

## **Cyberpunk: Badland Madman Chapter 18 - Scav Hunting, Panam's Heart, Skullwork, Steamy Interview & Certainty**

The Continental, The Glen,

The entire building that housed the Atlantis had already been renamed The Continental, both on CitiNet and official records. It was filled with Microbots on each floor that worked day and night to convert the building into the desired look.

The only living, breathing inhabitant of that building was a little boy, living alone in the luxurious penthouse on the roof, with a gorgeous view of the city. He was alone, but not sad or lacking spirit.

"Oh! So yummy!"

Lucas sat in front of the massive TV, watching a cartoon about a boy named Ben with an alien watch. He didn't know about it, but again, he didn't know anything. Last time he watched TV for fun was... he couldn't remember.

In his lap was a bowl of tasty ramen imported from Japan. It was the closest thing to the real one, and Lucas loved it.

But still, when he eyed the massive glass window, he sighed.

"I wonder what Mr. Blackwell is doing right now."

####

Bellevue Overwalk, Kabuki,

*[Take the right, Cyph. Go upstairs.]*

Cypher went right, going out of the alley. The lights were turned off, no street lights, no lamps. His night vision feed through the brainwave interface showed him everything. He held the M221 Saratoga, aimed ahead, while listening to Atlas and following the hints.

It was a large apartment complex building. Not very spread out, but it was tall with more than twenty floors. The stairs he walked took him straight to the fourth floor. He didn't know why an entire walkway was designed to take you to that floor from outside the building, but it was there.

*"Where's all the other folks living here?"*

*[They are inside. I have locked their doors and isolated their neural links. They cannot hear what we do.]*

*"See! That's why I ain't ever getting that shit in my head."*

Cypher kept climbing until he reached the top of that stairway. Strangely, that single hallway could be accessed by two different stairways. And they didn't take Cypher to a floor, but rather one single door.

The entire complex and expensive multi-entry stairway was designed to take you to just one door on the third floor. That alone spoke of the importance of that place.

*[Crouchwalk.]*

By then, Cypher had become accustomed to Atlas, and he moved in sync with his AI friend. He instantly dropped to a knee and started crouch-walking, keeping himself hidden although it was all dark.

*[Proceed left at the next turn. That path will take you directly to the door. There is a large man stationed as a guard. He remains unaware of the lighting change, currently occupied with his holophone.]*

*"Alright, let's keep it quiet for now."*

Cypher carefully crouchwalked and took the left turn. The elevated alleyway curved from there, so he kept going forward against the wall.

Thup!

The suppressed single gunshot echoed for a split second. With absolute accuracy, Cypher shot the man in the head. But the very next second, he shot at the knee, urging the dead body to fall forward, instead of backward on the closed door.

Cypher stood up and walked over to the closed white door with Japanese written on it. Before proceeding, he paused, standing right on top of the fat body of the guy he just killed. He let his assault carbine hang at his side as he fixed his tie and balaclava.

*"Only block the ones going for my head. Let everything else hit. I need that sting, or I'm not gonna grow."*

*[That is an idiotic idea. Putting yourself in danger will bring nothing.]*

*"Yeah, you're not wrong. But all I've done in this body is ride the edge. If I don't improve, my senses and skills are gonna go dull. Don't let me die, no crit hits, alright? I'll handle the rest with this suit. Oh, and throw on some music. Crank it through every speaker in the building."*

*[Humans are fascinating at times.]*

*"Thanks for the compliment."*

Cypher grabbed his submachine gun and aimed it at the door. He didn't have to give any sign; he just let his heartbeat enter an eased state. Atlas sensed that and opened the door.

"Hah! Good one!" Cypher praised the music choice. It was the exact one he remembered from John Wick. Though he couldn't remember the song title.

*[Two moving closer.]*

He received all the information directly into his eyes and ears. He saw the incoming Scavs marked despite the darkness.

Thup! Thup!

