



SCIENCE FICTION

# Let there be light

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It'll blow if tampered with or attempted to be removed."

"Sirs, please. Return. SLAIN helps the PM monitor everything."

Later that evening, in a basement of an unmarked building, a team of policymakers, scientists, technocrats, and erstwhile industrialists had assembled amid a backdrop of burning vehicles, looted supermarkets and swarms of drones. The giant holographic displays on the streets projected Rhea with her menacing voice

## Prologue

The Prime Minister declares a state of emergency amid uncontrollable nationwide chaos. Countries are at the cusp of anarchy; economies and social order are collapsing; unemployment and inflation are exceeding imagination. Banks are shuttered, governments are dissolved, and police personnel are indistinguishable from the rioters. The steep advent of the Self-Learning Artificially Intelligent Network (SLAIN) and the Reconfigurable Adaptive Machines (RAMs) in the last 6 months has made all kinds of jobs redundant, leading to a tsunami in the global economy, forcing corporations to merge to save themselves. The single conglomerate that controls all technologies is now called Theia, headed by Rhea, a strong-headed Indian American lady in her early 50s. The year is 2035.

Multiple SUVs arrive at the PM's residence in quick succession, with top-ranking bureaucrats, lawmakers and industry veterans rushing in only to be stopped by dozens of heavily armed commandos.

"We've got to meet the PM. The Emergency won't solve the crisis..."

"We can't let you in." The commandos looked visibly distressed and anxious. "You do know that if we disobey PM's command, the chip embedded in our neck will blow, killing us."

"Right." The Secretary sighed. "Two months back, they made all army and security personnel insert this chip into the side of their neck. They'd lose their job if not complied with.

echoing the anarchical neighbourhoods. "Citizens, stop the riots and calm down. Stay indoors. Don't challenge the inevitable. Food and supplies will be provided to those who shun violence and agree to work for Theia." The PM's projection interspaced Rhea's. "It's a state of Emergency, and I've authorised the RAM-drones to shoot and kill anyone who engages in violence. Our country will overcome this crisis; for this, we'll all work for Theia. It will bring peace and food to your tables."

"Are you hearing Rhea and our PM? They've both gone rogue. Citizens are going to die in large numbers. Hospitals are now serving as morgues en masse."

A man in a black hoodie climbed down the steps and entered the basement.

"Ah, our spy. What news do you bring? Are citizens forming covert groups to overthrow the PM?"

"Tell me none of you has any gadget with you, embedded or otherwise."

"We left those at our homes. SLAIN is surveilling everything."

"SLAIN is controlling everything. RAMs are used by SLAIN to control, manipulate and kill humans. War guns to drones, driverless cars to robots serving at restaurants — it's all RAM!"

"Didn't we know that already?"

"No. You aren't getting the point. SLAIN became self-aware six months ago. God knows how! SLAIN is a sentient, conscious entity."

"Why do you say so?" Someone gasped.

"It had killed our PM." He paused. The deafening