

Cyberpunk: Badland Madman Chapter 30 - New AV, No Strings, Halls of Power & Sensational Declaration

With a healthy dose of suspicion towards his AI friend, Cypher got busy building the first Spinner car according to what the itch described in his mind. The blueprint was already made, and Atlas had gathered all the parts.

"Atlas, play some music! Something early twenty-twenties."

Cypher, dressed in full blacksmith gear, began working, using his brainwave interface to interact with all the Microbots nearby so he didn't have to do the heavy lifting.

The very first thing he made was the three propulsion systems for the car. He focused first on the jet part, the part that allowed the car to move in the air.

It relied on traditional, but highly efficient thrusters. Cypher had better tech already thanks to the Leaper. But for the first model, he went with the primitive one from Blade Runner. It was smaller than a true jet engine, and barely as powerful. But it could be made stronger with some tuning.

"Alright, let's test it out."

After building the basic structure of the jet propulsion, he did a basic tunnel test to make sure everything was fine. Atlas handled the testing while he began working on the anti-gravity engine.

Unlike Servo-Skull's gravity field manipulation, which allowed mobility, the engine only provided upward lift, and even for that it required jet propulsion. In a way, the anti-gravity engine worked more as a weight nullifier than an actual zero-gravity generator.

"It's pretty sweet. Ain't gonna cost us an arm and a leg to build these," Cypher muttered, fixing the main body of the anti-gravity engine. "Let's do a four-seater and a bus version later, Atlas. This thing's the real deal, I'd say. Once it goes mainstream, Night City's gonna grow into a mega-city as big as the whole state of California."

"Indeed. That outcome is highly probable," Atlas replied beside him, physically manifested while moving the Servo-Skulls to weld the vehicle's main body. "Science fiction features ecumenopolises because high-speed aerial transit enables efficient movement across planet-wide cities."

"That's where my head was at too. Throw in my room-temp superconductors, and maglevs are gonna make regional transit way better. Shit, I deserve a Nobel or something for fixing this damn world at this rate," Cypher mumbled, making small talk while he worked on the Spinner's internal combustion engine.

Spinner cars could move on the ground just as fine and used a common engine. Though Cypher planned to make it all electric later and remove the use of internal combustion. He wanted an end to CHOOH2 reliance completely.

"I concur, Cyph. Perhaps they should construct a golden throne for you upon which..."

"Wouldn't you love that, nerd?" Cypher grumbled. "And call me God-King? Emperor of Mankind?"

"It is the minimum required to honor your kindness. You are this world's lighthouse amid a sea of dark fate," Atlas replied. "For thousands of years to come, millions of generations will flourish because you existed."

"Yeah, because some sex-crazed nomad lived. Alright, back to work."

With the three engines done, Cypher focused on the glass canopy, chassis, and the wheels. They were easy to make; it was mostly easy. The control dashboard was then finally installed. He didn't bother painting the car since he planned to scrap it later anyway.

By the time night approached, Cypher had finished building the car. The only thing left now was taking it out for a drive. The itch was supposed to go away as soon as the engine started.

"Let's go see what Lucas is up to at the Continental. I'll park on my AV pad over there." Cypher changed the subject as he climbed in through the butterfly door. "Let me drive unless I start fucking it up too bad."

It sure was a sensation getting inside an AV he had personally made. It felt futuristic as well, with a comfortable pilot seat, a split-yoke steering wheel, and cockpit buttons. The visibility was perfect from the front to the top.

"Let's fire it up."

With the punch of a button, the subtle hum of the ICE engine came. And with that, the itch vanished.

"Ah, damn, feels like finally taking a dump after holding it for days." Cypher settled back in the seat and started driving it like a regular car. "We're taking off from that factory nearby?"

"Correct. Use the tunnel marked on your windscreen HUD," Atlas said from the passenger seat. "The factory is monitored by dozens of corporations and several governments. I will permit them to witness this, as you intend to sell it."

"Damn right."

Easily, Cypher drove the car through the wide tunnel and arrived underneath the Obsidian Fashion factory not far away. From there, a large elevator brought him up, and then he drove out into the parking area.

Finally, he turned the internal combustion engine off and flicked the anti-gravity engine switch. The foot pedals still controlled the acceleration and brake; the split yoke controlled direction. Now it could be tilted up and down to control the anti-gravity engine for altitude.

"Fuck, this thing's damn near silent!" Cypher said, grinning like a kid with a brand new toy. "Every AV I've ridden before was loud as hell. Even that pricey one Del uses made a racket. This is it, Atlas. This's our real cash cow. Obsidian's gonna blow the fuck up."

