touched the scar under his eye, his joking tone gone.

"That means Blaze wasn't the end."

Ronald exhaled slowly. "We shut down the sniper network, but whoever funded it is still out there."

Police sirens echoed as Blaze was taken away, but even in cuffs, he smiled.

Star noticed it. “Why are you smiling?”

Blaze leaned closer. “Because breakfast isn’t the first thing you should be worried about.”

The police car door slammed shut.

Later That Day

The team sat in a quiet restaurant on the edge of the city. Pancakes on the table, untouched.

Laser looked at his plate. “First time I don’t feel like eating.”

Zoro forced a grin. “That’s illegal.”

Villain checked the windows. “We’re being watched.”

Star’s phone rang again.

This time, it was a video.

A masked figure stood in front of multiple screens showing crime scenes from cases long forgotten.

A female voice spoke—calm, cold.

“Blaze failed.”

Zoro stiffened. “Who are you?”

She tilted her head. “The one who finishes things.”

The screen glitched, and a name appeared in red text:

Ember

The video ended.

Silence.

Ronald stood slowly. “That name hasn’t been used in ten years.”

Laser looked up. “Meaning?”

Ronald met their eyes. “Meaning Blaze was just phase one.”

Outside, a helicopter passed low overhead.

Star folded his hands. “Then we don’t stop.”

Zoro finally picked up his fork. “Good. Because I hate unfinished pancakes.”

The team shared a look—fear, determination, and something stronger than both.

They weren’t done.

Not even close.

Chapter 6

The helicopter noise faded, but the feeling didn't. The team stayed seated a moment longer, pancakes still mostly untouched—except Zoro, who stabbed his stack with unnecessary aggression.

“Unfinished pancakes,” he muttered. “Unfinished villains. Same energy.”

Laser didn't smile. He was scrolling through his tablet, eyes narrowed. “Ronald... Ember. Say it out loud.”

Ronald leaned against the window, arms crossed. City lights reflected in the glass like distant fires. “Executive Mediation Bureau. Off-the-books task force. Black-ops cleanups. If a case was too political to solve... they erased, it.”

Villain's jaw tightened. “Or buried it.”

Star looked between them. “Ten years ago?”

Ronald nodded. “Officially dismantled. Funding disappeared. Records wiped.” He paused. “Unofficially... there were rumors. One operator who never quit.”

Laser swallowed. “A woman.”

Silence again.

Then—clink—Zoro set his fork down. “Cool. So we’re not chasing a gang. We’re chasing a ghost with a budget.”

Star’s phone buzzed once. Everyone froze.

He didn’t answer it. Just placed it face-up on the table.

Nothing.

Villain exhaled. “She’s letting us sit with it.”

“That’s the point,” Ronald said. “Psychological pressure. Ember never rushed. She let people unravel.”

Laser pushed his plate away. “She showed me my ICU room for a reason.”

Star nodded. “She’s mapping our weak points.”

Zoro tapped the scar under his eye. “Too late. Already found mine.”

Outside, a car slowed. Too slow. Villain’s eyes tracked it until it moved on.

“We need to disappear,” Villain said. “Tonight.”

Ronald shook his head. “No. She expects that.”

Star stood. “Then we do the opposite.”

They all looked at him.

“We go public,” Star continued. “Every reopened case. Every name Blaze tried to bury. We light it all up.”

Laser frowned. “That paints targets on our backs.”

Zoro cracked a thin grin. “Yeah, but it also paints her.”

Ronald considered it, then nodded slowly. “If Ember thrives in the dark... we burn the dark.”

Star’s phone finally rang.

This time, it showed a location ping—old industrial district, dockside.

Along with one line of text.

Unknown: Phase two begins at midnight.

Unknown: Bring the team.

Laser stood first. “She wants an audience.”

Villain adjusted his jacket. “Or a body count.”

Zoro grabbed his coat. “Either way... pancakes later.”

Star looked around the table—his team. Bruised, hunted, unbroken.

“Let’s go reopen some wounds.”

As they stepped outside, far across the city, a woman watched their feed go dark.

Behind her mask, Ember smiled.

“Good,” she whispered.

“They’re still brave.”

Chapter 7

No sirens,” Zoro muttered. “No cops. No welcome mat.”
“That’s intentional,” Ronald said. He adjusted the ear comm in his ear. She wants us connected—but watched.”

Laser moved his hand unconsciously, the faint movement still there when his senses activated (he has a very sharp sense of anyone near him) “She’s close.”

Star looked at him. “You feel it?”

Laser nodded. “Same way I felt her before surgery

William stepped out first, his coat collar high. “Eyes up. Ember doesn’t do ambushes. She does presentations.”

They moved on foot after that. Boots on concrete. Then a sound came like a ship settling or a door opening.

Then they saw it.

Dock 14.

Floodlights came on, one by one, bathing the pier in white. At the center stood a stage—portable lights, a folding table, and a single chair.

And behind it — A massive screen stuck to shipping containers.

Zoro whistled low. “She rented the pier.”

The screen flickered to life.

Footage rolled. Police reports. Court transcripts.

Cases Star recognized. Cases he’d reopened.

Victims’ faces filled the screen—then faded into the names of suspects who’d walked free.

Laser gulped.

“That’s my surgeon,” he said quietly.

The image zoomed. A man shaking hands with another person

Ronald’s jaw clenched. “Ember doesn’t erase cases. She selects them.”

A voice cut through the air—calm, and everywhere at once.

“Welcome.” it said

The chair on the stage was still empty.

Unfortunately, “you’re late.”

Chapter 8

She stepped into the light without drama.
Just a woman in a charcoal coat, sharp, mask seamless and
—embers glowing faintly along its edges like coals.

Ember.

She sat, crossing one leg over the other.

“You did exactly what I hoped,” she said. “You didn’t run. You didn’t hide. You escalated.”

Star stepped forward. “You wanted us public.”

“Yes,” Ember replied. “Because fear is louder when it has witnesses.”

The screen changed again.

Live feeds.

Newsrooms. Social media dashboards. Hashtags climbing.

#REOPENED

#EMBERFILES

#BLAZETRIAL

Laser stared. “You leaked everything.”

,” Ember said correction “You lit it.”

Villain folded his arms. “So, what’s phase two? You kill us?”

Ember tilted her head. “No. That’s phase four.”

Zoro snorted. “Bold move

She ignored him.

“Phase two,” Ember continued, “is choice.”

The screen split into five panels.

Each one showed a location.

A hospital wing.

A courthouse parking garage.

A safehouse Star recognized but never told anyone about it.

Ronald’s old apartment—pre-agency.

And—

Laser’s ICU

Laser took a step forward. “That room should be empty.”

“It was,” Ember said softly. “Until tonight.”

The camera zoomed.

A patient lay unconscious. Face blurred.

A tag on the bed read: LASER — EMERGENCY
TRANSFER.

Zoro said That’s not him.”

“No,” Ember agreed. “But it could have been.”

Star’s voice was steady, but his hands clenched. “You’re threatening civilians.”

“I’m demonstrating capacity,” she replied. “Blaze buried crimes. I weaponize truth. Same blade. Sharper edge.”

Ronald stepped forward. “You’re testing us.”

“Yes,” EMBer said. “Because heroes always fail the same way.”

Chapter 9

The room stayed silent.

Star broke first. “You’re wrong.”

Ember’s mask tilted by a fraction. “Am I?”

The screens shifted again. Five locations. Five ticking clocks. Red timers appeared in the corners of each screen.

23:59... 23:58...

Laser’s jaw tightened. “You’re running a test on us he declared

“No,” Ember said. “I’m running an exposure.”

Villain scoffed. “Cute lecture. But you don’t pull the trigger, do you?”

“That depends,” she replied calmly, “it depends whether you understand the lesson.”

Ronald stepped closer to the central console, eyes scanning the screens with speed. “Those sites aren’t random.”

“Good,” Ember said. “Then you’re paying attention.”

Zoro cracked his knuckles. “Hospital. Court garage. Safehouse. Old apartment. ICU” He grinned “You’re mapping our guilt.”

Star looked at him sharply.

Zoro met his eyes. “Don’t pretend. We all see it.”

The timer hit 22:40.

Laser swallowed. “The ICU patient—who are they?”

Ember didn’t answer immediately. When she did, her voice was softer. “A man who needed a bed. Who got moved because the system bends for names it recognizes.”

Laser’s fists clenched. “That happens every day.”

“Yes,” Ember said. “That’s why it works.”

The hospital feed zoomed in. A nurse argued quietly with an unseen administrator. The word priority flickered in the audio transcript.

Star exhaled. “So, what’s the choice?”

The screens froze.

Ember leaned back in her chair, crossing her legs again. Unhurried. In control.

“You may intervene,” she said. “Publicly. Live. Right now.”

Villain raised a brow. “Intervene how?”

“Confess,” Ember replied. “Each of you. One truth you buried. One compromise you justified. One line you crossed and never uncrossed.”

Zoro laughed once, sharp and incredulous. “You want a press conference apology tour?”

“I want proof,” Ember said, “that you understand power doesn’t make you clean.”

The timers resumed.

21:15...

Ronald's voice was low. "And if we refuse?"

EMBer tapped the armrest once.

