

## Blade Runner

# The Challenge

(from: Chapter 1)

On his way to work, Rick, like so many other people, stopped outside one of San Francisco's larger pet shops. In the centre of the long shop window stood an ostrich in a heated plastic cage. It was, Rick knew, the only ostrich on the West Coast. He spent a few minutes staring at the price, and as a result he was late arriving for work at the police station.

While he was unlocking his office door, his boss, Police Inspector Harry Bryant, appeared at his side.

"I want to see you at nine thirty in Dave Holden's office," Inspector Bryant told him. "Holden," he added, "is in Mount Zion Hospital. Half his backbone was blown away by a laser gun. It'll be a month, at least, before they can fit him with a new plastic one."

"What happened?" Rick asked, shocked. Holden had been fine the day before.

"Nine thirty," Bryant repeated, and walked away.

Rick entered his own office. Holden was one of the best. His attacker must have been one of the new super-intelligent androids with the Nexus-6 brain. Most police forces were protesting about them, in Russia as well as across America. The company that had developed the Nexus-6 was difficult to control, though, because its main factory was on the planet Mars.

Rick took a large brown envelope from his desk drawer, then looked at the time. He looked through it until he found what he wanted: all the most recent information on the Nexus-6.

The figures were extraordinary. The Nexus-6 had a choice of ten million separate electrical pathways in its brain; in less than a second these androids could react in one of at least fourteen different ways. They were more intelligent than some classes of human specials, so no intelligence test would trap them. The only hope of recognizing them was by using the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test; only humans were capable of feeling empathy with other life forms. Rick, and other followers of Mercerism, had no problem experiencing the feelings of other living creatures. Humanlike androids did not have this quality. They stood alone, so they were considered killers. Rick and his colleagues could kill them without breaking the laws of Mercerism.

It was already nine thirty. Rick quickly put the papers back in the envelope and hurried to Holden's room. Inspector Bryant was already in there, using the videophone.

"I see you've brought the information on the Nexus-6," Bryant said, putting the phone down as Rick entered.

"Yes, I thought it must be them," Rick answered. "How many androids are involved and how far did Dave get?"

"There were eight to start with," Bryant said, checking Holden's notes, which were on the desk in front of him. "Dave killed the first two."

"And the others are here in Northern California?"

"Dave thinks so. That was him on the phone."

"I'm ready to take Dave's place," Rick offered.

Bryant thought for a moment. "Dave used the Voigt-Kampff Test on those he suspected. You realize that the test was not prepared specially for the Nexus-6? No test has been."

He paused. "Dave thinks it's accurate. Maybe it is. But before you look for the other six, I want you to fly to the Rosen Corporation in Seattle and talk with the people who made them."

"And test the new androids?"

"Yes. I'm going to phone the company now and discuss the possibility of including several humans in the tests. You won't know which ones they are." Bryant suddenly pointed his finger at Rick. His face was serious. "This is a very responsible job. Dave has a lot of experience behind him."

"So have I," Rick said.

"Your jobs usually come through Dave. He chooses them carefully.

But now you've got six that he intended to kill himself, and one of them shot him first. Max Polokov. That's what it calls itself. If Dave was right, of course - his list of names is only as accurate as the Voigt-Kampff Test itself.

And so far the test has only been given to the first three, the two Dave killed and then Polokov. Dave was giving the test when Polokov lasered him."

"Then Dave was right," said Rick.

"Go to Seattle," Bryant ordered. "Take a station car."

Rick stood up. "Can I take Dave's notes with me?" he asked. "I want to read them on the way."

"Let's wait until you've tried that test," Bryant said.

His voice was not encouraging, Rick noted uneasily. He stood up, feeling miserable. But Dave's sudden disappearance from work meant

he could earn six thousand dollars if he killed all six androids. He should be pleased. He breathed deeply for a moment and then turned his mind to Seattle.