

# Micky Maus

Story by Delmer Esau  
Editing by Lucas Castro  
The Last Version

To access the sprawl Neuronet and learn more about the Corporate War  
go to [www.warpunk.com/neuronet.htm](http://www.warpunk.com/neuronet.htm)

Warning: Audio

- The Corporations: Multinational companies based around the Pacific Rim that have been granted government powers. Some are democratic, some are totalitarian.
- The Ronin: Elite mercenaries not officially enlisted in police or military forces. They follow a code of martial honor, more or less.
- The Neuronet: The evolution of the Internet. The cloud connection of information between your cell phone, that security camera, those robot cleaning devices, the tablet implanted in your wrist.
- The Cells: Massive arcologies, cities in buildings.

Best music to play as you read this is *Me And My Girlfriend* by 2Pac Shakur. We are not affiliated with Death Row Records.

Sorry kids. This is not for people under 18.

We begin...

The blond girl walked with purpose through the mallway, following the crowd of kids heading for the party. Ahead of her, a pair of girls laughed hysterically, already a bit tipsy as they passed a flask of vodka back and forth. They were certainly respecting the tradition of dressing as garishly colored as possible for a rave. Rachel, however, wore a black turtleneck sweater over a black dress and a glowing blue hair tie, just as the hacker lady had asked her to.

*FRIEND: Get to the Deca-Dance party by 11 pm. The event following the gladiator tournament. We will find you so keep your chin up! Erase this text now, kid.*

Rachel Commons pushed the text message in her mind's eye. She dumped it into the trash icon where it was immediately scrambled into random characters by the pulse of her blood stream. Both analog and brain implant tablets were available and analog was usually the only legally allowed for minors but Rachel had one of the plastic brain implants that allowed her to connect to the Neuronet, an ability that she considered both a blessing and a curse. The eighteen year-old looked at the other people gathering towards the distant music beat.

It must be nice to be normal, rather than a medical miracle. She reached

behind her neck and felt the double jack-points that allowed fluid transfer. She was a freak covered up under seven years of uncomfortable turtleneck sweaters.

--== || ==--

Maus scanned the thrashing rave crowd from the elevated cafe, one hand gripping the railway. She was close. He received the text from Vicky and he was to get the kid out. The sound was a deafening drum beat that pounded his senses. The hall was a darkness punctuated with brilliant lights and the roar of techno.

"How long can Vicky scramble the facial and attitude rec?" he shouted to his fellow Ronin, just loud enough to be heard.

Johnson answered his boss after checking his sleeve tab "She's got about an hour to keep us ahead of the detection curve but these camera A.I. will eventually catch up." he raised his hand to indicate one of the passing hovering micro-bots. It stopped, a square gray plastic box with two air-foils, and looked at them. It paused then moved on to fly over the multicolored and throbbing crowd of teenagers and yuppies. "Yap, she's hard at work at that Tasty Burger we left her at. She said the wireless Neuronet access in the joint was unmonitored. Looks like an easy night for us."

Maus rubbed his right temple. The fume of drugs in the air gave him a headache. He ignored the latte he had in hand, merely ordered to look like he fit in while him and Johnson waited for their package. They were dressed in plain black, like simple 30 something businessmen out for a good time. They kept a Nike duffel bag under their table that would be needed if their identity as enemy Ronin was uncovered. Its contents had passed the passive metal and explosives scanner that hovered by them when they sauntered into the main hall like two guys who just got paid. The fake VIP badges Vicky had forged got them by the human door check without having to submit to a search. A-OK in the USA.

When the two men had walked up the grated metal staircase Maus looked through at the two women together underneath it. One white with a long pony-tail and a black chick with a black shirt displaying animated text. *t.A.T.u RIP Forever*. Looks like the white chick was getting to second base.

"Could be an easy night. As long as Vic doesn't take a bullet. We are deep within a competitor's Cell here. But Plan A would be a nice way to spend the night." Maus said.

"Yes, yes, the mythical Plan A. Rumor is 3 people actually managed it 6 years ago in Korea." Johnson quipped. The two men shared a laugh.