The courthouse garage feed glitched—then stabilized, showing a car slowly filling with smoke.

Laser took a step forward. "Stop."

"You first," EMBer said.

Star closed his eyes.

Then he stepped into the light.

Chapter 10

Star didn't look at the cameras at first.
He looked at his team.

Laser's eyes were sharp with warning. Ronald's jaw was set. Zoro's grin had vanished entirely. Villain leaned against the console, arms crossed, unreadable.

Star inhaled.

"My name is Star," he said, finally lifting his head. "And I let someone die."

The room seemed to listen.

. Not a sound.

"I had evidence," Star spoke." His voice stayed steady, almost clinical. "But the case was tied to three hospitals. One of them was already under review. If I pushed, funding would have stopped

The hospital screen flickered beds lining the hallways.

"So I buried the file," Star said. "I told myself I was choosing the greater good."

He swallowed.

“Two weeks later, an ICU generator failed in one of the unfunded wings. One patient didn’t make it.”

The timer read 19:42.

Ember’s mask didn’t move.

“You didn’t pull the plug,” she said. “You just dimmed the lights.”

Star nodded. “I never reopened the case.”

The car in the courthouse garage became louder. Smoke thickened.

“Next,” Ember said.

Chapter 11

No one moved at first.

A huge straining sound came as something heavy shifted above them—metal protesting under pressure. Dust sprinkled from the concrete ceiling.

Laser stepped forward slowly boots against the oil-slick floor.

“Next,” Ember repeated, her voice calm, almost gentle, yet somehow louder than the cracking beams overhead.

Ronald inhaled sharply through his nose. He put a hand down his face and stepped into the light cast by the burning vehicle.

“I’ll go,” he said.

Star turned toward him, and a surprised expression came across his face. Ronald never volunteered for anything that involved feelings.

The timer blinked to 19:27.

Ronald rolled his shoulders like he was preparing for a fight. His eyes never met Ember’s mask. Instead, he stared at the smoke curling the ventilation ducts.

“My name is Ronald,” he began. His voice was steady but worn out because of his cold. “And I saved the wrong person.”

William tilted his head slightly, interest behind his otherwise still posture.

Ronald continued.

“There was a building collapse four years ago. Old textile warehouse in Sector Nine. Bad structure. Illegal additions. You know... all the additions they do for their own benefit.” He let out a chuckle. “We got there twelve minutes after the first distress call.”

The garage lights flickered.

“I heard a voice under the rubble,” Ronald said. It was a man. In his twenties maybe. He was still alive. He was trapped under a steel support beam. He kept yelling that there were children inside. Said he was trying to get them out when it fell.”

Laser’s jaw clenched He remembered that mission. They all did.

“I used most of our heavy machinery to remove that beam,” Ronald said. “It took nearly seventeen minutes. When we pulled him out, he grabbed my arm and thanked me. Said I was a hero.”

Ronald’s fingers slowly clenched into a fist at his side.

“The children?” Ember asked quietly.

Ronald laughed again.

“They were in the opposite wing. That section collapsed while I was pulling him out.” He gulped. “Three kids. One volunteer teacher. All of them died before we reached them.”

Ember looked from behind her mask. Ronald stood there silently. Then Embers voice broke the silence, Next, she said your time is running out.

But that's when Star realized she was making them tell their mistakes to show that they are guilty..

Chapter 12

Star's eyes narrowed.
Not at Ronald—but at Ember.

The pattern fell into place finally.

Confessions.

One by one.

Into the spotlight

Timed.

Recorded.

Not to save them.

To judge them.

“Stop.” Star’s voice cut through the silence

Ember didn’t move “Next,” she said again, more firmly now.

“Your time is running out

“No,” Star said stepping forward. “You don’t get to do that.”

Laser looked between them. William straightened, alert now.

Even the timer seemed louder as it ticked down.

Ember finally faced Star. The firelight reflected off her mask.

“This is necessary.”

Star laughed. "That's what you told them too, isn't it?"

Silence.

Star pointed at her hand.

"At the fair last year. The Westbridge Fair. Explosion near the west exit." His jaw clenched "I was on cleanup duty. Found something in the debris. Melted edges. Green stone."

He took another step closer.

"An emerald ring. With an EMB imprint on the inside."

Silence filled the room.

Ronald looked up

Laser swore under his breath. "That incident was classified."

"I never turned it in," Star continued. "Because I couldn't place it. No records. No owner." His eyes looked at Ember's gloved hand. "Until now."

Ember curled her finger just slightly.

"You were there," Star said. "You caused it. Twelve civilians dead. All because of you."

The timer blinked. But no one was paying attention to it everyone was focused on Star.

"You're making us confess," Star said, "so you can convince yourself we deserve whatever you're about to do."

For the first time, Ember didn't respond.

The ceiling creaked again.

Finally, she spoke.

You saved the man instead of the children she said, her voice no longer gentle. "You chose wrong."

Star shook his head. “No. He made a call under pressure. Just like you did at that fair.”

“You pulled the trigger,” Star said. “And now you’re playing the judge.”

A long pause.

Then—slowly, Ember removed her glove.

On her finger: an emerald ring. Inside, faint but visible—

Ember.

William exhaled softly. “So that’s it.” he said you are the main culprit.

Ember’s voice was different now.

“They called it an accident,” she said. “They buried it. They buried the truth. You know why? Her hand clenched into a fist. Because I told them I controlled everything.

Star stepped forward until they were almost face to face.

“No,” he said quietly. “This is revenge. You are doing this because we imprisoned your brother. Wyll that ring a bell? Star said...

And for the first time, since she arrived — Ember hesitated to speak.

Chapter 13

Ember's hesitation was all it took.

A sharp crack broke the silence—not from the ceiling this time, but from outside. Then another sound. Boots. Shouted commands.

“Police!” a voice boomed through a loudspeaker. “This area is surrounded. Power down all devices and come out with your hands visible!”

Laser's head looked toward the corridor. “They found us.”

Star didn't take his eyes off Ember. “You didn't plan for this, did you?”

The timer on the wall flickered wildly, numbers moving fast as interference cut through the system. Sparks jumped from the wiring. Whatever control Ember had was slipping.

William moved slowly placing himself between Ronald and the collapsing pillar. “Backup's late,” he said, “but I'll take it.”

Ember's jaw clenched “You think this changes anything?”

Another explosion—controlled this time—blew open the entrance. Smoke filled the room, thick and white. Through it, the police appeared holding riot shields, helmets, rifles raised but steady.

“Ember!” the commander shouted. “We know who you are. We have warrants for your arrest in connection with the Westbridge Fair incident.

Ronald let out a breath he’d been holding for what felt like hours.

Star stepped forward again, voice low but carrying. “It’s over. You don’t get to decide who pays anymore.”

For a moment, Ember looked almost small standing there, the firelight dying around her as the emergency lights turned on.

Her fingers brushed the emerald ring.

“You’re wrong,” she said quietly. “It was never about control.”

She looked at Star then, really looked at him. “It was about making you feel what I felt.”

Police advanced, shields locking together.

“Drop the ring,” the commander ordered. “Hands where we can see them.”

Ember laughed. Then, slowly, she slid the ring off her finger. It hit the floor with a clink, spinning before coming to rest at Star’s feet.

She raised her hands.

As officers rushed in and snapped hand cuffs around her wrists, the ceiling finally gave one last groan—but the danger had passed. Medics came in. Fire teams followed.

William looked at Star, nodding toward Ember as she was led away.

Star stared down at the ring on the ground, then turned away as an officer covered it with an evidence bag.

“No,” he said softly. “She met the truth.” “What do you mean,” William asked? It means that she knows more than us she knows the truth of all our cases, the victims, the suspects everything, if she escapes, we lose it all. William stayed silent and he was about to say something but stopped. Then he went with Star and they looked at the sunrise.

Outside, sirens were heard —dozens of them—cutting through the break of dawn.

And for the first time since they’d been bought into the light

No one was on trial anymore.

Chapter 14

Then—
Sound of motors were heard through the air.

WHUP. WHUP. WHUP.

Laser looked up. “That’s... not ground support.

Dust shook loose from the ceiling as a helicopter roared overhead, its shadow sweeping across the chamber. A white spotlight cut through the broken roof, flooding the room in blinding light.

“Air unit?” the commander said confused. “That’s not ours!”

Before anyone could react, the spotlight glared intensely—and two dark shapes dropped through the smoke, descending fast on cables. They hit the ground hard, rolling, already moving.

“DOWN!” one of them shouted.

A flashbang detonated.

When vision returned, chaos filled the room.

One man struck the officers holding Ember, precise and brutal disarming them in seconds. The second was already at her side, blade flashing. The handcuffs fell away, clattering to the floor.

Star staggered forward. “Ember—!”

She turned just once.

Not fear.

Not relief.

Recognition.

The man grabbed her harness, clipped her to the rising cable. Gunfire cracked upward, controlled, forcing the police back behind their shields.

William raised his weapon. “They’re extracting her!”

The helicopter surged higher. Wind tore through the chamber as Ember was lifted off the ground, boots leaving the concrete.

As she rose, her eyes locked with Star’s.

“This isn’t over,” she said—quiet, carried away by the rotors.

