

CYBERIZATION

CHAPTER 1

//: SUBJECT COMING ONLINE.

A distant, icy voice resonated all around me, sounding both feminine and eerily synthetic—likely the instigator of this pounding headache. Everything felt so bizarre; was I still dreaming or about to wake up? Yet, just as the ache climaxed, it evaporated, leaving an unsettling calm in its wake.

//: CRYONIC REVIVAL SUCCESSFUL.

“Hey... anyone there?” My mind called out, desperate for answers, but my voice was a silent captive trapped within my own thoughts.

//: CEREBRAL CYBERIZATION INTEGRATION COMPLETE.

As if emerging from a deep slumber, the haze lifted, revealing a meld of dream, reality, and... something more—digital, perhaps? For a brief moment, I wondered, “Ugh, what did I drink last night?” But an uneasy feeling gnawed at me—this was no ordinary hangover. “Is this just some wild dream? Or... have I really kicked the bucket?” As my brain rebooted, the surreal nature of my surroundings became clear: I was hovering as if gravity had simply forgotten me. Strangely, I drifted horizontally amongst machines that looked straight out of a futuristic medical assembly line—each pristine and silently urging me forward. The weight of panic pressed down as the stark realization hit—I was paralyzed, entirely trapped, without even the ability to blink. And yet, strangely, those bubbling sensations of fear dissipated as quickly as they surfaced, as if someone had simply turned them off with a switch.

I drifted amid an array of black wires, interspersed with luminescent cords glowing in a neon spectrum. They stood in stark contrast to the pristine white machinery around, with robotics adjusting and moving as I floated past. Confusion swirled. I’d just awoken, yet the expected surge of panic was conspicuously absent—even as the realization hit that I couldn’t recall... anything. Not even my own name. Oddly, it didn’t feel like total amnesia. When I didn’t focus on specifics, everything seemed... familiar. But any attempt to latch onto a specific memory resulted in a blank, akin to the fog of a heavy high. “Huh, ironic that I can remember what being stoned feels like.”

//: INITIALIZING REMOTE OVERRIDE.

My body realigned itself, seemingly upright. Yet in this gravity-defying illusion, I felt a paradoxical sensation of both plummeting and soaring simultaneously. Ahead, a circular portal constricted like an iris, granting me passage. Abruptly, a shrill hum echoed as I passed the gate’s threshold, vibrating through every fiber of my being. As it continued, the cold touch of metal met my feet. Frustratingly, I couldn’t glance down or tilt my head to inspect myself. Instead, I found

my legs propelling me forward of their own volition, the persistent hum ever present in the background.

As I was involuntarily marched forward, I crossed paths with several other circular portals. From these emerged robots—or androids—each uniformly designed with a sterile white exoskeleton encasing a contrasting black endoskeleton. Patches of gray marked the softer regions of their frames, evident on their hands, feet, and even lips. The majority displayed a gender-neutral appearance, though some bore more pronounced masculine features, particularly around the face and shoulders. The ostensibly feminine ones closely resembled the gender-neutral designs, lacking the typical curves associated with femininity apart from their thinner waist.

The robots, in all their monotony, bore a few striking details. The occasional flickering lights that dotted their exposed endoskeletons—especially around the ribs and joints—gave them an eerie semblance of life. The strangeness of the scene bore into me, and an unnerving thought lurked at the edge of my consciousness: Could I be one of them?

A pressing sense of dread should have overwhelmed me, but instead, my emotions continued to be dulled, much like the appearance of these androids—as if I'd been medicated under the meticulous direction of my psychiatrist. *“Pfft, of all the memories, it's him I remember?”* I mused. The artificial nature of my feelings was unsettling, yet the very fact that I felt frustration was a peculiar comfort. I just hoped I wasn't some self-aware AI, or worse, I was a ghost in a machine.

The group of androids accompanying me had grown to over a dozen, and we soon entered a vast room housing another three dozen or so. They sat upright and stiff at desks, reminiscent of a college lecture hall but with a distinct futuristic twist—all pristine white, black, and metallic sheen. With mechanical precision, I was guided to an unoccupied desk and placed in a seat. My posture was unnaturally rigid, something I was certain I'd never exhibited before, even with my current memory lapse. *“Yeah, I'm pretty sure I ain't cut out for this regal and profession-bearing shit.”*

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

Suddenly, freedom returned to my neck, allowing my head to pivot and pan. The relief was immediate; the forced forward stare had felt suffocating. With my head's newfound mobility, I quickly took in my surroundings, noting the increasing number of androids pouring into the room. But a flash of irritation surged—while my head was free, the rest of my body remained stubbornly inert, refusing any command. Lowering my gaze, the discovery was both anticipated and shocking: I was encased in one of these android bodies. More jarring was the realization that mine resembled one of the female models. *“Wait, is this a mix-up, or...?”* I wanted to voice my thoughts aloud but found my vocal cords just as uncooperative as the rest of my body.

