

CYBERIZATION

CHAPTER 13

THE LOST SPECIES

I was utterly in awe! The vehicle—let’s affectionately dub it a van-taxi-shuttle-spaceship hybrid for simplicity’s sake—glided into a docking gate. And, no bullshit here, we passed through an actual force field. Not a bubble thingy, mind you, but a vertical wall—just like in a galaxy far far away—barricading the station’s entrance and exit, gracefully admitting us into the docking bay of this gargantuan structure. ‘Super megastructure’ is the working title I’m going with until someone tells me otherwise. Oh, I’m rambling, aren’t I? Right – back to my moon landing!

The van-taxi—oh, whatever it is—screeched to a halt and I was practically vibrating out of my skin slash rig with excitement. Silica’s eyes lit up like it was Christmas morning, mirroring my own wild energy, while Orin managed a cool, stoic exterior and Aviana...well, she just looked bored. The door whisked open, we shuffled out, and I—trapped at the rear—resisted the urge to elbow my way to the front with an impatience I barely managed to mask. Pat on the back for me, resisting the urge to turn into a cyberized bulldozer, right?

Amazingly, the holographic advertisements were, well, rather mellow. Instead of chaotically cluttering every surface and space, they were—dare I say it—strategically doing so. And, oh boy, seeing a hologram of a strolling T-Rex? That was a neat touch! It took zilch time to pay our fees, a cost Orin surprisingly covered. Now, it’s not like he had a thing for Silica—or so it seemed—even though their personalities matched like oil and water, but that’s another story. It did make me wonder though: does he sport stock equipment downstairs, or is it all aftermarket? How does one even broach that topic with their modder? *I wonder if I could get a detachable one. Ugh, mind, stop wandering!* This seems to be a recurring issue when my excitement goes through the roof. I mean, why wouldn’t I be excited? I just entered Jurassic Park—on the FLIPPING MOON!

“Welcome to Luna’s Exhibit of Earth’s Lost Species,” the lady sang out as Orin happily parted with our entry fees. A too-perfect smile played on her lips, and her movements swayed with an eeriness that flirted with the boundary of reality.

Robot, or not? This future-day game of ‘Human or Android?’ often left me flipping a mental coin. Those cloaked in a human guise exuded a certain uncanny perfection, akin to closet terminators sheltering a mechanical skeleton beneath a veneer of synthetic flawless skin.

An ironic twist, really – if she was an android, her semblance eclipsed the humanity of our own little cyber-robo-crew.

I breezed past Creepy Lady at the entry, and bam—Africa. Lions, zebras, rhinos, hyenas, jackals, leopards, giraffes, elephants, the whole animal kingdom shebang. It all had that classic zoo vibe,

which, let's be honest, was straddling the fence between 'neat' and 'yawn'. But then, my eyes snagged on the dates—the 'bye-bye' dates and the 'hello again' cloning dates.

I felt my jaw unhinge slightly, no pretenses here. A shadowy realization crept in, reminding me that this whole zoo was a haunting tribute to extinction.

All of these furry and not-so-furry friends had clocked out, waved goodbye to existence, only to be yanked back into a replica of life. It was a surreal, disconcerting stroll through a kind of biological *déjà vu*.

The entrance was a solemn dedication to the last mass extinction—evidently a lengthy affair that kicked off in the twentieth century and waved its grim farewell in the twenty-second. A timeframe that, chillingly, spanned my original stint on Earth before the whole brain-freeze extravaganza. My steps through the exhibit were hushed, weighted; the others mirrored that silent trudge, absorbing the gravity of each lost species sectioned by continent.

But then, a particular exhibit sent me crashing to my knees.

My arms ached to thrust skyward, to shatter the composed facade even with my negative emotional dampeners or whatever they'd wired into me. I bellowed out into the abyss, "God damn you! God damn you all to hell!"

The exhibit read 'Canis Lupus Familiaris'. But to me, to us, they were simply 'dogs'. Extinct.

"Cats better be extinct, or I'm throwing a fit," Silica grumbled as she folded her arms.

"Nah. One of our neighbors has three," Aviana tossed back nonchalantly, the corner of her lip twitching upwards. My mood, well, it didn't exactly brighten.

My eyes narrowed, a hiss seeping through my gritted teeth. "Those little furballs of chaos survived, did they?"

Post-dog-apocalypse revelation, a tangible gloom stitched itself into our group's vibe. At least, for Silica and me. Aviana and Orin, those heartless robotic bastards, didn't seem to lose a wink of sleep over the extinction of the literal best animals ever—absolute savages. But alright, steering back to our original itinerary! We moseyed into an elevator heading for a different level, eager (well, partially) to eyeball the main spectacle we'd initially come for: dinosaurs!

