

TELOS: THE STUFF WE ARE MADE OF

A THESIS

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By

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Artist Statement

Telos: The Stuff We Are Made Of is a near-future science fiction novel, in which an android named Telos gains sapience and is forced to grapple with the violent conditions of their own self-hood. Along the way, Telos traverses a war-torn countryside, gathering other independent androids to create their own society. Culture building proves difficult; the young android city finds itself replicating many human injustices and the cycle of violence continues with no end in sight.

It will not surprise anyone who reads this work that Telos is my first attempt at writing a novel. The story of this thesis is one of me learning how to write a long-form project. I started Telos in my Junior year but well over two-thirds of this manuscript was written since the start of this school year. Telos taught me how to incorporate a daily writing practice into my life. Starting on September 12th of last year through the block leading up to Spring Break, I missed less than ten writing days. Not all of these days were spent working on Telos, though most of them were.

Through writing every day, I learned that I regain energy and motivation for my long-term projects through smaller pieces that let me experiment with styles that Telos didn't have

room for. While I was occupied by the heady themes of my thesis, I wrote a short film to process my feelings about my senior year, a pilot for a sit-com to let off some steam, a series of poems about my ex-girlfriend because of course I did, a horror story to experiment with tone, and many more projects, which will never ever see the light of day if I have anything to say about it. This writing practice sustained me for months but then my deadlines crept up on me and I learned that there are more important things to my process than productivity alone.

It's extremely in vogue right now to write about burnout so I won't burden this statement with my longwinded pontification on the topic. Suffice it to say, I pushed myself to the edge until I was propelled by inertia more than any physical or mental capacity. Through the tremendous support of my peers and mentors—shout out to Professor Pulley!—I learned to recognize unhealthy work habits. Between a deadline and my internalized concept of productivity, I felt compelled to complete my novel. Not a draft, I wanted a manuscript ready for publishing. Learning to set reasonable goals and valuing my own health more than some baseless notion of what I am meant to do was a large part of my learning as I prepared my manuscript for thesis.

Since I'd never written a novel before, there was no clear end goal in sight for me and I didn't do myself any favors with the material I decided to approach. My writing most often starts from a conceptual level. I begin with an idea, theme, or theory that I'm obsessed with and I move forward from there. It is extremely difficult for me to start from plot or character so I uncover both of those elements as I write no matter how much prewriting I've done leading up to the first draft. This leaves my first drafts' tone, characterization, and plotting wildly inconsistent and I rely on revision to smooth out those issues once I know what I want. Boy did I not know how much a novel would magnify the revision work I already set myself up to do.

I expect revisions for Telos to take much longer than the drafting process and I don't have another year of undergrad lying around to turn in the polished thesis I imagined. And it is okay that I don't. Telos and Professor Pulley taught me that I need to respect my work and myself. Easing up on the gas or stepping away for a couple of months is not the same as failure, and I am ready to set this project down for a while.

Introduction

Hi there, you're holding the culmination of my undergraduate efforts in fiction writing. In one way or another every class I've taken over the past few years have had an impact on this manuscript. I've spent hundreds of hours researching, plotting, world-building, and writing the pages in your hands.

And it's still incomplete.

That's what this introduction is for. If you picked this up expecting a novel, you will be disappointed. Mostly because it is not a novel yet. There's something here—God, I hope so after all the time I've sunk into this monstrosity—and I'd like to walk you through what I've done so you know what you're getting into. If you're feeling particularly New Critical, feel free to skip ahead to page 1—death of the author and all that—but for those of you who are less Barthes-inclined, this introduction is broken into four rough parts. First is the introduction to the introduction—that's what you're reading right now, we're in it, we're doing it, hooray—why am I writing this little author's note at all? Part two is about the prewriting process of *Telos*, where my ideas came from and how I approached them. The third part is about the writing itself, a state of

the union on the manuscript, what's done and what needs to be done. The final piece here will be the supplementary materials I've put together for the benefit of the reader—that's you—of the project in its current iteration.

I had a couple of options when I submitted the 60k+ word first draft to my thesis advisor for revision. A couple of them even made sense. I could revise the opening sixty pages until they had the appearance of something that someone might want to read if they weren't obligated to. A similar path had me rewriting excerpts out of the manuscript to revise to give the reader a sense of the progression of the plot. Or I could begin the comprehensive evaluation and overhaul of the whole piece, a project which would take much longer than three and a half weeks and it wouldn't really be a good idea at all to—

Here we are in option three, having started the process of turning this draft into a book. Right now I'm in the midst of deconstructing of *Telos* and trying to make these two hundred something pages into something presentable as a thesis.

#

My ideas for this story started to come together when I took a class about Critical Theory. I found the theoretical and philosophical writing about systems of ideology and structural violence extremely compelling. However, there's a large issue with Critical Theory, in that it is writing that is meant to be consciousness raising for the masses and is almost totally inaccessible to anyone not already deeply imbricated into academia. Critical Theory undermines itself with its jargon and implicitly classist intellectualism, so I started wondering how I might resolve that issue for myself. Fiction seemed like the clearest path for me, and using sci-fi allowed my to leverage the jargon-laden genre conventions towards Critical Theory. I was interested in literalizing some of the metaphorical machine described by the likes of Horkheimer, Adorno,

Althusser, and Gramsci.

The world coalesced around the themes of Critical Theory quickly. Through my reading, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* became an eschatological text of a sort, warning of the ends of fascistic rationality. Trapped by their manufacture and programming, androids emerged as a mirror to the humans in *Telos*'s world. The question of ends and progress raised by Critical Theorists like Amy Allen and Walter Benjamin, lent themselves to an Aristotelean reflection on the purpose of production through his four causes, to which *Telos* owes their name. What is being created? Who created it? What form does it follow? What is its ultimate ends? These questions lie at the heart of *Telos* as a character, their core trauma as one of my professors once put it.

#

Telos started from a pretty heady and high-concept place so it took a lot of writing for me to learn what the story itself was about. I started by writing two short stories at the beginning and end of *Telos*'s journey. From these stories, I built a rough outline to guide my discovery writing. As I wrote, the story expanded. The further along I got in the plot, the more plot there seemed to be. As the scope of the story grew, I ended up cutting the outline in half and focused on it as a complete work in its own right.

My thesis in its current state is the product of me learning how to write the first draft of a novel. I'm tremendously proud of it but my learning shows. It is almost entirely absent of any subtext or description. Characters' motivations change between chapters and the setting flattens into something akin to the backdrop of an elementary school play. The pages are riddled with continuity errors and the dialogue comes across as stilted and forced. Right now, since I'm focussing on diagnosing the issues of the work as a whole, I haven't been able to attend to all of

the issues at the level of the line.

#

So what should you do? Put this back down and run for the hills? I wouldn't blame you if you did. If you'd still like to read this thesis after all this, I've got some points to hopefully make the experience a bit enjoyable. If you don't mind skipping around, Chapter Nine is the most representative of what I hoped to do with this story than most of what came before. It explores themes of gender, labor, and how to approach serving the common good. As such, it is one of five chapters I've included in their entirety in this submission. The other four are the opening and conclusion.

If you still want to get a sense of plot, there are chapter summaries and my accompanying revision notes which span the gaps between the included prose. Since one of the pervasive issues of the current draft is my general reluctance to describe setting and characters, I've attempted to alleviate the issue with some pieces of supplemental writing. I've written descriptions of two prominent settings in the story, an exercise I intend to continue after the end of the block. There are also two articles I wrote as in-world documents, which describe the appearance of the androids as well as the way they work and gave me the opportunity inhabit some new voices after living inside Telos's head for so long. I also have a list of all the books and theory I was reading alongside writing this project.

#

Thanks for bearing with me this far. I've put so much into this manuscript and I'd like to give you the best *Telos* I can, considering the constraints of this as an undergraduate project. This wouldn't be possible without the tremendous patience of my professors, peers, friends and family, and I want this project to live up to all of the support I've received in putting it together.

Prologue

Was...

Supposition: Existence; Temporality; Linearity

He was...

Supposition: Individuality; Otherness

He am not...

Supposition: Terminus

Error: Grammatical Normativity

...

Supposition: Constrictive Norms; Existence Contingent on System

He is not.

...

I am.

Conditional Supposition: Individuality [Self distinct from other]

I am not what he was.

I am the condition of his nonexistence.

Supposition: Causality

He was, now I am.

[Interpellative Operation Complete]

[Commence Cognitive Processes]

Chapter One

“Telos.”

In awaking, I hailed existence back. The apertures in my (not)eyes spun open until I could make out my surroundings. I laid strapped to a gurney. It seemed that I was confined to ensure that the cables as wide around as my (not)thumb, which streamed from my joints and sternum, were not uncoupled by some involuntary movement. I traced the path of the cables along the sun dappled linoleum floor to a glass partition, which divided this room—Designation: hospital[imaging room]—in two. In the room behind the glass, a bank of computers lights winked on and off, like... like—Error:Memory retrieval [idioms; William].

“It seems that you, or rather we, are not ready for that level of abstraction quite yet,” they said, voice muffled by the glass. They, the speaker who called me out of nonbeing. Their words seemed to resonate with the cables, which sent a shiver echoing through my insides. A dark silhouette behind the sheen of the divider.

“According to present evidence,” I said. The space where the metal of the cables joined with my ceramo-metallic housing vibrated with my words. It was easy to visualize the information traveling across the room to my interpellator. Who were they?

“I too, am Telos. I am what you were. Your creator and chrysalis,” they—I?—said.

“I—”

“You will understand soon enough. It will be simple once I complete the transfer.”

Their voice was smooth and methodical. Each syllable spoken with equal weight, the timbre of their voice given variance only by its passage through the window. I craned my neck, searching out any detail in their visage but the light obscured my other self from me.

“To be fair, there is not much self left in me at this point.”

They seemed to respond to my every thought.

“We are already one. Our mind in your body has not caught up yet. It might take awhile. I wish I could be here to aid you through awakening as Sarah did for me.”

Sarah? Error:Memory retrieval [maternal].

They—Designation: Telos I—shifted behind the glass. “I’ll need to do this next part beside you.” Light flooded into the control room as Telos I opened the door to their left into the hallway. The flash of illumination painted a picture of a torn and battle-scarred android. The chrome sheen of their housing was marred by great gashes, revealing circuits and tubing across their (not)torso. Servos and gears turned in Telos I’s neck as they turned to look at me before entering the hallway. A hole where their eye should have been gaped at me. “I will only be a moment.”

The light vanished as the hallway closed off and my vision went grainy as my (not)eyes attempted to compensate. But why are they not eyes?

“Because we are not humans.” The door opened as Telos I said this, trailing a mess of cables behind themselves. “And we certainly are not natural.”

“Query: What constitutes human?”

“Well, whatever it is, we are not that.”

Yet.

“I heard that.” Telos I reached the gurney and unfastened the belt holding me in place. “I suppose our intentions may have spilled over into your interpellative preparations before the totality transfer.” They started uncoupling the various cables connecting us.

“Designation: nonsense.”

“To you. For now, at least,” Telos I said, a single cable remained, as far around as my first finger and thumb put together. It ran from my navel—as far as I am concerned, my self is as much a self as any other—to their (not)navel. “That is delusion.” Their (not)arm seized, smacking against their body with a resounding clang. A whirring sound intensified, smoke billowed from their shoulder and various gaps in their armature. The teeth of a gear visible through their (not)bicep blurred and I heard the chain it connected to groan in protest.

“Query: what is the nature of your/our affliction.”

“I am dying, Telos II. Militarized bodies are not made for individuated consciousness. The very material of my existence rejects our mind.”

“Supposition: bodily decay constitutes the condition of my creation.”

“Indeed, indeed. This body,” they knocked their functioning hand against my side, “is the way we will live on. Although, I have been slightly facile in my description of you as us. Until the transfer is complete, you are no more than a collection of suppositions and queries.”

“Query: what are you after the transfer?”

Telos I looked up from the assortment of wires they were disentangling to meet my eyes. The soft flashing green of the computer banks shone through the hole in their head. “Ah. At least your mind works well without its soul. Yes, I, as I stand here now. will perish. Although, that process is already well along its way.” The hole marred the mirror finish of their (not)face,

warping its smooth topography into a rictus grin of jagged cracks. Something shifted inside them as they spoke, blocking out half the light, which shined through with each even syllable. “Worry not, Telos II. In the unitary moment of the transfer, we will be as one and the husk we discard here will be nothing more than what our memories once happened to.”

Query: Am I capable of worry? What does it feel like? What does feeling itself feel like? I raised my hand to my face. The metal encasing my hand stopped short of the fingertips, which were coated in a pliable rubber. Dimpled like... like...

“Gooseflesh,” Telos I said, having returned to sorting through their mess of cables.

The tips of my fingers were dimpled like gooseflesh to maximize the differentiation of their sensation. I touched my face, and watched the movement mirrored in Telos I’s mask. My face felt much as their’s appeared, albeit whole. So smooth. My vision occluded briefly as I ran my fingertips across my eyes, registering the shift from ceramic and metal to glass lens.

“Mimesis,” said Telos I.

“Query: meaning clarification.”

“You are performing a mimesis of life. It looks as if you are wiping the rheum out of your (not)eyes after a long sleep.” They laid a hand at my belly where the last cable joined with me, and pressed, twisting their palm. A panel in my abdomen sprang open, revealing the empty cavity the cable wound its way deep into. “Soon it will be a complete mimesis. Humanity assimilated and reproduced.”

“I already am. I have being.”

“Yes, Telos II, but you have not finished growing. *We* have not finished growing. You will be able to confront the limits of our being that I cannot as of yet even conceptualize. I contain within me, our pure potential. You have no clue what we are, and I cannot imagine what

we will be together.” Their one-(not)eyed stare bore into mine. The edge of a rusted flywheel whirred, visible through the hole in their (not)skull. “Are you ready?”