Turning my attention to the android seated to my right, it was clear it had a more masculine frame, judging by the broader shoulders. Just as I observed him, he seemed to be doing the same to me. The depthless black of his eyes, reminiscent of camera lenses shaped into eyeballs, gave off an eerie vibe. In a curious, almost comical gesture, he began tilting his head from side to side as if trying to convey a message. Unable to respond in any other manner, I mimicked his movements.

The exchange might have been humorous under different circumstances, but with everything else going on, it just added to the strangeness of the moment.

After what felt like hours of waiting, the vast auditorium eventually filled to capacity, housing roughly three hundred androids. These mechanical entities all boasted the same sleek white exoskeletons, varying only in three distinct frame designs. A tangible anticipation hung in the air.

Breaking the prevailing silence, a door at the front slid open with a whispering hiss, briefly revealing a backdrop of what seemed to be a monitor displaying Earth in all its blue and green splendor. Two figures stepped in, blocking the view, and yet a wave of relief washed over me. They were unmistakably human, a sight for sore eyes in this metallic hallucination I had found myself in.

The first, clearly rooted in the realm of science and medicine, donned a crisp white lab coat. His demeanor hinted at an obsessive dedication and countless late-night research sessions. In stark contrast, the second figure drew attention effortlessly. His outfit was a fascinating mix, combining the seriousness of a double-breasted business suit with the intricate details of traditional oriental attire. It was an ensemble that radiated both sophistication and a certain level of business arrogance. The air around him screamed ‘lawyer,’ making it clear which realm he hailed from. One glance, and I knew I wasn’t going to like him.

The lawyer approached the podium, Dr. Lab Coat standing a respectful distance away, presumably preparing for his own address.

“In light of the judgment rendered in the case of UHA vs. CryoCyber Solutions, all present have undergone a process whereby your cognitive faculties, previously preserved in cryogenic stasis, have been integrated into medical grade cerebral chassis and CryoCyber Solutions standard surrogate bodies. Per the stipulations of the court’s order, CryoCyber Solutions is obligated to disburse a monthly allowance intended for living expenses, applicable for a span of six months. Furthermore, each individual will be entitled to redeem two vouchers, exclusively at CryoCyber Solutions, which can be utilized for legally permissible cybernetic body modifications and advancements.

“It is imperative to note that any modifications or alterations undertaken outside the prescribed parameters will result in the immediate termination of all warranties and protections as provided by CryoCyber Solutions. Upon your departure from Luna Orbital Facility, you shall partake in a compulsory orientation program designed to acquaint you with societal norms and regulations as mandated by the Department of Home Earth Regulations,” he articulated with practiced monotony, making it clear he’d navigated this script numerous times in the past.

The legalese might’ve soared right over my head, but one bit hit home—I’d been dead, my brain chilled like some sci-fi popsicle, and now they’ve brought me back. “*Damn, I really did kick the bucket, and now I’m thawed out in... what? The future?*” The weight of that realization ricocheted in my mind. Even though I couldn’t let out a peep, the synchronized swivel of android heads told me I wasn’t the only one trying to digest this bombshell.

The lawyer descended from the podium and, without ceremony, exited the auditorium. As he left, Dr. Lab Coat took his place. “For now, I’ll be restoring the motor functions of your upper body,” he announced.

//: TRANSFERRING CORE FIBER-MOTOR CONTROL TO SUBJECT.

A cool relief spread through my upper body as I gradually reclaimed control. Sure, my legs were still stubbornly anchored, rebelling against any attempt at movement, but regaining some autonomy felt like a win. With the newfound mobility, I glanced further down than my neck had previously allowed, noting the peculiar white, plastic-like toes of my robotic form. While odd, I wanted that self-affirmation after observing similar features in others. It was just a bit irksome that I couldn’t give them a little wiggle.

I also discerned that the gray parts of me, which felt oddly organic and pliant like genuine flesh, were the only sections that retained any sense of touch. The rest of my form was a fusion of cold metal and hard plastic. The tactile sensations were somewhat comforting, grounding me in this bizarre reality.

A fleeting thought crossed my mind: were some of my emotions suppressed? And once Dr. Lab Coat up there decided to restore them, how would I react? Would I be overwhelmed with grief or remain detached and apathetic? Only time will tell.