Two shots, he killed them both. But those flashes created enough light for everyone to become alert. Cypher quickly rolled to the side.

Bang!

Gunshots struck where he had been standing before. He also saw where they came from and proceeded. It was a nicely furnished floor, a karaoke studio from the looks of it. Where he entered was the wide reception. As he went in the door, he reached a long alley with cabins on each side. But he noticed those cabinet walls didn't touch the ceilings.

It would have been a suicide if he hadn't had Atlas.

Cypher threw a grenade in one of the cabinets that had four Scavs hiding.

Boom!

The explosion lit up the entire floor. All the glasses in the distance shattered. Cries and screams rang out. Fire broke out.

"What is this place?" he asked.

*[The establishment is a Tyger Claws-run karaoke bar. Scavs used it as a lure for women, slowly forcing them into making BDs, then XBD, and in the end harvesting them as dead bodies.]*

"No holding back then."

Through his super supportive vision, he saw three Scavengers coming towards him from a distance. He saw them through the walls and prepared himself. However, he was stuck in a tight alley.

He quickly let go of his machine gun as he started to run forward to make it in time. His one hand grabbed the handgun, the other gripped the collar of the bulletproof vest as he pulled it over his face and front as protection.

As soon as he reached the end of that hallway, he leapt forward, spinning midair to look at the three Scavengers left in surprise at his entry.

Bang!

Cypher shot at one, square in the face on the nose. He fell to the ground and continued to roll himself.

Ratatatata!

The two remaining Scavs sprayed bullets at him.

*"Fuck! It does hurt!"*

He felt like countless paintballs had struck him far too close. But it wasn't enough to stop him. He jumped sideways, using the office-like area to his advantage. He crouched behind a table and flopped it over for cover.

But he didn't stay there. He left a grenade there and leapt away. As the grenade exploded, and the two Scavs got distracted, they took aim and drilled bullets into their skull.

*[Cyph, do not pierce all their skulls. We need them.]*

*"Ah, damn, yeah. Good looking out. I almost forgot why we're actually here."*

From there, he found the stairs and carefully made his way up. He got shot at and covered himself with his suit. But he noticed whenever Atlas intervened. Those moments meant it was a critical hit, and he took it as a challenge to never lead to such moments.

Bang!

He shot one through the narrow gap between the stairs. The Scav was trying to peek at him.

"Ugh!"

As soon as he reached the floor, he could smell something foul. Plastic flaps were hanging from the ceiling at the entrance of the floor, like a butcher's shop. And inside, he could see through his vision that twelve Scavs waited for him.

He quickly reloaded both his guns and took a deep breath. They knew he was going to enter from there, so he had to make it quick.

Woosh!

He leapt in through the plastic flaps and rolled to the side. He threw his last grenade towards the biggest concentration of Scavs and found cover while getting a dozen bullets shot into his suit jacket. It fucking stung.

*"Did you make the music louder?"*

*[Yes. I am also blaring it in their ears through neural port.]*

Cypher laughed and got up. He covered his face with the suit and aimed. The Scavs, not all, but most, had optic implants that helped them see in the dark. But they weren't as good as what Cypher had.

He ate their bullets, and whenever he shot, one of them dropped.

By then, he had realized what the entire floor was. It was a large, empty hall with multiple operating tables. There was blood everywhere, on the floor, on the chairs. There were also a few dead bodies cut open.

It reeked.

Bang!

He ran straight towards the remaining five men; each step was followed by a sideways leap to dodge the bullets. He aimed with a relaxed hand, holding the gun in an impractical way. Shooting felt like a second nature to him.

"Shoot together!"

He heard the Scavs shout in panic. All of them began shooting at once. But he still charged towards them and made a low dive, shooting everyone's legs. But some of them had cyber limbs.

Bang!

He got into a close-quarter fight with the last two Scavs. Their entire lower half were cyberware.

"Fuck!" Cypher cursed when one of them kicked him in the stomach.