As the elevator doors slid open, we shuffled out into a room so monumentally vast it seemed to gulp down the horizon. Strangely eerie, given it was...well, a heaving mass of more people than we'd seen at all the other exhibits combined. Yet every single one of them was staring, not ahead, but down. Beneath their feet.

Curiosity piqued, I too directed my gaze floorward and—oh. The floor was glass. Below us, what my pre-cryo brain identified as a giant armadillo lumbered casually along. As I stared, attempting to mentally juxtapose the creature with my ancient animal knowledge, writing flickered into existence on the glass, an arrow materializing to point at the creature: 'Ankylosaurus'.

Casually meandering, with eyes staunchly affixed beneath me, my dinosaur expertise—or complete lack thereof—became undeniably apparent. The glass flooring declared, ‘Spinosaurus’, yet that name drew a big, fat blank in my mind. All I saw was a huge lizard...thing, sporting what looked like a fish fin. Drifting aimlessly, I navigated around fellow ogling wanderers, all of us partaking in a kind of dino-gazing ballet while occasionally pumping into a stranger or five.

My goal was to spot a T-Rex, a creature at least somewhat familiar from faded movie memories, or perhaps that long-necked gentle giant. And, oh! The one with the trio of horns on its head! However, all my eyes found were more anonymous, oversized, scale-ridden geckos below the glass. Certainly fascinating, but I found myself wondering—where were all the A-list dinosaurs hiding?

After several hours, despite not having seen what I’d really come for, our little gang of four agreed we’d had our fill of prehistoric spectacles. My enthusiasm had frankly fizzled after that heartbreaking dog exhibit, but I’d stuck it out—Orin had kindly footed my entry fee, after all. Our group had naturally spread out on the path, Orin leading the way with Silica by his side, and Aviana trailing behind them, while I lingered at the back, lost in thought as I stared at her backside.

I gently sidled up next to Aviana, aiming for a little privacy from potential eavesdroppers, especially Orin. “Hey, Aviana,” I whispered cautiously, “Can I hit you with a kinda personal question?”

She nodded, “Shoot.”

Inhaling a quick, nervous breath, I dove in. “So, uh, where might one...acquire additional...erm, lady parts? And, uh, have them installed?”

Her lips curled into a sly grin, a twinkle of mischief lighting up her eyes. “Oh, I know just the right modder. Fabulous work,” she shared with a conspiratorial wink. “But a word of advice—go for the lab-grown cyber connect implants. The first couple I tried weren’t organic, and let’s just say the removal and washing along with letting them soak in the sink after each use was...a lot.”

I blinked in surprise, “Wait, your vagina comes off?”

“Sure does. I’ve even got a few attachable penises in my collection. You should swing by sometime; we can have a bit of a show-and-feel,” she winked again, a playful glint animating her expression.

“Umm...sure,” I mumbled out, a tad more hesitantly than I’d intended. Aviana wasn’t exactly my type, but the twist our chat had taken left my mental gears grinding in surprise. I could feel my circuits (or whatever I had going on in my brain these days) sputtering, trying to reroute my thoughts back into some semblance of coherent conversation.

I was beyond grateful I wasn’t capable of blushing.

“Aww, look at you blushing!” Aviana cooed.

Shit—stupid HD Coating!

Silica swiveled around; her curiosity piqued. “What’s the chit-chat about, you two?” she inquired.

“Little Obsidia here was just asking about—”

“Nothing! Absolutely nothing,” I interrupted, my words tumbling out in a hurried mess.

Even Orin craned his neck to throw us a backward glance, but my eyes swiveled away, landing anywhere but on my companions. Aviana, finding my discomfort the pinnacle of comedy, slung an arm around mine, tugging me along while her laughter bubbled around us.

She’s evil.

A quiet thought niggled at me as we strolled: why wasn’t embarrassment filed under the ‘negative emotions’ category to be dulled by whatever circuit they had attached to my brain? *Would’ve been useful right about now.*

Just before we could make our grand escape, my eyes latched onto something odd: robots. Not the potentially undercover, kinda-human-esque types we’d encountered at the entry. And certainly not the likes that resembled, well, yours truly—android bodies sporting human brains. No, these were the undeniable, unashamedly mechanical, robot robots. They were busily setting up a stage, their mechanical limbs swinging in a synchronized dance of technological efficiency.

A rusty cog clicked into place in my brain. Ah, yes, the summit! They were having that chit-chat session with the aliens right here. My eyes lingered on the preparation scene a moment longer, a tiny seed of an idea germinating in the back of my mind. If I ever needed to, you know, off one of those extra-terrestrials, this setup might just offer the perfect spot.

I sighed, the seed of an idea sprouting tendrils of potential plans. A sit-down with Viri was definitely in the cards. And pronto.

With the robotic construction ballet behind us, we trudged into the docking section, plopping ourselves down to wait for whatever van-taxi-shuttle-spaceship hybrid monstrosity would be our chariot this time around.