Then she was gone.

The cables vanished into the smoke. The helicopter turned sharply and disappeared into the night.

Silence fell—heavy, stunned.

Medics froze. Officers stared upward. No one spoke.

An officer finally looked down and picked something up from the floor.

The emerald ring.

He sealed it into an evidence bag.

Star didn’t look at it.

“No,” he said softly. “She ran from the truth.”

Sirens continued to wail outside—but now they sounded distant.

Because the trial hadn’t ended.

It had just begun.

Chapter 15

Star didn't wait for orders.

The rotors' thunder was already fading when he bolted.

"STAR—!" Laser shouted after him, but Star was gone, boots pounding up the slanted debris ramp toward the blown-out side of the chamber. Wind whipped his coat as he burst into the open night.

The helicopter was climbing—fast—its lights slicing through smoke and rain.

Star ran straight at the edge.

And jumped.

Laser yelled "He's insane."

Star hit the cable, fingers locking just as the line stretches more because of his weight. The impact tore his shirt and bruised his chest, but he held on, muscles screaming as the city came into view beneath him.

Above, a hatch slammed open.

One of the men leaned out—masked, eyes cold—and swung a boot into Star's ribs.

Star took the hit, spun once in the air, then kicked back—heel smashing into the man’s knee. Bone cracked. The man gave a sigh yelp of pain and vanished back inside.

Star hauled himself upward, hand over burning hand.

Another figure dropped from the hatch—the second man—sliding down the cable with a blade flashing silver.

They collided midair.

Steel struck Star’s forearm, slicing fabric and skin. Star slammed his head forward—felt the impact through his skull—then wrapped the man’s wrist and twisted. The knife flew, spinning into the dark.

The man growled at Star.

They grappled, suspended over nothing, the helicopter shaking violently as the pilot tried to steady it

Inside the open hatch, Ember moved.

“STOP,” she shouted—but her voice was torn apart by the wind.

Star hooked a leg around the cable and used the momentum, swinging hard driving his shoulder into the man’s chest.

The man slipped.

For a split second, his eyes widened.

Then his grip failed.

He fell.

No scream. Just vanishing darkness.

Star dragged himself level with the hatch. He locked eyes with the remaining man—the injured one—who jumped at star despite his shattered knee.

Star met him head-on.

They crashed into the cabin.

Weapons skid across the floor. The helicopter tilted dangerously alarms blaring. The pilot yelled.

The man swung wildly. Star caught the punch, slammed him face-first. The man fell unconscious.

Silence—except for the rotors.

Star turned.

Ember stood clipped to the harness, steady despite the chaos.

“You shouldn’t be here,” she said.

“You don’t get to disappear.” Star said

She stepped closer, eyes flicking briefly to the unconscious man.

“You think this is running?”

“Yes,” Star snapped. “Because facing it would mean admitting what you did.”

Her jaw tightened.

For the first time, something cracked.

“You don’t know the whole truth,” she said quietly.

“Then tell it,” Star said. “Here. Now.”

Before she could answer—

The helicopter fell downwards into a nosedive.

“WE’RE HIT!” the pilot yelled.

fire ripped past the open hatch from below—police shooters on the rooftops. One bullet smashed into the tail...

Warning lights flooded the cabin red.

Ember looked at the chaos below. Then back at Star.

A choice.

She reached up—and unclipped herself.

Star's eyes widened. "Don't."

She stepped backward toward the open hatch, wind tearing at her hair.

"This really isn't over," she said again—but this time, there was something else in her voice.

Regret.

Then she jumped.

Star jumped too

Too late.

She vanished into the darkness below, a secondary line snapping tightly a second later, as a hidden chute deployed, pulling her sideways.

Star dropped to his knees, breath ragged.

Sirens rose again—closer now.

Laser's voice crackled in Star's earpiece. "Star. We've got eyes on you. Get out. Now."

Star stared into the night where Ember had fallen.

"This isn't a rescue," he said softly.

"It's a hunt."

And somewhere below, Ember was already running. Star took the parachute and jumped and just as he did the helicopter burst into flames...

Chapter 16

Star didn't think.

He grabbed the parachute with one brutal motion, sprinted two steps, and hurled himself into the outside the helicopter.

Behind him, the helicopter became a collapsing sun — a ball of fire tearing through the night. Heat scorched his back. The shockwave threw him violently, sky and city trading places in a dizzy blur.

The parachute detonated open with a bone-snapping jerk. His body dragging him from freefall into a swing. Above, burning fragments of the helicopter rained down like dying meteors, sg toward the streets far below.

Star steadied, breathing hard, eyes scanning.

Smoke. Sirens. Flashing red and blue light across rooftops.

And there —

A movement between buildings.

Ember.

Her hidden parachute carried her sideways in a controlled motion, gliding low, fast, but controlled. She wasn't falling.

She was navigating.

Star twisted his topos angling sharply towards ember. Wind roared in his ears as he dove after her, canopy straining. The city rushed upward — glass towers, terrified people in the traffic.

Laser's voice burst through the earpiece.

“STAR, ABORT. Police air units inbound. You're drifting into a live zone.”

Star's jaw clenched “Track her.”

A pause... Then—

“...Negative visual. She dropped behind the block.

Of course she did.

Star's eyes locked on the skyline, calculating.

EMBer hadn't jumped to escape.

She'd jumped toward something.

He cut left, collapsing part of the canopy to lose altitude faster. The ground drew closer. A rooftop rushed to meet him — concrete, antennas.

He hit hard, rolled, parachute collapsing behind him in a tear of fabric. Pain flared through his ribs, but he was already moving, ripping free of the harness, scanning down below

Empty.

A faint metallic clang echoed from the far stairwell.

Star ran.

Down two steps at a time, boots scraping the concrete floor. The stairwell door slammed open under his shoulder, into a dim corridor. Emergency lights blinked. Somewhere, alarms were heard from the helicopter crash.

At the end of the hallway—

The door swayed gently.

He approached slowly now, senses sharp.

Inside there was darkness.

And a voice.

“You’re predictable.”

Star froze.

Ember stepped from the shadows near the window, calm, as if she’d been waiting.

. No panic. No fear.

Only that same unreadable intensity.

Star’s eyes narrowed. “You planned this.”

“I plan everything.”

“You almost got me killed.” “No. I knew you’d jump.”

A distant thrum filled the air — helicopters, multiple, approaching fast.

Police.

Star took a step forward. “You’re not walking away again.”

Ember tilted her head slightly. “This was never about walking away.”

Before Star could react, the window behind her shattered inward.

Smoke grenades were thrown.

The room vanished into choking gray chaos.

Star jumped through the haze, but Ember was already moving.

By the time he reached the window—

Nothing.

Only smoke and the dizzying drop to the streets below.

Laser's voice roared in his ear.

“STAR, ROOFTOP TEAMS EVERYWHERE. YOU NEED TO MOVE!”

Star stared into the night, fists clenched, pulse thundering.

Somewhere out there, Ember was still three steps ahead.

And smiling.

Star turned, eyes burning with anger.

“Then we change the rules.”

Chapter 17

Star didn't wait for Laser to repeat himself.
He moved.

Boots pounding down the corridor, through the emergency-lit haze, he shoved open the stairwell door and took the steps three at a time.

"STAR," Laser yelled. "Footage shows multiple people moving to your position. You've got special unit teams on three different rooftops."

"Good," Star muttered. "Let them look up."

He burst onto the lower roof access landing and didn't slow. Instead of climbing higher, he busted the railing and dropped to the neighboring rooftop two stories below. The impact hurt his already damaged ribs, but he rolled through it, coming up running.

Ember hadn't been escaping.

She'd been guiding him.

That metallic clang in the stairwell... deliberate. The open door... staged. The smoke grenades... timed perfectly with police arrival.

She hadn't wanted him to be caught.

She'd wanted him redirected.

"Laser," he said, voice tight. "Traffic cams. Three-block radius from crash site. I want anything that moved *against* the panicked people."

A pause. Keys clattered rapidly in the background. "You think she went on ground level?"

"She always layers her exits."

"...Hold."

Star crossed the rooftop and leapt the alley without breaking stride. Wind tore at his jacket. Below, people flooded sidewalks, phones raised toward the burning wreckage in the sky.

Laser inhaled sharply. "Got something. Alley cam, west of your position. Delivery truck... Stopped seconds before you landed."

Star changed direction instantly.

"Driver?" he asked.

"No visible. Back doors opened for exactly eight seconds."

"Eight," Star repeated.

"Yeah. And— Star... heat bloom inside the cargo hold. Not human."

Star's pulse kicked harder. "Define."

"Too stable. Its like a device a nuclear reactor or something its heat readings are off the charts

Star hit the fire escape of the building and slid down the ladder, boots sparking on metal. He landed in the alley and sprinted west.

The delivery truck was gone.

But tire marks remained — fresh, aggressive acceleration.

Star crouched, fingers brushing the tracks. Still warm.

“She’s moving something,” he said.

“Or someone,” Laser replied quietly.

Star straightened. His mind ran through every file. Every rumor. Ember didn’t steal the money. Didn’t sabotage randomly.

She targeted infrastructure.

Energy grids. Data vaults. Experimental tech.

And tonight’s helicopter?