“Now, where was I,” the Doc mused, pausing to scratch his cheek thoughtfully. “Ah, yes,” he continued, seemingly talking to himself. “For those who had digitally preserved their transcended minds, you’ve been living among us for quite a while. Hence, much of this briefing might seem redundant to you. However, for the newly reawakened among you who might be grappling with disorientation, an AI assistant will be made available at your assigned residence courtesy of CryoCyber Solutions. This AI will be well-equipped to address any queries you might have. My primary task today is to update your records in our database. Regrettably, due to the devastation of the third world war, a significant portion of our data was lost, leaving only fragments. If you’re struggling to recall or don’t identify with the names we have on record, please provide a moniker of your choosing, and we will update our system accordingly.”

The previously unremarkable surface of the desk transformed before my eyes, coming alive with light. I hadn’t anticipated the shift; it had seamlessly blended into the room’s aesthetic as a simple, solid fixture. Yet, as displays around me filled with presumably recognizable data for my neighbors, my screen was disappointingly sparse.

The name “Obsidian_Knight_26601” blinked mockingly at me. While the numbers felt foreign, the main handle stirred a faint, almost nostalgic sensation. Could it have been my gamer tag from my past life? But as I scoured my fragmented memory for my real name, I came up empty-handed.

Resigned to the circumstance, I had to coin a new identity. I could discard the digital alias, but what would replace it? Casting a glance downwards, my android form leaned unmistakably feminine. But did that outward appearance genuinely reflect who I was or who I used to be? The uncertainty was maddening.

“Thirty seconds before we proceed,” the dick in the lab coat declared, his tone irking me. Yet, despite my mounting frustration, there wasn’t a hint of panic to accompany it.

I keyed in the name “Obsidian,” but the sight of it on the desk was unsatisfying. Out of nowhere, a countdown began from ten beside the name. For the briefest of milliseconds, I thought I had finally felt an ounce of panic, but it remained absent. I gave myself another once-over, then looked back at the name. As the counter reached its final second, I impulsively hit the backspace.

“Our system will also synchronize with the UHA and customs for when you return to Earth,” he stated. The revelation caught me off-guard, and judging by the flurry of head movements, it surprised most of the others too. “I’ll be reassuming control over your bodies shortly and directing you to the shuttles based on the home regions listed in our files. Those without specific regions, per the lawsuit’s terms, will be assigned to a designated city by the UHA. Good luck,” he declared, before stepping away from the podium and exiting the auditorium, following in the footsteps of the lawyer.

There was a deluge of questions bubbling in my mind. Topping the list was, “*What on earth is the UHA?*” Closely followed by the nagging curiosity about my current location in the vastness of space. And given the glaring absence of any region next to my scant profile on the desk’s display, where exactly were they planning to send me? It was maddening to be so information-starved in this sea of unknowns. But what truly grated on me was the blatant indifference exhibited by the lawyer and Dr. Lab Coat. It was overly apparent to me; they were corporate bastards. It was as if we were just another task on their checklist to be swiftly dealt with and dispatched.

//: *REINITIALIZING CORE FIBER-MOTOR CONTROL OF SUBJECT.*

The sudden jerk of my body made it clear: autonomy was no longer mine. Though, to my relief, they hadn’t commandeered my head’s movement. My head and eyes darted around, capturing the sight of everyone rising from their desks in hauntingly perfect unison. In any other scenario, the sheer number of individuals moving simultaneously would have inevitably led to some commotion, perhaps a few accidental collisions. Yet, in this surreal synchronized procession, there was a seamless flow. I found myself being ushered out of the auditorium without the slightest jostle or misstep.

Our little forced procession diverted us from the door at the front of the auditorium, depriving me of the chance to discern if the Earth’s depiction was a genuine view or simply a projection. Instead, we were directed to a separate exit opposite where we had come from. The moment I stepped through the doors, the monotonous humming that had faded into the background of my awareness ceased entirely. Its absence was striking only in the moment of its departure. More shocking, though, was the sudden loss of gravity.

Now weightless, our procession transformed into an almost balletic drift, a dance of androids moving in haunting harmony. We diverged and converged before various doors. Some portals welcomed sizable groups, with up to twenty individuals congregating in front of them. In contrast, the door that I was directed to stood solitary, expecting just me. It heightened my feeling of isolation amidst this new reality.