Bang!

He eased the gap, side-stepping as another kick came. He pressed his pistol under the Scav's chin and blew the guy's brains out. The last one was right behind him, no longer attacking, but retreating.

Thud!

Before Cypher even did anything, Atlas fried his brain. There was no escape for the Scavs from that hell.

*[This floor is clear.]*

Cypher moved for the stairs again, the final floor where the hostages were also held.

*[The remaining thirteen members are upstairs. That floor contains living spaces, captive holding, BD and XBD recording studios, and the local gang boss's office. The captives are in the XBD studio. Aside from their boss, the twelve members are waiting for you at both the stair entrance and the elevator entrance.]*

*"There's an elevator? Alright, send it up, keep them busy. I'm gonna try some wild stuff this time. When I say it, blind them for three seconds, cool?"*

*[You won't make it.]*

*"You don't even know what I'm planning. You can't read my mind."*

*[I have computed all possible scenarios, and I know what you will attempt. You will fail.]*

*"Yeah? Then I'm gonna prove you wrong."*

*[Real life is not a movie, Cypher.]*

*"Watch me."*

Cypher checked his bullets again and walked upstairs. The music was loud, and another song was playing. His footsteps were inaudible, so he ran as fast as he could upstairs and reached the large single door.

"Now!"

He kicked open the door and saw eight men standing right there, aiming towards him. It was pitch black in there, but he used his night vision, jumped like a maniac, and did something crazy. Simply because he had the luxury to fuck around.

Bang!

He landed both his feet on top of the nearest man's shoulder, shot into the head, and jumped to another man. He shot him as well, albeit nearly falling. He leaped for the third one, and this time...

Thud!

*"Fuck! You were right."*

*[I have recorded that from eight different angles.]*

"..."

Cypher fell on his ass, not because he missed the man but because his jump broke the man's spine.

Bang!

He still killed him. But then, three seconds were over, and panic spread. He rolled away quickly, continuously spraying the SMG in their direction, gunning down half of them. But then they all retreated into multiple rooms.

*"Atlas. Point me to the room where the captives are. Kill the rest, except for the boss."*

*[Third door to the right. Two Scavs inside.]*

Without wasting time and stopping all his fun and games, he kicked the XBD studio's door. His night vision showed him the situation inside. A child, two women, and a man. All of them were huddled in a corner.

The two Scavs were...

*Huh?*

The two Scavs were lying on the floor, hands above their heads.

"We surrender!"

Cypher walked over to them with a scoff. "Like I give a shit."

Bang! Bang!

Quickly after that, Cypher fixed his tie, put away the guns, and walked towards the four captives. He waves his hands, smiling.

"No need to worry. You all are safe no—"

"Help!"

Cypher dumbly stared at them. Atlas had already turned the lights on in that room so they could see him.

*[Cypher. You have a balaclava on, and you're covered in blood from head to toe.]*

*"Ah, you're right."*

Cypher quickly removed the balaclava and showed his mostly clean face.

"Hey, don't freak out, alright? You're good. Just hang here. NCPD's gonna roll up and grab you soon," Cypher told them and walked out of the studio.

He headed towards the leader's room. Since the lights had turned on and the music was running at low, he reckoned all the others were dead. With his handgun at the ready, he let Atlas slide open the doors.

"Stay back!"

Cypher walked inside, following that voice. Right there, behind the grand table, was a single man, covered in chrome from head to toe. The entire jaw was fake, and fake pipes were going down the throat. It was a tall man, clearly enhanced with cyberware.

"Relax," Cypher said as he aimed the gun.

"You won't get anything from me! You won't!"

*[Duck.]*

Cypher's body moved on its own and ducked, used to following advice.

Pooooof!

Right that instant, the Scav leader's entire body exploded from inside out, splattering everything across the room and raining down blood everywhere, covering Cypher again, this time his face as well, since he'd removed the mask.

"Ugh... That's nasty. What was that?"

