

CYBERIZATION

CHAPTER 12

OFF TO LUNA

My journey to mastering this cybernetic body has felt a lot like an elephant trudging through quicksand. I've practically moved into the training simulations, trying to get a grip on this metallic (carbon fiber?) frame while being virtually bashed to bits over and over again. It's become my daily grind, partly to dodge dealing with the kill-or-be-killed scenarios they've got lined up for me. I mean, since when do assassins get to pick sides? It's all a tangled mess and diving into training seemed like a good way to dodge it for a while. Now I'm wondering, is picking not to pick also a pick? "Ugh, my circuits are frying over this!"

So, here I am, a supposed assassin with the bizarre luxury of choice. It's like asking a cat to pick its favorite fish; weird and a bit too philosophical for my taste. I'm stuck in this loop of indecision—is not choosing also a choice, or just a pause button on the inevitable? My head's been spinning faster than a hard drive in overdrive. Still, I keep throwing myself into the virtual ring, taking the punches and hoping each one brings me closer to some kind of answer.

I find myself muttering in the virtual silence, "Ugh, I'm losing my mind over this!" The thought of choice and where it leads keeps looping through my brain, tying my thoughts in knots.

My existential crisis takes a backseat as a digital fist smashes into me, yanking me back into the brutal reality of my training ground. Each hit, each tumble chips away at whatever cool I've managed to hold onto. And every time I find myself flat on the simulated deck, I can't help but wonder, "Why am I even doing this?" The program's answer? Sending the next wave of faceless goons to knock me around.

I cling to this glimmer of hope that each thump, each virtual beat down is teaching me something vital. Maybe, just maybe, it'll be the key to unravel this whole twisted situation and let me take control of my destiny, whatever that means in this robotic shell.

The worst part of it all? I still hadn't bothered to ask Viri about my options or who I was supposed to kill. Not out of frustration, anxiety, or fear, but because I felt utterly and completely indifferent to it all. Honestly, I wasn't panicking about having to murder someone. AT ALL! And therein lies my moral dilemma.

A week post my cryofreeze awakening, I resolved it was high time to swivel away from the relentless grind of the training simulations. So here I sat amidst a lush forest, enveloped by the soothing cadence of chirping birds. Well, in reality, I was still nestled in my quaint, dark gray apartment, but the holographic expanse unfurled around me did a splendid job at crafting the illusion of boundless verdant vistas.

Seated before me was my exact double—legs crossed, eyes mirroring my every movement. A fascinating dance of mimicry unfolded as my doppelganger mirrored my actions with a futuristic finesse. It was not just a mirror reflection but a projection—a holographic spitting image.

Now atop the agenda was a task that seemed simple yet proved to be elusive—mastering the holographic manipulations my rig was capable of. Or more accurately, getting a handle on the Holographic Deception Coating (HD Coating) that enveloped my entire frame. And what was at the pinnacle of my wishlist? A glorious mane cascading down my glossy, plastic-like white scalp. Because, yes, even a cybernetic girl dreams of good hair days!

The thrill bubbled within me as the task unfolded with scant to no effort. Like many feats my newfound rig was capable of, this felt intuitive, as if my form whimsically tuned into my desires, moving gracefully to the rhythm of my thoughts. Sure, after the relentless beatdowns in the virtual arena, not everything was a cakewalk. Yet, tweaking the settings turned into a cryptic affair. I found a few hair options, yet adjusting the length or color seemed beyond my grasp—well, at least I couldn't figure it out. "*Perhaps a microtransaction,*" I mused in jest. Instead, I stumbled upon a palette of preset options. Some of them carried a whisper of familiarity, reminiscent of faces I'd glimpsed in the underbelly of the city or across the murmur of the bar. And yet, amid these digital treasures, I found a myriad of hair options!

I opted for long black hair with bangs, a simplistic choice, but the pulsing lights of cyan blue tips added a nice touch, if I do say so. I had a faint memory of a girl striding through the streets with this look, yet with a whirlpool of faces I'd seen, certainty eluded me. Regardless, I had hair now! My mind began sketching other facets of my appearance to tweak, yet a sudden rap at my door pulled me away.

