

WATCHERS

BRIAN WEIMER

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Prologue

The sleek, corporate towers comprising the epicenter of New Phoenix illuminated the night landscape like a jewel on fire. The complex integration of structures merged into a pattern of modern symmetry; a convergence of steel, concrete and glass.

In the sky above the city, an aerial object glided silently.

The Eye - an advanced, remotely-controlled drone - soared above the industrial towers. Having a spherical, metallic exterior, the mechanized craft maintained a steady speed as it flew over the heart of the city.

Scanning. Tracking.

On the grid-like streets below, lights flashed from police cruisers as sirens blared, disturbing the serene illusion of the nocturnal environment.

Advancing forward, the Eye passed alongside the tallest structure in the city - Trikon Industries – a hexagonal building covered in windows on each side. Near the top of the tower sat a large, holographic sign; projecting the name of the corporation in a bluish-purple neon light. Bathed in the illumination, the Eye flew past a large, upper level window; reflecting in the glass.

Moving from one panel to the next, the drone ran alongside the outer perimeter of the building before flying past the circular tower of Apex Financial, Imperium Technology and Paragon International.

Scanning thousands of wireless frequencies and transmissions within range, the internal receivers within the Eye detected a signal with a unique signature. Homing in, it isolated a spiked energy harmonic originating from the unidentified source. The drone analyzed and transmitted the data back to its controller. Increasing velocity, the machine flew over the sports arena, the Palisades, the convention center, the Civic hotels and a half dozen other buildings.

While in flight, the probe detected identical surveillance drones flying at lower elevations, continuing to track the source of the signal. Before it could detect the point of origin, another object closed in from the west on a direct trajectory; an enemy attack drone.

The Eye had been detected.

Activating built-in defense turrets on either side, the Eye prepared to engage as the opposing machine drew closer. Black, bulkier and more menacing in appearance, the high-powered 'ravager' drone increased velocity as it raced towards its target.

Sweeping down on top of The Eye, the enemy drone utilized a tracker drive, attempting to disable the rogue drone. The Eye dove, evading capture.

The enemy drone maintained pursuit as The Eye descended. The ravager locked onto it, firing concentrated red laser beams from its rotating side turrets. The Eye swerved sharply, avoiding a direct hit; flying in an erratic pattern as the enemy drone pursued. The aerial objects sped

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through the sky, the Eye leading the other drone on a high speed chase; ascending and descending in an attempt to evade.

Unable to shake the ravager, the Eye performed a sharp dive, speeding through an opening of a multi-level parking structure. Coming out the opposite side, it followed a narrow course between two buildings.

Not far behind, the opposing drone maintained its pursuit. Releasing another struck, it hit its target. Protected by its armored plating, the Eye absorbed the direct impact before increasing speed. Employing a strategic maneuver, the Eye ascended to a higher elevation again, putting distance between itself and the enemy drone before circling back around the perimeter of a tall structure.

The Eye flew towards the ravager, on a direct course. As they locked into one another, both drones opened up and fired. They released a rapid exchange of red and blue lasers, simultaneously striking the opposing machine as they raced towards each other. Before colliding, the ravager turned left at the last moment, the Eye going right.

Losing sight of the enemy drone, the Eye weaved around the side of a corporate neon sign. Within seconds, it detected the ravager still in pursuit, homing in on its target like a heat-seeking missile. The Eye accelerated, flying at top speed as it attempted to shake the enemy.

Not far behind, the ravager emitted another round of fire, missing the Eye by centimeters.

As the dueling machines sped over the city below, the Eye released a bright pulse of electrical energy at the attacking drone. Enveloped by the powerful blast, the ravager froze up. Flying on a straight path, it crashed into the side of

a building, smashing into several pieces and falling to the sidewalk below.

The Eye continued its flight over New Phoenix; tracking the source of the signal.

The strength of the wireless transmission increased as the drone drew closer. Before it could reach the point of origin, a second warning began.

