

CYBERIZATION

CHAPTER 2

//: REINITIALIZING CRANIAL FIBER-MOTOR CONTROL OF SUBJECT.

“*Seriously?*” My inner voice quipped as my head and eyes locked forward. With no grand exit or guidance, I found myself being propelled forward out of the shuttle. Oh, I had a mental tirade queued up, but the fervor of my annoyance just didn’t reach the boiling point I knew it should have.

Much of my irritation stemmed from my inability to inspect the spaceship I had just disembarked from more closely. Being robbed of my own free will and movement certainly didn’t help. From my earlier glimpses, these ships resembled white pills, bisected like an open-faced sandwich with intricate machinery nestled in-between. “*If only I could’ve gotten a closer look,*” I sighed inwardly.

The spaceport was a stark contrast to the pristine visuals I had encountered up to this point. It was grimy, defaced with graffiti, a total mess. Instead of the sophisticated passages of a cutting-edge hub, the place emanated the melancholy air of an abandoned subway station. The structural materials were perplexing—everything around me bore a unique, almost haunting blend, as if metallic veins ran through solidified concrete. This metallic-stone fusion, bathed in drab shades of gray, starkly contrasted with the audacious splashes of color from graffiti artists who had made their mark.

Among the chaotic graffiti, several tags stood out: *FUCK THE RICH GENO FUCKS!*, *GENE\$\$ OVER HUMANITY?*, *PURE GENES*, *TAINTED WEALTH!*, and *DNA CAN’T MASK DECAY!*... Countless others blurred in my peripheral vision, their messages lost to me as I moved involuntarily, trapped within my own—rebuilt—body. My expectations had leaned towards waking up in a utopia, especially after glimpsing the astonishing technology around me. But this reality was disheartening. It might shed light on why I felt more like an object than an individual.

My controlled stride began to decelerate as I passed a substantial horizontal window, spanning about thirty feet, while only being about six inches tall. It was embedded in a wall nearly two feet thick, hinting at either an office or a classroom beyond the glass. My limited field of view prevented closer scrutiny. From my peripheral vision, I could discern a few figures seated inside, but they too remained obscured from my restricted gaze.

Without prompting, my body pivoted to face a thick glass sliding door that opened in anticipation of my approach—a relief, as I couldn’t have halted my stride even if I’d wanted to. Sadly, a detailed glance at the seated figures eluded me as I automatically took the nearest seat, adopting that rigid, robotic posture I was growing to detest. Still, any simmering anger felt more like a subdued grumble, truth be told.

I could discern the shuffling of someone rising from a seat and approaching, but my constrained gaze stayed stubbornly fixated forward. The hard sound of footsteps drew near before settling beside me. A male voice, woven with a synthetic undertone, remarked, “Yo, ain’t seen a rig like yours in forever. They still churnin’ those out at the tech-mills?” After a pause—likely waiting for my response, which I couldn’t give—he added, “Ey, you locked in there?” followed by a metallic knock on the side of my head. “Damn corp parasites, always playin’ wire-jockeys.”

The soft hum of the sliding door signaled another’s arrival, and the awkward shuffle of footsteps soon followed. Thanks to my position near the entrance, I had a clear view of the newcomer. With an uncanny resemblance to a battered Terminator, he was strikingly out of place. His suit—crafted from a rough, unfamiliar fiber—was missing its blazer and had its sleeves rolled up, revealing tattoos. Or were they painted decals? The crowning peculiarity, though, was his face: stretched flesh that looked as if it had been pulled taut and stapled onto his tarnished chrome cranium. And then there was the cigar. Because, of course, why not?

The individual beside me, the one who’d given my head that rude knock, piped up sounding rather pissed as T-POS entered, “Yo, corp-drone! What’s the glitch? Your overlords are wire-jockeyin’ her rig! She’s all locked up tight in there.”

“What?” the robot in the suit murmured, glancing my way. His pale-yellow eyes flashed, mimicking a blink. Removing his cigar to reveal rusted metallic teeth, he then consulted a notepad that had been resting on a desk—more a sheet of transparent paper—tapping on it with the same hand that held the cigar. “Let’s see... Ah, there you are, Obsidia Knight?” he posed, seemingly anticipating a reply. A split-second later, he returned his attention to the pad, as if recalling the very reason he consulted it—my inability to respond or move autonomously.

“*Knight? I was certain I only registered my name as Obsidia,*” I thought, taken aback.

//: *TRANSFERRING CRANIAL FIBER-MOTOR CONTROL TO SUBJECT.*

After a few moments, I regained control over my neck and head. It wasn’t much of a consolation, considering the rest of my body remained locked. And the silence? Not being able to voice my frustration was infuriating. With so much I wanted to scream about, the numbing sensation dulling my emotions felt like a cruel joke. I guess that means infuriating isn’t the right word... No, more like a persistent, low simmer.

Turning my head, the individual beside me finally came into full view: a punk-rock android. A sleek black exoskeleton encased most of his frame, interrupted by segments of vibrant cyan and purple. These colors mirrored his eyes—one glowed cyan, the other a deep purple. Despite his robotic appearance, he wore clothes. Actually, everyone did, except for me. His attire reminded me of an ‘80s punk rocker, complete with spikes, but what really caught my attention was his massive afro. It shimmered with what seemed like fiberoptic lighting, creating a mesmerizing lightning storm effect within its depths.