I glided across the floor, leaving my holographic doppelganger behind, and opened the sliding door to find my neighbor, Silica, standing there with an expectant smile. She, too, had recently traversed the chasm between past and this bewildering future, her cerebral essence reawakened from its icy slumber.

"Hey Obsidia," Silica chirped, her voice carried a tender note of familiarity.

"Hi, what's up?" I quizzed, my curiosity gently piqued.

"Oh, we're taking a little excursion to the zoo, thought I'd swing by and see if you'd fancy joining," she chimed in.

"We?" I cocked an eyebrow, scanning the vacant hallway beyond her frame.

"Oh, Orin and Aviana," she hastily added, her cheeks coloring just a tad. *I wonder if that's a modification she added.* "Should've mentioned them earlier. They share our frozen-brain saga."

"Ah, I see," I grinned. "But the zoo?"

Her face lit up like the dawn sky, "Yes! The place is apparently filled with extinct cloned animals!" Her eyes sparkled with child-like wonder. "They've got dinosaurs," she added, her voice bubbling with excitement.

My eyes widened at those words. “Yes!” I blurted out without an ounce of hesitation. I knew I should stop putting off my conversation with Viri about my kill options, but honestly—DINOSAURS!

Not missing a beat, I breezed out the door of my apartment, the pull of the outdoors tugging at my circuits. Though whatever added programing that shielded me from the prick of negative emotions, the positive ones fizzed through my wiring and brain with a child-like exuberance that had me practically hopping on the balls of my feet.

"Umm... Obsidia?" Silica's voice, tinged with a blend of amusement and concern, sliced through my bubble of elation.

"Yes?" I chirped, the bounce in my stance unabated.

Her lips curled downwards in a delicate frown as she gestured towards my form. "You going to put on some clothes?"

A swift glance downward revealed the absence of attire on my sleek frame. However, given the anatomy—or lack thereof—of my android physique, I struggled to find the concern in her observation. But alas, social conventions beckon. With a spin on my heels, I swayed back into my dwelling to fish out the singular set of clothing I owned. As I halted before my seated duplicate, the reflection of my bare form against the soft glow of holographic embers brought a smile to my lips.

With a flick of thought, I navigated through my holographic wardrobe—a spectacle of options unfurled before me. Indeed, it seemed the persistent yoga pants had weathered through ages, holding their ground in the fashion frontier. Without much ado, I opted for a snug pair, coupled with sleek black heels that seemed to carry a blend of class and comfort. A gray cropped jacket with short sleeves completed the ensemble, or so I thought, until the absence of a shirt under the open jacket nudged at my consciousness. A swift mental shrug brushed away the trivial concern. Given the eclectic range of attire I had witnessed among the dwellers of the megastructure and undercity, my choice seemed rather conservative. Besides, the robotic shell encasing me blurred the conventional lines of modesty—was I indeed topless, or merely a reflection of contemporary trends? The thought amused me as I breezed out once again, my animated excitement evident for all to see.

As I emerged, Silica awaited, flanked by two figures I deduced to be Orin and Aviana. Their appearances were as contrasting as they were captivating.

Orin had indeed delved heartily into the realm of personal customization. His arms now bore a robust, boxer-like build. He had completely discarded the pristine white hue—a signature of CryoCyber Solutions’ starting model—for a sea of reflective chrome. The absence of hair atop his head was amusingly compensated by a rugged metallic beard that clung to his face, evoking an eccentric resemblance to a stainless-steel sponge. The tailored vest and polished dress shoes he donned, though devoid of a button-up and blazer, imparted a professional, baller-like quality to the guy.

Aviana, on the other hand, carried the ethereal white finish with whimsical dashes of pink gracing her frame. Her hair, a spectacle of fiber optics, cascaded from her scalp in a sleek ponytail with playful hues chasing each other to the tips, mimicking a celestial rainbow. Her attire, however, flirted with audacity—a fishnet top stretched over a meticulously crafted chest, laying bare her choice of anatomical details, housed under a barely-there skirt which, along with a glimpse of a pink thong, made a bold statement. A fuzzy pink cropped jacket with short sleeves hung off her shoulders. In other words...she looked like a prostitute. The sight momentarily beckoned self-awareness as I glanced at my own open jacket.

