

# CYBERIZATION

## CHAPTER 3

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Navigating the vast urban skies, I tried to discern who—or what—was steering the craft. Just like the shuttle I encountered earlier, there was no visible pilot, not even a semblance of a cockpit or steering mechanism. A fragmented memory hinted at automated cars existing before I was... suspended. “Before I died” would normally be the phrase, but given my peculiar situation, “put on ice” seems more fitting. Whatever the past held, it was clear that automation technology had advanced leaps and bounds during my absence. For now, it seemed the only company I had was that bottle of champagne.

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

Suddenly, for the first time since my jarring awakening in this alien future, I regained a moment of autonomy over a body profoundly unfamiliar to me. Raising my hands—a simple act I had taken for granted—I scrutinized them. They were no longer flesh and bone, but rather part of an intricate prosthetic system that constituted my entire form. At first glance, I appeared to be molded from plastic. Yet, as I focused on their design and texture, I deduced a carbon-based material, perhaps an advanced polymer, as a likely candidate. But what truly disconcerted me was the inconsistent sensation; while certain areas of my hands relayed touch, others were hauntingly devoid of any feeling.

To my astonishment, I couldn’t find any visible motors or servos. Instead, a web of black, synthetic fibers, eerily reminiscent of muscle, stretched beneath segments of my polished white exoskeleton. Lifting my arm for a clearer view, my rib cage area came into focus, revealing an endoskeleton beneath. The design hinted at a carbon structure I thought I recognized. But “thought” is the key word here; with my memories a tangled mess, it’s hard to trust any supposed expertise I might’ve once had, or perhaps never did.

It struck me as peculiar; I was sure that T-POS parole officer, or whatever his title was, mentioned I wouldn’t have full control over my body until I reached my “probationary dwelling.” As I mulled over that thought, a figure began to materialize in front of me. It was as if he’d teleported into the vehicle. Yet, something was off—his face was fuzzy, hinting at a holographic projection? Unlike the grainy holograms from stories set in galaxies far, far away, this one was sharp. The lint on his professional suit was discernible, but the static distortion of his face made the entire projection jarring. Regardless, he took a seat opposite me, the gleaming bottle of champagne being the only barrier between us.

“Obsidian\_Knight\_26601,” the man began, his tone dripping with a mix of reverence and condescension. It bore an uncanny resemblance to the haughty demeanor of that lawyer from earlier, though the voice itself differed. “It’s truly an honor to meet someone with your unique skill

set. I won't dance around the subject. Extracting you from stasis was quite the endeavor, but we require your expertise," he continued.

"*Expertise?*" I muttered, genuinely baffled by his words. But then it hit me. Even though I felt in control of my body, my voice wasn't cooperating. No sound came out!

With an unmistakable air of arrogance, he reached out, startling me as he actually grasped the champagne bottle. As he poured himself a glass, my eyes fixed on his pale flesh hand, made even more ostentatious by a massive ring, its centerpiece a gleaming blue gem. I'd been dead certain he was a mere projection.

"Considering your present... situation," he began, with a tone dripping condescension, "I'm told you might need time to adjust." He paused for a sip, seemingly enjoying the weight of the silence. "Thus, you've been *graciously* given three months to handle your first target," he declared, emphasizing the word as if he had just granted me a priceless gift.

"*Handle? Target?*" My inner voice bubbled up with confusion, praying that I'd just misheard him.

The door of the flying car slid open, prompting me to shift my gaze from Sir Fuzzy Face to the wintry void beyond. Our descent and landing had gone entirely unnoticed by me. Despite the thick blizzard, a peculiar silhouette cut through the snowstorm. It bore a nostalgic resemblance to a '60s van, albeit revamped with a cyberpunk flair—as if a hippie van had been thrust into a futuristic makeover. The details remained shrouded by the snowfall, but one feature was unambiguously clear: a glowing neon sign proclaiming "Taxi."