Maus checked his tab and looked into the drunken mob below. The rave was held in an expanse of dance floors, D.J. tables, speakers and food courts that went on seemingly forever in the Terran commercial Cell. Maus and Johnson were well built, close cropped mercenaries and they just barely fit in among the emaciated, doped up party-goers. The main hall was the size of a football field with a mecha gladiator arcade on one end and street access on the other. On both sides were a multitude of mall corridors that joined this section to the

rest of the arcology. Perfect for escape if there was trouble. Over-looking the hall on both sides were the high-priced cafes for people who didn't want to blow their brains out on the main hall with the dance crowds and drug dealers making their rounds.

Johnson looked down at a man wearing a ball cap with the emblem of a blinking purple pill LCD on it selling methepitome to the kids in the mosh.

"Anything goes at Terra, hey boss?" Johnson chuckled.

Where was this kid? Maus didn't want to get bored sitting here waiting because in his line of work boredom leads to distraction and distraction leads to problems. He also didn't like to slow down because he might think about his sister. His little sister was the reason the Company gave him the job in the first place and her image came to his mind against his wishes in these hours. He saw her there lying on a hospital bed, dying. The pollution that plagued the Oceanic Raft Cities had claimed her. Suffering to the end of incurable, fatal leukemia.

--== || ==--

Rachel learned after she was seized by Terra Child Services that if she obeyed her foster parents she wouldn't get beaten. If she objected then she earned a hit upside the head. She had missed her real parents, as the two executives who now cared for her didn't actually, really care. Her special DNA tore her apart from her birth family as she became a conduit for medical research into stem cell technology, a test-subject for the development of healer cells. The tests and implants into her spinal cord began when she was twelve, but she was valuable, an "asset" to Terra as they always said when she wouldn't speak and threatened tears at the dinner table. Her foster father hated when she didn't smile. By her estimation he hated everything. The security manager she was to call Rick, who dictated her activities outside of the lab, was a bit more amiable. But he would stray near the door after he and the rest of her escort dropped her off from the lab or school to give a full account of just how she was complying. She either sank or swam, at home, on his quiet report.

On her eighteenth birthday, her crappy friends from the crappy private school she was overjoyed to be graduating from were invited by her fake mom for a small party. A "get together" as fake mom called it. Rachel felt like they were coerced into coming, to make it seem like she was half-normal so she wouldn't resist the Juvenile Stem Production Program of which she was the twisted star. She was amazed they even let her go to a school, but the omnipresent cameras ensured that she wouldn't be trouble. Otherwise, she would reap a strike to the head for her misbehavior. She was told by her lab managers that soon after her birthday she was being moved to a place closer to the lab, a room of her own so she would be easier to study.

Then something incredible happened. The morning after the awkward party, while sitting at her school desk studying history, a message came into her tablet. This room was supposed to be completely sealed from text messages as a study hall, so Rachel was somewhat amazed.

*FRIEND: We can offer you a better deal. We are friends. Erase this now. Dump the cache too.*

In the weeks that followed, her new hacker friend began coaching her on how to make a break for it. Her getaway had started at her so-called home. She had quickly slipped through the front door making sure it did not scrape when shut, after running the program in her bedroom stereo that the hacker lady had uploaded to her the night before. While Rachel stood out on the apartment deck she had watched the bars of her hand-held analog tablet indicate 2 terabytes loaded. The hacker lady texted it would "spooof the house security program" into believing Rachel was still in the house, but Rachel didn't quite understand how stereo noise could do this. Something about echo location. The lady must have been nearby; Rachel tried to guess which rooftop or light her rescuer was near, but to no avail. She had plugged the tablet into her stereo using a real analog wire, as instructed, and left it there. The next night at 10 pm, after her parents were asleep, she hit the play button on a low volume. She then, as strictly instructed by her new friend, left taking nothing with her except a 50 Yen bill. She didn't want anything to remind her of this place anyway. All she owned now was her dress and sweater and a florescent blue scrunchie she had a classmate buy for her. She quickly tied up her hair with it after she stepped into the elevator. The Yen was to pay into the rave.

All that she learned from the hacker had culminated to this. She had set her escape plan into motion, and had now passed the point of no return. One way or another, her medical captivity would soon be coming to an end.