Silica's smile warmed the air between us. “Ready?” she inquired.

“Oh, absolutely. I’m quite thrilled,” I replied, the words tumbling out adorned with an unmasked enthusiasm.

“Splendid! Oh, let me do the honors—this is Orin and Aviana. And you two, meet Obsidia,” Silica chimed in, her voice carrying a melodic tone. Although the identity of the duo had already been self-evident to all, courtesy’s soft touch graced our introduction.

With a friendly wave, I greeted, “Hello!”

Their responses mirrored my gesture, voices entwined in a chorus of warm reciprocation.

Silica chatted, “It's been only a week since you thawed out, hasn't it, Obsidia?”

“Yeah, a week today,” I replied with a small smile.

“Oh, the whole parole officer visit should be on your agenda soon then,” Orin threw in, his tone relaxed.

I blinked, “Oh, is that a thing for all of us?”

Aviana rolled her eyes, “Yep, and it’s such a hassle.”

Orin shrugged as he explained, “Back in the twenty-fourth century, convicts could choose to have their brains frozen when they died. But with all the cyber warfare, wars, and a super volcano popping off, nobody really knows who was a psycho killer or whatever. So, now we all get a parole officer to make sure we don’t go on a rampage or something.”

“Huh, well...shit,” was my only reply.

Our banter continued to flow effortlessly as we navigated through the hallway and into the elevator, descending from the heart of the megastructure. Once the doors parted, an unsightly flying yellow taxi-van awaited to ferry us across the vast stretch of the city. As I clambered into the van, a fleeting glance revealed a figure in the distance, eyes seemingly fixed on us. However, the sight blurred into the background as I shifted, making space for Silica to climb in.

Soon, we were gliding over a cityscape that seemed to unfurl endlessly beneath the clear skies. With no driver to accommodate, the taxi-van felt surprisingly spacious. Seated across from the trio, I found solace in the expansive panorama beyond the window. As we distanced ourselves from our point of departure, the stature of the megastructures piercing the horizon seemed to

escalate. They stood tall, their crowns grazing the clouds, presenting a sight as intimidating as it was awe-inspiring.

Unlike the grounded behemoths from where we commenced our journey, a cadre of floating edifices began to stipple the skyline. Much like the hovering spaceport, these structures defied gravity, levitating in mid-air with an air of mystique that brewed a concoction of wonder and curiosity within. The sight was nothing short of surreal—a testament to the boundless marvels this futuristic realm cradled. Though my past remained shrouded in an impenetrable fog, I couldn't help but feel a ripple of gratitude for the present moment, for being here now amidst the allure of the unknown.

I had completely tuned out the conversations going on around me as I peered out the window as we continued ascending higher and higher. It was then that I realized that I had forgotten to ask a rather important question.

“Umm... Where's this zoo again?” I asked.

Aviana blinked a few times before leaning forward, eyes darting towards Silica. “You didn't tell her?”

“Nope,” Silica grinned.

“Tell me what?”

“We're off to Luna,” Silica revealed with a playful smirk.

“Luna?” I echoed.

“The moon. Well, the main city on the moon,” Orin clarified, his tone dry.

“Wait! We're going to the moon?” The words sprang from me as I leaned forward in my seat, eyes fixed on Silica. “Are we heading to the spaceport then?”

“Nah, that's more for trips beyond Earth's turf. It's a customs thing, but no one really sticks to those rules,” Silica chuckled.

I turned my gaze back to the window as we continued our ascent higher into low Earth orbit. The sprawling cityscape seemed to stretch on forever.

“Earth has become quite crowded,” I muttered aloud.

“Yeah, at this rate, the ARK option is looking more and more appealing,” Orin added. “I wish we could just head out to the stars, start fresh on new worlds, but the alien bastards have made it clear—they don't want us there unless we ditch our AI.”

“It's a catch-22. The AI is what's keeping us afloat,” Aviana sighed.

