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# Beneath the Iron Sky

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## Introduction

Beneath a sky forever shrouded in cold alloy clouds, the city of New Tanith endures, both crumbling and unyielding. Here, the sun rarely makes it past the iron-clad haze; its rays strangled by the legacies of an age that dared to dream beyond permitted limits. In the aftermath of the cataclysm known as the Silencing, the days belong to the Directorate—the nameless, faceless regime whose enforcer drones glide ceaselessly between the skeletal hulks of forgotten towers. Everyone is watched, every errant whisper cataloged, every street corner cast in the shadow of suspicion. It is a place where freedom has withered, and even hope is considered sedition.

Cassia Lin has learned how to vanish in plain sight. As a mechanic among the city's bonepickers and salvage folk, she wears grime and grease like armor. Her knuckles are scarred by stubborn bolts and the constant, furtive repairs necessary for survival, but her quick wit and sharper mind remain carefully hidden behind downcast eyes. Years ago, when the Directorate came for her father—accused of “innovation crimes,” a death marked by brilliant and unlawful thinking—Cassia became an orphan of caution. Now, she survives by fixing what is permitted, quietly concealing the intelligence that might see her disappear as well.

Each day brings its share of hazards. The regime proclaims order, but famine and fear seep through the cracks in the city's broken mosaics. Cassia's workshops shift constantly—she moves from smashed tram sheds to the cavernous underbellies of collapsed factories, always alert for the Directorate's enforcers with their silent boots and emotionless masks. The penalty for curiosity is harsh, and the price for disobedience is steeper still. Whispers echo about those who have vanished, rumors flit like moths about the fate of Cassia's own father. Yet no one speaks loud enough to make hope contagious.

Cassia has not forgotten—slowly, quietly, she has accrued the fragments of a life left behind. A cracked lens, a schematic half-burned, a father's note concealed inside a hollow wrench handle. While the city teaches its children to worship compliance and fear the past, Cassia keeps her own memories alive, haunted by questions, and gazing toward the untouched horizon beyond the barricades.

It is in this twilight world that our tale begins. On the day when shuddering tremors split the ground beneath New Tanith, fate places an impossible relic in Cassia's calloused hands: an outlawed radio, artifact of a forbidden era. The act of its discovery is simple. Its consequences, boundless.

With the finding of that device, Cassia will awaken secrets buried by the Directorate,

challenge the limits imposed on her existence, and become entangled in a rebellion that could reshape her world. The iron sky may press low upon the city, but beneath its tyranny, hope flickers—fragile, defiant, and waiting to ignite.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Shadows Beneath the Towers

The tremor hit just as Cassia was wrestling a rusted intake valve from a repurposed filtration unit. It wasn't the first, nor would it be the last; New Tanith was built on a skeleton of old-world infrastructure, its foundations groaning under the weight of decades of neglect and the Directorate's heavy-handed additions. This one, though, felt different. A deep, guttural rumble that vibrated up from the cracked pavement, through the soles of her worn boots, and into her bones. The air thickened with dust and the metallic scent of stressed steel.

From her vantage point beneath the towering, skeletal remains of what was once an office block, now patched with scavenged corrugated iron, Cassia saw a plume of debris rise far across the district. A muffled roar followed, a sound of crumbling masonry and tortured rebar. Her heart hammered a frantic rhythm against her ribs. Earthquakes, even minor ones, were always dangerous. They could bring down unstable structures, shift the already precarious balance of the city, or, worse, expose hidden pathways that the Directorate's patrols might then choose to investigate.

"Cassia! You alright?" Old Man Tiber, her current 'employer' and the proprietor of this ramshackle workshop, yelled from deeper inside the gloom. He was hunched over a sputtering generator, his face smudged with oil and worry. Tiber was one of the few who tolerated Cassia's quiet competence, and he'd lost enough family members to the Silencing to understand the value of keeping one's head down.

"Fine!" she called back, her voice a little breathless. She wiped grease from her brow with the back of a gloved hand, leaving a dark smear. The valve, stubborn as a forgotten memory, finally gave way with a screech of tortured metal. She pulled it free, a small victory in a world full of larger defeats.

The aftershocks rippled through the ground for several minutes, causing tools to clatter and dust to drift down like gray snow. When the vibrations finally subsided, an eerie silence settled, broken only by the distant wail of a Directorate siren – a stark reminder of who held power in the immediate aftermath of any disruption. The Enforcers would be out in force, ensuring 'order' was maintained, which usually meant reinforcing their pervasive control.