Another attack drone was detected, closing in from the north. Identical to the previous attack drone, the ravager flew between two buildings. Without provocation, it unleashed a round of laser fire.

Narrowly avoiding impact, the Eye increased velocity, taking a sudden turn downward before dropping a couple hundred feet in elevation. As the ravager followed, firing again at its target, the Eye initiated countermeasures, releasing a bright flash of electrical energy. The opposing drone absorbed the blast. Unlike the previous strike, the ravager appeared unaffected, continuing its pursuit.

Circling a corporate tower with the pursuing drone on its tail, the Eye altered course.

The ravager accelerated, closing the gap. The Eye circled another building in an evasive maneuver. It fired at the higher level building, cracking the window upon impact. Shattering the plate of glass, it entered the corporate building. Rupturing the quiet environment of the empty office environment, the Eye blew papers into a whirlwind as it sped past desks and offices.

The ravager followed, firing again. Unable to lock onto the moving target, it missed the Eye by several inches. Turning a corner, the Eye raced down a corridor before arriving at the far side of the building. It fired at another

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window before crashing through it, still pursued by the enemy drone as it emerged outside. The ravager released another round of fire, hitting the Eye.

Impacted by the strike, the Eye rattled, protected by its armor plating before turning around. Deploying countermeasures, the drone utilized an intense electrical charge at almost point blank range. The core of the ravager was struck. Disabled in one single motion, it lost power, free falling hundreds of feet to the street below. The enemy drone impacted on the concrete and broke into multiple pieces.

Tracking the same signal harmonics, the Eye ascended to a higher elevation, moving towards the southern edge of the metro region. Drawn to an empty overpass, the probe descended near an overpass, hovering silently above a street lamp.

Seeing an identical ‘ghost’ drone at a higher elevation not far away, the Eye remained hidden until it vanished from view. Meanwhile, it detected a transmitter hidden nearby. Isolating the location of the device, the Eye analyzed the object before shooting straight up into the air.

The drone continued to scan multiple wireless transmissions, tracking the source to its point of origin.

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The cool night air brushed against the mans face as he gazed out at the urban environment from the upper level of the parking structure.

Kyle Jordan - code-named Phoenix – studied the familiar terrain through a pair of advanced night specs, spotting a surveillance drone cutting through the night air in the distance.

With his short brown hair and athletic physique, the world-weary leader appeared younger than his fifty years, staring up at Trikon Industries, towering in the midst of the elaborate landscape.

A glint of intensity filled Kyle's hazel eyes as he watched and listened; an adverse current silently telling him opposing forces would soon collide.

A venomous threat abode nearby, hidden within the confines of the fortified citadel. Behind its walls and beneath its streets, New Phoenix pulsed, controlled by a hidden power.

“Where are you?” Kyle whispered, as if his words would be carried by the wind to his unseen enemy.

Concealed within his ironclad soul were scars too deep to trace; wounds from a life abandoned, originating from a

time when the world seemed brighter and more innocent. Not that it ever was. He knew that now. His youthful illusions had long been shattered; decimated in a single night.

Kyle briefly reflected on the life he once knew, obliterated by evil men destroying everything he had once held dear. Through it all, he had protected those he held most dear by letting them go. To them and everyone he had ever known, he no longer existed. The person he had once been was forever gone.

Memories of the tragic night when his old life ended flooded Kyle's mind like scenes from a movie. Albeit one he very much wanted to forget. As far as the world knew, he had perished long ago; crashing and burning in a ball of flame. Though he could never go back, those he loved the most remained safe and that was what mattered most.

What's done is done, Kyle silently reminded himself.

Fighting in the present, he moved through the city and the world like a spectre; an invisible weapon from an unseen arsenal.

Kyle adjusted the focus on the specs and saw two more drones in the dark sky.

Kyle waited, watching as the probe grew closer, descending in elevation.