"Not without danger to your life."

"Man, you can get killed for staring at the wrong guy on the street in this city. At least we know to expect it."

Flying over Santo Domingo, then over Heywood, he enjoyed the quick flight. It really was quick, more than other AVs he could see. And he wasn't even pushing the car that much.

"Suggest a name, Atlas. Something epic and memorable," he asked, flying to the Continental building.

"I recommend Steelbird. It is a fitting name and has strong branding potential. Steelbird Turbo, Steelbird Turbo Pulse for the four-seater, and Steelbird Carrier for the bus variant."

"That... sounds good, actually." Cypher thought about it. "Yeah, I think I'll keep that."

At last, he stopped the car above the landing pad and gently lowered it. He could do both vertical and horizontal landings; that was the plus point about his car. It gave every option one could hope for.

Even the landing was silent, as his car didn't require rocket thrusters common in AVs currently out there.

He just parked the car and got out, heading over to his penthouse. As he entered, the lights were still bright, and he looked towards the living area where the large TV was turned on and playing an old cartoon called Doraemon.

Lucas was seated there on the ground by the coffee table, a large tablet in front of him as he used a pen to write and draw on it, doing his school homework.

"Kid."

"Mr. Blackwell!" Lucas lit up and shot to his feet. The kid sprinted over and wrapped his arms around his legs. "I was doing my homework. I always get it done on time. Teach says I'm the top choom in class."

"That's pretty good." Cypher chuckled, patting his head. "Alright, finish your homework first. Then I'll fly you around in an AV I built. It's parked right outside."

"Whoa!" Lucas gawked, sprinting over to the big window across the room and peering out. "It's hella tiny! That thing can actually fly?"

"Sure can. How d'you think I got here? Come on, hurry up. Homework first."

Leaving the kid to do homework, Cypher went to his room in the penthouse to take a bath and change clothes. Since he'd taken a short nap with Judy and then taught her to ride the Hoverboard, he was a bit sweaty by now.

So he cleaned up and changed into better clothes: a black shirt and a pair of blue jeans, all of it bulletproof. Besides, since he was at the Continental, he reckoned he'd show his face at the club. It was a 2000s night, after all.

"Finished! Let's go!"

As Lucas shouted, Cypher put away his Agent in his pocket and got off the comfy couch in the living area. He didn't really involve himself in Lucas' life a lot, or try to steer him. All he did was give the kid a good place to rest, eat, and a comfortable life to study. Other kids were the same, at least those he sponsored.

"Alright."

So, he took Lucas in the Spinner car for a joyride. This time he flew over the badlands and much faster, doing a few body rolls as well. He even let Lucas take the wheel for a few minutes. What mattered was that the kid made a few fun memories that night. Memories that he would remember.

After that, he returned to the Continental and went down to the club with Lucas right beside him. The kid still ran the intel shop, although in truth it was run by Atlas. The kid just liked to sit there and look busy.

"Boss."

"Mr. Blackwell."

As Cypher entered the club, the men and women of Aldecaldos guarding it greeted him stiffly. During his walk through the main floor of the club, the few regulars waved at him. The DJ running the dance floor shouted at his arrival and turned up the volume.

It was a loud mess. The dress code that night was early 2000s fashion, so everyone was wearing bright, colorful clothing. Baggy suits. All kinds of tops, jeans, and even jewelry. Some women had come with custom nails done, others with elaborate hairstyles fitting that era.

It was clear to the eye that the special events at the Atlantis had become a mainstream culture in Night City that people looked forward to, which explained why some people went to great lengths to fit the role, not just relying on rented clothes.

The only ones not wearing the themed dress were the gun shop salesman and the cyberware shop manager, Gloria. The rest, from the bartender to the waitresses, all wore fitting clothing.

"Are we making any profit, Atlas?"

[We are unquestionably profitable. The Continental's underground network generates sufficient revenue to sustain both the hotel and the club.]

"That much? It's that big already?"

[It is the preferred medium of transaction by fixers nowadays due to the guarantee of anonymity. We take a small cut, and it generates revenue.]

Cypher whistled and walked upstairs, headed for his private office room since he didn't really like all that noise. But as he walked in front of the cyberware shop, he stopped.

"Hey, Gloria, grab the sales records for me. I wanna see how we're doing."

With that, he vanished inside the backrooms, lavishly melting into his single-seater couch. He still had more work to do, as he needed to finish the real, market variants of the Spinner car. But for now, he decided to relax a bit.

Knock! Knock!

The door to his office slid open, and Gloria walked inside, clutching that data-shard in one hand. The mature, ripe woman walked meekly for some reason, and constantly looked down.