*[His employer had armed his implants with an explosive. He meant to destroy this room and take you with him. I stepped in at the precise moment and limited the damage to him only.]*

*"Fuck, thanks, Atlas. Anyway, what's the plan? Need me to chop the heads?"*

*[No. You will return to Lake Farm. I will deploy Delamain and bring Microbots here to collect the skulls.]*

"Great!" Cypher yawned and holstered his gun. He turned on his heels and started making his way down. He had no need for the implants there; they were too dirty. He didn't bother checking the systems, as that was Atlas' job.

And he was extremely tired and wanted to sleep. He'd been working nonstop from party to T-Bug to Evelyn to Goldstein, and now ending it with a literal bang.

"Thirty-six kills. Gotta be a record if we could boast about this." Cypher muttered, grabbing a burrito from the first floor's kitchen where he'd first entered. Finally, he headed to the same door he'd entered from.

Wooosh!

He pressed the button on the door, and it slid open.

Cypher froze in place.

"NCPD! Hands above your head!"

"..."

Cypher blinked dumbly, still covered in blood from head to toe, even his face now. The situation didn't look good. He stared left and right. The entire walkway in front of him was filled with blue uniforms and hats. There were even some robots and... a fucking MaxTac AV hovering nearby?

"Hands above your goddamn head!"

Cypher took one last bite of the burrito and then let it drop, raising both his hands. Though deep inside, he was cursing.

*"Atlas! You clanking bastard! You did this, didn't you? Why? You said you got the NCPD under control."*

*[You need street credibility and a reputation as a madman in this city. This was the ideal moment. Every Scav you killed in there was listed as wanted, each with a bounty attached. No laws were broken by your hand.]*

*"Still, man, a heads-up would've been nice. Now they're gonna haul me to the station to grill me, and I'm exhausted, dude."*

*[They will do no such thing. They will smile, greet you properly, take pictures, and treat you like royalty. I will oversee the optics on the Net and within the media as we proceed. For this night, however, you will sleep at the station.]*

*"How can you trust them?"*

*[I don't. But I hold their life, their darkest secrets hostage. And they love money.]*

Cypher sighed and slowly got down on his knee and fell forward, surrendering. Immediately two NCPD officers jumped on him, snatched his guns away and put the cuffs on him.

"Hey! Who touched my ass!" Cypher jokingly barked. "It's a multimillion dollar ass."

A policeman laughed with him.

"We know, Mr. Blackwell."

*Ah, they know my name.*

####

Panam Palmer was in the Charter Hills, having finished an early morning delivery gig. With some light munchies, she relaxed in her truck, seat reclined, and listened to the radio while wondering about her life.

"Gooooood morning, Night City! Yesterday's body-count lottery rounded out to a solid 'n' sturdy eighty! Thirty-six outta Kabuki! Thanks our favorite new corpo boss Cypher Blackwell the Scav Hunter! The Club Atlantis is open again..."

"Pffff~!"

Panam ended up spraying her coffee all over her dashboard and hastened to fix her seat. She grabbed her Agent quickly and searched the CitiNet for this shocking news. As soon as she visited the News 54 website, all she saw was Cypher Blackwell's face.

But instead of being handcuffed, Cypher was standing between four cops, all of them were smiling as if it was a group photo. Cypher was in the same suit as the party, but now it was covered in blood.

"There's a video?!" Panam saw the website tell that a video of the shootout was circulating on the unregulated websites. There was also talks of a BD.

It didn't take long for Panam to go to one of those websites. This one was used mostly by Nomads to post their Wraith hunting, and other crazy gigs. There, at the top, she found a new video posted a few hours ago with over a million views already.

As soon as she clicked, she heard loud music. Most of the video was shot through a night vision filter, and it seemed to be security footage. Right there was Cypher, shooting down enemies with ease which was too damn precise to be human. It was as if Cypher had absolute spatial awareness and full control over his own body and surroundings. Saving himself, crouching, rolling, and...