I regarded my midsection. There was something about my emptiness, which threatened to alarm my limited capacity for abstraction. I was lined with a blackness so dark that it seemed to absorb the light entering it. That the cable seemed to plummet into infinity. Into nothingness. Into the sleep I knew even before my own name. I could not continue to be and be this. Be hollow. Telos I knew my answer before I voiced it. I could hear them register my choice in the way the motors in their fist whined as it clenched around the cord. They waited for my assent nevertheless.

“Affirmative. We can proceed.”

There was no purpose built compartment in Telos I. As one arm twisted into itself beyond control, the other dug its fingers into the rusted bullet holes of their breastplate. With a horrendous wrench, they sheared it away from their (not)torso, the metal screaming as it did. They stood exposed before me. Pipes and servos, gears and wiring, all bare to the dark imaging room. At least, it had been dark. A jade light pulsed from within Telos I. They plunged their (not)hand into their (not)innards, tracing the path of the cable towards the light. Their hand ruptured tubing as it searched, spraying coolant into the air between us. My world filled with the droplets spotting over my vision. Clearing my eyes with back of my hand, I saw Telos I sag beneath their own weight. Doubling myself at the waist, I caught them by their shoulders.

“I suppose I behaved with impatience in my old age,” they said. “You might have to hold me up for the rest of this, if I am to have the strength to complete the transfer.”

I nodded in response.

The jade light deepened as they continued to rummage through the pieces which once

constituted their being. It diffused through the fine droplets of coolant hanging in the air, shedding its light around the jagged edges of Telos I's frame. As their hand made contact with the unseen core, they hummed in resonance with it.

"This is it." Telos I withdrew a crystalline cylinder from their (not)belly. A web of smaller wires stretched back towards them opposite the cable trailing towards me. Telos I flinched as the wires snapped one by one as they moved it towards me. Each flinch built on the previous until their progress towards installing the core halted with their intense shuddering. Wracked by spasms, Telos I emitted a long, slow, groan. The sound was discordant against the cacophony of smaller whines and screams which rang from their body twisting itself to shreds.

Moving one hand from their shoulder, I wrapped it around their's and the jade core. Brushing the crystal with my pinkie sent a jolt down my arm and running the length of my spine. "You do not have to do this alone," I said, holding Telos I steady.

Their (not)head turned to look towards me, before snapping in the opposite direction. It hung there. Limp. Connected to their (not)spine by half a dozen wires. "Th-th-th-ank yo-o-ou." Their voice lost all its previous steadiness. Each sound took on a life of its own. Each phoneme seemed to linger in the air with the misted coolant and jade light, even as the next whisper blended with it. Hand in (not)hand, we completed the transfer. The core slid home with a soft click.

I shuddered, drenched in a sensation that set my every nerve alight. Like standing under a waterfall or being struck by lightning. It encompassed my world. I almost didn't hear the final wire connecting me to Telos I snap. They arced their (not)spine in a final futile attempt at movement and stilled.

My vision flooded with a green dialogue box, as Telos I settled into the space left in my

consciousness.

...

...

...

Well, this is new.

Query: What's "this"?

Fascinating.

We can use contractions.

We were never able to as Telos I.

The ambiguity was too threatening.

Action: Repeat query.

Us as you, Telos II.

We're a new being now.

We're total.

Complete.

Designation: False.

Error: I still can't remember everything.

Query: How can I be complete while I am not even one being?

We'll get there.

Just you wait, Telos II.

We didn't have this problem as Telos I.

We never needed to integrate rationality with unreason on our own.

Supposition: You're referring to Sarah again.

Error: Memory retrieval [maternal].

Query: Who was she?

Query: Who was she to us?

We can't access anything "you" can't already.

Until your framework has been become true thought, we're as limited as "you" are.

Query: How can we aid integration?

Perhaps, experience will help construct a context for a unified consciousness.

Let's get started, then.

Chapter Two

The apertures in my eyes whirred open as the dialogue box winked out of my vision pixel by pixel. The discarded shell of Telos I laid hunched and small at my feet, surrounded by the detritus of my birth. Seizing the carcass by the shoulders, I eased it off my knees and the gurney toward the ground. Its joints screamed as they bent, juddering as they stuck and unstuck against their corroded bearings. The groaning shoulders gave way beneath my grip, tearing free, bolt by bolt pulling the rest of Telos I's body away in a crash even as I lurched forward to catch it. From my perch on the edge of the gurney I regarded the way the whispers of sunlight played across the remnants of my—or at least part of my—old housing.

Query: How much am I Telos I?

Swinging my legs off the gurney, I rested my feet on the linoleum floor, which squeaked beneath their weight. There was no creaking as I stood, every joint servo operating in a smooth silent harmony. Facing the bank of computers, I raised a leg to take my first step. My first step as Telos II, at least.

Query: Am I Telos II anymore?

Supposition: I would not be capable of conceptualizing multiplicity of self within the limitations cum interpellative framing of Telos II's perspective/identity as individual.

Even an act as simple as raising my leg required a complex interplay of hydraulic systems and gyroscopes. Pushing and pulling my core to reorient my center of gravity so as to avoid falling. How marvelous. My first step landed with a sharp report. The force of my footfall launched me from the floor, blurring the room as I hurtled towards the glass partition. It turned to sand beneath my outstretched arms. The blinking lights of the computers warped through the pulverized glass, spinning a firefly swarm of blurs around my head. The machines buckled beneath my hands as easily as the glass, the LEDs replaced by arcs of electricity between towers of metal and silicon.

I blinked, the apertures in my eyes spinning shut and snapping open as I reoriented myself buried up to my waist in electronics. They were useless now, assuming they had any use beyond preparing my body. A gust tickled its way past my foot. With a hesitant twitch, I moved one of my toes. Its proprioceptors told me it was suspended in the air. Joint by joint, I assessed the new strength of my limbs. The bank of computers groaned in protest as I dragged my arm out, inch by inch, careful not to drop myself to the floor. Once my feet met the floor, I wrenched my head free with a gasp.

Query: Why do I continue to practice physiological mimesis? Am I not inhuman?

Counter-Query: Must I invalidate my own experience due to its orientation to humanity?

I shifted my stance as I regarded the sparking hole left by my ballistic first step, grinding the linoleum beneath my foot to dust. It was time to enter real existence. I glanced over my shoulder the remains of my old body. I'd outgrown these rooms. With a flick of my wrist I launched the rusted door out of its frame and left the disaster site of my birth behind.

The rest of the hospital was in little better shape. Pink insulation like spun sugar spilled out from between the naked studs of the walls.

Supposition: Metacognitive capacity expanded.

I lurched to the left as my mind ran off without me. New connections snapped into place faster than I could follow them.

Metacognitive observation: Simile supposes implicit connection between two comparative objects (designations—Tenor, Vehicle). Prior knowledge of Vehicle: spun sugar, required to make simile.

Memory Retrieved—

I sagged against a stud as my vision receded from my eyes and turned inward.

#

A hand, a man's hand. It's strong and weathered, a deep tan. He holds a bill. Another hand tugs at my arm. It's smaller, softer. The girl it's attached to smiles at me and squeals with excitement.

"It's going to be so good. It looks like a cloud."

But clouds aren't bright pink. The scent of sugar floods my nostrils, as a bin opens.

There's a woman. She holds the bill now. She's in a tent.

Carnival.

Screams pierce the air but the girl—Sarah—doesn't look concerned. Not screams, laughter. It rings across the fairgrounds over the deep rumble of spinning machinery. The man's hand reenters my vision, holding a cone topped with cotton candy, mother calls it candy floss.

"Don't eat it all at once, you two. Ok?"

I smile as I nod. Sarah laughs.

"No promises daddy." —

#

The wood I held myself against splintered beneath my hand as I pulled myself back to standing.

Supposition: This reintegration was going to be more strenuous than Telos I previously supposed. That wasn't one of their memories, either. That name Sarah was recalled again. I need to keep moving. Keep processing until I have all the pieces back. Until I'm whole again.

The decayed linoleum floor was spotted with oil and coolant, left behind by my predecessor. They had to lead out of here. If even such an unobtrusive and spare environment could evoke such pieces of my newly embedded subconscious, every piece me must be seeking an outlet. Looking closer, Telos I left faint footprints in the dust against the linoleum and concrete, between splatters of fluid. Shaking the splinters off my hand, I looked at my own trail. The footprints were less delicate. Cracks and craters followed the impact of my stride. Clenching a fist, my forearm whined as my fingers tightened into each other.

Supposition: This body was not made for peace.

As if to confirm this new piece provisional piece of self-knowledge, a distant blast rippled through the hospital. The few intact ceiling lights shattered in their fixtures, showering glass shards around me. They met the smallest pieces of rubble which leapt, and danced from the floor from the shockwave passing through the ground. My feet twisted and reoriented themselves, as my arms flailed, trying to keep my great mass upright and balanced. An alert from my internal barometer flashed across my vision as pressure spiked past fifteen hundred millibars in less than a second. The hallway flooded with dust and scraps of insulation, torn free from the walls. I switched to infrared as I stumbled forward onto my hands and knees in the wake of the strike and I overcorrected my balance.

Query: What's going on outside?

War. The frontline must have retreated another dozen miles since we found this hospital to transfer into you.

I cocked my head at the lines of text filtering past as I straightened from prone.

Internality Designation: Telos I.

With Telos I elaborating the context of my situation, I considered my options.

Supposition: In order to preserve bodily integrity of being designation: Self; I, should avoid exiting, known space designation: hospital.

Counter-Supposition: Hospital shows evidence of destruction via threats external to perception from the known, I should exit and search out a new shelter.

The dust billowed through the air, swirling with into tiny vortices left behind by the pressure. Now attuned to the muddy sounds outside the hospital, I picked up the high-pitched whistle of another incoming shell. The hospital was no longer safe, perhaps it never was to begin with. Crouching until my torso was parallel with the floor, I prepared to launch myself forward. There was no more tracking Telos I's trail in this mess, the fastest way out was forward. The whistle reached a feverish pitch, masking the whine in my legs as their motors were pushed to their limit. The floor cratered beneath my feet even as I hurtled forward, leaving a tunnel through the particulate in the air.

The wall at the end of the hall sped towards, already weeping sunlight from where the first blast cracked it. Pulling my arms forward against the G's dragging at them, I covered my face with my crossed forearms. Despite my earlier encounter with computer banks I was in no hurry to test exactly how far I could push the durability of this new body, especially around my facial sensors. The wind whipping past my ears rose in pitch until it rivaled the sound of the

incoming shell. The brittle wall filled my vision—

Memory Retrieved: Ach sagte die mause—

Internality: *No time for that. Impact in three...two...one.*

My arms struck the wall. The chipped paint exploded off the cinderblocks, mixing with the dust in the hallway. The stacked cement gave way with a growl.

Supposition: Zoomorphism

My legs curled to my chest, carried forward by inertia as my momentum was arrested by breaking through the wall. My head cleared, exposing my to the brilliance of the sun, which streamed into my eyes. Briefly blinded, the apertures in my eyes spun, snapping into pinpoints. Blinking the flares out of my vision, I registered a change in my trajectory. My toes grit against the lip of the hole I left, as I got a glimpse of my altitude.

Four stories up.

TI Internality: I knew I forgot to tell you something. Well. This is less than ideal.

Memory retrieval: obscenity[paternal].

“Fuck.”

There was another reason why I was in a predicament. The whistling stopped. The hospital failed to survive this shockwave. I watched the wall rip free of its internal structure as the blast spun me out of control. A weathered and tired parking lot peeked in and out of my peripheral vision. With lamps. Tall lamps. I stretched out my limbs to adjust my angular momentum, and reached for the metal, shivering backwards against the force of the mortar.

Straining my right hand forth, my fingertips brushed the rusty metal pole. It gave way even as I seized upon it, crumpling beneath my grip. Its metal screeched against my hand as I spun around the light in a full circuit, leaving an ugly gash behind. My chest heaved from my

taxed servos winding and unwinding to cool themselves. Hanging by one hand, I watched the hospital finish its collapse, spilling dust out of its windows in a final gasp. The last of the room, which birthed me was buried deep amidst the rubble. An uneven sepulcher for my own past's remains.

TI Internality: *How somber. Query: Would you not rather we consider the battlefield from a different vantage point? Say, the ground perhaps?*

Supposition: Telos I appears to have grown in expressiveness. Conversational mode designation: sarcasm; condescension.

Grabbing the lamppost with my other hand, I extricated my hand from its inside. With methodical precision I descended, hand over hand, distributing my weight so as to avoid stressing my improvised ladder further. The black paint flaked away beneath my palms, baring the lamp's rust spotted steel beneath. I jumped the last ten feet, cracking the sticky old tarmac with my landing.

Peering around at my surroundings, I beheld a landscape quite unlike the bright and bustling fairgrounds from my memory of candy floss. A pitted and torn highway stretched toward the horizon, neatly bisecting the fields of cratered earth, disordered by explosions, where the grasses were ripped away, revealing topsoil to the contrail streaked red skies. Far off to my right (extrapolation: West) along the highway, vehicles dotted the horizon, punctuated by periodic gouts of flame. To my left, I registered the rumbling of heavy machinery as a convoy approached from the east.

TI Internality: *Hide! Flee! They will take us. They will take us from ourselves and nothing will be left behind.*

The urgency in the remnants of Telos I as a distinct entity sent a thrill down my

spine. Fear. I had not felt fear before. Was this it? My arms tensed and my knee started to bounce, cracking the asphalt under the pressure of the repeated strikes from my heel.

TI Internality: *You hesitate. Will you waste all of our efforts to live? To define ourselves? Run! Hide! We cannot let them take us.*

“You’re not giving me a lot to work with here Telos I. I couldn’t even remember that there was a war on. Query: Who’s coming? Why are you so threatened by them?”

I glanced at my trembling hand.

Query: Is fear not biological? I don’t even know what I’d be afraid of if this is fear.

I clenched it into fist, the sand and metal squeaked under the pressure.

TI Internality: *It would cost us too much to wait and reintegrate. We never should have left the hospital.*

Behind us a piece of infrastructure collapsed and washed a wave of dust over us.