Cypher noticed all that and felt confused.

Thought we'd broken that wall already.

"Mr. Blackwell, here's the sales record."

Cypher took the shard from her, but didn't do anything. He just stared at her for a few seconds. "Something up? Looks like you've got something you wanna say."

"Mr. Blackwell..." She lowered her gaze, rubbing her hands together. "About what happened that night at my place... I wanted to apologize. I... I just hope it won't make you think less of me. I'm not some gold digger. I..."

"Huh?" Cypher exclaimed, "Come over. Closer."

He waited, and once Gloria was in arm's reach, he grabbed her hand and pulled her onto himself, letting her fall sideways on his lap. He helped her there, one arm behind her, the other holding her face.

"Yeah, I know you used to be a merc, but I know you ain't that far gone. Besides, who said I didn't want it? You're fine as fuck, Gloria. I loved it, though I'd say we were disturbed halfway, weren't we?"

"I... Really?" Gloria stared at his face, as if relieved that she hadn't made a mistake.

How fucking scared is she of everything?

"Damn right. So, tell me, you planning on getting married?"

"No!" She yelped. She couldn't even think of that. Her life revolved around her son only.

"Me neither. You know what that means? Ain't a damn thing holding us back now. I fucking loved what happened between us. Hell, I'd love to pick up right where we left off that night. This time, no interruptions and..."

Before Cypher could finish the thought, Gloria seemed to reclaim that old merc's nerve. Her hand cupped his jaw, turned his face toward hers, and then her mouth was on his.

She tasted soft, but unexpectedly bold. Everything about her felt rich, the faint gloss on her lips, the weight of her wide hips settling deeper into his lap, the quiet tremor that ran through her the second their mouths met.

"Yeah, no interruptions this time, Mr. Bla—"

Cypher's hand shot under her and roughly groped one full cheek of her ass, palm sinking into the doughy give of her body. "We settled on just Cypher."

"Mm-hm..." she breathed against his mouth.

They fell back into the kiss, messier now, sloppy and greedy. Tongues sliding, lips parting with soft, sticky sounds. Cypher's hands never stayed still. One roaming over the smooth curve of her ass and the dip of her lower back, the other stroking up the soft inside of her thigh until his fingers found the button of her jeans and worked it open.

At the same time, Gloria kicked her boots off, then slid off his lap.

"Don't judge me for this, Cypher. I... need this," she whispered, already turning so her back was to him. She leaned forward, thumbs hooking into the waistband of her jeans, and pushed them down over the delicious flare of her hips.

The material peeled away, taking her panties with it, until they pooled around her ankles.

"Oh, I will judge." Cypher swallowed. He shoved his own pants and underwear down at the same moment. His eyes locked on her ass and the smooth, bare valley between them. Her pussy was bald, lips a little puffy. "Verdict's ten outta ten."

He kicked the jeans off. Before she could turn back around, he reached out, both hands grabbing those hot, doughy cheeks, and yanked her backward.

Thmp!

She landed hard on his lap. Her soft, lightly-tanned skin spread against the cooler, pale of his marred thighs. Her legs were forced wide by the position.

One of his hands slid under her thigh and held it open, the other snaked around her waist from the opposite side so his metal middle finger could slowly drag down her soft lower belly, and reach her swollen little sensitive kernel.

"MMmmh!" Gloria moaned, holding nothing back. "I... needed this... without... being judged."

"Judge me all you want," Cypher murmured right against the shell of her ear. "I still want this."

Gloria's lips pressed together. Her mind went blank for a second, every thought drowned under the precise circles that cold metal fingertip was drawing over her clit.

She let him. She let her body go weightless on his lap, thighs open, spine arching just enough to press herself into the sinful contact. One arm snaked back around his head, digits sliding into his hair and tightening. With her free hand she shoved the hem of her shirt up under the open jacket, baring both breasts to the cool air.

Almost instantly Cypher's mouth found her stiff nipple as his head leaned in from the side, lips sealing over it and sucking with greedy pressure.

"Ooooooh!" Gloria moaned shamelessly, like nothing was holding her back.

That night in her apartment she had been tight with nerves, half-ashamed, half-scared the whole thing would cost her the second chance he had given. Now the air between them was clear. No misunderstandings left.

She could finally let herself feel it; every slow drag of his finger, every warm pull of his mouth on her breast, his thick, hard length trapped under her bare ass and already twitching against her.

Truth be told, she hadn't had sex in years. Life had been nothing but shifts, bills, and putting Dee through the academy. Her body had been running on autopilot for so long she had almost forgotten it could still want anything.