Turning my attention back to the car's interior, I found both the man and the champagne bottle conspicuously absent. "Given the need for discretion in preserving your cover, it's imperative we're not seen together. Your handler will provide any necessary details henceforth. I merely wanted a firsthand look before unleashing you upon our adversaries," his disembodied voice echoed, even in his absence.

"*Was that bottle just another hologram?*" I pondered.

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

At that cue, my body went rigid, without even the decency to let me look around. Seemingly driven by some intrusive software or remote command, I found myself being ushered out of the flying limousine and directed towards the taxi. A part of me longed to look back, lured by the intensifying hum emanating from behind – unmistakably signaling Sir Fuzzy's exit. However, the sound swiftly faded into the background.

The taxi's door seamlessly slid open, mirroring the limo's action. And, just as in the limousine, it was devoid of any driver or passenger. I was ushered into the seat, the door smoothly sealing shut. With nary a prompt, the vehicle surged skyward, its gentle hum reminiscent of a contented cat's purr.

The taxi ride was brief, spanning just a few city blocks before beginning its descent. The encompassing snowstorm obscured much of the vast cityscape. Yet, the sporadic glimpses of

glowing lights, masked by the raging snow, hinted at colossal structures closely packed together—reminiscent of mega-structures from some crazy sci-fi renditions of future metropolises. Upon landing, I disembarked without fanfare and proceeded into the imposing complex.

Upon entering, I was immediately struck by my frustrating inability to look upward. From the limited perspective I had, the building seemed to encircle an inner courtyard. Although the structure's true height remained a mystery, I had a hunch about crisscrossing bridges overhead. Still, without the capability to confirm, it remained pure speculation.

*“Ugh, I wish I could just look up,”* I lamented internally.

Drawn to an elevator, I was elated to notice that three of its walls were made of glass—perfect for a panoramic view of the courtyard. Eager for a bird's eye perspective, my hopes were dashed when, upon entering, I involuntarily pivoted to face the solid door. With the expected view now denied, I was grateful my emotions were being dulled; otherwise, I might've been on the brink of an all-out meltdown.

As the elevator began its ascent, odd flashes of light caught my peripheral vision. They weren't jarring like abrupt light changes but more rhythmic, reminiscent of visual patterns you might see on a TV. The inability to check their source was irksome, but with a mental shrug, my fleeting irritation dissolved. Instead of the usual elevator muzak, a commercial advertisement of some kind droned on. But my thoughts were consumed by Sir Fuzzy and his cryptic “target.” The unnerving notion that he mistook me for some hitman persisted. Despite my fragmented memories, I was certain of one thing: that was not who I was. Even worse, I only had three months to take care of it.

The elevator doors parted, revealing a corridor with a clear view of the inner courtyard. As I began tracing the route around it, my suspicions were confirmed. Intersecting bridges spanned the expanse, crisscrossed by an array of colored wires of varying thickness. Much like the spaceport, the place was in disrepair: litter strewn about, graffiti marring every surface, and markings that eerily resembled bullet impacts. The silver lining? The eerie silence and empty corridors, likely due to the early hour. However, this environment sharply contrasted with the glossy, futuristic utopia I'd seen when I first awoke.

As I progressed, one of the myriad doors slid open, revealing a cyborg-android girl echoing some of my own features. However, she bore unique touches: her caramel complexion, seemingly organic, belied hints of its synthetic nature. Her luminescent green hair and matching eyes, reminiscent of that Robo-Punk guy's flair, pulsed with her own distinct light pattern. Intricate metallic designs traced down from her eyes, enhancing her mechanized elegance. Dressed in a casual gray sweater draped loosely off her shoulder, her absence of pants was notably evident. While she sported a black thong, she still appeared more modest compared to my current state.

“Hey there! Didn't know we were getting another brain-pop,” she greeted with a beaming smile. Regrettably, I didn't reciprocate her enthusiasm. I continued on, not from a lack of interest, but because I was devoid of control over my own body. Still, she didn't seem fazed, keeping pace and staying just within my line of sight.