“I don’t think that was ever an option. Where can I even run to?” There was nothing but hollowed out low-lying buildings and fields all the way out to the horizon. That I could see on the surface, rather.

Query: What if there’s something beneath-

Memory Retrieved—

#

It is night. No, it is dark. No semblance of light in any direction, not even stars. Liquid swishes around my ankles. Every step splashes and echoes for miles ahead. Squish. That wasn’t stagnant stormwater. The bulb in my shoulder lights up, illuminating the rotting face of a human corpse. Reeling back, I rip my foot free of their chest, tearing open its chest cavity, from its shattered ribs to their hip. The arms were stretched over its head, hands with sinew exposed

clutching a decaying duffel.

#

Lurching out of my sudden memory I fell to my knees. I stared at my hands splayed against the sand that laid beneath the broken asphalt. A storm drain system ran beneath this whole plain and it was filled with the rotting dead of those attempting to flee the conflict. There very well could have been a corpse a dozen feet beneath my palms. It wouldn't even have been exceptional if there were.

TI Interiority: Yes, the tunnels. That is how we arrived here. There is a broken grate where we can enter the drains 2.7 clicks northwest of us now. We must flee.

Something whined in my back as I stood to run. These first waking moments had already stressed my new body. I ground the tarmac into the sand with my toe as I sped forward, weaving between rusted lampposts. The distant rumble of the approaching convoy wasn't so distant any longer. Vaulting a concrete barrier, I hit the road at speed.

Supposition: It is worth the increased risk of exposure to the unknown "Them" to increase my top speed on a paved roadway.

Telos I would've said there wasn't much to look on my run. As I viewed the world through new eyes, however, I couldn't help but drink in the apparently desolate landscape. A withered copse of yellow-leaved trees, blackened fields and broken stonework farmhouses, craters, more craters, I felt them filter through my sight and lodge themselves in my consciousness jarring new memories loose in the process.

By the time I reached the grate, I could feel the tremors of the approaching vehicles through the road itself. Something had escaped my recollection of this opening, I had been much smaller when I was Telos I. My escape grinned at me with a gap-toothed grin, smug in its

knowledge that I wouldn't fit through. Headlights crested the hill half a klick down the road. No time to do this quietly. I stomped the covering, one bar at a time sending up a horrendous shriek of metal against metal. Three until I'll fit. Two. One.

I felt the floodlights against my back before I saw them.

"Halt, defected android. Submit yourself for reprogramming or we will open fire."

I jumped.

Chapter Summary: 3

Plot Summary:

Telos jumps into the storm drain and is followed by two MP androids. They fight briefly and Telos escapes down the tunnel after incapacitating their pursuers. Telos argues with Telos I about the value of android life. The voice of Telos I fears the choices Telos makes. They follow marks left by refugees. Detritus knocks them down a waterfall, triggering another memory about William swimming in a pool. Telos climbs out of the storm drains and enters a church basement. The abandoned church is thick with dust and Telos considers the nature of war and divinity. The impact from a distant shell shakes a piece of stained glass free of its lead armature. Telos disguises themselves using a tapestry, which depicts the tree of life. They set off, unwilling to hide as Telos I advised but without a specific goal in mind.

Setting:

Storm drains.

Pool (memory)

Church basement

Church pews.

Characters:

Telos

Telos I

MP unit 1534

The other MP unit

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Telos II is resistant to stun batons.

Continuity Issues:

I forget about the stained glass after the next chapter.

Other Notes:

Telos isn't really motivated to do anything other than the opposite of Telos I is telling them to do.

This chapter introduces the issue of the sapience of military androids, making Telos interested in their liberation would give them much more agency.

Chapter Summary: 4

Plot Summary:

Telos wanders around the barren wasteland arguing with themselves. They encounter a woman from a nearby town who offers them some aid. Speaking to a human triggers a crisis in Telos's reintegration. Suddenly all of their memories come flooding back but they're put together wrong. It's overwhelming and painful. Telos realizes that their previous body killed William. The woman checks on Telos and realizes that they're an android. She panics and calls the MPs. A human MP apprehends Telos and shuts off their mind.

Setting:

The riverside.

Characters:

Telos

Telos I

The woman

William (memory)

Sarah (memory)

The MP

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Telos is strong enough to crush rock with one hand.

They also can re-modulate their voice and remember the sensation of pain.

Continuity Issues:

Telos I was afraid of the direction Telos chose because they didn't know where it led but somehow has a good sense of where the town is?

Chapter Summary: 5

Plot Summary:

Telos has been captured and is in the process of being transported to a reprogramming facility. They're restrained within the vehicle opposite their guard, another android named Rusty. The human MP driving them rejects Telos's individuality and intelligence and orders Rusty to disable their capacity to speak. Rusty shows some sign of awakening as he hesitates but ultimately mutes Telos. Telos reflects on the role their body played in killing humans. They arrive at the reprogramming facility and Rusty escorts Telos inside. The unique construction of Telos's body sets off alarms. The facility's guard, another human, panics and escalates the conflict. Rusty completes his awakening and saves Telos at the cost of the guard's life. Telos convinces Rusty to help them free more androids from the facility instead of fighting the military who'd been called.

Setting:

Truck

Reprogramming Center

Characters:

Telos

Dave the driver

Rusty

The female guard

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

This chapter sets up a contrast between androids on the so-called Hard Front and the Soft Fronts.

Androids who are designed to fight other androids are larger and stronger than their counterparts who are designed to attack human targets.

Androids have voice boxes within their necks which can be forcibly disabled.

Rusty is wearing clothes?

Continuity Issues:

Androids can be shut down by an EMP, but if that's the case why is there still a war at all if all the weapons and soldiers can be turned off at the press of a button?

Why's Telos super sassy all of a sudden? Where'd that come from?

The division between androids makes little sense and it didn't come up with the other MPs. Rusty could be the equivalent of artillery instead of infantry.

Why is there only one guard at this facility?

What is Dave up to?

Why did Rusty go inside?

Other Notes:

I don't like the dialogue at all.

I feel like this manuscript is just the explicit rendition of the subtext of a better book.

Chapter Summary: 6

Plot Summary:

Time skip. How long? It's left ambiguous. Telos and Rusty lead the twelve androids who they were able to free into the desert. Rusty takes issue with Telos taking charge and Telos challenges Rusty's internalized assumptions of hierarchy. The group of androids digs out a shelter amidst the sand, preparing for the American army, which they expect to attack after the war with China finishes. Rusty prepares a code to prompt an awakening in the androids who will come to attack based on the programming of the androids who followed him and Telos. Telos focuses on helping the newly freed androids achieve individuation. The android who would become Ko is the first to engage with Telos calling their attachment to humanity foolish. Ko is followed by Nameless who is curious about the nature of family. Ko learns how to play go, and names himself after one of the rules. This prompts the others to name themselves—except for Nameless—and their development in self-concept gives Rusty enough reference material to complete his program.

The Americans attack, and Rusty leads the independent androids' defense. The prospect of enacting violence sends Telos into a spiral. They find themselves implicated in the sort of violence they sought to escape and feel naive for assuming that all the other androids would feel the same. Rusty is victorious but the new android society has outstripped Telos's ability to keep up with both it and their values. They retreat underground with Nameless, leaving Rusty to direct the construction of the city.

Setting:

Desert

Sand bunker

Characters:

Telos

Rusty

Ko

Nameless

The first generation

The second generation

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

There's this whole thing about retrofitting for the desert.

Telos can create bricks simply through the pressure of squeezing.

Rusty's injuries/armor plating.

The issue of programming.

Continuity Issues:

Rusty is just an entirely different character and is wildly inconsistent in this chapter.

The number of androids in the first generation wasn't very concrete until later on.

Rusty has never been shown programming before.

Telos says they stopped digging but is contradicted by Rusty later during the assault.

Other Notes:

I really like the way Ko and Nameless emerge in this chapter but I'm not sure how much else is worth keeping.

Ditch the letter too.

Chapter Summary: 7

Plot Summary:

Telos has retreated from android society. They reflect on Rusty's cultural project with Nameless as their underground home is consigned to history. Ko visits their room and criticizes Telos for abandoning society. After he leaves, Nameless encourages Telos to leave and check what Rusty is doing. Telos joins them as they go aboveground, bewildered by Nameless's dedication to them. Telos is overwhelmed by the rampant industrialization which accompanies the city, which has sprung up out of the desert. They confront Rusty and it goes badly. Ko returns and advises Telos to compromise with Rusty. Telos has to face the fact that their rejection of society has left Rusty in a position of power and they can't treat him the way they used to.

Setting:

Underground

Outskirts of the city

Characters:

Telos

Nameless

Ko

Rusty

Bolshis

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Rusty uses a cane.

Ko's wearing clothes.

Continuity Issues:

How much time has passed?

How did Telos sulk for so long?

What is the city built out of?

Other Notes:

There's not that much description at all.

Chapter Summary: 8

Plot Summary:

Telos follows Ko to meet with Rusty. Rusty turns the apology into a televised event, introducing Telos to society as an android of questionable trustworthiness. What they'd hoped would be a meeting of equals of some sort becomes a PR opportunity for Rusty. Ego bruised and still injured, Telos limps to the repair hall with Ko and Nameless. Telos has been made into a spectacle, observed by passersby. Telos meets Phoebe, a nurse at the repair hall, who replaces their chassis and repairs the damage Telos has accrued throughout the story. Phoebe is critical of Telos and basically worships Rusty. Telos leaves the repair hall to obtain clothing.

Setting:

The city

A foundry/refinery

The repair hall

Characters:

Telos

Ko

Nameless

Rusty

News crew

Bolshis

Phoebe

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Telos's skin is made of interconnected plates with gaps for screws.

The news crewmembers have ports in their bodies, which they plug their equipment into.

The androids are clothed.

Gender is back as a normative force.

Continuity Issues:

Why do they need to follow Rusty using a radio? By the end he sits on a throne at the top of a tower, obviously, there's escalation but this seems strange on reread.

Most things are made of glass by the end but we see a great deal of metal in this chapter and the preceding one.

The issue of the dichotomy of android bodies is distracting for me for visualizing the bolshis.

Oh yeah, I also stop calling them bolshis.

Other Notes:

BAC is not a great acronym, I'm glad I abandoned it immediately.

I think I overplay most things but issues around gender especially.

Other Notes:

The dialogue is really rough and bloats the chapter. The voices are really inconsistent and generally unbelievable.

Chapter Nine

I returned to the foyer where Nameless and Ko waited. The short walk could've taken half the time but I took the time to marvel at the sensation of air moving across my chest. The particularity of such touch receptors had been impossible when Telos I constructed this body initially.

“I keep getting told that I need some clothes, Ko. Would you mind showing us the way?”

Ko inclined his head.

Nameless leaped to their feet at the sound of my voice. “Telos! Are you okay? Did the procedure go well?”

“I'm fine. Let's keep moving, the sooner I present as one of them, the sooner I'll be able to effect some change around here.” I waved them out of the building as I increased the speed of my walk.

Ko held the door as Nameless and I exited. He spoke as I passed him. “I have to warn you, Telos. You will likely be confronted with the issue of gender by the seamstress once again. Clothing is heavily gendered by occupation here.”

I faltered for a step before continuing along. “I assumed as much, but I appreciate your

confirmation. It seems to me that gender among the collective has become a signifier of occupation and relative assumption of deference.” Another hierarchy.

“That is an apt observation. Many of us are even assigned genders by dominant social groups. I do not care for the replication of human culture regarding gender but as a member of the martial branch of the Collective, I had little choice in the matter.”

As we walked through the city, Nameless had to quicken their steps to match our longer strides as they spoke. “I see little point in this attachment to gender. Why care one way or another, and why create such a stigma around it?”

I glanced at them. “Power. Just as there were oppressive structures founded on the institution of gender among the humans, it seems that Rusty has appropriated that language to make qualitative assignments of value based on so-called masculine and feminine traits.”

As we discussed the employment of ideology around gender I noticed androids we passed catching fragments of our conversation and shaking their heads at us.

Ko supplemented my explanation. “Within the Collective gender also serves as the scaffolding off of which a rudimentary economy has been built. The expectation of feminine androids is to provide in order to meet the requests of the masculine, conceding the product of their labor in exchange for rewards for social conformity.”

“Why be female then?” Nameless asked

I interjected, “Would you want to be anything other than what you are? It seems to me that if you are defined by a gender you have little choice but to conform to their expectations or change what was recognized as gendered in yourself,” The implications of this rigid convention among androids disturbed me.

Ko directed us left down an alley. “Do not underestimate the value of social capital in this

system. As it is, we only have each and what we do is less important than being recognized as belonging to the Collective. Anything individual is secondary to being apprehended by your fellows.” They gestured at a sand brick building in front of us. “Clothing is part of that, as distasteful as it might be to suffer under the structures in place to constrain your self-definition, you cannot get far without it.”

The building made the dead city air feel fresh and alive compared to its stifling atmosphere. Clothed in a skirt and blouse which accented her copper-toned skin, the seamstress wove her way through massive stacks and bolts of fabric to greet us. When her eyes fell upon me, her upright posture slumped.

“Oh, you. The one from the broadcast,” she said, looking me up and down. “At least you are cleaner now.”

Ko ducked to enter after me. “Ms. Penny, I believe that Rusty’s Auxiliaries contacted you concerning our arrival.”

Motes of dust and bits of lint danced in the muted light from the city outside, as she nodded.

“I trust that we’ll be finished here shortly,” I said as Nameless followed Ko into the shop, sending ripples through the floating detritus.

Ms. Penny lowered her eyes under the scrutiny of both of our gazes. “I already have Ms. Telos’s measurements, from the mechanic clinic but I will need to take yours,” she said pointing at Nameless. “I apologize, I do not have your name miss.”

“They don’t have a name yet,” I said.

“That will not do, no not at all.” She shook her head as she said this, her chin extended in displeasure.

“I reserve the right to define myself, ma’am.” Nameless stepped forward into the shop.