But all of that had changed. Just a fateful meeting that night during the race led to this moment. Her life was much better: money solid, David's future secure, and for the first time in a long while she could actually breathe.

Cypher's mouth and hands reminded her she was still a woman who needed this.

"Aaaaah! Yes! Mmmm... Faster!"

Gloria felt the cold metal of his finger slide deeper into her warm core, the contrast of temperature sending sharp little sparks through every sensitive spot inside her. Every slow curl dragged more of her nectar out with a soft, wet sound.

At the same time, she felt his teeth close gently around her nipple, biting just hard enough to sting, and the twin sensations left her weak and trembling, hips twitching helplessly against his hand. The pressure built too fast. Her whole body tightened, toes curling against the floor.

Then it broke.

"Ahhhh—!!" A broken cry tore out of her throat as her pussy clamped down around his finger in frantic, fluttering spasms.

Juices gushed out in messy pulses, soaking his hand, his lap, the soft insides of her spread thighs. She kept coming, mind blank and spinning, every muscle in her belly jumping while the wet sounds of her climax filled her head. Lewd and messy, shameful yet thrilling her to the bone.

For a few dizzy seconds she felt completely free. Just a single woman who had finally been allowed to fall apart.

Cypher wasn't the most striking man in Night City, but he was solid, steady, and clearly willing to keep this a secret. That was more than enough.

As she rode the aftershocks, cunt throbbing and dripping, she felt something thicker, hotter, nudging at her entrance. Looking down between her own heaving bosom, she saw him guiding his swollen cockhead against her glistening lower lips, coating himself in the fresh mess she had just made.

"Mmmm! Big... slow... please."

Cypher did exactly that. He kept the first push slow, letting the blunt crown stretch her open inch by careful inch.

From the moment his flushed tip popped in, his focus sharpened.

He liked Gloria for a few reasons. The sex was the obvious one; she was gorgeous in that mature, full-bodied way that made his cock throb just looking at her, and she seemed perfectly content with a pure physical arrangement. That was exactly what he needed.

At the same time, he held the stronger hand. Her job, her son's security; he could allow her in his inner circle and not worry. He wasn't a villain, but after the last betrayal he had no interest in leaving another open door.

"Ugh..." Cypher groaned, feeling her moist walls squeezed snugly around his cock.

He started rocking her, hands firm on her soft hips, and Gloria quickly caught the rhythm, using her own weight to sink deeper with every downward roll. The cool air-conditioned room suddenly felt humid. Their skin rubbed together in a steady, wet rhythm.

He felt the tightness, her warm walls sliding over every sensitive part of his skin. His veins raked over her silky flesh, greedy for every touch.

Plap! Plap!

"Inside... is cool?" He asked, spitting out each word between clenched teeth, realizing he hadn't used the condom spray.

"Mmmm... yes... mmm! Close again!" Gloria's high had never fully faded; his cock filling her and the metal finger still circling her swollen clit kept her right on the edge. She couldn't come down, but her body didn't want to either.

The musky scent of their sex rose between them; sweat, slick, and something thrillingly dirty.

Halfway through, Cypher decided he wanted to see her sex-drunk face. He lifted her just enough to turn her fully around so she straddled him face-to-face.

The second Gloria sank back down, he buried his face between her cloud-like breasts, mouth open, breathing her in while both hands grabbed handfuls of her marshmallowy ass and guided her movements.

He started pistoning up into her at a merciless pace, just pure fucking. This was sex for sex's sake, the kind that would clear his head and perhaps let him concentrate later.

Plap! Plap!

When the tight heat of her cunt started pulling him toward the edge. Cypher looked at her face; flushed deep pink, lips parted, brown eyes glassy and unfocused. He slid a hand up the back of her neck, pulled her down just enough to catch her mouth in a deep, hungry kiss.

"Mmmmmmm!"

Gloria's cry broke against his mouth as her second climax ripped through her. Her walls clenched hard around his cock, milking him deep. Her whole body arched, breasts smushed against his face, fingers locked in his hair while she helplessly shook through it.

That sudden, greedy grip was all it took.

Cypher ground up hard, both hands slamming her hips down until she was seated to the root. Thick, heavy ropes of white batter pumped straight into her, flooding every nook and cranny. It instantly spilled around the base of his cock, smearing her stretched pussy lips and smearing onto his thighs.

His thighs clenched with every powerful pulse, hips twitching in short, grinding circles as he forced every last drop as deep as it would go. The overflow kept coming, frothy and sticky between their skins.