The unceremonious slide of the door revealed an interior that struck me as a futuristic take on a school bus. Plush seating paired with polished white trims against the stark contrast of sleek black metallic surfaces set the tone of luxury. My body, still seemingly operating under an unseen puppeteer's control, gravitated toward the front seat of the shuttle. As I settled in, a sophisticated harness, reminiscent of those in a roller coaster but significantly more refined, ensnared me, securing me in place. The irony wasn't lost on me: even without the harness, I wouldn't have the option to move on my own.

The thrill of securing a front-row seat with an unobstructed window view sent a jolt of anticipation through me, even in my constrained state. Initially, all I was privy to were the nondescript hangar doors, locked firmly shut. However, their stoic facade was soon disrupted by a blinking yellow light, signaling their imminent opening. As they slid apart, they framed an iconic and breathtaking sight — the moon in all its cratered glory. The realization hit me like a tidal wave: I was aboard a space station orbiting the moon!

It was an odd disconnect, being able to feel exhilaration but remaining untouched by other deeper, darker emotions. Yet, any introspection was set aside in favor of the adrenaline rush as the shuttle powered forward. Initially, it seemed I was on a collision course with the moon, but with a smooth adjustment, the shuttle realigned its trajectory. In that brief transition, I glimpsed other shuttles, each carving their own path in the inky void. Then, capturing all my attention, Earth appeared — luminous and spellbinding. The yearning to reach out, to somehow touch that distant jewel, was overwhelming. If only my body would obey.

The ambient air vibrated with a familiar humming, eerily reminiscent of the station's undertone. As the pitch began to ascend, a sensation washed over me, not of movement but of the universe itself shifting. Bright stars blurred, their static glow streaking past like cosmic rain. Earth drew closer, not with the jolt of a rocket's thrust, but more like I was a fixed point as space swirled around me.

The vast emptiness of space shifted rapidly to the teeming expanse of an Earthly cityscape poking above the clouds at night. The anticipated thrill of the shuttle's blazing reentry was lost, replaced by a dizzying speed. Glinting mega structures rose all around me, a testament to technological leaps. *"If I can recall, we were poking at smartphone screens and tiptoeing around with baby AIs,"* I mused. Pushing that thought aside, I tried to lean my head forward, eyes narrowing, trying to discern the skyscrapers unfurling around me, but everything looked so different. Granted, I couldn't quite remember how things should look, but I knew this wasn't it.

As I was trying to make sense of everything, a giant woman cloaked in radiant pink materialized out of the clouds below and right in the shuttle's path. My head almost twitched instinctively, a mere semblance of a flinch, but even that was prevented by whatever was keeping my negative emotions at bay. Though, I did pass right through her. My mind raced to process. *"Holograms?"* It seemed a plausible guess, especially as more ethereal figures and constructs illuminated the cityscape, adding to the surreal sights.

Diving through the clouds, the shimmer of the city's lights sharpened, unveiling more details of the sprawling metropolis beneath. However, a burgeoning snowstorm speckled the shuttle's view,

creating a misty curtain. Out of the blue, the shuttle changed its trajectory, veering towards a mammoth structure that appeared to float in mid-air, a defiance of gravity. “*Has to be some high-tech wizardry,*” I mused internally.

If I had full command of my emotions, I’d probably be losing it right about now. Everything was unfolding at such a whirlwind pace. But in my current state? I was just riding the emotional waves, pretty sure the tide would turn at some point. Yet, there was this undeniable spark of childlike wonder lighting up within me. And it flared especially bright when the shuttle seamlessly docked inside that levitating behemoth.

//: *WELCOME OBSIDIA TO SPACEPORT PHOENIX, ARIZONA, OF THE UNIFIED HUMAN ALLIANCE.*

The icy synthetic voice resonated in my head, ushering in a torrent of emerging queries. Amidst the deluge, a fleeting memory surfaced: my impulsive decision to snip the “n” from “Obsidian” during my renaming. To me, Obsidia had a certain flair. My identity was still clouded and elusive, but this feminine silhouette felt right, at least until memories resurfaced or a new longing for something else emerged. But the true oddity was the snow. “*Snowing in Arizona? So much for global warming... And just what in the world is the Unified Human Alliance?*”

Without ceremony, the harness released its grip. Under a directive not my own, my body stood and aligned itself with the shuttle’s exit. A new, enigmatic world awaited. The foggy memories of my initial end evaded me, yet I was unwavering in embracing this unforeseen second chance. Beneath the surface, a muted segment of me ached to mourn, holding onto the hope that once this silent puppeteer’s strings were severed, I’d find some closure. But in this moment, a bubbling anticipation overshadowed all else, and I was eager to witness what came next.