"Stopping bullets with a jacket? What?!"

She watched as Cypher took insanely accurate shots in ways one wouldn't imagine. Cypher blocked bullets with his suit jacket. It was intense and so fast-paced. Then came the top floor, and she saw Cypher jump on one man's shoulder and shoot his head, then jump on another, and on a third, before gracefully falling to the ground and kept shooting.

Even in close quarters, Cypher dealt with the Scavs with ease.

"He's... too good at this. What is even happening?"

Panam watched in silence, with slight numbness, as the final scene happened in which the Scav boss simply offed himself. "W-Why do this?"

She watched the video again and then read the news. Nearly the entire front page was about Cypher Blackwell, from the picture of the shootout to the photos of the club. There was also talk about Obsidian's new products and an upcoming bulletproof clothing line.

"Is he still at the station?"

Curious, she dialed Cypher's number on the holo. As expected, it didn't connect. But just a few minutes later, she received a text reply, asking her to pick him up from Kabuki's police station.

"He's at the station."

She quickly put away the food she was eating and stepped on the gas, returning to the main highway. It was morning traffic, so it took her time, especially with that big truck. She crossed Japantown West, over the bridge, and reached Kabuki. The police station was at Pinewood St South.

Just as she stopped in front of the station, she saw Cypher walk out, his suit jacket in one hand, bloodstained, his face clean, and the other hand holding a bento box. She didn't get out and let him climb into the passenger seat.

"Morning, gorgeous. Appreciate you coming to grab me."

"Are you okay?" Panam asked, real concern on her face. "I saw the video."

"What video?"

She frowned, then, before driving, pulled up the video on her Agent and handed it to him. "It is all over the Net. Every news channel and radio station is buzzing about it."

Panam noticed how Cypher gawked at the screen, then proudly smirked, and then seemed to mumble something under his breath. She didn't say anything.

"I'm looking sharp as hell in this. Like James Bond or something. Hey, take me to Lake Farm. Also, you got a first aid kit?"

"Behind your seat," she said, punching the destination into the nav. "What were you even doing? I saw you at that party last night, and now this. What the hell happened in just a few hours?"

"Shit happens, Pan."

She noticed from the corner of her eye as Cypher removed his black shirt. She gave a full look and found countless red dots all over his body. They looked like bruises from an impact. And the way Cypher applied some cold packs on them and flinched told her enough.

"Those from the bullets?" she asked. "How did that suit tank all of them? No, hold it, why were you even in there solo? You could have called me. I would have picked up anytime, Cypher."

"Yeah... that's kinda sweet, Pan. But it wasn't a big deal, honestly. I was bored, ran into some Scavs, and dropped them. Good scav's a dead scav, right? Same deal with Wraiths. They had four people grabbed too, two of them kids. They're good now."

"You did it to save people?"

"Huh? I ain't no hero, Pan. Don't take it the wrong way. I did it for me. And yeah, I cooked up a new kind of cloth that can stop high-velocity rounds. What, you want some? I can make you a few like what you're wearing, maybe different colors. But you ain't wearing much, you're gonna have to cover up. Not that I'm complaining, just so we're clear. This is perfect."

Panam rolled her eyes at his shameless compliments and hesitant ogling at her chest. She was used to it, but it was hard to say it didn't do something this time.

"I will think about it. Was going to call you anyway. You said to meet you later at the party. Not sure if it is the right time after all this. But what is this job you mentioned? Said my clan gets work too?" She said, cruising through Heywood. "Mitch is on edge. Swears Saul is ready to cut a deal with Biotechnica."

Truth be told, she was slightly desperate. Her clan was surviving, but not thriving. All their hopes and dreams behind coming to Night City were shattered once they arrived. Legal gigs were limited, and illegal gigs didn't pay unless they involved flatlining someone.