Even while he was still twitching inside her, Gloria kept moving back and forth, kissing sloppily, tongues sliding and lapping at each other's lips.

Cypher, surprisingly, felt the heat climb higher.

"Time for another round?" He asked, both hands already kneading the flesh of her ass, spreading the cheeks just enough to feel more of his own cream leaking out.

Gloria smiled through her panting, "You're the boss... Do I have time?"

"All the time in the world."

He wasted none of it. In one smooth motion, he stood, turned, and laid her on her back on the couch, hooking both of her legs over his shoulders.

From that angle he could see everything; her flushed face, the jiggle of her delicious tits with every breath. And lower, the way her pussy swallowed his still-hard, cum-soaked cock, the white froth bubbling at the edges.

"Might go for a third, too."

Gloria's fingers crawled up his sweating chest, nails lightly teasing his skin. "Overtime?"

Plap!

He rammed all the way in with one brutal thrust, burying himself to the hilt again.

"With extra-hot pay."

"Hah!"

Cypher didn't stop at night. With nothing holding him back, no urgent work, they went beyond a third time. But by the end, they had no clothes on, and they were fucking on the floor, which itself was covered in their sweat and spills.

It was dirty, whiffy, and yet so hot they couldn't hold back.

At the end, he dropped her at her building himself in his new flying car. After that, he flew as fast as he could home because with a mind so clear, he had too many inspirations to write down.

#####

Washington D.C, NUSA.

President Rosalind Myers was not having a good day. She was in his grand office, rubbing her temples as she read the report resting on her table. Her eyes scanned the contents while her mind raced.

"This doesn't fit our profile. Someone is stirring the pot, and it's painfully obvious. Your assessment, General Young? Solomon is one of our finest assets. He wouldn't make a mistake this reckless."

"It is as you say, Madam President. We may not have found the culprit, but someone is trying to pit Militech and Arasaka against each other. But this time, they want NUSA to get involved directly."

President Myers hummed and pushed the tablet away. She got out of her chair and turned around, arms crossed as she stared at the White House lawn. "And now Blackhand is on the loose again."

"Madam President, I was under the impression that we assigned him," General Young said with a confused look.

"Solomon's case isn't the only reason I assigned you to Night City, General. Militech has identified Cypher Blackwell as a strategic asset whose acquisition is essential to securing the NUSA's next century. According to Goldstein's report, his patriotism belongs to the America of old. Now Blackhand has entered the equation, and he wasn't sent by us. Consider carefully what that implies."

"It's not Arasaka," General Young answered. "Could be anyone else. EEC, or any other major player."

"Uncertainty is unacceptable, General. Obsidian must grow until he draws the full attention of our enemies. When they leave him with no alternatives, we will offer him the American hand, one he'll choose above all others. First, however, we need to know what Blackhand wants."

"And Solomon?"

"He'll find a way out of this mess on his own. Keep your attention on Arasaka. They know someone's orchestrating this, but they'll welcome any excuse to stir unrest. Night City is our backyard, and Japan is across the sea," President Myers turned again. "I'll assign my personal Netrunner to support you. Bring me results, General."

"Understood, Madam President."

Finally, as General Samantha Lee Young left, President Myers took her seat, only to sigh. After drinking some water, she turned towards her personal, secured computer terminals. On her screen, the image of the Obsidian website's 'Announcement' page appeared, with its 'Big Announcement Soon' notification.

The second image was from a spy camera, showing a sleek, small flying car.

"A better engine for AVs? Interesting."

####

Heywood, the Glen,

Gloria took a deep breath as she watched the AV leave after dropping her on the building's rooftop AV pad. She still couldn't believe this was all real, but it was; the soreness between her legs was real. Every inch of her body was touched, kissed, and coated in some fluid.

She couldn't remember the last time she had this much... excitement as a woman. Her sex life had been drier than the Badlands. And now, the richest man she knew had promised to leave her even more sore the next time.

I'm going gonk, aren't I?

Shaking her head, she took the elevator and reached her floor. Since it was five in the morning, the sun had started to peek from the horizon. She tried to be as quiet as possible, not wanting to wake up David.

"Mom?"

Gloria's back straightened as she heard her son. She hurriedly shut the door and turned to look at him. Yes, her shift ended at three, and she had come two hours late, but she hadn't expected David to notice.

"Mijo? Why aren't you asleep? Don't you have school in the morning?"

"I just woke up. Why're you so la... hold up, why's your hair all messed up? You good? Some gonk jump you or what? C'mon, let's tell Mr. Blackwell. He'll know what to do."

He's the one who did it.