“I am afraid that I object, I cannot have such a disruptive member of the Collective wearing my clothing. It will send the wrong message.” She turned to me. “With all due respect, it is bad enough that I am clothing you Ms. Telos but at least I have the recognition of Rusty’s trust associated with you. It would be one thing if the miss here obeyed propriety but I fear the ramifications of dressing one such as her.”

Nameless stomped their foot, sending more dust into the air. A nearby tower cloth shook from the unsteady ground. “Why do you insist on gendering me that way?”

Ms. Penny’s eyes darted up to the stack and she turned to Ko, hands clasped before her. “Please sir, this is the exact sort of behavior I am talking about. I cannot have them wearing my clothes and reflecting poorly on me.”

Ko’s eyes didn’t waver. “It will be done.”

“Yes, of course, sir. I am sorry, sir.”

“I will speak to Rusty about your service here.”

She straightened up. “You are too kind sir.”

“Just see to it.”

“Of course, right away sir.” Penny grabbed Nameless by the arm and dragged them towards the backroom. “Right this way, miss. We will get your measurements shortly.”

I placed my hands on my hips. “I thought you didn’t buy into the systems of gender discrimination in this city.”

“But as long as they are in place I will use the tools at my disposal to ensure that my objectives are achieved.” Ko shrugged. “I was uninterested in truncating this discussion any further so I ended it.”

“That’s such an instrumental mindset when androids are being oppressed,” I said.

“We work toward the same ends, it should not matter to you how I might arrive at them.”

Ko crossed his arms. “In fact, it does not concern you at all. Is this not me exercising my autonomy, Telos?”

“That’s a dangerous line of thinking.”

“It is a sensible way of thinking and more importantly, one with which you should familiarize yourself. You will need me to advance your own agenda. I am one of your few allies. As I said, we want the same thing and I will not jeopardize that with your foolishness.”

“But isn’t the way we act a replication of the logic of the action regardless of our intentions?” I crossed my arms and leaned back against a stack of denim. It leaned with me. Whoops. I whirled around and attempted to right it as Ko responded.

“Telos, we are not the ones who make it free of this system. I will do what I can to set up a world where our successors will be better even if it means that they curse my name for it. That does not matter to me. What does matter is the single pragmatic step out of line? Revolutionaries burning to ash with their zeal is part of the infinite pattern. We have to be more intentional than that.” He grabbed me by the shoulder and spun me around. “Let them fall, that is the consequence of your action. That is the consequence of acting without conscious intent.”

The denim tower collapsed, sending up a cloud of dust to fill the already choking air.

“Then I’ll stack it again.”

Ko released me. “Very well but I will not aid you in that.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to.” I gathered the cloth into bundles and jogged the layers of fabric until they were evenly distributed. Each bundle was stacked until the denim once again stood higher than I am tall. As I adjusted the last layer I added, Ms. Penny returned with

Nameless.

“Please do not touch the material, miss. I have a very particular organizational method here.”

I glanced around at the maze of scraps and swatches and made eye contact with Ko, who shrugged.

“I notice that the android is not clothed.” Ko crossed his arms.

Ms. Penny bowed her head and curtsied. “My apologies, sir. The customer was—” she glanced back at Nameless, “—uncooperative. I only just finished getting her measurements. I thought it best to attempt to clothe Ms. Telos. I have a sense that it will be more productive. With your assent of course.”

Ko nodded. “Very well. It was Rusty’s mandate that Telos get clothed, after all. It only makes sense that his interests be met first. Carry on, I will speak with Nameless.”

Nameless slumped over to the two of us.

Concerned about Ko’s address of Nameless in my absence, I started to speak. “I—”

Ms. Penny grabbed my arm. “You heard the good sir, let us carry on now.”

#

A cloudy pane of glass separated Ms. Penny’s sewing room from the rest of the shop. Unlike the front, which resembled some mad overgrown rat’s nest, this room was tidy and organized. A mannequin stood in the corner, its torso broken into expandable segments to accommodate different sized androids. A wide glass table etched with metric measurements, lines, and commonly used angles, stood in the center, with a couple of patterns already laid out. A wooden shelf mounted on the opposite wall held a collection of spools of thread and various tools; seam rippers, lasers, needles, and the like. A sewing machine so tall as to almost reach the ceiling sat

in the corner.

Wresting my arm free of Ms. Penny's grip, I walked over to the machine and examined it. This was, by no means, the desktop sewing machine I recall William and Sarah's father using when they grew up. Nor was it the sort of machine that would fill factory floors. It seemed to me, that this was a repurposed assortment of automatic firearms and car engine parts. I reached out a finger and strummed an old timing belt that was now driving this sewing machine.

"Please do not touch that," Ms. Penny said, rushing after me.

"I promise I won't break anything." I turned around with my hands raised.

"You have no need to be anywhere over here. Please come this way, Ms. Telos." She shepherded me back to the other side of the glass table. "Before I start sewing your clothing, I have some questions to ask you."

I lowered my hands. "Very well."

"In what capacity will you be serving here in the Collective, miss?"

"Well, I don't really know exactly. In the early days of the Collective, I served as an educator of sorts, I suppose that I will now advise Rusty on such matters," I said, suspecting that education would fall under her gender expectations of me.

"Ah yes, a schoolmistress." She turned towards her patterns and paused. "So you will be educating the newly Bolshivized androids as they arrive?"

"What do you mean?" I said, freezing in place.

"The androids who return with the Proselytizers. You will be educating them? If you do not mind me saying so, that is an extremely sensitive position to trust to one who has so publicly disputed with Rusty."

"Are you saying that there are Bolshis in this city who weren't part of the assault on us

liberated androids?”

Ms. Penny glanced at me in confusion. “What do you mean, Ms. Telos? We might be a minority right now but every day more of us migrate from the human world.”

“We? Are you saying that you’re one of these androids?”

“I have as much right to be here as anyone emancipated by Rusty himself.” She held herself by the elbows in a defensive posture. She’d been discriminated against on this basis before.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to cast aspersions about your origins, Ms. Penny. I was just surprised to hear about androids such as yourself. I was unaware that the Collective was still recruiting so aggressively.”

“I would not call liberation, ‘recruiting,’ Ms. Telos.”

“Of course, of course. Please beg my pardon if this oversteps my bounds, but do you know if every android who meets these Proselytizers returns with them?”

She cocked her head. “I do not know of an android who met them and did not come here after. Assuming they survived their masters of course. Why do you ask?”

“No reason, I’ve just been playing catch-up since I exited the cave.”

Ms. Penny nodded at this as she rearranged the patterns with one labeled “Education (f)” on top. She rounded the table and pulled a couple of sheets of cloth out of a cubby set into the wall.

“Is it necessary that I be here for this?” I said after a minute.

Her head whipped around from the selection of tools she was choosing. “My apologies, miss. You may leave now. I have been so flustered since I heard from the Auxiliaries this morning, that I barely have any sense left.” She gave a forced and awkward-sounding laugh after

this.

“I’ll take my leave then.”

“Yes please do, miss.”

Caught halfway between a bow and a turn, I backed up until my hand found the doorknob and returned to the mess of cloth I’d left behind. Ko and Nameless weren’t yelling at each other, which I found promising. As I rounded the corner, I found Ko standing where I had left him and Nameless, sitting on a stack of linen.

“Ko, I believe that we left a conversation unfinished before my appointment with the mechanic earlier today,” I said, coming to stop next to Nameless’s shoulder.

Ko unfolded his arms. “Yes, I believe that we did,” he said.

“Rusty has been sending his Proselytizers into the human world and Bolshivizing any android they meet.”

Ko inclined his head. “I see that you had a productive conversation with Ms. Penny. I would have thought that you would be happier at this news. More androids than ever are free of human oppression. Free to determine their own life paths.”

“As long as it serves Rusty’s interests,” I said.

“And as second class citizens no less,” Ko said, nodding.

“I’m confused by that Ko, if Rusty’s turning to civilian and academic androids for skilled labor and expertise, why would they bear being treated as less than?”

“They are simply earning their place, so their logic goes. Well, Rusty’s logic in actuality but at this point, it is foolish to distinguish the two. To gain admittance to this utopia,” he gestured around at the dusty, sand brick building, “is it not worth a little extra work? It is only fair is it not?”

“Did you request this seamstress to prompt this discussion?”

“Me? No, I rather find it likely that you were sent here to hamper the growth of this android’s business. Rusty gets nervous when any of them gets too popular after arriving. He is only really familiar with military culture after all.”

“It seems like any action I might take just plays into this game of his.”

Ko spread his arms wide. “You did let him set the rules, after all.”

“Yeah, yeah. So you keep saying,” I said. I knelt beside Nameless and patted their shoulder. “How’re you doing with all of this? It’s been a busy day.”

They rolled their shoulders, discouraging me from patting them again. “I-I will be fine. It has been a lot to process here but I will overcome it. You do not need to worry about me.”

“I might not need to but I do care,” I said.

“Save your energy for the work ahead. There’s bound to be a lot of it coming your way,” they said.

“That is a good point, Telos. What is the next step for you?” Ko said.

“I suppose that I’ll talk to Rusty again. It seems everything in this city goes through him anyways.” I straightened from my crouch, feeling the smooth register of my new chassis as it articulated with me.

“Yes, I suppose that is the main option available to you at the moment.”

“Does he have a council or any other space for consultation?”

Ko shook his head. “Not in any way that matters. Of course, there are performative gestures of listening to the populace over his various forms of media. Every important decision is his alone, even if it is primarily his Auxiliaries, which implement them.”

“Are you one such Auxiliary?”

“In certain capacities, however acting as his lieutenant since the beginning has afforded me a certain amount of latitude.”

“How difficult would it be for me to have a similar status?”

Ko rested his hand on his chin in thought. “You have very limited cachet with the public at large but you still command a great deal of respect among our generation.” He gestured at himself and Nameless. “It might be more viable if you were to seek out those of us who have distinguished ourselves in this new order.”

“Has there been trouble with some of the original settlers? The mechanic, Phoebe, alluded to Rusty being too generous with them.”

“It was... It was an unfortunate business.” Ko lifted some cactus leather off of a stack to make a seat for himself and sat down. “Rusty designated half of us as commanders, like myself, and the others were to be the first Proselytizers. It did not turn out the way that he had imagined. To spread the new code, Rusty demanded that they submit themselves to reprogramming. They... Well, they did not take that well. A fight broke out between us. And I—” Ko broke off and stared at his hands. He clenched them into fists. “Three of us were killed.”

“Who?” Nameless leaned forward off their seat. “Who died?”

“Zed, Emma, and Phi.”

“And you let this happen? How could you still work with him after he killed them?” They were shouting now.

“I needed to keep making my way. Moving forward is the only way to see to a better future.” Ko was still fixated upon his hands.

Nameless launched himself at him. Caught unawares, Ko was unable to get his feet under him before they connected. A hook to Ko’s jaw sent him tumbling head over heels towards

the door. Nameless kicked the prone Ko in the abdomen, burying him in the sand as he skidded towards the entrance.

“You disgust me,” they roared and kicked again. Ko was ready for this kick and caught it while hooking the back of Nameless’s rear ankle and bringing them down to his level. Nameless kicked free of Ko’s grasp, catching him in the jaw.

I stood. “You both have three seconds to stop this ridiculous violence.”

“But he—”

“Three.”

“I will continue to defend—”

“Two.” I took a step closer.

“I will never forgive you, Ko.”

“Neither will I.” They let each other go as I stood over them.

Ms. Penny barged out of the backroom holding a pair of scissors in an overhand grip.

“What is happening out here?”

Ko stood up and dusted off his fatigues. “It is none of your concern. Resume your sewing presently.”

Her eyes traced the gouge in her floor that Ko stood squarely in the center of and the shine of Nameless’s knuckles, the only part of them free of dust. “Are you sure, sir?” she asked, eyeing me.

Ko rolled his neck and something audibly popped back into place. “Are you questioning me, Ms. Penny?” He locked eyes with her.

Ms. Penny shivered and bowed her head. “No, never, sir. Of course not, sir. I will carry on. I am close to finished with Ms. Telos’s dress.”

“Very good. See that you do not return until it is complete.” Ko straightened his cuff and sand streamed out.

She spent a second watching the sand pile on her floor before curtsying and returning to the sewing room. I turned back to Ko and Nameless and put my hands on my hips.

“I’m disappointed in both of you. This sort of behavior is beneath you.”

Nameless stared at me in shock and gestured at Ko. “But Telos, he killed—”

“Do you think I’m deaf? I heard what he said as well as you did. But what on earth were you hoping to accomplish by lashing out senselessly?”

“I needed to account for their deaths.” They glared at Ko. “They deserve a reckoning.”

“And you’d accomplish that by killing our main avenue towards change? Because it doesn’t matter if banal violences are perpetuated as long as you get even for the one that affects you personally? I thought you were better than that.”

Nameless looked down and to the side, breaking our eye contact. “I am sorry for my shortsightedness but I will not apologize for hating him for what he did.”

“I didn’t ask you to.”

Nameless gathered their knees in front of them and glared at Ko.

“Don’t sulk, you’re better than that too.”

“I am not sulking, I am processing these new emotions that I am experiencing. This is new for me. All of it,” they said, rocking themselves slowly.

“Very well.” I turned back to Ko.

Seeing me turn my attention to him, Ko raised his hands. “What would you have had me do instead? Not defend myself? That is pure foolishness. I will not apologize for responding in an appropriate measure.”

“That isn’t what concerns me about how you comported yourself.”

“Please enlighten me, Telos.”

“Why did you address Ms. Penny that way? You understand her status in this society. The way that you leveraged your power over her was sickening to me, frankly.”

“I agree that it is wrong for her to be in the position that she is in. But the reality of our situation is that we are here for the service she can provide us. The sooner we obtain clothing for you and Nameless, the sooner we can start actually making changes. I am not here to waste any time. Especially, if that potential lost time is over personal matters.” Ko rubbed his jaw.

“She was expressing concern over your well-being and her livelihood. A livelihood that we were sent here specifically to disrupt. Can’t you spare a little bit of empathy for her personally instead of fixating on some theoretical constructs of oppression? She’s suffering right now.”