“Hey,” Robo-Punk acknowledged, tipping his head slightly in my direction. I mean, I was pretty certain “Robo-Punk” wasn’t his given name, but with introductions off the table for me, might as well have a little fun with the naming game.

The T-POS responded, “I managed to release only the last command override she got. Her rig’s set up to fully unlock when she’s in her probationary dwelling.” He paused, adjusting his tie slightly. “Alright, back to business. Everyone here under the UHA order is on a six-month parole, tied to your time served.”

I wanted to shout, “*What the hell does he mean by time served?*” But, naturally, I was still voiceless.

“Hey corp-drone, where’re my aftermill up-mods?” Robo-Punk interrupted, just as the machine in the suit was gearing up to continue.

“Any illegal aftermarket mods were seized by Earth Homeland Security post-arrest. That should’ve been clarified when you got nabbed,” the robot in the suit said, an almost sigh-like tone adding a surreal touch to his stretched-out face. “But here’s the deal: any owed time can be nixed with military enlistment. Opt in, and not only are you fast-tracked for an officer rank, but your name’s pulled from the draft list.”

“Shit, might as well be a death ticket,” a woman’s voice murmured from behind me. I strained to turn and catch a glimpse of her, managing only a sidelong view. From what I could tell, she looked mostly human but with distinct robotic prosthetic arms. I’d almost forgotten that there were others in the room with us.

The urge to ask if there was an ongoing war nagged at me, but for the umpteenth time, my voice was trapped, as silent as the void of space. Moreover, even if I could ask, did I truly want to know? I was honestly more interested in figuring out how long my brain’s been on ice, and more specifically, regaining control over my body—not to mention my missing memories. The briefing, or debriefing if you prefer, dragged on interminably. For what felt like a few hours, the T-POS simply pored over his transparent paper, occasionally glancing up to cross-verify details with someone, then diving right back into the task. The whole ordeal was tedious, reminding me of endless waiting lines at the DMV – a mind-numbingly inefficient waste of time. But hey, at least I can remember those!

The T-POS leaned back slightly, “Alright, that seems to be everything I need.” He paused, drawing a breath as if he were capable of it. “One last tidbit for you: I’ll also be your parole officer, making my rounds to check on you weekly.” Without missing a beat, he returned the ever-present cigar to his mouth, its glow dimly reflecting off his rusted teeth before getting up and departing.

“Glitchin’ corp-drone, bet his gray matter’s tucked away in some high-rise corp fortress,” Robo-Punk spat. “And those shroom-leather duds he’s sportin’? Garbage,” he scoffed.

To my surprise, I managed a response—I nodded back at him! But almost immediately, my body, as if on some unseen command, jerked upright from its seated position and started propelling me towards the sliding door. At least I could still move my head freely. Small victories, right?

“Damn corp parasites, wire-jockeyin’ mill-heads!” I heard Robo-Punk rant, though I could barely make sense of half of what he said. “Oi, Plastic-Girl!”

Yeah, that nickname was not going to work for me.

“If your rig’s glitchin’ or needs a byte-boost, mods, or even some creds, ping me up!” he hollered as I was propelled away.

//: Contact Data Received.

I quickly found myself back in the graffiti-covered hallways of the spaceport. With newfound freedom to move my head, I took the opportunity to really survey my surroundings. The place was a veritable mess. Alongside the pervasive graffiti, there was garbage littered everywhere. Disturbingly, I also noticed what seemed to be bullet scars marring the walls. An eerie silence enveloped the space, which felt strangely incongruent with its derelict state. It was difficult to gauge the time, but recalling my post-sunset arrival, I guessed it might be somewhere between two and three in the morning.

I soon found myself heading outdoors, straight into what appeared to be blizzard conditions—in Phoenix, Arizona, of all places! I was at a loss for how the climate could’ve shifted so drastically, but I had a mountain of unanswered questions. Why, for instance, was my brain put on ice? A clause in my will, maybe? I’d like to believe I’d make such a decision, but with my memory in tatters, I couldn’t say for sure. I pushed those ponderings to the back of my mind as I braved the hurricane-strength winds, snow relentlessly pelting my face. To compound the absurdity, the spaceport hovered high in the sky, flanked by towering skyscrapers. The night was dark, the snow limiting visibility, punctuated only by the distant luminescence of those behemoth structures. The scene was both haunting and mesmerizing. I couldn’t help but worry about potential brain freeze. Here’s hoping I had some built-in cranial heating system.

After just a few steps into the raging elements, I halted abruptly, feeling oddly out of place. It took me a moment to realize where I was standing. I was on some kind of landing pad which oddly looked like something straight out of—y’know, a galaxy far, far away. Amidst the howling winds, a buzzing hum reminiscent of the shuttle and station I’d been on earlier reached my ears—or mic. Suddenly, a brilliant light from above illuminated the area, spotlighting me, as a craft began its descent towards my position.

The craft settled smoothly, its silhouette reminding me of a classic Bentley limo—albeit with the tires missing and stretched out a bit more. It practically oozed mobster vibes. The door slid open, and without any prompting, my body propelled itself inside. I braced for the unexpected, yet the interior left me somewhat deflated. It was empty. No chauffeur, no other passengers. Just a lone bottle of champagne, gleaming enticingly. But could I even drink? For that matter, how did eating work with this prosthetic body? My brain, isolated as it was, must need some kind of sustenance... right? As I sat down, the door closed on its own, and I found myself ascending even further into the sky, not sure what to expect next.