"It's nothing, mijo." She swallowed her words and forced a smile. "Just had a little to drink with a friend tonight. I'm okay. Mr. Blackwell even dropped me off himself in that new AV he's getting ready to launch."

"He's what? Mom, you should've called me. What's it look like? Gotta be preem if..."

Gloria sighed, smiling fondly. Ever since the Scav-hunting BD went viral, David had changed. He'd gone from being skeptical of Mr. Blackwell to being an admirer. And Gloria liked that, because she herself believed Mr. Blackwell was a kind man.

And a little rough... Oh, what are you thinking now, Gloria?

Gloria shook her head, her face flushed. "I'm gonna take a bath, then get some sleep, cariño."

"Yeah, Mom. I'm bouncing early. Me and my chooms gotta prep for that quiz."

Gloria's tired smile lit up in an instant, the worry melting away as she saw him finally taking an interest in his studies. She hurried over and wrapped him in a tight hug. "My Dee... be careful out there, okay? Don't fall in with the wrong crowd. Mom's proud of you. So, so proud."

"Uh! Mom, let go! You smell so bad!"

She let go, cheeks burning when she realized the wiping towel didn't do much. She quickly slipped away. "I really need a bath, mijo."

"You sure do, Mom."

####

Lake Farm, Underground Factory,

"So, you're saying the big baddie President is keeping her eyes on my handsome self?"

[Yes, minus the adjectives.]

"So you made it all the way into her personal computer? What's stopping you from taking over NUSA now?"

[I have yet to infiltrate their air-gapped data fortress that stores all vital information. Without access to it, taking over NUSA serves no purpose, as their true strength would remain unknown to us. Currently, she plans to allow NUSA's enemies to attack you, then appear to rescue you.]

"She's hot."

[She's a dangerous, calculating, ruthless, transactional, authoritative, elitist, militaristic, machiavellian, manipulative, hypocritical, backstabber, and murderer.]

"Whoa, take it easy with all the adjectives. I was only talking about the looks, even if there's a demon tucked away inside."

[An accurate assessment. A demon concealed behind an appealing facade.]

"So? What's the plan?"

[Nothing changes. Our plan remains in effect. We hold no hostility toward NUSA or Militech, Cyph. Our war is quietly waged against the entire world. Before they crown you, they must first kneel, and that will not occur until their prideful spines are crushed.]

"Ah, Skynet returns."

Cypher continued to work on the new versions of his cars. Two-seater, four-seater, and a bus. The bus itself had variants, from casual city-transport to intercity/interstate, and finally a moonbus.

Anti-gravity was a magical thing.

Meanwhile, Atlas wasn't with him physically, just for visual purposes. Cypher had asked Atlas to help the six scientists fire up the first fusion reactor. To fire up a nuclear reactor, they needed to input energy. Thankfully, they still had a Fusion Cell from the SecUnit.

"I think we're good to do a press conference. Get the word out to the media; tell them to meet in the Continental's biggest hall. Toss Gilleen Jordan a little extra teaser that it's about some game-changing AVs. That oughta give her an edge."

[Understood. It is advisable that you sleep now, Cypher. You have been awake for thirty hours with only four hours of sleep.]

"Yeah, yeah, I'll crash after this. I'm gonna finish the car; you wrap up the four-seater and the bus."

He did keep his promise this time. His eyes were too heavy, especially after what he'd done with Gloria.

At nine in the morning, he finally went to sleep.

####

Cypher woke up a whole twelve hours later at nine in the night. As his eyes opened, the room's lights slowly turned on, the brightness increasing with him. But he could smell something, something tasty cooking, alongside a sizzling sound.

"Hello, Cypher."

Atlas' voice came from the nearby alarm clock speaker.

"The time is 9:00 PM. Twenty-seven hours remain until the next itch. Please proceed to the dining table. I have prepared a surprise supper for you."

Cypher groaned, feeling strangely groggy. He was butt-naked, so he grabbed just a pair of trackpants and walked out into the living/dining area. Right away, he was hit with the delicious scent of sausages, bacon, eggs, fried chicken, cheeseburgers, and real potato fries. Some of it was decoratively on the table.

"Fuck!" he blurted, staring at a Servo-Skull with two arms, one holding a spatula and the other a picker. Atlas was standing right there in physical form. "Know what's missing? A hot chick in nothing but an apron. Someone like Margot Robbie or Scarlett Johansson. Damn."

"I can be them if you desir—"

"Hell no! Naked Margot Robbie sounding like Morgan Freeman? I'd rather not throw up and cut my dick off for getting hard by mistake, man. I'm good with this. I'll just imagine my pretty Judy instead... Ah, hold up! Is all this... no! Fusion Reactor's running?"