Cassia packed her tools quickly, her eyes scanning the familiar, dilapidated landscape. The tremor had dislodged more than just dust. A section of the wall to her right, part of an old, abandoned subway station entrance, had buckled inward, revealing a gap she hadn't seen before. It was just a dark maw, choked with rubble and twisted metal, but the air wafting out of it felt... different. Cooler, damper, carrying the faint, metallic

tang of forgotten tunnels.

Curiosity, a dangerous instinct in New Tanith, tugged at her. Tiber's workshop was in a relatively low-traffic zone, tucked away from the main thoroughfares the Directorate typically patrolled. If she was quick, she might be able to take a look. Forbidden exploration wasn't just about uncovering secrets; it was about finding useful salvage. The pre-Silencing world was a treasure trove of forgotten components, and Cassia's true skill lay not just in fixing things, but in understanding how they once worked, how they *should* have worked.

"I'm going to check the back wall," Cassia informed Tiber, slinging her worn satchel over her shoulder. "Might be a weak point." It was a plausible excuse. Structural integrity was always a concern.

Tiber grunted, still wrestling with the generator. "Don't be long, girl. Enforcers will be doing sweeps. No sense attracting attention." His words were a standard warning, almost a mantra for survival.

Nodding, Cassia slipped away, moving with the practiced ease of someone who navigates ruins daily. The gap in the wall was narrow, requiring her to squeeze past twisted girders and piles of concrete chunks. Her small, battery-powered lamp, a discreetly modified piece of sanctioned tech, cut a weak beam through the oppressive darkness within. The air grew heavier, thick with the smell of damp earth and stale dust.

She found herself in what appeared to be a collapsed ticket hall, its ornate ceiling long gone, replaced by a jagged hole open to the sky. More rubble lay everywhere, but beneath it, the distinct outlines of old turnstiles and shattered glass booths emerged from the gloom. This section of the subway was clearly long abandoned, a ghost of the vibrant past. The Directorate didn't bother with these forgotten arteries; they focused on the visible, the controllable.

Carefully, Cassia picked her way deeper, her lamp beam dancing across graffiti-scarred walls and piles of collapsed concrete. The silence here was profound, broken only by the drip of water and the scuttling of unseen creatures. It was a silence that felt ancient, untouched by the hum of the city above, or the relentless buzz of the Directorate's surveillance. It was a silence that invited whispers.

Her light illuminated something glinting beneath a pile of broken tiles and a tangle of defunct wiring. It wasn't large, just a small, rectangular object, partially buried. Intrigued, Cassia knelt, carefully brushing away the debris. Her fingers, accustomed to the contours of discarded machinery, recognized the shape immediately. A box, approximately the size of her hand, made of a dark, sturdy composite material. No visible ports or indicators, just a smooth, enigmatic surface.

As she cleared more of the dust, a faded symbol became visible on its casing: a stylized wave icon, strangely familiar, though she couldn't place it. This wasn't sanctioned tech. Everything permitted by the Directorate was either clunky, basic, or clearly marked with the regime's austere emblem. This device felt different, almost... elegant. Forbidden.

Her breath hitched. This wasn't just old. This felt *ancient*. And dangerous. The Silencing hadn't just outlawed 'unchecked technology'; it had obliterated the knowledge of it. Even owning a schematic of pre-Silencing circuitry could earn you a one-way trip to the Interrogation Zones. Her father had been accused of 'innovation crimes,' a euphemism for dabbling in the very things Cassia was now holding.

A faint, almost imperceptible hum resonated from the device as she held it. It was incredibly subtle, a ghost of a vibration against her palm. It wasn't powered, not yet, but it suggested an internal complexity that hinted at its function. What could it be? A data storage unit? A sensor? Her mind, always keen to unravel mechanical puzzles, buzzed with possibilities.

She hesitated, her instincts screaming at her to drop it, to run. But the hum, the mystery, held her captive. It was a challenge, a riddle left by a forgotten age. And despite the pervasive fear instilled by the Directorate, Cassia Lin was, at her core, a mechanic. And mechanics fixed things. They understood things. And sometimes, they found things that could change everything. The lure of understanding outweighed the immediate terror.

Carefully, she tucked the device deep into her satchel, burying it beneath a tangle of wrenches and spare parts. The heavy material of the bag helped to muffle its faint hum, though she could still feel the subtle vibration against her hip. Her heart continued its frantic beat, but it was no longer just fear. There was a new, unsettling thrill pulsing through her veins. She had found something. Something forbidden. And in the shadowed ruins of the old subway, beneath the oppressive weight of the iron sky, Cassia Lin had just taken her first, unwitting step towards a truth that could either free her or destroy her.

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