“Alright, enough with the political talk,” Silica interjected. “We're about to see dinosaurs!”

“I heard they're hosting the summit with the aliens at the Luna Zoo,” Aviana chimed in, earning another playful glare from Silica for veering back into politics.

Suddenly, the perpetual hum that accompanied these flying vehicles crescendoed in tempo, luring my eyes back to the window. Yet, the comforting hum I'd grown accustomed to was replaced by a rather unsettling rattle this time. Before my concern could find a voice, a spectacle of light swirled around us, soon calming the loud rattle to a more soothing hum. The flash subsided, unveiling an up-close view of the Moon beyond the glass.

“That view takes my breath away every time,” Silica smiled.

“Breath?” Orin quirked an eyebrow. “I thought you opted for the internal circulation upgrade. Something about wanting to moonwalk without a suit?” he teased.

“Oh, hush! You know what I mean,” Silica shot back.

The exchange piqued my interest. I had undergone quite a few upgrades, and apparently, I wasn't endowed with a standard body, though appearances suggested otherwise. Now, I found myself wondering if I too could saunter across the moon's surface without a spacesuit. Yet, without confirmation, I wasn't willing to take that leap—literally.

As our descent continued, I saw Earth's vista disappearing behind the Moon's horizon. “Are we landing on the dark side of the Moon?” I inquired.

Orin cast a half-smile. “There's really no dark side, per se, but we're on the side hidden from Earth's view,” he clarified, his voice a blend of amusement and assurance.

Silica chimed in, her eyes still cradled by that contagious smile. “Some conservation mandate from the twenty-sixth century forbids construction on the visible side,” she added.

Despite Orin's explanation, a blanket of darkness draped over this side of the moon, making the city lights below twinkle like stars against the lunar surface. As I gazed out the window, an architectonic marvel unfolded before me. The craters, now cradles of human endeavor, housed clusters of buildings, their lights forming a constellation of earthly outposts on lunar soil. An intricate network of tubes zigzagged across the desolate plains, interconnecting the craters like veins of some giant, sleeping organism. While not all craters boasted massive domes, a great number bore these transparent crowns. Some even resembled colossal greenhouses, harboring lush forests to farms that seemed to defy the sterility of their lunar domicile.

“Obsidia, you're going to break the glass if you smush your face any harder against that window,” Silica chided gently with a playful glint in her eyes.

Caught in the act, I reluctantly peeled my face away from the glass, though my eyes remained anchored to the surreal vista. Among the plethora of marvels, one structure seized my gaze, its colossal form dwarfing the sprawling megastructures back on Earth. It hinted at the shape of a pyramid, yet bore massive support arcs jetting from its frame, resembling the skeletal wings of some gargantuan celestial being. The sight was an awe-inspiring puzzle, my mind tangling around the sheer ingenuity required to conjure such an edifice.

“How on Earth... or should I say, on the Moon, did they manage to build that?” I found myself whispering, humbled by the behemoth of engineering.

Orin was quick to chime in, “Oh, a lot of the materials come from mining operations in the asteroid belt. The vast wealth of resources out there is a game-changer.”

Aviana nodded, adding her piece, “I’ve also heard some buzz about the UHA strip mining Mercury. There’s talk about building up a fleet capable of standing up to the Enclave.”

Silica leaned forward with a mock glare towards Aviana, “We’re here to forget about the nitty-gritty of politics for a while, remember? We’re on the moon with a zoo full of dinosaurs waiting for us. Let’s not waste this day on grim possibilities.”

Much to my giddiness, I noticed we were heading straight for the massive pyramid-like structure. “Is that the zoo?” I couldn’t help but ask.

“Yes,” Silica smiled, her own giddiness apparent.

For the first time, the menacing thought of training and killing receded to the far corners of my mind. I basked in a euphoria, the happiest I had ever been—well, as far as my memory goes. Yet, unbeknownst to me, lurking beyond the veil of my present joy were horrors poised to unravel. Little did I know, the real choices awaiting me were pivotal, not on who to kill, but who humanity should go to war against—ourselves or those beyond us.