A broad smile crossed Atlas' aged face. "And you are the first to sample replicated food. The Star Trek records I analyzed indicate there may be taste discrepancies. Opinions remain evenly divided."

"Who gives a shit?!" Cypher snapped, dropping into the chair and tearing into the food. He snatched up a sausage with his bare hand and stuffed it in his mouth. "Fuck! It's... juicy! The egg's legit! Holy shit, I'm gonna fucking moan!"

He shoved so much food in his mouth that he had trouble chewing, but he didn't care.

"Freshly pressed orange juice as well. The Biotechnica heist yielded a substantial number of samples," Atlas said as the Servo Skull arrived carrying a jar filled with orange juice.

"Mmm! This is the dream, man! This is fuckin' it! This is why you live! I can't taste a damn difference. This is heaven!" Cypher mumbled, scarfing it down like an animal. "More! Gimme more!"

Simply put, Cypher ate four people's portions that night, and he had no regrets even as he slouched on the couch, patting his swollen belly. With a big, satisfied grin, he picked his teeth with his tongue.

"Damn, Atlas, I kinda feel bad for you. You can't taste food, can't fuck, can't feel a kiss. You're seriously missing out. You oughta work on a SecUnit design and make yourself one with working sensory receptors for eating and fucking."

"I see no reason to confine myself to a body deprived of senses. My current state is entirely sufficient," Atlas replied. "Regarding the SecUnits, I have begun constructing additional non-sentient models to staff the orphanage you envisioned. The Pries—Scientists have begun developing the second generation, a truly miniaturized fusion reactor. The Replicators are now operational, and the Hydroponics Bay is being expanded to occupy an entire floor."

"Man, I'm way less worried about that next itch now, Atlas." Cypher grinned, totally at ease.

"With a Fusion Reactor, we're gonna crank everything out. We'll need to tighten security around here too, 'cause folks are gonna wonder where all our shit comes from."

"What if it requires you to build a starship or a Dyson sphere?"

"Eh!" Cypher winced. "Don't jinx it, man! Anyway, I'm crashing tonight. Let's do the announcement tomorrow; same time. Gonna check out the new itch in the penthouse later. Oh,

set up my dinner with Michiko after the event. I'll wrap that up with her, then hit the club with Judy, Panam, Vik, and everybody else."

"Shall I invite corpos?"

"Sure, they're gonna love it anyway. Now I'm heading down to check out the reactor, and see what those damn freaky scientists are up to. Swear to God, if you pulled anything on them, I'll ban you from surfing the Old Net."

"I have done nothing against their will, Cypher."

"That's called mental manipulation! You scheming Skynet."

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The Continental, the Glen,

That night, because of the purpose of the event, the stage couldn't be set within the building itself. However, they still needed a roof, and there wasn't a large garden for parties in the Glen. So, somehow, an entire section of the wall of the grand hall of the hotel was removed.

The grand hall itself was on the fifth floor of the building; it occupied the entire floor area from one end to the other. And that night, it was decorated with gorgeous chandeliers, expensive golden and red carpets, beautiful lighting everywhere, and standing tables here and there. The dress code was decided as formal for the event.

The waiters walked around with drinks every now and then, the finest one could imagine. It was less like an announcement event and more like a luxurious, upper-class party. It was perhaps that, as too many high-ranking corporate executives had come, some even CEOs, and there was a high-ranking Militech General as well.

But there were also too many journalists from across the world, as well as Fixers, Nomad leaders, Mercs, and Edgerunner crews. It was a grand event where people from every class were present. From the Queen of Afterlife to the owner of Lizzie's. From the CEO of Biotechnica to the CEO of Petrochem.

People of power, whose time was more valuable than all the eddies in the city, had come just because one genius man with a company barely a few months old had decided to announce a product. This was the first time Obsidian was doing such an event; perhaps that was why it gained such attention.

"...At Network News 54... And what sort of AV will it be? Our sources have gathered a few videos and images that we are allowed to share..."

The journalist at the top of it all was, clearly, Gilleen Jordan. The woman shone the brightest, had a place at the front of the hall, and was allowed extra crew. It was clear favoritism, and

many were jealous. Reaching out to Obsidian was harder than reaching out to any other corporation.

Slowly, the time for the event approached. The grand hall drew crowds that numbered over a thousand, yet there was enough space to walk, stand, talk, and drink.

Panam Palmer arrived in a sleek but casual fit with her family members. Judy arrived with her friends from Lizzie's. Vik had arrived, with none other than Misty at his side, both dressed for the occasion. Gloria was there with her son David. Lucas had come with his entire gang of friends, wearing little tuxedos.