Not a police unit.

It had been theirs.

Transporting something off record.

Star’s stomach tightened.

“Laser,” he said slowly. “What was on that flight?”

Silence.

Too long.

“Laser.”

“...I don’t have clearance.”

Star’s jaw clenched. “Override it.”

Another pause — tense, dangerous.

Then: “Prototype containment core. Recovered three months ago from the fair i incident.”

Star went still.

Fair incident?

“And we were moving it why?” Star asked, already knowing he wouldn’t like the answer.

“Because it’s destabilizing.”

“And Ember knows.”

As if summoned by thought alone, something above them roared.

Not police.

Not news.

Sleeker.

Quieter.

Star looked up.

A black transport drone cut across the skyline unmarked.

“Laser.”

“I see it. That’s not ours.”

The drone banked sharply — toward the industrial district.

Toward where the delivery truck would logically head.

Ember wasn’t running from the police.

She was racing someone else.

Star exhaled slowly.

“Then we change the rules,” he repeated.

And ran toward the industrial sector.

Chapter 18

The warehouse loomed silent and skeletal against the night — windows dark, loading docks empty except for one.

The black delivery truck.

Star slowed as he approached, sticking to shadow.

“Thermals?” he whispered.

“Multiple signatures inside,” Laser replied. “Two humans. One... fluctuating.”

“Fluctuating how?”

“Like it’s phasing between temperatures.”

The core.

Star flexed his fingers and approached the side entrance instead of the dock.

Inside, voices echoed.

“You’re late,” a man’s voice said — calm, precise.

“I’m punctual,” Ember replied coolly. “You’re early.”

Star edged closer to a cracked side door and peered in.

The warehouse floor had been cleared. In the center sat a containment cylinder — metallic, glowing faintly from within.

Opposite Ember stood a tall figure in a tailored coat, posture surgical in its stillness.

There was a man too, but Star didn't recognize him.

But he had authority.

"You risked exposure tonight," the man said.

"You miscalculated," Ember replied. "There's a difference."

The man's gaze flicked briefly toward the upper shadows of the warehouse rafters.

Star froze.

Had he been seen?

"No matter," the stranger continued. "The core belongs to us."

"It belongs to no one," Ember said sharply.

The cylinder pulsed brighter.

The air temperature shifted.

Star felt — a pressure in his skull, like gravity bending sideways.

"Laser," he whispered. "That fluctuation—"

"Spiking," Laser interrupted. "Star... it's reacting to Laura

"To whom?"

Before Laser could answer, the stranger raised a small device in his hand.

The cylinder's glow intensified instantly.

Ember's expression changed — just slightly.

Concern.

"You don't understand it," she warned.

"I understand," the man replied.

The cylinder began to hum — a rising, unstable pitch.

Star made his choice.

He stepped through the door.

“Step away from it,” he ordered.

Both of them turned.

Ember didn’t look surprised.

The stranger looked... interested.

“Ah,” the man said softly. “

Star’s eyes flicked to Ember. “You planning to tell me who this is?”

“No,” she replied. “Because you won’t like it.”

The hum became a shriek.

Cracks of light split the air around the cylinder.

Laser’s voice exploded in Star’s ear. “It’s going critical! You have seconds!”

The stranger pressed his device again.

The core’s energy snapped outward in a blinding arc—

—and stopped.

Frozen mid-expansion.

Like time itself had hesitated.

The stranger smiled faintly.

“Adaptive containment,” he said. “You see, I do understand it.”

Star’s pulse pounded.

Ember moved suddenly — not away, but toward the cylinder.

“Don’t,” Star warned.

Too late.

She slammed her palm against the containment shell.

The reaction was immediate.

The frozen energy surged — but not outward.

Inward.

Into her.

Light swallowed the warehouse.

Star was thrown backward into steel crates, ears ringing, vision blown white.

When the light faded—

The cylinder was dark.

The stranger was gone.

The drone outside roared away into the night.

And Ember stood at the center of the warehouse floor.

Unharméd.

But different.

Heat shimmered around her skin.

Her eyes glowed faintly — not orange.

White.

Star got back up to his feet to his feet.

“Tell me,” He said hoarsely, “that was part of the plan.”

Ember looked at her hands.

Flexed her fingers.

The air warped with each movement.

Her gaze lifted to his.

For the first time—

Uncertainty.

“He wasn’t supposed to have that device,” she said quietly.

Outside, sirens closed in again.

But neither of them moved.

Because something else had just changed.

The rules hadn’t shifted.

They’d shattered.

Chapter 19

Star walked toward ember and smiled
She looked at him, he didn't seem confused, but he felt even more relieved.

Ember said, "Why are u smiling?"

Star laughed. Laser looked at Star concerned. Then star said, "You really thought that I don't know what's in that cylinder? Of course, I do because I'm one of the 3 people who made it."

Ember froze and looked at star staring in disbelief. Just then Sans William and Zoro appeared what's going on Zoro demanded.

Star looked around and spoke it was the 12 of December 2009 when I and Blaze were called for a lab experiment at Stadford hill over there were 2 other people both in lab coats they showed us the chamber and told us what it really is .It's a control chip used to control humans it uses nuclear energy to make a person almost unstoppable. It was powerful but illegal had this gone into the wrong hands and the world would have been destroyed.

I and Blaze both, knew how dangerous this weapon is so one night we entered the facility and stole it and programmed it to follow only our commands. So you see I knew what was inside

that chamber, that's why it shrieked when I approached it because it recognized me.

Everyone stood in shock and disbelief, especially Ember

Star turned towards his team, I'm sorry I didn't tell you all this in advance, but it was important to bring the truth out

Star looked at Ember and said, "The rules were not shattered but it was me who shattered them."

Also, he said looking at Ember your power should end right now.

Just as the words left his mouth Embers glow stopped and she fell on her knees.

Star looked at his fellow members and winked, and they too nodded back with a smile

Chapter 20

Star looked at ember and said I know u are not the one behind this whole scheme but the real mastermind id the Joker he is the one who built this chamber, he is the one who planned the fire at the fair last year, he is the one who is behind the missing people and Important officers.

Ember looked at star in shock and said, “you know the Joker?” Her voice showed surprise and amusement.

“Yes” Star replied I know who he is now if you tell us about who he is and how u met him maybe we can find a way to get you out of prison.

Ember looked at star and said ok I do not have any option anyway, so it makes no difference if I tell u who he is or not.

“You think you know him,” she said quietly. “But you don’t know what he’s capable of.”

“Then tell us.”

Ember exhaled and leaned back against the cold p wall.

“The Joker isn’t just some criminal who likes chaos. His real name is Adrian Vale. At least... that’s what he told me. He used to be a structural engineer. Brilliant. Obsessive. He designed high-security buildings, underground facilities, even parts of the city’s old subway system.”

Star's eyes widened slightly. "That's how he built the chamber."

Ember nodded. "Yes. He knew the city from the inside out — its weaknesses, its forgotten tunnels, its blind spots. But he wasn't always like this. He believed the city was rotten. Corrupt officials, powerful people making deals in the shadows. He thought he was exposing them."

"The fire at the fair last year?" Star asked.

Ember's jaw tightened. "That was never meant to kill anyone. It was supposed to be a distraction. He planned it to draw out certain 'important officers,' as he called them. The ones he claimed were involved in disappearances. But something went wrong. The flames spread too fast. He didn't predict the wind shift."

"And the missing people?"

He captured them because he believes they're connected to something bigger — bribery, illegal operations, hidden funds. He's been building a case in his own way. Gathering proof. Forcing confessions."

Star stepped closer. "And you? How did you meet him?"

Ember gave a laugh.

"I met him at a city planning conference two years ago. He was charming, soft-spoken and intelligent. He talked about redesigning cities to make them 'honest.' We started working together on a community project. At least that's what I thought it was."

Her voice lowered.

"But he was already building the chamber by then. He recruited me because I'm good with permits, schedules, supply chains. I

didn't know what it was really for. By the time I figured it out, I was too deep in.

"So, you stayed," Star said softly.

"I stayed because I thought I could slow him down. Redirect him. But he doesn't stop once he starts a game. Everything is a game to him."

Silence hung in the air.

"If what you're saying is true," Star said, "then he's still out there. Still planning."

Ember's expression shifted — not fear, but something worse.

"He's always planning."

Just then, a guard's voice echoed down the corridor.

"Star! Phone call for you."

Star frowned. "For me? Who would—"

"It's urgent," the guard insisted.

Star hesitated, then walked to the security desk. The receiver felt cold against her ear.

"Hello?"

For a moment, there was only silence.

Then a calm, male voice spoke.

"Impressive detective work, Star. Truly. I always admired your work."

"You see," the voice continued smoothly, "Ember told you just enough. She always was sentimental."

Star's grip tightened. "Joker."

“Mastermind is such a dramatic word, don’t you think? I prefer... architect.”

“You have exactly forty-eight hours to find the next piece. Check the old subway maps. The ones that were never decommissioned.”

Star’s heart pounded.

“If you fail,” the Joker added lightly, “the city loses something far more important than officers.”

The line went dead.

Star slowly lowered his phone.

From the back, Ember watched in silence.

“He called, didn’t he?” Ember whispered.

