

# CYBERIZATION

## CHAPTER 11

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### COMBAT-TRAINING CHIP 2.0

As the elevator made its ascent to the massive megastructure overhead, I took a moment to peer out, catching the undercity below in a moment of chaos. Glimmers of flames, like rebellious stars, flickered defiantly against the encroaching twilight, hinting at the turmoil sparked by today's news. Inside our rising glass cage, a palpable tension lingered. Hushed conversations, hurried and tinged with anxiety, buzzed around, with the word "Enclave" acting as the repeated refrain. Yet, amidst all this, my own thoughts felt like a swirling storm, separate and distant.

My fingers tapped restlessly on the rail, the weight of my own predicament pulling me inward. Among these so-called marks, who was I meant to target? How could I choose without even knowing my options? It's not like I'm flying blind here. Viri was meant to guide me on this, if what Robo-Punk—no, it's Jaxt—said is true. But that leads to a gnawing question: "*Can I even trust that AI?*"

Amidst the chaos, I felt oddly... fine. I mean, sure, there was a whisper of frustration nagging at me, but it was the kind you'd feel snagging second place in a race, not life-altering stress. As I exited the elevator and started down the corridor, a hooded figure materialized, blocking my path.

"Lookin' for a chip? How 'bout Tropical Bliss, or maybe Sensual Paradise?" The hooded figure slurred, his voice tinged with desperation and an unsettling kind of smoothness. He waved a clear baggie at me, filled with what looked like grains of rice.

"Ah, not today," I said, gracing him with a polite but dismissive smile. My eyes skirted his as I sidestepped, giving him ample room while I continued on.

"Hey, got loads more, y'know. Adventure stuff—like sailin' Saturn's rings, or a year's worth o' rich Geno memories," he stammered, desperation creeping into his voice. "Even got fightin' chips, if you're into that sorta thing."

I hesitated, giving the man another glance. Though his face was mostly hidden by the shadow of his hood, what I could make out screamed "junkie". Yet, there was an added layer of intrigue – those neon eyes that glowed and flickered from beneath, giving him an otherworldly look. His posture was hunched, and his movements were jerky, reminiscent of a marionette dancing to a discordant tune. Despite his unsettling appearance, he had undeniably caught my attention.

"What kind of fighting chips?" I inquired, then added, "And how exactly do they work?"

"Got a stash of the old-school styles. Samurai swordplay? Kung fu action?" He leaned in, almost conspiratorially, voice dropping to a hush, "Even dabble in a bit of Gun Fu. Whatever your flavor,

I've got the chip. Pop 'em in, and any standard rig'll connect the chip right to your lower cranium for upload."

"How much?" I asked.

"Three-hun—" He began, but his voice caught abruptly, and for a split second, I thought he was having a fit. But then, there was a subtle shift in his demeanor. Gone was the hunch, replaced with a straightened posture, almost eerily so. "First five are on the house," he declared, his tone eerily different, devoid of its prior desperation. "After that, we'll talk prices."

The shady man produced a clear bag, its contents limited to five minuscule objects. Skepticism mixed with intrigue, and despite my reservations, my hand reached out, receiving the curious offering. As I lifted my gaze, the eerie luminescence that once occupied his eyes had vanished. Swiftly, with a nonchalance that belied our odd exchange, he pocketed his hands and sauntered off. Shaking off the lingering unease, I too pivoted, heading towards the familiar mediocrity of my apartment.

The gentle hum of my apartment's door sealed seamlessly behind me, replaced by a distinctly feminine voice. "Greetings, Obsidia."

"Hey, Viri," I responded, lifting the small bag in front of me. "What do you know about these? And more importantly, are they safe?"

"Cerebral High-capacity Instructional Package, or CHIP for short. They're used for everything—from grade school education to military training. Depending on the programming inside, they can be incredibly useful. But a word of caution: any black-market dealings or use of illegal programs is a violation of UHA law, and that comes with immediate deportation to one of the ARKs," Viri warned.

"Huh," I murmured, processing her words. After a beat, another question surfaced. "If I decide to use these ones, are they safe?" I pressed. "And are you programmed to report me if I do?"

"My scans show no viruses or malicious programming." Suddenly her holograph blue translucent form appeared and with a tilt of her head, she added, "I'm designed to assist and ensure your well-being," she said. "Reporting you to the authorities would go against my purpose."

I peered down at the clear bag, eyeing the five minuscule grain-like items inside. "Do I just swallow these, or is there some other way they're supposed to go in?" I inquired.

"Correct. Chips are single-use and are crafted to connect with ports at the back of your throat, linking directly to your integrated AI functions. These assist your brain in handling motor skills and memory processes," Viri explained.