“Trust me, I’ve been there. My first day? Full-blown panic mode. I felt like I was possessed by some weird, demonic mindflayer,” she chatted, her tone both understanding and light. Piecing together her words, I deduced she too had been thawed from a cerebral freeze. “Just take a mental breath and remember: you’re nearly through the worst of it,” she attempted to reassure, although it struck me as odd given my dulled emotional state. Judging by her body’s enhancements, she’d likely been here longer and had undergone a few upgrades.

With mechanical precision, I turned sharply towards a door. It slid open in perfect sync with my approach, revealing a dimly lit space beyond. Drawn to an object resembling a couch, I seated myself without pause, facing an unadorned wall. To my surprise, the green-haired girl had followed, entering the room after me.

As the door sealed with a soft hiss, she casually called out into the room, “lights,” dispelling the gloom. The familiar grayish metallic walls surrounded us, notably absent of any graffiti. With an air of effortless poise, she stood before me, arms crossed, leaning slightly against the chilly wall, her gaze locked onto my face.

*//: INITIALIZING FULL CEREBRAL AND SYSTEM DIAGNOSIS.*

She continued, her voice casual but filled with understanding, “After the AI finishes its protocols, it tends to evaluate your brain’s adjustment to your rig. It’s a safety precaution, really. They don’t want to hand control back until they’re sure you won’t... well, freak out.” She hunched forward a bit, her eyes meeting mine, a hint of understanding in them. “Trust me, it’s for the best. When I first woke up, it felt like an eternity trapped in my own body. But once you’re back in control, everything starts making a bit more sense.”

“*Easy for her to say,*” I mused in my mind. Judging from her words, she didn’t seem plagued by memory glitches, nor did it appear she was moonlighting as an assassin.

“It’s quite a daunting experience, isn’t it? I’ve been there, and so have the other three,” she said with a wistful smile. “Forgive my lack of introduction earlier; I’m Silica. I was part of the third group to be awakened. Orin and Aviana are the other two, and are from the first batch,” she rambled, seemingly trying to divert my attention from any rising panic. Yet, considering the circumstances, I felt I was managing the situation rather seamlessly, perhaps these dulled emotions were a good thing.

She tapped her chin thoughtfully, pondering her next words. “Use the mod vouchers the company handed out on cosmetics. Everything else? A waste. Don’t buy into their promises. The underground modders, they’re the real deal. And if you can, get a concealed weapon attachment. Voiding the warranty from those Cryo-Sleazebags? Pssh, not even a concern. They never keep to their word, especially with our rigs. If we had the funds to sue them, then you wouldn’t need their worthless warranty. Oh, and steer clear of anything above the thirty-second floor. That’s Synth territory. Big gang here, but they mostly leave us regular folks alone. They stick to the ‘Don’t shit where you eat’ mindset. Honestly, it’s more decent than what you’d find in most of these other mega-structures. Oh, and a heads-up about the inner city—rich organics run the show there, and they’re not exactly friendly to our kind,” she concluded.

Silica came across as genuinely pleasant, but as her words flowed, my mind kept drifting back to Sir Fuzzy and the three-month deadline for my first hit. The more it simmered in my mind, the more I felt he'd pegged me as some elite assassin—which I was far from being. The question of who my handler might be still dangled unanswered. And while Silica didn't exactly scream 'handler,' I wasn't about to rule out the possibility just yet.

*“How do I get myself out of this mess?”* I thought with an inward sigh.

*//: CEREBRAL AND SYSTEM DIAGNOSIS COMPLETE.*

*//: RELEASING PARTIAL CEREBRAL AND SYSTEM FUNCTIONS OVER TO SUBJECT.*

As the internal message echoed, a hint of a frown marked my brow. However, upon catching sight of the green-haired cyborg, my mood lightened, my lips curling into a faint, playful smile. “Hey there, I’m Obsidia,” I voiced, each syllable colored with an ethereal, digital tone. At long last, I was free—thank God almighty, free at last! And that sentiment coming from an atheist? The irony was not lost on me.