CHAPTER 1

Janus



Day One

At 02:17 on the coldest morning Geneva had seen in nine years, a man appeared inside a locked corridor at JANUS.

The corridor was forty meters below the lakefront and had no doors between the eastern lift and the biometric chamber. Its walls were poured concrete behind pale acoustic glass. Pressure sensors slept beneath the floor. The ceiling watched in infrared, ultraviolet, thermal depth, and ordinary light, though ordinary light had become the least trusted form of seeing.

Nothing opened. Nothing failed. The man was simply absent from one frame and standing in the next.

Sophia Vale saw him twelve minutes later, when the night supervisor called her out of a dream she could not remember.

She lived close enough to walk to JANUS, but the wind off the lake drove needles through her coat, so she took an autonomous cab and spent the six-minute journey reading the incident summary on her wrist display. Most anomaly reports were written by MIRROR before a human investigator saw them. The language was calm, exact, and faintly condescending.

UNREGISTERED PHYSICAL PRESENCE.

CONFIDENCE: 0.9971.

IDENTITY CORRELATION: NULL.

ENTRY VECTOR: UNRESOLVED.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: TEMPORARY CONTAINMENT.

Under the recommendation, the system had added a note Sophia had never seen before.

DO NOT ATTEMPT PREDICTIVE COMPLETION.

She read that line three times.

MIRROR completed everything. A damaged face in a crowd. A missing week in a travel history. The future route of a cargo vessel whose transmitter had failed in a storm. Completion was the system's central habit, and the habit had become the world's. A missing fact was no longer an absence. It was a probability waiting to receive administrative weight.

The cab recognized the JANUS perimeter and darkened its windows. Sophia placed her palm over the door reader. A pulse of blue light crossed the bones beneath her skin.