Rachel looked up as the thump of the rave grew louder. She quickened her pace. The elevator took her to the main commercial floor, where she walked to the Cell commercial mallway hub and started following the Deca-Dance stickers, plastered here and there, that the rave promoters used as bread crumbs to bring the kids. Her foster parents had often ranted to each other and her at dinner about the bullshit surrounding the entertainment center an she had never, ever been allowed to go. Not to the mecha gladiator arcade, or the raves which often resulted in overdoses on designer dope, or even the more benign cafes.

As she started her hike down the corridors the girl did not notice a young man in denim shuffling towards the rave, one of many party-goers trekking through the mallway, who looked at her and fell behind her to stop and size her up. He quickly pulled his sleeve back and started typing into an expensive arm implanted keyboard.

*Connect to Major Richard Straight.*

--== || ==--

"Black and blue, that's what we're looking for. We won't recognize her face in this." Maus told Johnson. "Maybe we will be able to just waltz her out of here."

When Maus had presented himself to Mitchell in the head office in Oahu, a headache from the previous night's Coronas afflicting him, he wondered why Oceanic wanted him on such short notice. What deadly task was to befall him

this time? He stood at ease, his feet at shoulder length apart, his hands behind his back, and waited. Corporate Operations Manager Robert Mitchell was a man graying before his years. He looked up at Maus from his desk, looked down at a paper file, and looked up again.

"The people sickened when the North Island off-shore reactor melted down are mostly dying from incurable cancer," Mitchell said. "No treatment available, as is normal with cancer caused by radiation exposure. You know this more than anyone. We have bought many of them time by throwing the medical equivalent of the kitchen sink at this problem, but most will die." Mitchell said. "A third of the good people of the Hawaii Raft Cities could end up gone."

"And, sir?" Maus said, looking down at his friend.

"We were approached by our competitors at Terra," Mitchell explained. "They want to sell us batches of biologically produced healer cells to cure our sick. This stuff is high tech and unseen before in science, engineered in secret. However the price point they are negotiating for is so expensive it won't help most of our people even after we pay the ransom."

"I'm getting even more interested." Maus said, his eyebrow raised.

"We have an angle. Turns out the organism prototype that can create these cells and holds the entirety of hardware and implanted software might be something we can liberate from their research operation in Los Angeles and replicate ourselves. They abuse her. Apparently they don't have the sense not to smack around an uncounted fortune."

"Sir?" Maus asked, his brow twisted with confusion.

"She's a teenage girl, Maus. An informant from a cleaning company reports physical abuse and a smart kid at the business end of it. They kidnapped her because her blood tests showed a high compatibility with the nonsense they wanted to install. She'll walk away from them so damn quick it will make a terabit datalink seem slow. Your job is to get her and bring her to Hawaii. We need to get to her soon, though, because after her eighteenth birthday they are moving her to the lab where security is too severe for an extraction."

Maus felt resolve to accomplish this task, beyond his simple duty to his employer. Some redemption could be at hand.

"I have a request for resources, sir."

"I'm ahead of you. Victoria Crane and Matt Johnson are already on a flight to the Seattle Sprawl. Sarah will set you up. Good hunting." Mitchell passed the file folder up to Maus as the mercenary smiled.

After Maus left Mitchell's office and waited for the Manager's assistant to transfer operational files to his sleeve tab, he looked at the front page in the folder. It was a photo of a tall, blond young woman leaning against an apartment deck railing. Sorrow was deeply engraved in her gazing blue eyes.

--= | =--

Rachel rounded a corner where the lights were dimmer and the mallway was thick with painted, glowing people. A hundred feet ahead was the mouth of the rave with the security door check. There was a gathering of people who couldn't front the door charge or were waiting for others. Rachel was nearly overcome with a single emotion. Freedom. The freedom she briefly felt when she was granted sole access to the school swimming pool to do laps or tread water. It was supposed to keep her in shape for lab testing. But to her it was her only time alone and drifting. That was the feeling she felt now. Tingling.

Rachel ventured a smile and walked towards the event and wondered what life will be like. Belonging? The hacker lady had said the dudes who would move her out of the sprawl were really tough, and good men. Rachel wondered if she could maybe one day be one of these mercenary types doing good deeds as Ronin for hire. The Corporation that was "extracting" her were open to exploring any employment opportunities she was interested in, from what the hacker had said. And boys. No boy in her classes had ever been brave enough to date the freak with the corporation leering over all her school affairs. One dude had been brave enough to break into the pool and swim with her, laughing with her, but the next day he ignored her. When she said hi to him he walked away quickly, his eyes wide with terror.