Star turned back toward her, eyes burning with determination.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “And the game just changed.”

Chapter 21

Star was hesitant to go as he suspected a trap but Zoro Sanz and Lazer wanted to go star waited for a few minutes then spoke ok we will go all of you get ready and suit up we leave in exactly 5 minutes...

Before they left Zoro said Star you said that you were one of the three people that made the chip the other one is blaze then who is the third one?

Star's jaw tightened.

"Adrian Vale."

Silence swallowed the room.

Lazer stopped mid-motion. "The Joker?"

Star nodded once. "Before he became... this. We worked together on micro-tracking tech. It was meant for emergency response—disaster zones, collapsed buildings. A chip that could map underground

Zoro's expression darkened. "And he used that knowledge to map the tunnels."

"Yes," Star said quietly. "He improved it."

Lazer zipped his bag shut. "So this isn't just a game to him. It's personal."

Star grabbed his mask. “It always was.”

Five minutes later, they stood at the entrance to an abandoned subway beneath the old industrial district. The iron gate had long rusted through, hanging half-open like a warning.

A cold draft rose from the darkness below.

“This line was never officially decommissioned,” Star said. “Just sealed and forgotten.”

“Forgotten by most,” Zoro muttered.

They descended the cracked concrete steps. Their boots echoed as they reached the platform. Dust coated everything. Old signage hung crooked, letters faded beyond recognition.

Lazer activated the chip scanner.

The small device hummed softly, projecting a faint blue light across the tunnel walls.

“Signal’s faint,” Lazer said. “But it’s there. About two hundred meters ahead.”

They moved cautiously into the tunnel itself. The air grew heavier. Rats scattered at the sound of their approach.

Halfway through, Zoro stopped. “You hear that?”

A low mechanical sound.

Star raised his hand, signaling silence.

They moved forward slowly until the tunnel opened into a wider maintenance chamber—one that did not appear on any public map.

And there it was.

A massive steel crate sat in the center of the chamber.

Floodlights mounted above it flickered on automatically as they stepped inside.

The sudden brightness made them cover their eyes.

“Motion sensors,” Lazer whispered.

The crate was enormous—at least twenty feet long, reinforced with riveted steel plates. A digital lock blinked on its front.

Zoro circled it carefully. “This wasn’t dragged here. It was assembled here.”

Star stepped closer. “He wanted us to find it.”

“Or he wanted someone else to,” Lazer added.

The scanner beeped sharply.

“Signal’s strongest here.”

Star knelt by the lock panel. It required a six-digit code.

“Forty-eight hours,” Zoro muttered. “Maybe this is the first piece.”

Star stared at the numbers. Then he noticed something etched faintly into the metal near the base of the crate.

A symbol.

Three interlocking circles.

The same symbol they had used years ago when designing the chip.

“Three creators,” Star whispered.

Lazer’s eyes widened. “You think—”

Star entered a sequence.

0-3-0-9-1-8.

The date of their first successful test.

The lock blinked red.

“Wrong,” Zoro said quietly.

Star exhaled slowly.

“Wait,” Lazer said suddenly. “You said Adrian believed the city was rotten from the inside. Corrupt foundations.”

Star looked at the ground.

Then he saw it.

Beneath the crate, barely visible through the dust, was an old subway marker painted onto the concrete: Line 7 – Section 24.

“Seven twenty-four...” Star murmured.

He entered: 0-7-2-4-0-0.

The lock clicked.

All three stepped back instinctively as the crate’s heavy latches released with a thunderous clank.

The lid lifted slowly.

Light from above spilled inside—

And reflected.

Gold.

Stacks and stacks of gold bars filled the crate to the brim.

The chamber shimmered in warm metallic glow.

Zoro let out a low whistle. “That’s not just corruption money.”

Lazer stepped closer. “This is federal reserve-level storage.”

Star’s mind raced.

“This isn’t payment,” he said. “It’s leverage.”

Tucked neatly on top of the gold was a small black envelope.

Star picked it up.

Inside was a single card.

You're getting warmer.

— A.V.

Suddenly, the tunnel lights flickered.

And somewhere deeper in the darkness, metal doors began sliding shut.

Zoro looked toward the entrance. “Tell me that’s not what I think it is.”

Star’s eyes sharpened.

“It’s phase two.”

From hidden speakers, a familiar calm voice echoed through the chamber.

“Well, done, Star. But gold is heavy... and so are consequences.”

The ground beneath them trembled slightly.

“You have exactly ten minutes to decide,” the Joker continued smoothly. “Secure the gold and save your reputations... or follow the real trail and save the city.”

A pause.

“You can’t do both.”

The countdown clock projected suddenly onto the far wall.

Lazer looked at Star. “What’s it going to be?”

Star stared at the glittering mountain of gold... then toward the darker tunnel beyond the chamber.

His decision would change everything

Chapter 22

Star calmly walked towards the hologram of Joker and smiled. He said, “you really think you can trap me. You forgot that I always come prepared. Through the hologram Star saw Joker’s surprised expression and he said you can never come face to face with a person.

I know that you cannot remove your mask and that’s because I was the one who designed it

Joker just stood there in utter disbelief

Star calmly gave a smile and said this tunnel the technical equipment required for it guess who supplied you with it

Everyone looked towards Star in shock he had never shared anything regarding this with them.

Star looked at their expression and clapped his hands twice and calmly walked out.

The others followed him

Just as they were about to leave, Star turned back and said you can keep the gold and he clapped his hands again and there was a huge explosion in the tunnel the whole tunnel collapsed

Star dialed Joker, and Joker said, “Well looks like someone likes aura farming eh.”

Star said, “You start the story, but I write the ending.” Joker gave a chuckle.

Well, he said I’ll be looking forward to the ending

Star said I know you don’t care about the gold your main targets are the officers because they know something you don’t. I know that you are on your private island now and have them imprisoned there.

Joker gave a chuckle and said, “Well I was right about your detective skills, but I didn’t know that you were this smart.”

Star said you don’t know a lot of things, but I will come soon and make sure I put an end to you.

Then my guest Joker said, “But you remember I said that if you don’t go to the tunnel the city will lose something more valuable than officers well, I will show it to you in 20 minutes’ live.”

“Well, I’ll be waiting” said Star and they all got in the jeep and drove to their facility.

Once they reached, Ember said “Well any luck”. Star looked at her and said, “you missed out of a lot of action”.

Ember said nothing but just sat down quietly.

After a while Zoro spoke up “Star” he said, “Why did you not tell us any of this do you not trust us?”

I trust you all but I do not want to put you all in danger so its better that I face the consequences noy you all.

We are a team and we will all stand together no matter what

Thanks star said now we just wait for joker to play his next card.

“But how do you think joker gets all his funding,” said Sans.

Just like we are a team the same way joker is part of a organization called the circus and joker is not the main head

he's just the mask the main attraction the famous one the real head is the ring master, but I don't know who he is yet.

Lazer sat down on a chair and laughed at what was supposed to be a murder case has led to an international investigation.

Anyone for some pancakes asked Zoro in this whole case we have not eaten anything.

"I'll have a few pancakes and a black coffee," said Star.

"I'll have an egg and bread," said sans.

I'll have a stake," said Ronald. "Same for me," said William

"I'll have a pizza" said Lazer.

"And I'll have a pizza, fries, a burger, a smoothie and an ice cream," said Zoro I'll order it all right now

The order came in 10 minutes and star paid the bill.

"Wow that was fast," said Lazer.

They might know I'm famous boasted Zoro(in reality the food came early because Zoro has a VIP pass and has paid extra for it since he gets hungry often).

As they ate star looked outside the window their HQ was located on a private island just outside the city borders owned by star. Star originally was a multi billionaire and Ronald was his associate and a billionaire himself.

Star met Blaze in a business meeting and that's how the FCO organization was formed.

Star has a lot of super cars and still owns a lot of stock shares so that's how they all get their funding.

Ronald still runs his business and supplies 40% of the FCO funds.

They also have a lot of personnel working with them.

Adrian vale aka the joker was also part of the team but left to pursue his own ways.

Just as they were eating alarms flooded the HQ a sound came on the emergency speaker there been a massive fire at the state bank road all fire personnel reached there as soon as possible.

The message wasn't for them as all alerts come to their HQ too'.

They were all just relaxing when a call came on stars phone.

Star picked up the receiver and pressed it against his ear an anxious voice spoke from the other end.

Star sir it's me chief of police officer Leonardo come to the bank immediately this fire may have something to do with your case!!!

Star rushed out and immediately reached the scene within 10 minutes there were more than 20 fire engines trying to put out the fire .

Why are they so many fire engines asked star is the fire really that bad?

If it was a fire so many would not be required but look at the material used in this fire

The police chief handed him a bag containing a small glowing rock .

I believe this is uranium said the police chief but is suggest that u test it first.

Star looked at his members if really uranium was used in this fire then this case became a whole lot complicated.

Star went to his underground lab and ran a few tests and after some time he took off his lab coat sat on a chair and gave a deep sigh

So what is it said lazer

Silence filled the room, and Star spoke it's uranium .

The room felt quieter as the truth came out

This was on a whole other level star never thought that Joker had such power

Chapter 23

Nobody moved
Even Lazer — who normally had something sarcastic
ready stood frozen, eyes locked on the small
containment chamber across the lab.