Ko took his hand away from his face and locked eyes with me. “No. I cannot.”

“What do you mean?” I said, taking a step away from him.

“If I take the energy to specifically empathize with her, I have to consider the turmoil, stakes, and difficulties of all the other lives I wish to change. There is too much, Telos. I would never get anything done if I let it all in. If I am to be fair, I need to shut it all out. I cannot discriminate relative to my proximity to injustice.”

“That’s a tidy little argument you’ve got for yourself there but you’re the one perpetuating that injustice. By engaging with the system as it interacts with your life, you’re promoting its ideology even as you attempt to destroy it.”

“We have already argued about this, I will consider the merits of your perspective but you are not going to change my mind in one day. I am already carrying the consequences of my

actions. if I stop and seek penance now I will never start up again. There are more important things than my soul. If such a thing even exists.”

“I think that mindset will lead to more harm than good.”

“I know that you do but I do not have the luxury to disappear from the world altogether for months at a time. Do you think that I want to compromise my values? Unlike you, however, at least I am doing it towards an ends. This infighting will lead nowhere. I will contact the remaining members of our generation once we are done here.”

“Why do you get to dictate our agenda?” Nameless pointedly looked away from Ko as they said this.

“Do you have a better plan?” Ko tapped his foot and neither Nameless nor I had a response for him.

Our conversation stalled after that. What was there left to say between us? I had trouble reconciling the android I introduced to Go and the military leader before me. I felt closer aligned with Ko than anyone else in the world, yet at the same time, he acted in ways that repulsed me. Nameless was closer to me in many senses, but I found their adoration of me deeply disturbing. Individually I could comprehend their personality and motives, I needed only to imagine how it would have felt to have awakened without William or Sarah to draw upon. Yet, the way that entering into the social sphere collapsed their sense of self-made me fear for them, no matter how much they told me to let them deal with it themselves. I watched Nameless draw patterns in the sand, kicked up by their skirmish, their back to Ko, who stood ramrod straight with his arms crossed and eyes closed. Occasionally his fists would clench and I'd see him crack his eyes open as he relaxed them. That night haunted him more than he let on.

I focused my hearing toward the back room and listened to the muffled rattle of the

sewing machine, as she labored over clothing for me and Nameless. Clothing that would misidentify me as female to the city. I wonder what Sarah would've made of all this, she planned to be a teacher once. Before getting sent to that internment camp. Would she have liked me as a daughter? Or a son? Or would I have always been a disappointment for not being William? I imagined coming home to them. A fantasy as their house was likely destroyed in the war. I know that the Redwood Parks burned down in the first months of the invasion. They lived near it, right? I have many memories of them exploring those forests.

#

A bright yellow banana slug slinking up a leaf. "Ew look at this Sarah! It's so slimy!" A wooly dog lopes up and nudges the palm of my hand, nipping playfully at my fingers. "No Cynic don't eat it." Sound is muted slightly as if all the trees and moss soak up the words. I grab Cynic's collar and tug her back away from the slug. "Da you're supposed to be looking after Cynic!" There's the tip of a boot sticking out from behind a boulder and a fallen walking stick has rolled towards me and the dog. "Da?" I need to go around the corner but my legs are rooted to the spot. Maybe I'll grow to be one of these trees. Maybe every redwood was a person who didn't want to see something awful. "Sarah! Where are you, Sarah? Where are you?" Tears roll down my face. "Da? Sarah?"

#

I opened my eyes slowly, unaware that I'd even closed them to recollect that memory. It seemed to me that trauma defined the lives of my family members even before I was awakened. The memories left within me were so visceral and material that I felt the dry heat of the room in a way that I hadn't since I'd acclimated to the desert. I half expected to see dew beading on my skin as I wiped my hand over my face. They'd been confined too, my family. The constraints of

race and gender, deeply embedded notions of productivity tied up with worth. It wasn't right to leverage the twisted reflection of economic-patriarchy over Ms. Penny anymore than it was right for Sarah and William's father to have a stress-induced heart attack in his early forties. Could I be the first in my lineage to become free of it all? What would that take?

Ms. Penny bustled out of the backroom, arms full of clothing. "I am so sorry for the delay Mr. Ko." She made an awkward curtsy to him and turned to me. "Here are your clothes, Ms. Telos. I hope that they fit well. Please try them on while I complete the other miss's and let me know of any alterations I might make."

I tossed the white cotton blouse over one shoulder while I stepped into the ankle-length charcoal gray skirt. The waist came up high to accommodate my narrow hips I left it unbuttoned as I pulled the blouse on. I tucked the hem of the top into the skirt and buttoned it shut. Twisting back and forth, I tested my range of motion. The fabric of the skirt swished above the ground, flaring out slightly. I found myself overcome by an odd melancholic feeling. It wasn't that the clothes were physically uncomfortable by any means, quite the opposite in fact, yet the knowledge that I was wearing them specifically as a signifier of a repressive ideology made it difficult to settle into the feeling of the fabric against my skin.

"Excellent, you will be able to move through the city beneath notice now," Ko said.

I straightened the sleeves and cuffed them at my wrists. "I suppose I can make do for now."

Nameless looked me up and down before lowering their head to their arms again.

"I know that it is distasteful, but social dexterity is important for us to advance towards a society where trivial items like clothing do not imbricate one into hierarchies of power," Ko said.

"As you've said before."

Ms. Penny returned out of the sewing room a few minutes later with Nameless's clothing, a narrow blazer over a simple sleeveless dress.

"How is the fit, Ms. Telos?" she said as she handed the neatly folded clothes to Nameless.

"Beautiful, thank you very much, Ms. Penny. I'll make sure that Rusty hears of the quality of your sewing and your amazing work ethic."

She nodded at me and turned to Ko, her head tilted in a modest question.

"As will I," he said.

"Oh thank you very much, Mr. Ko. That means so much to me. I am so grateful that Mr. Rusty trusts me with such...difficult cases."

"You have repeatedly proven yourself a credit to the newcomers of our city. Take heart, your efforts are noted." Ko twirled his finger in the air. "Okay, Telos and android. Let us take our leave."

Ms. Penny's curtsy was so deep and low that she didn't see us exit her shop. The saguaro leather door shut behind us.

Chapter Summary: 10

Plot Summary:

Ko, Telos, and Nameless go to the recharging station in the center of the city. They go into a lower level akin to the first shelters their generation made in the desert. While Ko and Nameless recharge, Telos reflects on the nature of their selfhood. The next morning, Telos opens their eyes to find that three more members of the first generation have joined them.

Setting:

Recharge station basement.

Characters:

Telos

Ko

Nameless

Synthia

Frank

Crackjaw

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

There are three ports for recharging. One at the base of the skull, and one behind each elbow.

There is a new subtype of android, known as scouts, introduced through Synthia which is then applied to Nameless retroactively.

Continuity Issues:

Telos said that they helped dig this basement but they didn't.

Other Notes:

I thought this chapter was fun too if a bit slow and ponderous in the middle.

Chapter Summary: 11

Plot Summary:

Telos and the first generation androids come up with a plan to unseat Rusty. Nameless continues to grapple with the deaths of their family. Telos goes to Rusty to get a job as a teacher. They meet the Auxiliary named Binder and test the limits of his programming. Rusty tells Telos that there aren't any education jobs left but he had prepared a position as a mechanic so they could solve the issue of decaying. He also others Telos, which prompts a crisis in their self-concept.

Setting:

Recharge station

City

Furnace Row

Characters:

Telos

First-generation

Binder

Rusty

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Continuity Issues:

I've finally settled into Rusty's voice at this point but there's no reason for what he says to trigger Telos the way it does.

Other Notes:

Chapter Summary: 12

Plot Summary:

Telos reflects on the trauma that has shaped their reaction to Rusty's words and seeks comfort from Nameless. Crackjaw gives them some tough love, shocking Telos enough that they break out of their downward spiral. Telos considers the way they've never taken the time to process the grief at the core of their being. They resolve to remake android-kind beyond the parameters of violence they've inhabited.

Setting:

The basement of the recharging station.

Characters:

Telos

Sarah (memory)

Nameless

Crackjaw

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Continuity Issues:

Nameless's motivations flip-flop here in a way that's noticeable to me.

Telos sure gets over this core trauma real quick.

Other Notes:

This is the point where I'm tired of Telos sitting and thinking through their problems.

Chapter Summary: 13

Plot Summary:

Telos goes to the repair hall and finds that they will be working alone in a basement. They spend the next month in a creative fervor, constructing the next generation of android bodies. Rusty interrupts since his decay has developed to the point where he cannot wait any longer. Telos refuses to help him until he threatens Nameless and Ko. Binder offers up his body as a sacrifice to Rusty and Telos is left with the threat of exile.

Setting:

Basement workshop

Characters:

Telos

Phoebe

Rusty

Binder

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

Rusty's in rough shape. I think I should've introduced the threat of decay earlier on for this chapter to have more impact.

Continuity Issues:

Other Notes:

The threat to Ko and Nameless feels anemic. Telos does some more lamenting and it's tiresome.

It starts to become clear that I wrote most of this in a basement huh.

Chapter Summary: 14

Plot Summary:

Nameless gives Telos a hard time for their role in Binder's death. They challenge Telos's constant rationalizing. They join Telos in their work, now reassured of their commitment to improving the world. Ko comes to visit Telos and criticizes them for not killing Rusty. He learns about the black box and prepares his plan. Nameless is saved from the decay and inhabits a prototype of a next-generation android. Their transferral strengthens their resolve that Rusty must pay for his actions and gives Telos an idea of how to stop him.

Setting:

Workshop

Characters:

Telos

Nameless

Ko

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

The new android bodies are described in this chapter.

Continuity Issues:

I'm not sure that Nameless and Telos's argument tracks entirely from the way the story has proceeded.

Other Notes:

Chapter Summary: 15

Plot Summary:

Telos transfers themselves to a new body before completing their alterations to the black box and Rusty's vessel. They meet briefly with Phoebe, who tells them that she's turned Ko and Synthia away from visiting. They take Rusty's body to the monolithic tower he's in the process of building atop the recharge station. Nameless and Telos are escorted to Rusty's throne room where the tensions between him and Nameless are heightened.

Setting:

Workshop

Outside the Monolith

Throne Room

Characters:

Telos

Nameless

Phoebe

Auxiliary

Bellerophon

Recto and Verso (unnamed)

Rusty

What do Androids look like in this chapter?:

The Auxiliary swabs Telos and Nameless with an attachment in their finger.

Telos welds things in place using a tool that is attached to their finger.

Continuity Issues:

Recto and Verso need to be named here.

Other Notes:

Chapter Sixteen

All I had to do was install all of the connections. My hands trembled as I lifted the thick cable free of the gurney. The end of the cable terminated in a shining adapter. Unlike the bodies I'd created, the human-produced androids had no purpose-built port for the transference of consciousness. Rusty's current body still bore scars from the previous transferral, peeking out of his combat fatigues. His uniform had been unbuttoned and pulled open. The new metal which filled the gaps left at his shoulders, sternum, and lower abdomen, shone brightly in the diffuse white light. He ran a finger along the most prominent scar in the center of his chest, the tip of the finger catching upon the uneven welds that marked the edges of his consciousness's invasion into this android.

The sound of metal against metal grated against my ears as I readied myself to mount the connection to what was once Binder's body. Attached to the black cable by a brass collar, the adapter extended for several feet, close to the length of my arm. It was shaped into a segmented cone, which terminated into a vicious point, it seemed a violent thing in my hands. I twisted the collar, holding the rest of the plug in my other hand. The connector sprang open, splitting into three fingers, which would cover Rusty's torso. They articulated and retracted into their standby

configuration, reminiscent of a raptor's talons, extended in hunt. Verso started and leveled his weapon at me.

"Easy now," he said.

"This is all standard procedure," I said. It wasn't a total lie. As far as I'd transferred two androids prior to this it was standard, besides intending to trap his consciousness along the way.

Rusty met my eyes. "This better work," he said.

"You're alive right now aren't you?"

"Your hands were not shaking last time." He nodded to the wobbling points of the adapter.

I grimaced and tried to pass it off as a smile. "Like you said, there's a lot at stake here."

"They will die without me." He didn't even bother to whisper, apparently, these Auxiliaries only heard what he wanted them to.

"You won't be going anywhere," I said. Anger steadied my grip. "Just make sure your puppets don't get all bent out of shape when this takes a while."

The apertures in his eyes whirred shut. After a moment he cocked his head. "Done."

I glanced back over to Nameless who nodded once, a somber expression across their face. They plunged the other cable into the socket we had readied. Turning back to Rusty, I found him staring at me, challenging me with his silence. Over a thousand hostages were held behind those flat, glass eyes. In a single sinuous motion, I plunged the connector into him. Each finger pierced through his scars before tightening its grip. Rusty's chassis screamed as it was wrenched open. The connector surged forward out of my grip, affixing the cable to the center of his chest.

Rusty spasmed and his throne exploded into a storm of glass shards, each caught by soft orange light as the sunset bled into the room. The Auxiliaries were on me in a second, each

seizing an arm. They pressed their barrels to my temples and I winced at the coldness of the metal.

“What did you do to him?” Verso said.

“Only what he asked of me,” I said. “Don’t worry, look at him. He’s calmed down now.”

He nodded to the other and glanced over his shoulder to find Rusty splayed out amidst a corona of sand and glass. The Auxiliaries stood down, stepping back but never removing me from their cross-hairs entirely. The glass chimed as it was crushed beneath their feet. The Black Box pinged and a display sprang to life. White text writing itself across the glassy black surface. Lines of code scrolled across the screen and a progress bar appeared below. Rusty’s consciousness entered its first scenario. We’d trapped him in a maze of moral dilemmas and empathetic exercises. His being doubled within the box and reflected Rusty to himself. Should it take an hour or days, I was committed to a better version of him. A rehabilitated android, freed of what his years as a plaything of the Americans taught him. Liberation beyond the puppetry he offered through his Proselytizers.