Her reverie was disrupted by a text to her mind-visual display.

*FRIEND: RUN RACHEL, JUST RUN.*

*RACHEL: But I have to pay. That was the plan.*

*FRIEND: JUST RUN PAST THE DOOR. IF YOU SEE A BLACK ROBOT, HIDE.*

The blond sucked up her strength and bolted into a sprint towards the rave. Her heart thumped as hard as the music. She wasn't going to fuck this up.

Three hundred meters behind her, in the maze of mall corridors, an elevator door opened revealing two black uniformed security officers, one bald with a graying blond mustache and one with a buzz-cut and a robotics specialist's badge on his shoulder. Both wore the green Terran crest over their hearts. The young officer dropped a massive black metal suitcase and carefully unbolted the latch. He opened the case and from inside it picked up a black robot with three hover fans and a wicked looking gun nozzle protruding from its body under a sensor eye. The officer set it down carefully, as if it was a beloved pet. He pressed a green button behind what would pass as its neck and a red glowing eye emanated from the sensor.

"Target Rachel Commons, search from database. Command for target is capture. Command for opponents to target objective is eliminate," the officer said to the bot.

*"Authorization for eliminate command requested."* the bot said in a quiet but clear human-like tone. The older man stepped forward from behind the robot deployment officer.

"Command eliminate given by Major Richard Straight," the middle-aged security commander said to the robot. "Password Four Foxtrot Beta Tango". With that command the robot's fans immediately powered up with a hissing whine. Its red eye flickered as it began a Neuronet sweep of all nearby Cell security cameras and robotics within the local Cell Intranet databanks. It found footage from a swarm of information activity at the rave and lifted in flight down the mallway.

--== || ==--

*VICKI: FUCK! I'm sorry Maus. We have an HK in the game and it's closing in behind her. I don't know how she was spotted. Maybe an eye-witness.*

Maus read the text message Vicki sent to his coat sleeve tablet from her mental implant. This wasn't good. A Terran Hunter Killer robot was a brutal machine. As Maus typed onto the tablet he tried not to look up at the flashing blue and red police lights that suddenly lit up outside the street door far to his lower left; It was quite a distance away for the cops to reach their position, but damn. He typed quickly.

*MAUS: Looks like plan B. ETA till Labyrinth Program is served to local Intranet?*

*VICKI: I need a few more minutes! Code is complete but I need to access several different local systems for it to work. Oh. Oh not good. Police are outside this restaurant. I got a cop coming in.*

Maus had no time to respond as he heard shouting at the arcology mallway rave door; an angry screaming over the music. The mercenary looked over to see a blond woman running for her life while being chased into the crowd by a bouncer who was shouting at the top of his lungs. He grabbed her shoulder from behind and twisted her around. The crowd of ravers were either ambivalent or amused. The ones who found it funny laughed even louder after the blond pulled back her fist and then decked the bouncer in the face.

Good girl. Maus grabbed the duffel bag from under the table and laid it out on top. He and Johnson unzipped it and each pulled out a sleek dark gray plastic air rifle loaded with large circular ammunition drums

"Gas!" Maus shouted at his partner and they fingered the ammo type command in their LCD triggers to SODA. These small ammo globes each held two sections with different chemicals separated by a thin plasti-membrane. Rachel was still fighting her way to the cafe staircase when a drunk party-goer noticed the two Ronin covering Rachel's approach and screamed. Others saw too and did likewise. The patrons of the cafe dropped flat hoping the madmen wouldn't kill them.

Police approached, wading through the berserk crowd from the street door, taser batons swiping back and forth in jerking sparking motions. The bouncers assaulted through the crowd as well. One of them had received a message to "Help out the good ol' police on this one."

"Into the crowd!" Maus shouted to Johnson. Their rifles made no sound as they

fired the CO2 propelled SODA rounds at everybody approaching the blond. More screaming ensued as the music kept playing a metal techno beat. Then as the SODA rounds impacted the separation in the globes dissolved. The baking soda and tetra-floro-chlozine in the rounds mixed together. This caused an exothermic reaction which spit a fizz of knock-out gas everywhere and people started to collapse immediately into sleep. The bouncers, the ravers, the cops. Everyone the two mercenaries fired on fell unconscious as Rachel climbed the metal staircase. A terrified kid tried to pull himself up over the blond, clawing at her from behind, but she pushed him back with her foot and staggered up to the two men whom she hoped were the mercenaries. Behind her now was a full blown riot.