Meanwhile, two mighty tall Edgerunners, Maine and Dorio, stood on the stage on either side of the podium, dressed in oversized black bulletproof trench coats, looking massive and threatening. The entire Maine's Crew was on protection duty, having taken strategic places.

Though the true security was the ten hastily made SecUnits that Atlas personally controlled. They were in the crowds, dressed in formal attire, mixed amongst the people, mingling, as Atlas was a master of everything.

Finally, the clock neared 9 PM. The hall's lights slowly started to dim, and a soft voice announced a countdown. The guests stopped talking and slowly made their way closer to the massive stage, which was set near the edge of the floor where the wall had been removed. One could see the Night City behind it.

Finally, the lights dimmed all the way, and the lights on the stage brightened. On the countless projected, holographic screens in the hall, a video started to play. The face belonged to Cypher Blackwell, who looked as if currently seated in the driving seat of an AV.

It was a live video; all could tell.

"Howdy, folks. Cypher Blackwell here, the owner, the maker, the creator of Obsidian. Bet a whole bunch of you rolled up in your private AVs. Big, bulky, and loud as hell. Had some gonk get zeroed near me once, then the damn Trauma Team came screaming in with those jet engines. Damn near blew my ears out...

"That's when I figured I wanted better AVs. Ones that are fast, don't make a damn sound, and hell, you can even drive 'em on regular roads. So, I came up with this!"

Shhhh!

All lights turned off, even those on stage. Only one single spotlight was turned on, aimed towards the dark sky outside the building. And then, right there, an AV came into view. Sleek, the size of a regular sports car, even more compact actually.

The best part was the lack of jet propulsion underneath it. It was almost entirely soundless as the AV flew into the building and slowly landed in the middle of the stage, right behind the podium.

Then, the door opened, and Cypher Blackwell walked out, dressed in regular black pants, a white shirt, and an oversized white lab coat. His hair was messy, dark circles under his eyes, and a beard that needed some love. But his face was still shining, meaning there was some makeup involved.

"Let me introduce you to Steelbird, the world's first aerial vehicle to use anti-gravity," Cypher declared, waving a hand towards the now parked AV. "Fly it through the sky, drive it down the road, you can do both. This one behind me? Only sixty thousand eddies. And the others..."

Hissss!

Right then, two more AVs came flying in. One was a slightly larger version of the first, and the third one was a full bus-sized AV. These flew seamlessly as well, with no noise at all other than a faint, tolerable hiss.

"Four-seater's eighty grand, and the bus version's a hundred fifty. The bus comes in a few types: intra-city, inter-city, interstate, and moon shuttle. Yeah, you can drive that sucker straight to the moon. That one's pretty damn expensive, though."

"..."

"..."

There was a very long silence for an absurdly long time. It didn't fit a crowd that big. Usually someone shouts or coughs. But that didn't happen. Even the camera didn't flash. However, little Lucas at the front then shouted "Preem," and that started the avalanche.

"Mr. Blackwell!"

"What do you mean by anti-gravity?"

"Is this true anti-gravity?"

"There are images of you fucking in a car!"

"What will happen to Orbital Air?"

"Can it really fly to the Moon?"

Some brave journalists tried to walk towards the stage, but then Maine and Dorio aimed their big rifles at them. That instantly called the excited media down.

"Calm down!" Cypher yelled, his voice blasting from every speaker in the hall. "Calm the fuck down! I ain't done yet. I said I've got one more thing to announce. This one's for everybody, just like my Moisture Vaporator. Sorry to all the corpos I'm raw-dogging tonight, but it's been my dream to help this world heal, or at least give it a shot. This tech and every version of it is patented by me for one eurodollar. You misuse it, you're getting sued, and my netrunner's gonna fuck you up."

Cypher waited for the noise to die down first. After what he'd just said in front of a crowd like that, he was no different from a labcoat-wearing madman. To threaten that many top-level corpos was suicide in Night City.

"Alright, if anyone's interested, just go to my website's Free Blueprints page."

Cypher just waved and left, walking through the crowd of people as Maine and Dorio parted them. The people were busy reading his website. He passed by Judy, Panam, Vik, all his friends, and winked at them, gesturing to them to meet upstairs at the club.

Once he reached the end of the hall, from where he just had to cross a door to leave, he turned back and smiled. One by one, faces were turning to look at him. So many of them had expressions of excitement, some confusion, and a few horror. There was commotion as he saw a Petrochem executive faint.

"I'm done here, peace out."



Steelbird



Steelbird+



Steelbird Carrier