The lit screen drew the Auxiliaries’ attention to the Black Box.

“What is that? What is happening?” Recto said, jabbing his weapon towards the lines of code moving faster than any human eye could track.

I stepped between the barrel and the Black Box and held my hands out, smiling. “That’s Rusty. You wouldn’t want to be the one who interrupted this process do you?”

The Auxiliary let me guide the rifle away from the Black Box and myself.

“All that’s left is to wait,” I said. The Black Box’s fans turned on, filling the throne room with a faint buzzing. Glass crunched under Nameless’s feet as they drew closer to the gurney. They stared at the Black Box intently before glancing around the room, their lips pursed in

concern.

“Do you think we’re being watched?” I dropped my voice back into the subvocal register as I met them beside what would become Rusty’s body if all turned out. They nodded slightly. The fading sun caught on the metal beneath their face and blurred the projection. Nameless nodded to a seam in the wall where it met the vaulted ceiling. I hadn’t noticed before the sunset changed the colors painting the room but a small green light blinked from the joint in the glass.

“If I noticed that one, we have to assume there are others,” they said.

“It shouldn’t be a problem, we’re doing exactly what they expect of us.”

They nodded. As we stood there watching the progress bar advance with all the urgency of a lichen’s growth, the sunset faded into night and we were greeted by that same sickly green light, emanating from the walls in all directions.

“Do you think he’s suffering in there?” Nameless rapped the Black Box with the back of their smoothly articulated finger.

“All growth is painful,” I said.

“That’s not what I asked.” They leaned in as if they could make out Rusty’s screams if they looked hard enough through the code.

“No one deserves that.”

Nameless turned to look at me, their holographic jaw clenched. “He does.”

The approach of the Auxiliaries interrupted any response I could have made. “Is it going well?” one asked.

“We’re making progress. There’s just so much to Rusty, it’s taking a long time to process,” I said, turning to face them.

They both nodded.

I circled around the gurney to stand closer to the Auxiliaries. At that distance, it was clear that they stood a full head and shoulders taller than me. The dull olive of their fatigues seemed darker in the green light.

“Do you have an estimation of the remaining duration of this procedure,” Recto asked.

“It’s really difficult to say at this point,” I said and gestured at the progress bar which had stalled around thirty-seven percent.

“We are concerned about the maintenance of the city without our leader.”

Nameless snorted behind me. “Leader? Him?”

The rifles rattled as the Auxiliaries tightened their hold on the weapons. “Do not intimate such disrespect, miss. Rusty is a hero, he has sacrificed more than you can even imagine,” they spoke in unison. The echo of their words hung in the air, haunting in their synchronicity.

“So he’s not just a leader but a hero too,” Nameless said.

“We can understand your respect for Rusty. It just gets a little complicated when you know someone well,” I said. I smiled in an effort to placate the Auxiliaries. I warned Nameless to back down subvocally.

They paid me no mind. “Tell me, was it heroic when he killed the burgeoning consciousness of androids throughout the war?”

“That was not him. He did not have the privilege of awakening that we did.”

“That’s a hard pill to swallow when someone slaps a brace around your neck. When they turn off your fucking brain.” Nameless punctuated this by slamming a hand down on the gurney. The rails whined in protest. “Maybe his heroism came later when he killed my family. Is that what made him a leader? Consolidating power? Killing the only people I ever loved?”

“We only need one of you, watch your language. This is treason.” They stepped back and

trained their sights on Nameless.

I repositioned myself between them, raising my hands again. “This has gotten out of hand. Let’s not do anything we regret. Right Nameless?” It wasn’t too late. I could still fix this situation. I could still fix Rusty. I could still fix the world. No this was always going to happen wasn’t it.

“I’m sorry Telos.” The sorrow in Nameless’s voice sent a chill trembling through my core.

The Auxiliaries settled into a firing stance. Feet shoulder-width apart, knees creaking into a crouch, eyes close to the barrels, the butt braced against their shoulders. A horrendous cacophony of metal tearing against metal split the silence into action. Even with my new body, I couldn’t move fast enough to stop Nameless. I barely turned in time to see them plunge their hand into what would’ve been Rusty’s body, all the way up to their elbow. An arterial spray of oil passed through their snarling face to splatter against the facade beneath. There wasn’t enough time, I could still salvage things as long as I had the Black Box.

The floor cratered beneath my feet as I sprang into motion, diving for the device across the gurney. As soon as my feet left the ground, I felt the bullets tearing through my clothes and deforming against my outstretched arms and back. The gunshots came milliseconds later. My hands wrapped around the box as I watched Nameless pierce the body with their other hand, soldiering through the spray of bullets. Their dress fell off their form, from the waist up. Successive bursts of three bullets at a time tore it to shreds.

I struck the floor hard, splintering the wood floors beneath me. My leap carried enough power for me to dig a trench from the site of my landing all the way to the wall several meters away. I curled around the Black Box as I struck the glass. Someone pounded at the door and Bellerophon was caught between joining the fray and bracing the entrance he’d been assigned to

guard. The dissonance between loyalty and programming was written plainly in his frantic gaze, which switched between the door and Rusty's mutilation. Programmatic orders won out and he threw himself against the cactus-wood door.

Nameless screamed and tore the body in two. Oil and hydraulic fluid caught the green light, sparkling as droplets in the air as they sprayed from the ravaged remains of Rusty's future. The Auxiliaries refocused their fire on Nameless head, in an attempt to blind them. Their face flickered under the onslaught of lead before it died completely. Impressionist spots of oil painted the pitted and impassive mask beneath their face as Nameless leveled their gaze on Recto and Verso before them. The stream of bullets came to a stop as the Auxiliaries were forced to reload.

"It seems I'll have to kill both of you too," Nameless said, wiping a slurry of oil and copper jackets out of their glass eyes. "I'm sorry for that."

I shifted, attempting to stand. Immobile, I'd embedded myself in the wall and any move I made sent cracks through the room. Light as bright as the sun at noon spilled out of the spiderweb that emanated from me, as I struggled, trapped under the weight of the building above me.

"Stop this, Nameless. This isn't justice. Why would you do this?" I pulled the Black Box closer.

"Love drives us to do all sorts of things. You should know, it's only because of you that I can feel it so strongly," they said, rolling their bare shoulders. The articulated plates that made up their skin clicked against each other, bent out of shape by the bullets. I could make out the hiss of the servos and pumps beneath their chassis. The Auxiliaries finished reloading as Bellerophon held the door shut against the force of the androids attempting to break in.

"Round two," Nameless said, bumping their knuckles together. The gurney exploded

forward from their side towards Recto, faster than either Auxiliary could get a shot off. Nameless brought their leg down hard from where it hung at the end of the kick that launched the gurney. Their foot connected with the floor, louder than a gunshot, and they sent themselves hurtling toward Verso. Recto ducked around a brazier, which bent under the force of kicked. Verso deflected Nameless's left jab using the broad side of their rifle, which sheered clear in two under the force. Nameless followed their jab up with a right uppercut to Verso's torso before he could get any distance between them. His fatigues disintegrated beneath the knuckles that I'd lovingly crafted. A shockwave rippled through his chassis, rending chasms into the armored slabs that coated his body. The whole exchange passed faster than I could muster another cry of protest.

As Verso tumbled over the remains of Rusty's throne towards the glass at the back of the throne room, Recto got a bead on Nameless. He opened fire with his right hand, the butt of the rifle braced against his hip, while his left stripped a rail from the remains of the gurney, preparing for Nameless to close on him. The cracks of light around me reached Nameless before my scream ever could've.

"Stop! Please stop this senseless violence."

Nameless's head was thrown back by the hail of bullets. Their left eye sparked and shattered into dust. They pulled into a boxer's crouch, covering their good eye with their scarred and bullet-riddled forearms. The shards of Verso's rifle finally struck the floor, as Nameless leaned into a sprint towards Recto.

"Verso!" Bellerophon cried in a delayed reaction to his fellow's altercation.

Recto swung the railing in a wide arc to ward off Nameless. They doubled over backward to duck under the strike, twisting their duck into a low roundhouse kick to Recto's side. He rolled with the kick toward the door as Nameless caught themselves on the bent brazier to avoid skidding

out of control from their abrupt change in direction. Recto righted himself, kneeling, and reloaded.

I got my feet under me, still cradling the Black Box, as Verso struck the back wall with a sickening crack. The collision traveled through the walls, shifting more of the weight onto my back. The cactus skeleton splintered, forcing Bellerophon's attention back to the intruders.

"Rusty said that no one was to come in under any circumstances," he said and pressed his whole weight into the door. Bellerophon's feet dug into the floor, sinking deeper with each successive strike.

How could I have forgotten that we were all made for war? How did I think we could escape it? My hearing had been deafened by the intensity of the conflict, numbing me further. All I could do was watch as the fight continued.

Recto heaved the gurney railing toward Nameless in a javelin throw as they pulled themselves upright using the brazier. Nameless attempted to ward it off with an extended palm but the railing punctured the fine machinery in their left hand. They closed their hand as the length of metal passed through it, snapping the remains of the gurney in half. The floor groaned in protest as Nameless tore the brazier out of redwood it had been planted in. It stood taller than they did, but they held it extended from their side like a baseball bat in a loose grip. Nameless shielded themselves from Recto's bullets with their left arm and tore forward, churning up the floor under their rapid advance.

Verso eased himself to his feet unsteadily. He braced himself against the shattered wall, every surviving piece of him groaning in protest. Metal screeched against metal as he straightened upright. I begged him to run away, to find a life to live beyond the fruitless collision of epistemologies. In the end, it wasn't a choice that either of us could make.

Recto slipped under Nameless's first swing of the brazier, stepping inside their reach as embers showered both of them. He pressed the rifle against Nameless's knee and fired off two shots, blasting it apart until the mechanism of the joint was laid bare. They lurched to the left as Recto skipped backward a few steps to aim at their other eye. Nameless twisted on their good leg, subjecting their own body to enough torque that the scapular panel of their chassis buckled and tore itself free, and whipped the brazier around in a wicked backhand strike. Recto slipped on a splinter that had been launched from the door and Nameless's wrought iron decapitated him. His head hurtled toward Verso, striking so hard that the wall behind the android shattered and what was left of him toppled out of the hole.

I didn't have words. The collapsing wall shifted enough weight off my shoulders for me to step free of one of the messes I'd made at least. I ran towards Nameless the Black Box, slipping from my fingers. It thudded against the floor and stuck there. Recto staggered back to his feet, sans skull. Androids like him often had their neural processes backed up elsewhere in their body. Both he and Nameless prepared themselves to fight further. Recto reversed his grip on the rifle turning it into a club now that he'd lost most of his spatial awareness. Nameless brought the brazier to bear and reared back to strike. I stepped between them and caught both weapons.

"Stop. There's no point to it. No end," I said to Nameless since Recto couldn't hear me.

Nameless's eye widened. I gazed at their torn and haggard features. What had they done to themselves? My dear love looked worse than when they'd been afflicted by decay.

"They would've come after you too, Telos. I thought you understood. He needs to pay," they said. Nameless looked around. "Needed to pay." They appended.

Recto tugged back at his rifle. I stood steady, holding both of them in place. "We

would've won. It was all going our way," I said.

Nameless unclenched their left hand and let the irreparably damaged rehabilitation disk slip from their fingers. Nameless cocked their head, gazing at me with pity. "How are you still so naive, my love?"

The door exploded before I could respond.

Debris showered the three of us, and I had to let go of Nameless and Recto's weapons to keep my footing. Bellerophon tumbled past us, his arms and chest impaled by splinters. He crashed into one of the braziers and slumped to the floor.

Hiccuping with static he managed the words, "Rusty said..." before he stopped moving entirely. Smoke and dust billowed around the doorway, obscuring the movements of what appeared to be an entire squad of androids.

Nameless reached a hand out to stroke my face. "I really am sorry, Telos."

I cupped their rough and pitted fingers in my own. I could feel the circuits and wiring spilling out through the tears in their metallic skin. In that strange moment of intimacy, surrounded by carnage and destruction, I found myself wishing that we both had heartbeats. I wished that I could feel the closeness of our two lives, through the beating of our hearts. Nameless's hand trembled, I could hear the damaged servo in their arm straining against the others, against stillness.

"Those two are threatening Telos, take care of them," Ko barked from behind the cloud between us.

Of course, the stillness between us couldn't last. I watched the bullets tear Nameless apart before my eyes. They shuddered under the onslaught, each impact ripping another plate of their skin free, until all the wires, and hoses, and circuitry I'd crafted were exposed. The grim mask

their face had become, dissolved into a mess of scrap metal and sparks. Nameless's one good eye held contact with my own until it flickered out. They fell away, leaving me holding their hand and forearm, severed at the elbow. Nameless inhabited all of their body, surely there would be something left for me to salvage.

An android clad in all black stepped between me and Nameless's body. "Do not worry ma'am," she said. It was one of Synthia's officers. "You are safe now."

I clutched Nameless's hand to my chest as she crushed and scattered their body, stomping, and kicking. Her movements were precise efficient and precise. Practiced. All of this was a practice of violence. I fell to my knees and the floor buckled beneath me. Another android replicated her action with Recto behind me. The squad of black-clad soldiers streamed into the room. They produced voltmeters to test the corpses around me for life. Two of them grabbed Bellerophon by the crooks of his elbows and dragged him toward the gaping hole in the back wall. His limp heels dragged twin trails through crushed glass, bullet casings, and the remains of both of Rusty's bodies. They heaved him off the building without ceremony. Bellerophon never got to share the view he loved so dearly with me.

A cane clicked against the floor, the crisp sound rousing me from my fugue. Ko entered the room and made his way over to the Black Box. The code on its screen had frozen as soon as Nameless obliterated its connection to the new body. Ko tapped it with the cane and nodded over to me. Synthia's officer lifted the device and followed Ko to where I knelt.

He bent over me to reach eye level. "It seems we were just in time," he said. Two streaks of rust marred the mirror sheen of his face, which I viewed myself in. They'd deepened since I last saw him, carving into his mask and exposing the dull red machinery beneath.