Johnson turned to his right to reach out his hand. He did not see the Hunter Killer levitate from the top of the crowd and hover around and above him. Maus shouted and ducked grabbing and pulling a chair with him.

*Terminate opposition.*

The robot chambered venom rounds and auto-fired them at Matt Johnson. His armor vest stopped many but several needles riddled his neck and he collapsed dead over the cafe table. Rachel Commons stood and looked at the robot. Was this it? Brought back home by the machines? The robot scanned her.

*Target located. Capture with tranquilizer rounds.*

As the robot processed orders Maus shouted for the life lost of his friend. He stood, picked up the chair over his head and swung it. The chair smashed into the HK's left airfoil and the robot spun down, tried to stabilize, and then failed its maneuver as it crashed into the ground below. It made a whirring sound as it prepared its systems for redeployment. Maus grabbed the blond's hand and raced through the cafe. He led her past the interior tables, into the kitchen and out the back through a door that led to a service hallway. Into the bowels of the Cell. Maus shut the door behind him and pulled a nearby drum of what looked like coffee creamer against it. He typed into his sleeve tablet quickly.

*MAUS: Now would be a good time, Vicki. We need Labyrinth. Are you there? Vicki?*

*Vicki must be the hacker lady's name,* Rachel thought as she read Maus's tablet. She crossed her fingers that the woman was not in trouble. She was startled by angry shouting outside the door. Then she heard a triple beep from Maus' sleeve.

"Good," Maus said. Rachel heard locking and unlocking sounds. The door they came through made a bolting sound. Then she heard a door unbolt in the hall, which the tall mercenary dragged her through. For what seemed like an hour they zig-zagged through the Cell, doors locking and unlocking at will. At one point the two stopped in a room with a window. There was a door into the Cell and one along the same wall as the window. Maus looked unsure. He looked down at his sleeve. A vibration sounded through the room as they heard a distant explosion. Rachel jumped at the sound of it.

"Don't worry. They are trying to use grenades to get through. Not a problem,"

Maus said. He then took her hand again and led her through the door back into the Cell. They traveled for a long time as the pulse of adrenaline kept Rachel going. They stepped into a ground level parking garage and out onto the street. The crisp blast of cold air against her pale skin caused her to gasp.

A red haired and goateed man stepped out of a hover jeep parked at the road. Two others exited followed him; all dressed in dark gray coats and armor.

"Corporal, good to see you," Maus said to the fiery looking leader of the trio. "I lost a man, but gained our objective."

"Excellent, Maus. Not a failure in the end," the Corporal replied. "We're taking advantage of the chaos and are making a move on the Cell. See if we can turn this enemy resource into our asset." Maus nodded. "We have a safe place with a few slices of pizza for you just down there." the Corporal pointed. "Safe haven for you both 'til your pick-up arrives. Just know street traffic might come in."

"Thank you Corporal." Maus led Rachel to a small pizza parlor where he led her to a booth near the back. "We have to sit for a while." Maus said. He did not talk further. Not about her, him, Matt or Vicki. The girl decided to keep her silence. The man had been through a lot for her.

Rachel and Maus both bit into slices of Pepperoni. The loss of their friends not standing in the way of hunger driven by their exhaustion. Two skaters, young men in their late teens, pushed through the glass door and walked up to the counter. One was visibly excited.

"So this brunette chick, she's totally hot," one of the skaters said. "Older woman in her thirties. This babe has a fucking Dragonov pointed at the cop while she's in the Tasty Burger and he's pointing his service handgun at her from outside the door. The craziest thing I have ever, ever seen in a Tasty Burger, and that's saying something. I swear when the cop was approaching the joint she stood up and this thing just materialized in her hand, like a transforming gun from her coat!" the kid recounted as he looked up at the animated pizza menu over their heads.

"Dude, that's hardcore. What happened?" his friend asked as he looked up. Maybe a slice of Great Canadian.