Ronald was the first to break the silence.

“That’s not possible... uranium doesn’t just show up in random
fires.”

William leaned against the console, arms folded tighter now.

“It does when someone wants it to.”

Star’s face was pale, but his mind was racing.

“This wasn’t meant to burn a building,” he said slowly. “The
fire was just delivery.”

Zoro frowned. “Delivery for what?”

Before Star could answer, alarms exploded through the
underground lab.

A sharp, piercing tone.

Red lights.

Warning screens flashing.

CITY EMERGENCY BROADCAST DETECTED

Lazer spun toward the main monitor.

“What now?!”

The screen flickered.

Then a familiar symbol emerged.

A sharp grin.

A white mask.

Joker.

The video quality stabilized.

Joker sat casually in a chair, legs crossed, as though this were a comedy show and not a citywide broadcast hijack.

Behind him — darkness.

Just his voice.

Calm.

Amused.

Deadly.

“Good evening, Star.”

No one in the lab breathed.

“I hope you enjoyed my little demonstration.”

Star’s jaw tightened.

“What do you want?”

Joker chuckled.

“Straight to business. I like that.”

He leaned forward.

“You’ve been busy protecting your precious officers... your brave heroes... your little shields.”

The grin widened.

“But I told you something more important would be lost.”

The room grew colder.

Joker’s eyes seemed to burn through the screen.

“And you still thought I meant people.”

Star’s pulse spiked.

Williams expression changed calm, but serious.

“What did you do? Star whispered.

Joker spread his arms

“Oh Star... I didn’t destroy anything.”

“I relocated value.”

Confusion spread through the team.

Lazer muttered, “What is this guy talking about...”

Then Joker dropped the smile.

For the first time, his voice lost its playful edge.

“You guard lives.”

“I target meaning.”

The screen changed.

A live aerial feed.

The entire city visible from above.

Traffic moving.

Crowds gathering.

Nothing unusual...

Until Ronald noticed.

“...Why are all those buildings dark?”

Star’s eyes widened.

Entire sectors of the city — blacked out.

Not power failure.

No smoke.

No damage.

Just darkness.

Then Joker’s voice returned.

“While you chased fires and officers...”

“I erased something your city depends on far more.”

New feeds appeared.

Banks.

Data centers.

Government offices.

Hospitals.

Research facilities.

All offline.

All wiped.

All empty.

Gone.

Zoro stared in disbelief.

“...That’s impossible.

Joker's mask filled the screen again.

"No money stolen."

"No buildings bombed."

"No grand explosions."

"But identity..."

"History..."

"Ownership..."

"Trust..."

He laughed softly.

"Gone."

Star's voice was barely audible.

"...You didn't attack the city."

Joker nodded slowly.

"I removed its memory."

Silence came to the lab.

Joker leaned back, satisfied.

"Officers can be replaced."

"Buildings rebuilt."

"But a city without records..."

"Without systems..."

"Without proof of anything..."

He whispered:

"...That is true chaos."

The broadcast cut.

Just Star's team staring at the monitors.
The reality is sinking in.
This was bigger than terrorism.
Bigger than violence.
Joker hadn't taken lives.
He had taken structure.
Star sat motionless.
Finally understanding.
That's what he meant."
Lazer swallowed.
"More valuable than officers..."
Star nodded slowly, eyes burning with dread.
"He took the city's foundation."
"And now everything collapses."

Chapter 24

The red emergency lights continued to rotate across the lab walls, washing everyone in pulses of warning.

Zoro finally spoke. “So, what do we do now?”

Star didn’t answer immediately.

He was staring at the containment chamber again. At the faint, glowing residue of uranium particles resting inside reinforced glass.

Then he exhaled.

“Do you remember why this organization exists?”

Lazer blinked. “Because we have a talent for attracting psychos?”

“No,” Star said calmly.

He turned to face them fully.

“We are the Forgotten Cases Organization.”

Ronald frowned slightly. “That’s just a name.”

Star shook his head.

“No. It isn’t.”

He walked toward the center table and tapped the city map, where blackout zones still flickered.

“We exist because of everything the system overlooks.”

William’s eyes sharpened.

Star continued.

“We study cold files. Abandoned investigations. Incidents labeled ‘unsolved.’ Patterns dismissed as coincidence. Evidence buried because it was inconvenient.”

He looked at each of them.

“We solve what everyone else forgets.”

The weight of that settled over the room.

Zoro crossed his arms. “And you think Joker just created another forgotten case?”

Star’s gaze moved back to the uranium sample.

“No,” he said quietly.

“I think he used one.”

The team was still.

Ronald raised his brow. “Used one how?”

Star moved to the archive console. “Pull Case File 47-B.”

Lazer hesitated. “...The Harbor Containment Incident?”

William’s expression shifted instantly.

“That case was sealed.”

“Exactly,” Star replied.

The file opened on screen.

Five years ago.

A small fire at an industrial storage facility near the old harbor.

Official cause: electrical malfunction.

Damage: minimal.

But buried in the chemical analysis—

Trace radioactive signatures.

Not enough to trigger national alarm.

Just enough to confuse investigators.

Ronald leaned closer. "...Uranium."

Star nodded.

"At the time, pattern didn't match smuggling routes. It didn't match reactor waste either."

William whispered, "It matched research-grade signatures.

Zoro's eyes widened. "The same signature."

"Yes."

Star tapped the containment chamber display.

"Same purity. Same micro-method."

Lazer's voice dropped. "So, five years ago..."

"Joker tested the method," Star finished.

The room went cold again.

"He created a minor event," Star continued, "small enough to be dismissed. Logged. Filed. Forgotten."

Ronald swallowed. "He was mapping response behavior."

William nodded slowly. "Testing how much uranium could be dispersed without triggering federal involvement."

Zoro looked disturbed. "And no one connected it."

Star's expression hardened.

"We did."

They looked at him.

He allowed the faintest, humorless smile.

"That's why we're still here."

He turned serious again.

"Joker knew this file existed. He knew it would take a team obsessed with forgotten patterns to recognize the signature.

Lazer's fingers hovered over the keyboard. "He left it for you."

Star nodded once.

"He wanted us to find it."

"Why?" Ronald asked.

Star's voice lowered.

"Because the Harbor Incident wasn't about uranium."

He switched screens.

Satellite records.

And then—

A name surfaced.

Project node.

William inhaled sharply. "That was a data resilience program."

Ronald's eyes widened. "Government-funded. Designed to create decentralized archival storage."

Zoro frowned. "Why was it shut down?"

Star answered quietly.

“Budget cuts. Officially.”

He pulled up the project schematics.

Unlike centralized cloud systems, Mnemosyne used fragmented data shards stored in physical micro-archives distributed across non-networked municipal sites.

Analog-digital hybrids.

Air-gapped.

Un-hackable remotely.

Lazer stared at the screen.

“...If that project was partially implemented...”

Star nodded.

“Some sectors of the city may still have shard nodes.”

William’s voice grew steady again. “Meaning Joker wiped primary systems... but may not have touched dormant shard storage.”

Ronald leaned forward urgently. “If we can locate the shard map—”

“We can reconstruct the city’s files,” Star finished.

Zoro looked between them. “But if this system existed, why didn’t anyone use it?”

Star’s jaw tightened.

“Because the project was labeled inefficient.”

He paused.

“And forgotten.”

Silence again.

Lazer’s eyes widened slowly.

“You think Joker used the Harbor uranium incident to access a storage site.”

Star nodded.

“The harbor facility wasn’t random. It sat above Node 3.”

Ronald quickly cross-checked coordinates.

“...It does.”

William connected the final thread.

“He used low-level radioactive contamination to force temporary evacuation.”

“During which,” Star continued, “he accessed the shard registry.”

Zoro exhaled sharply. “He stole the map.”

“Yes.”

Star looked back at the blackout zones.

“He didn’t just erase data.”

“He ensured only he knows how to fully rebuild it.”

The room absorbed the enormity of that.

Lazer spoke quietly.

“So how do we retrieve the files?”

Star’s eyes sharpened.

“We don’t chase the stolen copy.”

He zoomed into old municipal blueprints.

“We reactivate node3

Ronald hesitated. “If those shard nodes still exist, they’ll be offline. Unpowered.”

“Good,” Star replied.

“Offline means untouched.”

William moved to another console. “We’ll need physical access to each node.”

Zoro cracked his knuckles again. “Field operation.”

Star nodded.

“But first, we confirm one is intact.”

He brought up Node 7.

Location: Beneath the old courthouse — outside the blackout epicenter.

Lazer ran a structural scan using city infrastructure sensors.

Signal returned.

Weak.

But present.

Ronald whispered, “...It’s alive.”

Hope flickered for the first time since the broadcast.

Star allowed himself one breath of relief.

“Joker erased the city’s active memory.”

He looked at his team.

“But he forgot something.”

William finished the thought quietly.

“Backup systems built by people who didn’t trust digital permanence.”

Star nodded.

“We are the Forgotten Cases Organization.”

He walked toward the exit corridor.

“We solve what the world discards.”

Zoro followed.

“And this time?”

Star’s expression hardened into focus.