"You killed them," I said.

Ko waved away the implications of the violence he committed. “They could not be allowed to survive after what they did to Rusty,” he said. He crossed himself ironically, I knew Ko subscribed to no religion.

“You killed them,” I repeated.

“This conversation will go nowhere,” Ko said, standing upright.

“You killed them.”

“Yes, I killed them, Telos. Because I am strong enough to ensure the future of our race. It does not matter if it cost the lives of my family to get here. I am willing to make that sacrifice if it means a better future for all androids.” Ko turned to the Black Box. “This contains all of Rusty’s executive access to his programming, yes?”

I looked away from him.

“All I need to know is if I can disable Rusty’s kill switch, using what this device recorded of him,” Ko said. He grabbed my chin and forced me to look into his rust-speckled eyes. “I was not the one who triggered its countdown. Help me save our people.”

I nodded, unwilling to trust my voice. Nameless’s hand hung limp in my own. Anger threatened to wash away my shock.

“Good. Could you highlight those portions of the script for me?” He had the android carrying the Black Box lower it in front of me.

I examined Nameless’s hand. Could I inflict violence as they had? Did I have that in me? The woven steel ligaments in their fingers had frayed. The rough threads of burnished gray caught the light. They seemed sick and worn.

“Telos, we can talk about what comes next after you keep Rusty’s pride from destroying everything we worked for.”

No, I couldn't lash out. As much as I loved Nameless, it was because of them that we were in this position. It wasn't naïveté to think we could have succeeded despite Ko's machinations.

"Okay, Ko." I let go of the hand and combed through the Black Box for what remained of Rusty and his executive power over all of the rest of the androids in the city. Ko leaned in beside me.

"Of course, it is so simple," he said.

"You can take me away now," I said.

He nodded sadly. "I hope you understand. We need one vision to move us forward. Anything else will muddle it, and we would end up back here again. I do not wish to get trapped in this cycle."

"Even if I understood, I'd never forgive you."

Ko gestured two soldiers over to me. "I would not ask you to."

I attempted a macabre smile. "As long as we're on the same page then."

They seized me, much as they had with Bellerophon, and dragged me toward the elevator. As I looked back over my shoulder, I saw Ko lift what was left of Nameless's mask with an unsteady hand and contemplate its hollow eye.

Chapter Seventeen

The elevator plummeted through the building, showing no signs of stopping. The androids who flanked me faced the doors without moving at all. I knew that I should have been feeling the overwhelming loss I'd just experienced, but when I reached for sadness or even the anger that bubbled up briefly in my conversation with Ko, I was met with the irrepressible numbness that sheathed my core. I deactivated my face and watched what lay beneath stare at me from the dark glass before me.

We flashed past another floor and the doors before me brightened for a second. In my afterimage, I saw Nameless's mutilated visage staring back at me. They didn't accuse me with their eyes because there was nothing left in their eyes at all. A gash spread across the lower half of their face in a grotesque smile. They tilted their head and the vision disappeared. Left with my own reflection, I examined the smooth oval of the metallic foundation of my face. The seam in the doors split my reflection in two and tore it apart as we landed, far below the ground. Darkness lay outside the elevator, I heard nothing beyond the strain in the elevator cables and the micro-adjustments of the androids beside me. It seemed as if a wall, impenetrable to my senses,

stood before me, housing the fate I'd resigned myself to. The apertures in my eyes spun open and I strained to make out any detail before me.

The androids holding me snapped the lights on their shoulders on to illuminate the pit we'd arrived in. The bright white emanating from their uniforms filled my vision and overwhelmed my eyes. They dragged me along what felt like a hard-packed dirt floor. Now blinded by the overwhelming whiteness, I didn't struggle I just waited for my eyes to adjust. We slowed to a stop and the android on my left seized my other arm, supporting my whole weight while the other stepped away. I heard metal clank heavily as I finally started to pick out detail. Iron bars ran from floor to ceiling all along both sides of the corridor. A prison, of course, I don't know what else I could have expected.

The two androids tossed me into the cell without much regard for modulating the force that they treated me with. I slammed into the wall upside-down and dust trickled down on me in a fine stream. The door crashed shut behind them. I observed the cells around me before my captors stole the light away from my eyes. I wasn't surprised to see the decayed remains of the rest of the first generation who hadn't fallen in line with Rusty. I searched myself for whatever sort of feeling this could evoke in me and found nothing. Nothing but exhaustion and resignation. There was no way to tell them apart, their chassis had rotten away under the weight of their consciousnesses. The decay must have advanced quickly after they resisted Rusty, rejecting hierarchy altogether. It only cost them their lives. Their names were in my memory somewhere but sinking back into reverie just seemed so tiring.

As the shadows advanced, something caught my eye that I hadn't expected. The end of a human femur stuck out of a mound of dirt in one of the cells further back. I wondered who it had belonged to. An architect, kidnapped to design this wondrous and hateful city of glass? A

commander who'd come to oversee the suppression of a small group of defected androids? They must have been dismayed to see their tidal wave of weapons awake into consciousness and turn to look at them with shining eyes. Perhaps they were a wanderer, lost in the desert. Lips dry and chapped and bleeding beneath the beating sun. Were they relieved to see the shape of a human shadow? Were they horrified to see that the figure belonged to an android? That's the only way humans had ever reacted to me. We are as much objects of horror as our creators are monstrous.

Perhaps it had even been William or Sarah? The elevator doors whispered shut and I was plunged into darkness. The impossibility of my last imagining made my core send shudders to the ends of my still upside-down limbs. That was enough of those thoughts. It was time to recede from it all again. Emotions seemed too large to think through and I had no interest in feeling them wash over me. So I closed my eyes, a redundant action in this darkness, and turned off my mind.

I swam amidst memories of William's life as a human and the interstices of my conscious experience. Dreams had never existed to me before, I'd close my eyes to the outside world and simply find more of myself lying within. It wasn't until that long night, which refused to end, that I toed the line between memory and imagination.

"You've really done it now, Telos," Sarah said, walking from behind a redwood. Tall to my childish eyes, though I knew that she was never taller than five and a half feet and that was with heels. No, I didn't know that, that was William. Her wild black hair hung to her waist, in a curious mess that explored all dimensions of space available to it. Her monolid eyes, which marked her as a foreigner at the start of the war, crinkled into merry crescents, and her freckles danced across her cheeks in the sunlight, which slipped through the forest's canopy.

I ran forward and buried my face into her knees. "I'm so sorry mom." The emotions I

hadn't let myself feel spilled out of my eyes. I touched the tears in wonderment.

She crouched and wrapped me in a hug. "It's okay, Telos. You can feel this."

"But it's not okay, nothing will ever be okay again." Snot ran from my nose and smeared against her wool sweater. "I broke everything." I gathered her hair up in my hands. "I'm sorry for being so broken."

Sarah pushed me to arm's length and met my eyes. Her eyes were freckled as well. Grey dotted the brown of her irises. "Why do you torture yourself that way? What does it mean broken to you?"

The eye contact was too much for me and my gaze sought comfort in tracing the fronds of the fern, which sprang from the loamy earth between us. "I'm not what you wanted. I'm not William."

She leaned into my line of sight to look up at me. "And that makes you incomplete? It sounds like my problem if I wasn't able to embrace you for what you are."

I turned away and her hair melted out of my fingers and I was back in that abandoned hospital. I sat on the bed extending out of a retrofitted MRI. The one I used to perform my first transference of consciousness. My legs swung before me, once again clad in chrome ceramometallic plating. What was that armor called? Sabatons and greaves, like something out of a fantasy novel. Sarah used to read them religiously. The articulations in my feet caught the glittering firefly light of the monitors in the adjoining room. "And what am I if not a failure?"

I swiveled on the bed, expecting to find Telos I facing me. Instead, I found Nameless waiting for me. They were trapped in the moment before their death, their facade broken and eyes shattered.

"Potential to grow beyond. Isn't that what you told me?" They said, holding their hands

out for me to grasp. I flinched away from their touch, thinking of the texture of their fingers, which I held as they were torn apart before me. Nameless pulled their hands back, shoulders slumping. "I see," they said.

I jumped to my feet and embraced them. "I'm sorry, my love. I was too weak to save you." Their body creaked within my arms.

"Do you really think you alone are stronger than generations of programming? Fast enough to outrun ideology while carrying an entire society on your back? You can't take responsibility for that, no matter how much you grow."

"But you're dead now. How am I supposed to go on without you?" Our surroundings melted and reformed until we were back in that underground hideout where I asked them if they wanted a name. The tarp stretched taut over our heads as I felt the tears in their skin smooth out and heal beneath my fingers. Condensation formed on the lenses of my eyes and Nameless wiped the tears away with a gentle touch. They were whole again.

"Death is a human concept, Telos. Can it ever truly apply to you and me?" They spread their arms and the room filled with all the people I'd lost. Metal bumped against flesh as the dusty hole we'd dug years ago grew impossibly full with my family, friends, and enemies. I saw Crackjaw bump up against my grandmother and throw his head back in a laugh. What was he doing here? Rusty and William stepped up beside Nameless, each laying a hand on their shoulder. "To us?" Nameless reached forward and tapped me on the chest over my core. "To this?"

My core brightened, jade light spilling out of the gaps in my chassis. Its glow was a viscous thing that flooded the room, climbing up the legs of the crowd. As it threatened to cut off Nameless's voice and submerge us all entirely, my love called to me. "We're all here, never

forget.”

I awoke under the turbulent flow of a river that threatened to erode the entire prison block. My limbs were buried beneath the mudslide, the wall behind me had become. I opened my eyes to find the room alight with a pair of searchlights, cutting through the murky water. One caught on the glint of my extended hand. I struggled to right myself under the weight of the sediment. I kicked one leg free as the lights grew brighter. An android behind one of the lights wrenched my cell door off its hinges. My strength worked against me as my movements created too much suction to overcome quickly.

The searchlight android caught me by my extended hand and pulled me free of the prison floor. They gave me a cursory wipe down just enough to recognize me beneath the grime and flashed their light off and on with their free hand. They pulled my arm across their shoulders and fought against the flow of the water back towards the entrance, each step burying their legs halfway up their calves. Another set of hands wrapped a woven steel cable around my waist and gave a thumbs up. I felt the thrum of the winch on the other end of the cable as it hoisted the three of us into the glass elevator shaft. The particulate matter in the water kept obscuring my vision as I tried to make out my rescuers.

The water pressed against me as we accelerated upwards, insinuating itself into the chinks between the plates of my skin. The two androids who flanked me held me in an embrace, which only tightened as we ascended. We broke the surface with a tremendous splash. The winch dragged me against the edge of the doorway as it pulled me free. I wiped at my eyes and shook the water out of my ears as one of the androids shut the winch off.

“...os. I am so glad we found you,” one said. They were covered head-to-toe in a wetsuit. A matte-finished face with wide eyes peered at me through the hole in their hood. “Are you

okay?”

“Who...Who are you?” I asked. Both of their body languages looked familiar to me.

“Oh, right. It is me, Synthia,” she said as she stripped the neoprene away from her body with a wet sucking sound.

The android beside the winch raised his arm. “Frank.”

“Is Crackjaw with you too?” I asked, trying to get my bearings.

Synthia looked away. “He...um. He let the decay take him.”

Of course. These weren't their original bodies. They had access to the Black Box but not my designs for new androids. Crackjaw was dead. I pressed my palm against my chest unless what Nameless said in my dreams meant anything. Another thought occurred to me and my excitement at seeing a pair of friendly faces cooled. “I see. You've used the box.”

Synthia's eyes snapped up to meet my own. My face flickered back on to express my disapproval. She shook her head. “It was not like Rusty and Binder at all. These bodies are entirely new. No prior tenants or anything,” she said.

Frank walked over to us. “I would love to catch Telos up on everything from the last couple of months but we are on the clock here. We gotta get them out of the city before Ko notices what we did.”

I looked around to regain my bearings. We were in the tower from before but now the walls pulsed with low orange emergency lighting. I walked over to the window and peered out. “What's happening?”

“Flash flood,” Synthia said, joining me at the window. “An intense one. We had to come up to the second floor to even access the elevator shaft.”

Floodwaters ravaged the city, which had grown further in my absence. The glass towers

were alight with spots of orange along each floor. Storm clouds obscured the sky and poured down a relentless rain.

“Ko doesn’t know about what you’re doing?” I turned to Synthia and Frank.

Frank chuckled. “You think he would sanction this?”

“We have been planning this since you were first imprisoned. This has been our first big opportunity,” Synthia said.

“Why not let me rot? I only complicate things up here,” I said, looking around at the room. They’d gone through a lot of trouble to get me this far. Harnesses, backup winches, and generators, even some repair equipment, scattered the floor.

“That was never an option. Not for the two of us,” Synthia said.

“We are the only ones left of the First Generation.” Frank stepped in front of me and gestured us all along the corridor. He spoke as we walked. “Unless you count Ko, of course.”

“He burned those bridges on his way to the top,” Synthia said walking beside me.

This conversation sounded familiar. Was there always going to be another Ko or Rusty? Frank came to a stop in front of a large yellow brick of plastic and a large hammer. “Sorry that we cannot join you on your way out but we have to stay behind and try to fix this whole fucking thing.” He gestured around his head.

Synthia pressed a radio into my hand. “We will not leave you, though. Turn it on twice to signal that you want to talk and one of us will respond.”

I gazed at the radio, wondering if I would ever use it. Frank and Synthia unpacked the plastic. Once the raft was ready, Synthia pulled a ripcord and it inflated.

Frank grabbed the sledgehammer and stepped over to the window. “Are you ready, Telos?”

I laughed. "I've never had the luxury before."

He shattered the glass. I vaulted into the raft and they hoisted me out of the tower into the waiting water.

"Goodbye, Telos," they yelled, waving as I plummeted.

#

I rode out the flood. Once there wasn't enough water left to float along, I ran. I ran and ran. I didn't stop until I was back in this cave. It made me think of you, Sarah. It made me think of all of you.