"Nothing after that really. This chick just kept the gun on him as she left the place. They stood out there pointing their guns at each other 'till a biker came and picked her up and they flew away. She must have been some corp heavy. Police don't take that shit from just anybody and the police and the corps have some kind of mutual understanding or something." The kid ordered a Coke and sat down with his friend. Maus looked down at the table while Rachel reached across the plastic and the pizza and squeezed his hand.

--== || ==--

Major Straight had already been removed from his command before he was tied to a chair inside the mecha gladiator arena. Normally mecha fights weren't deadly as the mecha pilots fought only until their mecha were disabled, like

tired giant robot boxers. He, however, wasn't in a mecha. He started to laugh to himself. A young executive inside a giant metal walking beast approached him. *Quite the show*, Straight thought to himself as he was killed by the executive, pounded by metal fists into the ground.

The rave and the interloper's body had been cleared out quickly and no one involved in the riot had been killed. Straight's death was recorded as a warning to any future soldiers to not fail. There were reports of Oceanic urban infantry storming key Neuronet hubs in distant offices.

--== || ==--

Rachel and Maus were picked up by a simple, four-door hover sedan and were piloted to a North Hollywood park. By foot and flashlight the two were led by a guide into the dark of the park. Rachel didn't understand why until the countenance of a monstrous, thirty year-old Russian model Hind became clear in the dark. The pilot greeted the two outside the aircraft. It was a giant beast of an attack helicopter painted jet black.

"Hello there! This thing don't look like much, but she's loaded down with a billion dollars of ICE and the rotors are damned quiet. No one will see you as you make your way to the sub, Hun." The pilot smiled at the girl as he helped her into the rear bay door.

"A Sub?!" Rachel asked.

"That's right!" said a woman's voice from inside the helicopter. "We can't fly all the way to Hawaii." Victoria Crane walked towards Maus and Rachel from inside the craft. Maus clasped her hand in what Rachel assumed was some sort of soldiers' greeting.

Rachel knew this was her rescuer. With eyes wide she hugged the hacker and then the three were buckled into restraints by the Hind crew. The machine powered up and bolted low over the city taking a path over the lawless barrens to help avoid detection, then flew clear over the ocean.

"It's been a busy night but one more thing," Victoria said to the younger woman, as she passed a tablet with a ready-message button flashing. Rachel took it and looked down, pressing Play. A face still familiar appeared.

"Mom?" Rachel's eyes were entranced.

"This is a recording, Hun. They say if you see this you are free. I hope so." Her eyes were wrinkled and gray was showing, but she looked excited. "We are at the Raft Cities. Your father is getting old, he's a bit sick, the stress on his heart all these years, but he will be here for many years to come. Him, your brother and I, we are so happy we'll be able to see you. We'll be here if you want us in your life." Rachel caught herself nodding to the recording. "You'll be helping a lot of people here and they made legal assurances under the Corporate Freedoms Act which these people seem to honor more readily than those bastards." The older woman looked down and then up. "I didn't want them to take you, but we had no choice. Things will be different and, if you want us, we'll be here."

"Of course," Rachel mouthed the words to herself. The message ended.

"So we got some time off. Wanna learn to surf? I hear from Vicki you're a swimmer." Maus asked the girl.

"Surf? Cool! Hang ten?" Rachel responded.

"Maus can't even hang a four, let alone a ten," Vicki laughed. It was an old joke between the two of them on who was the gnarlier surfer.

Maus reached into his jacket into a pocket over his heart and pulled out a photo, handing it to Rachel. It was him, about 20 and the girl about 10. They had the same blue eyes. They appeared to be quite happy, smiling widely for the picture.

"Mom told me to look after her but I couldn't. Guns don't beat cancer. You're going to save others who are on the same road as my sis was. What you did tonight was pretty fucking brave. Me and Vic do this shit for a living and we are always scared."

"What about your friend and that thing? I'm so sorry." Rachel said.

"Well. He was always ready. He was Taoist actually. Burned more incense than a monk," the mercenary made a motion with his hand back and forth in front of his face and then grimaced at a smell.

Vicky laughed.

"I'll tell you more about him in when we settle in at home. Maybe you can meet his parents." Maus rested his head back against the foam neck rest.

"I would very much like to. Tell them he saved me." the girl said, tears trickling down her cheek.

The Hind flew quietly over the ocean and into the night, a home for a while.