“This time we remind the city who it is.”

Behind them, screens still showed darkened sectors.

Chaos brewing.

Uncertainty spreading.

And somewhere in the shadows—

Joker watching.

Confident.

Unaware

that the very forgotten case he once used as a test

had become the key

to undo everything

he had planned.

Chapter 25

The corridor doors slid open with a metallic groan.

Outside the lab, the city no longer sounded like itself.

Sirens overlapped in distant waves. Emergency drones hummed across the skyline. Somewhere far below, voices echoed in confusion — citizens with vanished records, erased identities, blank systems that once defined their lives.

But Star walked as if none of it could reach him.

Focused. Controlled.

Behind him, the team moved with a shared urgency.

Node 7.

If it was truly active — even barely — it represented more than data.

The old courthouse stood like a relic from the past it had been standing there for more than 100 years now, its stone glam washed in rotating emergency lights. The blackout had spared this district, but only technically. Power poles flickered. Street displays glitched. Traffic signals froze.

The building was sealed.

Ronald glanced at the barricades. “Local authorities locked it down.”

“Expected,” William said.

Zoro stepped forward. “So we knock?”

Star didn’t slow.

“We enter.”

Lazer sighed softly. “Of course we do.”

Inside, the courthouse was a huge room of shadows.

Moonlight spilled through high windows, cutting across abandoned desks lay silent. Papers lay scattered where clerks had fled hours earlier, systems collapsing mid-operation.

Star moved directly toward the basement access.

No hesitation.

No doubt.

He stopped only once — at a heavy steel door marked:

ARCHIVAL STORAGE RESTRICTED AREA

William stared at it.

“This level wasn’t on public blueprints.”

Star’s voice was calm.

“Because it was never meant to be.”

Zoro grinned .

“My kind of architecture.”

The lock was mechanical.

Not digital.

Ronald raised a brow. “That’s either very good news... or very bad news.”

Lazer knelt beside it, unfolding a toolkit.

“No new means of technology means no Joker interference.”

Metal clicked softly under her fingers.

“Also means,” Zoro added, “no easy entry.” He kept on trying to unlock it

Then—

Click

The lock disengaged.

Cold air rushed out.

The cold of something designed to remain untouched.

Lights flickered automatically as they entered — dim, ember strips powered by an isolated circuit.

And there it was.

A cylindrical chamber in reinforced concrete.

No screens.

No terminals.

Only a small analog panel and a single port.

Ronald exhaled.

“...That’s Menemone the program.”

William stepped closer, almost controlled.

“Physical shard node.

Star’s eyes scanned the chamber.

“No external tampering.”

Lazer whispered, “It survived.”

Ronald opened his field scanner.

A faint signal pulsed back.

Weak.

But steady.

“...Core memory intact.”

Hope ignited like a spark through dry air.

Zoro leaned forward. “So, we plug in and download everything?”

Star shook his head.

“No.”

They looked at him.

“This system doesn’t deliver files.”

He tapped the chamber lightly.

“It reconstructs them.”

William immediately understood.

“Shards.”

Star nodded.

“Each node contains individual data segments. Individually meaningless. Collectively complete.”

Ronald’s eyes widened. “Meaning Node 7 alone is useless.”

“Correct.”

Zoro groaned. “Of course it is.”

Star’s gaze hardened.

“But it tells us something far more important.”

He pointed to the interface.

Lazer connected a diagnostic bridge.

The chamber emitted a low, hum — like machinery waking from being asleep for a long time.

Then—

A sequence of soft mechanical ticks.

Ronald watched the readout.

“...It’s requesting shard alignment.”

William’s voice tightened.

“It’s searching for the other nodes.”

Star nodded once.

“Which means the map Joker stole...”

He looked at them.

“...Isn’t unique.”

The interface clicked again.

Coordinates began to surface.

Slowly.

One by one.

shard nodes.

Scattered across the city.

Hidden beneath libraries.

hubs.

structures.

Places no hacker would ever target.

Places no system administrator would remember.

Places the world had forgotten.

Zoro stared at the expanding list.

“...That’s half the city.”

Ronald’s voice carried something dangerously close to awe.

“Menemone wasn’t inefficient.”

William finished quietly.

“It was invisible.”

Star allowed the smallest smile.

“And Joker can’t erase what he can’t see.”

They split into teams.

Speed mattered now more than secrecy.

Emergency vehicles flooded major routes, but Menemone nodes existed precisely where modern systems didn’t — beneath neglected structures, buried inside architectural zones.

Forgotten infrastructure.

Perfect hiding places.

Zoro and Ronald descended into an abandoned metro control system.

But behind a sealed maintenance wall—

Node 12.

Untouched.

Alive.

Ronald grinned.

“He really missed these.”

Zoro cracked the panel open.

“No.”

He smiled.

“He never knew they mattered.”

William and Lazer entered a decommissioned public library wing.

Analog systems.

Dead to the digital world.

But beneath the central archive pedestal—

Node 4.

Its amber light is still pulsing.

Lazer stared at it.

“...This city had a second memory.”

William nodded.

“And nobody remembered.”

Star moved alone.

Node 3.

The harbor.

Where Joker’s plan had begun.

The facility was long abandoned, its exterior corroded by salt and time. Security fences sagged. Warning signs faded beyond legibility.

But Star walked through the ruin with quiet certainty.

Because this place had never truly been empty.

Deep beneath the structure, past layers of forgotten storage chambers, he found it.

Node 3.

The original access point.

The one Joker had damaged

The one he believed secured his advantage.

Star examined the casing.

No damage.

No extraction.

Only evidence of temporary breach years earlier.

He nodded to himself.

“You didn’t steal the city’s memory...”

His voice echoed softly.

“...You only borrowed it.”

Reconstruction

Hours later, the courthouse chamber roared to life.

Not loudly.

But with the steady, deliberate rhythm of systems designed for permanence.

Shard alignments started.

Fragments merged.

Data structures reassembled like a city remembering its own name.

Screens flickered.

Then stabilized.

Records returned.

Infrastructure logs.

Identity databases.

Legal archives.

Medical registries.

Transit systems.

Communication layers.

Layer after layer of erased reality—

Restored.

Ronald stared at the flowing streams.

“...We’re bringing it back.”

William’s voice was barely audible.

“No.”

He watched the city rebuild itself.

“We’re waking it up.”

Across the skyline, systems reignited.

Blackout sectors dissolved.

Networks reappeared.

Information flowed again.

Citizens watched in disbelief as vanished histories returned.

Files re-materialized.

Connections restored

And somewhere, in the dark

Joker stopped smiling.

In his hidden observatory of screens and the news spread like a forest fire certainty.

Impossible.

Primary systems had been wiped clean.

Recovery paths eliminated.

Yet—

The city was breathing again.

Joker leaned forward.

Eyes narrowing.

Then he saw it.

A signature.

Old.

Air-gapped architecture.

His expression changed.

For the first time—

Uncertainty.

“...Menemone.”

Back at the courthouse, Star watched the final alignment stabilize.

The city’s memory was no longer in parts.

It was whole.

Alive.

Zoro exhaled slowly.

“So, what now?”

Star's gaze remained on the glowing systems.

Now steady.

"Now," he said quietly,

"We wait for Joker to realize..."

A faint, knowing smile appeared.

"...that forgotten things are the hardest to destroy."

And across the city, lights burned again.

Chapter 26

The transport back to headquarters was quieter than any of them remembered.

No one slept. No one even pretended to.

Menemone's restored grids had brought the city's lights back to life, but the glow outside the armored carrier windows felt artificial — like a stage set rebuilt after a fire. Streetlamps flickered past in perfect intervals.

Ronald sat with his arms folded, gaze fixed on nothing in particular. Zoro leaned back, helmet resting beside him, eyes closed but mind cracing. Lazer's fingers tapped absently against a sealed tablet, replaying fragments of reconstructed data in his head.

Star stood.

He always stood.

One hand braced against the ceiling rail, eyes forward, posture unmoving as if motion itself was beneath notice. The city passed him in reflections — fractured, silent, alive.

But unsettled.

Angular walls. Reinforced glass.

Menemone's recovery protocols had already restored internal systems. As the team entered, the familiar hum of operational intelligence filled the air — servers stabilizing dormant networks breathing back into existence.

But something was wrong.

They all felt it before they saw her.

Ember was waiting in the central command bay.

She wasn't seated at a console.

She was standing in the middle of the room.

And Ember never left her console.

Her expression alone was enough to halt the entire team.

Zoro straightened first.

"...That's not a good face."

Ronald's voice sharpened instantly.

"What happened?"

Ember didn't answer immediately.

The screens behind her shifted — Menemone responding to her silent authorization. Visual archives assembled. Old surveillance layers flickered into clarity.

When she finally spoke, her voice lacked its usual steadiness.

"We have a historical breach."

Lazer frowned.

"We just sealed half the city's breaches."

"Not physical," Ember said.

A pause.

“Operational.”

The word landed harder than expected.

Star stepped forward.

Ember met his eyes.

Then she activated the file.

Footage flooded the central display.

Not recent. Not during the blackout.

Old.

Recovered.

Corroded lighting. Security angles by time but reconstructed by Menemone’s restoration engine.