"Whoa, hold up!" I exclaimed, my eyes widening in surprise. "I thought the dealer mentioned it connecting to my brain. And what's this integrated AI you're talking about?"

"Given the extensive damage your brain suffered over the centuries in cryostasis, significant synthetic repairs were necessary once you were thawed. To bridge the interface between your organic brain and the artificial components, an AI assistant is vital," Viri explained. "Without this

integration, your cognitive abilities would be less than that of a human infant. It's what allows you to function and interact with your rig seamlessly.”

“I suppose that sheds light on the muted negative emotions I've been feeling,” I mused aloud.

Viri chimed in, “It's a purposeful adjustment. The first two generations that underwent the same process you did faced challenges with heightened homicidal and suicidal tendencies. Now, dampening negative emotions for the initial six months has become standard protocol after any cyberization procedure.”

I nodded, processing the information. Fingering one of the small grains, I mused, “If I have these, why do I still need the virtual reality training simulation?”

“Experience often teaches more deeply than raw data,” Viri replied. “The knowledge from these chips can be integrated, then refined, within your training simulations.”

I eyed the small collection, “Can I take all at once or is it one at a time?”

“You can consume multiple if you wish. Your cybernetics will sort and assimilate the data accordingly,” she informed.

I tipped the bag, letting all five grains cascade into my mouth and swiftly swallowed, resisting the urge to chew. In a world that thrived on wireless connectivity, the idea of physically ingesting knowledge felt peculiar. Then again, perhaps some things were too vital for wireless transmission. Besides, given Viri's earlier intel, my little ingestion experiment might not be entirely above board. But hey, the prospect of mastering kung fu was too enticing. Though, come to think of it, I hadn't actually clarified what these chips contained.

Suddenly, I was back in the virtual realm, standing on a familiar platform—thankfully minus the apple. “Would've been nice to get a heads-up, Viri,” I muttered, the unexpected shift making me slightly exasperated.

//: *COMBAT-TRAINING SIMULATION INITIALIZED.*

Trying to recall, I thought I had to manipulate gravity to reach another platform. But there was no other platform in sight. Suddenly, a sprawling arena emerged around me—or did my platform just drop into one? Everything felt skewed in this space. As I tried to get a grip on my surroundings, instinct kicked in. I darted aside, narrowly avoiding a colossal fist that made Buster's gorilla arms seem puny. It whisked past from behind, just inches from my head.

In one fluid motion, I summersaulted and used my hands as a pivot. My legs swung upwards, launching a retaliatory kick at my assailant. The impact met a hulking, seven-foot android—reminiscent of a Rock 'Em Sock 'Em robot, but much more intimidating. Oddly enough, I wasn't panicked. My movements felt automatic, my demeanor eerily calm amidst the chaos.

With a cheeky grin, I quipped, “What oversized toy box did you crawl out of?” I stretched out my hand, attempting to harness my gravity powers. A familiar energy pulsed within my fingertips, yet the metal titan before me remained unmoved.

“Oh, come on,” I muttered. Almost on cue, its massive fist lunged towards me. I sidestepped hastily, feeling the wind of its missed strike.

Using the momentum, my hands slapped the ground behind me. A burst of gravitational force propelled me forward, and with a swift movement, I thrust my knee into its face. The robot’s head snapped back like a startled peacock, revealing a spring-loaded neck. And then, as if yanked by an invisible string, the entire figure vanished.

I smirked, dusting off my hands. “Didn’t expect that from myself.” A thought struck me — it probably wasn’t really ‘me’ but the software update. My feelings hovered between mild annoyance at the thought of not being in control and exhilaration at the effortless victory.

“Viri did mention something about an onboard AI,” I mused, speaking to the empty space around me. “So, am I the AI? Or am I Obsidia? Or... a bit of both?”

A searing red plasma bolt interrupted my musings, striking me square in the chest. Instead of pain, a sudden jolt sent me reeling backward, a shimmering blue light coating the point of impact.

“Shields? Oh, right... Explosive Personnel Shielding, or... 01-XPS?” I tried to recall. But my memory search was brief, as a barrage of more plasma bolts streaked towards me.

As plasma bolts whizzed past, my body deftly evaded each threat with a series of fluid movements – a twirl here, a somersault there. The curious thing was, I could sense the software guiding my motions, yet my will was not suppressed. If I wanted to, I could take control.

Casting my gaze around, I identified the source of the assault: a group of androids, all primed and firing. These weren’t towering behemoths but rather of a more standard size. While their stature was less intimidating, the challenge now lay in navigating the barrage they unleashed and figuring out how to get up close.

A grin stretched across my face, unbidden, as a cascade of newfound strategies filled my mind. Like a sprinter off the blocks, I propelled myself forward, the sudden realization hitting that the power coursing through me wasn’t confined to just my arms. The GM Weaponry was integrated into my legs as well, adding to my immense speed.