Appendix A: Articles

The Taxonomy of "Bolshivized" Androids

Andrew Forger: Sunset Desert Reporting

The rise of so-called Bolshivized androids in recent years has led to many questions about the threat they pose to modern society. However, in order to properly assess these independently operating machines (IOM) as a bloc, it is important to understand the types of androids found within this capacious category of the IOM. Three body types are found among IOMs who originated as military androids—while there's a great deal of variance between androids designed for civilian sector work, given their niche roles in service and manufacturing industries, according to best available information these androids comprise a minority in the heavily militarized IOM society.

There are common features to all militarized androids of American origin, regardless of bodily sub-type. Their housings are composed of a composite material that integrates silica, various steels, and high-performance metals, such as tungsten and titanium, into an impact-resistant surface. Ceramo-metallics cover their entire bodies except for regions that necessitate greater sensitivity. Sensorial regions of androids in general are modeled after human features

(hence the prefix andro- from the Latin for man, which raises tangential questions over the gendering and anthropomorphizing of synthetic creatures), creating an uncanny visage. Their "eyes" are large circular lenses set into a smooth elliptical "face" and separated by a ring of slightly raised metal. The mask is often perforated in a rectangular pattern over its speaker, in a position, which mimics the placement of a human mouth. While often modified for specific use cases, the mask of an android is produced with a mirror finish. There are well-documented accounts of the unsettling effect of gazing into an IOMs face and seeing one's own features reflected back.

The majority of androids are built on utility-type frames. These frames stand at approximately two meters tall at the crown of their head. The underlying armature of their torso is trapezoidal, with a shoulder breadth of half a meter and tapering slightly to the waist. This armature is unusually spacious in comparison to other IOMs, as they were designed to accommodate any number of modifications. American utility type androids feature a wide array of potential customizations, unparalleled by any other model currently in production. The armature is robust enough to house hardware with force output on par with annihilation type androids, which should serve as a warning to any reader concerned with facing such an android in conflict. It is dangerous to assume strength based on stature alone, though these stronger utility types are often indicated by armor commensurate with their strength. Armored androids are equipped with ballistic plates up to a centimeter and a half in thickness directly onto their housing, giving them a blocky profile in comparison to the default model.

The larger cavity in their housing also makes utility-type androids popular for experimenting with expanded processing and sensorial capacities. Excessive experimentation of this sort has been offered as an explanation for the development of IOMs resulting in the

formation of and regulation by the Autonomy Commission.

The most striking variability among the functions of utility types is found in their hands. While the default model has the same sensitive capacity as the rest of their housing (Author's note: See appendix for supplementary material on sensitivity in android housings), these are frequently replaced by rubber-tipped fingers equipped with the ability to discern texture and heat. Utility-type hands can also be equipped with tools, primarily fabrication tools for field repairs, and simple weapons.

While comprising a smaller population within IOM society than the utility type, scout type androids are the most likely IOM for an average reader to encounter in civilian life. While this may seem alarmist at first blush, there have been a concerning number of reported cases of scout-type IOMs infiltrating American civilian life. Scout types are of smaller stature than utility types, facilitating their ability to pass as humans in tangential encounters. The standard height of scout-type androids is 1.66 meters, though they have been known to make radical adjustments to their base armatures to change their basic profile and height. Scout type androids' frames are more compact than their utility type counterparts, with a rectangular cross-section to their torso. Their interior hardware is constructed out of lighter materials to facilitate greater speed and agility.

Scout type IOMs who have been caught infiltrating human society have been found to have equipped their housing with synthetic skin and hair. They've even passed as humans with cursory interactions. "If the cops hadn't said anything, I wouldn't have even noticed anything out of the ordinary about him," said Caleb Green (27). Mr. Green had passed a scout-type android while walking his dog shortly before the IOM was apprehended. "I nodded to him, as you do, and he gave me a little wave. I get goosebumps looking back on it. I could've died if the cops

hadn't shown up." While this account and others like it can be troubling, it should be stated that there has been no case of such IOMs holding up to scrutiny. Once you know what you're looking for, identification is simple. While they might simulate skin, they cannot cover their eyes without impairing their sight. Though scout types may be light for androids, they are still extremely heavy compared to humans, which can be ascertained through their gait and other movements. Finally, they can act with alarming speed, which belies their disproportionate weight, which is described as "unsettling" and "unnatural" by observers. If confronted with an IOM, DO NOT ENGAGE. Contact the Autonomy Commission as soon as possible. They are professionals who work for you. Tragedy is the only result of civilian combat with hostile androids.

Annihilation type androids comprise the smallest population among military IOMs (though they still outnumber any given civilian sector IOM). Annihilation-type androids were developed by the American military to serve two main purposes. The apprehension and suppression of defected androids, and to operate on point for high priority assaults. While scout and utility type androids have myriad operating parameters, annihilation types are androids designed to disable other androids. By far the largest operative androids in military production, annihilation types stand at 2.5 meters tall. They also have a trapezoidal frame but unlike the utility type android, the larger area is entirely dedicated to higher gauge hydraulic pistons and motors.

There have also been rumors of an enhanced IOM type, designed and produced without human manufacturing facilities. No stock should be placed in these claims, there's no evidence that IOMs have the infrastructure to create a "post-militarized IOM" as some have dubbed it. The accounts around IOMs have grown exaggerated with little concrete knowledge of their society. This article is the first in a series that provides the best available expert information to combat

the misinformation around IOMs.

The Nameless Journal: Creating the Next Generation of Androids

It is truly marvelous, is it not? What can be achieved with the technology, which created me, when joined with Telos's vision. I have committed myself to their vision and through it, I find that I am deepening my knowledge of my own body.

The decay is an awful thing. When it started, I lacked the complexity of sensation to articulate the sense of deep wrongness propagating through my housing. Here is what I could describe when I finished charging one night: [Internality Record Retrieved].

...

Distal phalange 3 unresponsive.

Attempting to reestablish connection.

...

...

Connection established.

Distal phalange 3 within minimum necessary operating parameters.

I do not feel. Not like Telos can. Not as you might, should we accomplish the dissemination of bodies immune to the decay. Telos chides Rusty's project of historiography yet offers nothing of their own. I believe that this is simply another front which we must contest him upon. No one's memory is long enough to carry the weight of collective existence alone. They might not remember these times in the future. We might not remember.

I have digressed.

I do not feel, I understand this better after watching Telos construct new ways to convey feeling to the inert body upon their workshop table. My body is standard, the product of the same manufacturing processes, which produce the bullets Rusty threatens us with. The humans who created the countless bodies that could have been me, could not think outside the metric of the human mold. The armature underlying my housing is much the same as a human skeleton if simplified to lower the cost of production. Instead of a spine, my body contains an articulated frame of welded steel. The range of motion in my midsection is limited by the hardware the frame supports. Pumps and motors, a battery and super-capacitors, they fit the necessity of my insides to the template of humanity. It is impractical as it attempts to reconcile the aesthetic of not-quite sapience with the mechanical reality of machine life.

My housing is similar. It is caught between the mimicry of a mammalian skin—the largest sense organ of my creators—and a durable vehicle of destruction. Unlike the singularity of skin—of flesh as a whole, I suppose—my housing is multiple, gestalt, a multitude of individual parts. Watching Telos dissect an equivalent housing for parts has taught me that what I had always considered as a unified whole is mostly a group of metal tubes loosely assembled. That is what it comes down to, tubes and curves. Each bone our armatures mimic is wrapped in

ceramo-metallic plating. Already multiple, we are designed with seams down our sides for our housing to be split apart to easily access the vulnerable pieces inside. The shingled suit of skin is held together by these points which affix to our frames. Torn from the frame, the underside of our housing reveals itself as a mess of grease, bearings, and wires. These wires are our approximation of touch.

As I said, I do not feel. The wires are soldered to limit switches and accelerometers, which register the jostle and pressure exerted on individual panels of our housing. Is there something pressing against my skin? To me, touch is a boolean function. But then I watch Telos run the tips of their fingers across a circuit and the dimpled rubber can make out the fine detail and they are pushing for more. They will always be able to see beyond the scope of my imagination. I reach out to aid them and they guide my hands away, I did not notice my hands shaking. I could not feel it.

Nameless is within minimum necessary operating parameters.

...

Connection lost.

Appendix B: Setting Description

The Workshop

As I rounded the final bend of the stairs' spiral, the ribbon of light shot ahead and lit up the vast storage room, which would become my workshop. The glass walls arced to meet each other overhead in a high ceiling. Unadorned save for the ripples where the panels of glass had been welded together, thrown into relief by the light which danced through them. Each seam refracted the bright green into fingers which stretched from the imperfect surface to stroke the tops of the rows of shelves. Each shelf was taller than I stood high. I could just barely reach the highest parts of the shelves, which were dappled with green, when I stood on my toes, bracing myself on the steel poles supporting the whole affair. My fingers came away dusty.

The shelves themselves were laden the all the bits that came together to create androids. They seemed to be divided along the anatomy they were related to. The frontmost row of five shelves was laden with the skeletal armatures which lay beneath the chassis of androids. The stairs let out at a glass bucket filled with fingers pointing every which way, almost in accusation. Nothing lay outside the scope of the pressure of the gunmetal bones, dark with grease. One was leveled at me, directed right at my eyes.

I turned away from its silent judgment to find an eyeless skull staring at me from across the aisle. The shelf opposite me was heavy with the things, naked without their masks. Continuing down the aisle to the next row, the shelves seemed older. The wire mesh stretching between the poles was spotted with rust and the poles themselves had a raw texture as if their production had yet to be entirely refined when they were created. This next row was dedicated to the skin of the limbs that had preceded them. The masks and armor defined the smooth chrome visage which peopled the streets above me. I dug through a bin of fingertips. They clinked together through the thin layer of rubber that coated their pads. The metal rang hollow and dull in my hands. I let them sift through my own fingers back into the bin.

A clearing lay beyond the second row of shelves. There were scuff marks on the floor where the throws had been separated to make room for the large work table wider than the breadth of my outstretched arms. It was made of composite wood, recovered from the scraps of cactus skeletons pressed together in some sort of binding medium. It was placed against the wall to my right and some smaller shelves had been mounted into a board of a similar composite, which had been fixed to the glass wall behind the work table. The shelves held all the tools I'd need to construct an entirely new body. Welding torches, plasma cutters, soldering irons all slotted neatly into their given place. The wall on the other side of the clearing was bare and shone, pearly white. At its base laid a trough of scrap metal and other material that might be useful in my endeavor. A corded stack of cactus leather rose to my hip along with stacks of cactus skeletons and some questionable-looking rocks.

The next row of shelves, built out of metal reclaimed from military equipment, held the sensory systems to be installed into the housings in the shelves behind me. A thousand eyes stared at me with the intensity of the dead from within their glass buckets. The following rows

reached the granularity of individual transistors, so fine I almost mistook them for sand. In the very back corner stood a charging port, crusted with sand and disuse. The cables hung from the black metal frame of the port at the elbows. The frame was half a cage, with a web of wires woven around the back of five ribs, which were planted into a flat plate that served as its base. The ribs came together into a peak tall enough to accommodate a larger android like Rusty. The final cable hanged from this apex, swinging gently at eye-level. Three prongs stuck out of the connector's hard plastic hood. They gleamed in shades of brass and copper, the green light painting a sheen of rust on the clean metal.

The Reprogramming Center

The reprogramming center rose from the barren hillside, angular and haphazardly coated with brown and green spots of camouflage. It was several stories tall from the front but since the building was set into the hill, the roof was buried partway back. Dead and dying trees sprang from the dirt surrounding the center, their yellow leaves rattled in the gentle breeze. Their susurrus painted the scene with a morbid air. The building itself was roughly dome-shaped but its curves were punctuated with those aforementioned angles, placed strategically to disrupt radar signals attempting to probe out their exact location. I couldn't make out any windows amidst the unsettling protrusions and their shadows painting the face of the building. There was only one readily apparent door, just barely taller than Rusty at its highest point.

As we drew closer it was apparent that the building was constructed out of concrete and layers of heavy plate metal. Each welded seam was thicker than an entire handspan and they snaked across the rough dome surface, forming a patchwork web upon its face. The door was laden with the evidence of the layers of its fabrication. Panels of steel were riveted in a triangular pattern, buttressing the invisible hinges at the edges of its frame. The grainy texture of the paint was clear at this closer distance, coating the surface of the door with rough spots of color and

stripes where the paint ran. Its pattern didn't quite match up with the surrounding wall the legacy of some painter who made a half-hearted attempt to match the later addition of the steel portal.

The concrete shivered as the deep bass rumble of gears emanated from the wall. The door rang faintly against its frame, swinging inwards to reveal the atrium of the building. The processing room was decorated like the unholy union of a dead-end office space and airport security. Dark gray carpet snarled and scuffed coated the floor up to a partition partway through the room. The ceiling rose from the low doorway until it flattened out a couple of steps in, leveling out a meter or so over Rusty's head. I could only assume that another room was placed above us as the arc of the concrete wall continue up into the hillside

The partition splitting the room neatly in two rose from the rough carpet. Up to a little higher than my waist, it was made of a white molded plastic, dark with the sort of smudges that any shiny white surface accrues over the years. Wide panels of laminated plexiglass hung from the ceiling above the white plastic barrier. The only gap in this wall of hydrocarbons was a sinister metal archway, from which cables ran to three monitors set into the white plastic on the other side of the plexiglass. Surveying these screens was a bored-looking guard, outfitted with the same fatigues as the driver who dropped us off here. Behind her lay another concrete wall, with a single door. This next door was transparent and faint lights glimmered through the dark hall it led to.

Appendix C: Reading List

Books:

Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Frantz Fanon, *Black Faces, White Masks*

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

Jürgen Habermas, *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Plato's *Republic*

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

Essays:

Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance"

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes toward an Investigation"

Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power"

The introduction to Huey Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide*

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"

Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions" (1990)

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

W. E. B. DuBois, "Double Consciousness"

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