And there —

Zoro’s eyes widened.

“...No.”

Ronald’s posture stiffened violently.

Lazer stopped breathing for a full second.

Because the figure moving across the dock was unmistakable.

Blaze.

Alive. Speaking to someone outside the frame.

Ember’s voice cut through the silence.

“Timestamp: eight years before the blackout.”

The footage zoomed.

Another figure stepped into view.

White coat. Relaxed posture. Familiar, unsettling presence.

Joker.

No one spoke.

No one needed to.

The recording had no audio at first — just images of an exchange. Containers. Data drives. A transfer of something unseen.

Then Menemone reconstructed the missing layer.

Blaze's voice was tense, restrained.

"This isn't just data."

Joker's tone — calm, almost amused.

"It never is."

Blaze spoke again.

"You're playing with something unstable."

Joker replied savagely:

"I'm exposing something already unstable."

The feed froze.

Frame locked.

Ember deactivated the projection.

The room remained motionless.

Zoro was the first to speak.

"That's impossible," he said, though his voice lacked conviction.

"Blaze hunted Joker. He nearly died stopping him."

Ember's reply was immediate.

"He also met him repeatedly."

Ronald turned sharply.

“Repeatedly?”

Multiple files opened across surrounding displays — surveillance fragments, movement patterns, because Menemone had brought back what previous systems had lost.

Blaze. Joker. Interaction

Not many.

But enough.

Lazer stared at the data, disbelief mixing with awe.

“...He wasn’t working for Joker.”

Ember tilted her head slightly.

“No.”

A beat.

“He was working with him.”

Ronald ran a hand across his face.

“For what purpose?”

Ember hesitated.

Menemone’s slides shifted again, pulling deeper archival layers — material classification codes, shipment authorizations, logistics trails that should have been erased permanently.

But were not.

A new sequence stabilized.

Ember spoke softly.

“For this.”

The screens filled with records.

Industrial transport records.

Radiological shielding authorizations.

Zoro leaned forward.

“...What am I looking at?”

Lazer answered before Ember could.

And his voice carried something close to dread.

“Uranium transport chains.”

Silence.

Ronald stared.

“That can’t be right. Civilian infrastructure isn’t permitted to handle—”

“It wasn’t permitted,” Ember interrupted.

She expanded the records.

“Yet it occurred.”

The room became a storm of data.

Decades-old shipments.

Shell organizations — dissolved long ago.

Transit corridors routed through locations no longer existing on any official map.

Zoro’s confusion deepened.

“Why would anyone move uranium through civilian systems?”

Ronald’s expression darkened.

“To hide it.”

Lazer shook his head slowly.

“No... shielding protocols alone would require military oversight. This isn’t smuggling.”

Star had not moved.

But his eyes had narrowed.

Ember continued.

“These transfers predate Joker’s known operations.”

A pause.

“By many years.”

Understanding arrived not as a revelation.

But as a collapse.

Ronald spoke first, voice low.

“...Joker didn’t introduce radioactive materials into the system.”

Lazer finished the thought.

“He found them already there.”

Zoro looked between them.

“Found what?”

Star answered.

“The secret.”

The implications rippled violently.

Decades of undeclared uranium movement meant only one thing — an infrastructure of concealment so deep that even global monitoring systems had failed to detect it.

Or worse.

Had ignored it.

Ronald moved up and downnow, agitation breaking his usual discipline.

“This changes everything. Joker’s attacks, the memory collapse, the blackout — none of it aligns with simple destabilization anymore.”

Zoro’s voice was uneasy.

“You’re saying the chaos wasn’t the objective?”

Star’s reply was immediate.

“It rarely is.”

Ember pulled up Blaze’s final recovered interactions.

Encrypted messages.

But the pattern was clear.

Blaze had discovered the shipments.

Blaze had traced the materials.

Blaze had contacted Joker.

Not as an ally.

Not as an enemy.

But as someone chasing the same truth from opposite directions.

Ronald stared at the screen.

“...Blaze wasn’t corrupted.”

Lazer nodded slowly.

“He was investigating.”

Zoro exhaled.

“And Joker?”

Star’s eyes hardened.

“Was already there.”

The headquarters seemed smaller now.

As if the restored knowledge itself consumed space.

Ronald spoke

“So the uranium wasn’t a weapon.”

“No,” Star said.

“It was a motive.”

No one spoke after that.

Because every one of them understood the scale of what that meant.

Someone — long before Joker, long before the blackout, long before Menemone — had buried nuclear material inside civilian logistical chains.

Not stolen.

Not lost.

Placed.

And Blaze had uncovered it.

Joker had learned it.

The blackout had erased it.

Menemone had restored it.

Ember finally broke the silence.

“There is more.”

Star turned.

“The shipments converge.”

“Where?”

Ember’s eyes flicked toward a forming map projection.

A familiar sector of the city coastline illuminated.

Ronald's breath slowed.

Zoro's face changed.

Because they all recognized the location.

The harbor.

Node 3.

And without another word —

They moved towards the center

Chapter 27

The lights did not simply return.
They stabilized.

Across control centers, terminals, handheld devices, and forgotten government consoles, the same anomaly began surfacing — a pattern buried inside restored records. Not corruption. Not damage.

A trail.

William was the first to notice.

He leaned closer to the courthouse display, eyes narrowing as layers of reconstructed data scrolled past.

“...Star.”

No one spoke casually anymore when they used that tone.

Star turned.

William magnified a sequence of shipment logs — decades old, previously invisible, now reconstructed with clarity.

Industrial transfers. Port authorizations. Scaled cargo classifications.

But one category repeated.

Material designation codes that should never have existed inside civilian infrastructure.

Ronald's face changed as he read them.

"...Radioactive materials?"

Lazer's fingers moved rapidly across the keyboard

"These aren't recent."

Zoro frowned.

"How old?"

William answered quietly.

"Old enough to be forgotten intentionally."

Silence tightened the room.

Star stepped forward.

"Trace origin."

The system obeyed.

Not to companies.

Not to governments.

But to a chain of shell entities that no longer existed — organizations dissolved, renamed, erased long before the blackout. Yet Menemone had preserved what modern systems had discarded.

The shipments converged on a single location.

The harbor.

Node 3.

Star did not react.

But everyone felt the shift.

Zoro broke the stillness.

“...That’s where Joker started.”

William nodded slowly.

“Not started.”

He looked at the data.

“Hidden.”

The harbor ruins were no longer abandoned.

Emergency units flooded the perimeter when Star arrived, drawn by the restored intelligence feeds now flagging the site as historically critical. Searchlights cut through the dark night. Waves struck the metal of the distant lighthouse

Ronald scanned the underground chambers.

High radiation signatures.

Containment-grade shielding.

Storage vaults long emptied.

But not looted.

Star walked deeper into the structure, past concrete and corroded reinforcement beams, until he reached the chamber Joker had once accessed.

Only now, with Menemone’s truth restored, its purpose was undeniable.

Not a data breach point.

A transfer of authority.

William’s voice echoed through the comms.

“These shipments... they were never declared publicly. Someone moved uranium through civilian chambers.”

Ronald added, stunned:

“Which means Joker didn’t create the chaos...”

Zoro finished:

“He discovered it.”

Star examined the vault interior.

Old locking mechanisms.

Heavy transport containers carved into the floor.

This place had once held something the city was never meant to know existed.

And Joker had learned the truth years ago.

A slow realization settled.

The blackout.

The erased records.

The obsession with memory.

It had never been random destruction.

It was to preserve something.

They found him before dawn.

Not fleeing.

Not hiding.

Waiting.

Joker stood inside his observatory, walls of screens reflecting damaged city lights. For the first time, the grin was gone — replaced by something sharper, almost amused.

“You see it now,” he said calmly as Star entered.

Star’s weapon never left his side.

“The uranium.”

Joker tilted his head.

“Not stolen. Not smuggled.”

He gestured toward the restored city feeds.

“Buried. Forgotten. Hidden inside your perfect systems.”

William’s jaw tightened.

“You destabilized the city for this?”

Joker’s eyes flashed.

“I revealed it.”

Sirens wailed outside.

Containment units breached.

Within seconds, Joker was restrained, wrists locked in handcuffs designed for threats far more physical than any normal hand cuffs

Yet he did not resist.

He looked only at Star.

Almost satisfied.

“You fixed the memory,” Joker murmured.

“But you still don’t control the story.”

Star stepped closer.

“For someone who feared invisibility...”

He looked at joker in the eye

“...you left a very visible trail.”

For the first time, silence answered.

By sunrise, the city had absorbed the shock.

News broadcast across networks — recovered records exposing decades-old

material transfers. Investigations ignited. Authorities mobilized. Systems redesigned

And Joker —

Was gone.

Taken into custody under layers of security.

Neutralized.

Zoro leaned against the courthouse railing, exhaustion finally surfacing.

“So that’s it?”

Ronald allowed a rare smile.

“Looks like it.”

But Star did not share it.

He watched the waking skyline.

And spoke quietly.

“The Joker is caught...”

The team turned.

Star’s expression was unreadable.

“...but the Ringmaster remains.”

No one asked what he meant.

Because somewhere beneath was returning back to the city —

Something else was already moving.

To be continued...