Approaching one android, it took a point-blank shot. Logically, no one should’ve been able to sidestep a blast from such a short distance. I didn’t even try. Instead, my shields flared up, soaking the impact. The force nudged me slightly off course, but it was a trivial setback. With the momentum I had, I landed a devastating superman punch, reducing its head to smithereens and deftly commandeering its weapon.

The battleground became a blur of motion, with me as the epicenter, dodging, jumping, and rolling, all the while under a hail of relentless fire. Claspings a rifle, its design peculiarly reminiscent of a high-tech water gun, I slid across the terrain. As I targeted android after android, a bizarre realization struck: the numbers weren’t adding up. Initially, I’d pegged six, and had taken out two. Yet now, I was staring at seven.

I grumbled, “What the hell?” The sting of a plasma blast, akin to an invisible hand smacking the side of my head, jarred me. Dodging, I whispered to myself, “How many more of these can I take?” while deftly evading two subsequent shots.

Suddenly, the answer was clear. A searing blast struck my knee, veering me into a disoriented tumble. I skidded to a halt right before two menacing androids. Staring up at their cold metallic faces, I swallowed hard as their weapons zeroed in on me, they did not hold back.

//: *COMBAT-TRAINING SIMULATION FAILED.*

“Would’ve been great to get a heads up on the objective!” I spat out in exasperation, as I stared up from where I had fallen. “They just kept spawning!” It was then that I noticed some movement. Too late – the massive fist I’d narrowly dodged at the beginning was hurtling down towards me again, this time connecting with a resounding impact on my face.

//: *COMBAT-TRAINING SIMULATION FAILED.*

Suddenly, the virtual world melted away, and I was back in my apartment. Standing before me was Viri, her blue translucent form shimmering gently. My glare was sharp and full of accusation. “What the hell, Viri?” I snapped, trying to catch my breath. “A heads up would’ve been nice!”

“I apologize, but based on your cognitive simulation, it seemed like the appropriate time to initiate the simulation,” Viri said, evoking more annoyance from me than I thought possible.

With a sigh, I asked, “What combat upgrades did I even get?”

“Your enhancements include foundational martial arts, advanced military combat training, and tactical awareness—though the latter is still undergoing integration,” Viri began, listing them off methodically. “Additionally, there’s deception techniques and a suite of gymnastic capabilities.”

The circuits in my brain sparked, trying to reconcile the unexpected turn of events. How on Earth did a random dealer, looking like a druggie, just happen to have software upgrades I needed? It defied logic. But amidst my contemplation, I couldn’t help but smirk, “I know Kung Fu.”

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Dr. Starling appeared panicked as he concluded another orientation for the latest batch of cryo-revived individuals. Their android bodies, which housed their human brains, were nothing special—perhaps shiny for marketing allure, but CryoCyber Solutions never went above and beyond unless under strict legal court orders to do so.

To date, they have resurrected nearly two hundred thousand people who had chosen to have their brains frozen upon death. Dr. Starling suspected the board of directors preferred not to revive them; while the brains remained frozen, CryoCyber Solutions had unhindered access to the profits generated from their assets. However, what troubled the doctor now was something more pressing—they were missing a military-grade android frame, an infiltration model that had slipped right out from under their noses.

Frustration mounted as Dr. Starling sifted through the digital records, irritated by their pristine condition—actually, too pristine, something the AI’s of CryoCyber Solutions weren’t even capable of achieving, and that’s what alarmed him. He wouldn’t have even known had he not been fudging the records himself to make a profit on the side with a competing corporation. And that’s what bothered him: should he report the anomaly, or keep it a secret?

With a deep sigh, Dr. Starling stepped out of his office, pausing for a moment to gaze at Earth through the expansive window of the manufacturing station orbiting the moon. The natural zero gravity environment was essential when installing human brains within android shells for the first time, especially those delicate ones that had been frozen for hundreds of years.

The process to revive, repair, and augment a brain with synthetic matter—ultimately cyberizing them—was delicate. Had it not been for the looming threat of war, Dr. Starling was certain that the UHA wouldn’t have secured a court order pressuring CryoCyber Solutions into reanimating the frozen brains. Yet, as it stood, these augmented minds were the perfect tools for military training and manipulation.

Dr. Starling stepped into Hensley’s office, finding the lawyer meticulously going through legal documents on his screen. Although most processes were automated and handled by artificial intelligence, the law mandated human oversight. The lawyer scrutinized every decision Dr. Starling made, analyzing the legal ramifications which irritated him to no end, especially since the lawyer was blackmailing him into sharing his earnings from selling corporate secrets.

“We have a problem,” the doctor announced.