The only hope she had was Cypher. The man was now a corpo. When she'd met him first, he was a nobody, at least that was what she knew. And even now, after seeing that video, she knew Cypher was far from those office-sitting executives.

"That? Eh, not a big deal. I'm starting a few businesses. First one's moving stuff all over the States, mainly into big cities to supply my shops. We're talking guns, bulletproof clothing, and chrome down the line. The second one's the Continental. That building I bought, it's turning into a hotel for bounty hunters, mercs, that crowd. Gonna need some muscle to run the place. And yeah... there's more coming."

Panam ran numbers in her head. Aldecaldos were good at transporting goods across America. That was one of their main jobs to begin with. And to work as security for a hotel seemed reasonable and respectable as well.

"As for you," Cypher continued. "I ain't trying to throw you into danger. But I know you're a beauty with a bite. I'll toss out some risky gigs now and then. You and your Aldecaldos crew can grab a few."

Panam went silent, hearing that. The radio was on low, and as they crossed Arroyo, the city's landscape started to change. More wild, more dirt, more dust. She eyed Cypher now and then, noted him wearing his shirt back on.

Reminding herself that this man standing beside her just killed thirty-six people a few hours ago felt weird. Despite what he did, she felt nothing. If anything, she was impressed. Of course, they were Scavs, but that much violence by a single man wasn't the norm, not even in Night City. And he was mostly ganic, from what she knew.

How did Cypher Blackwell achieve so much in such a short time? She was intrigued and had no answer. Yet at the same time, she felt it was unnecessary to ask. He had already done more than enough.

"Take a left from there. See that lakehouse? That's my crib."

She saw the dirt path going left from the main road, alongside the lake's shore. On the opposite side of that road was an old milk farm, which now looked new with fences and more.

"You live here?"

"Yes, ma'am. I live here, almost died here too. This is where Obsidian was born. C'mon, I think I've got a couple drinks in the fridge."

Panam brought the truck to a halt near the parked car. The lakehouse looked so ordinary from the outside, yet calm. She could imagine why Cypher lived there.

"Maybe next time. I should go talk with Mitch. Saul won't go for it easily." She declined, although she really wanted to.

"I thought you left Aldecaldos."

Panam scratched her head, a little flustered. "Well... I did stop living there, but I didn't leave. It is complicated. I don't live in the camp, but I swing by regularly. You know how it goes out here."

"Ah, like a little breakup between lovers. Yeah, I get it. In any case, see you around." Cypher opened the door to get out.

"Wait!" Panam called, not thinking, her hand snapping to his arm before he could get out of the truck. "One question. Why? Why do this?"

"They're Scavs. They gotta die—"

"No, I mean it. Any normal guy would say I used you after what went down in that tunnel. I was acting like a total gonk, and I almost got you flatlined. But you let Mitch haul the rides. And now you do this. Why?" She asked, catching how rushed she sounded. It threw her off. For some reason, her chest felt tight. Folks in Night City do not show kindness without a reason.

Cypher relaxed back in his seat, and she let his arm go, waiting for an answer. She hoped to hear something important. A good enough reason. A revelation of what he wanted from her and her clan, so she wouldn't feel like she was taking advantage of Cypher.

"You're gorgeous, so pretty privilege, I guess."

"..."

"Hah! Just kidding, or am I?" Cypher's eyes locked with hers. "I don't know, Panam. Why don't we just kill a cat when we see it? Why're we nice to it? You don't overthink it, you just do it. And yeah, you messed up in that tunnel, but that's done.

"What matters is you're legit, and I know you'll have my back if things go bad someday. So I got a rule: when you run into someone crazy enough to be loyal and real in this city, you keep them close and don't let go. So fair warning, Pan, you ain't running from me."

With that, she watched him get off the truck and close the door.

"Hey!" She called him again, foot ready to press on the gas. She smirked as she eyed him out of the side window. "You'll have to catch me first."

She backed her truck at speed and watched Cypher still standing in place through her windshield. He wasn't moving, nor waving, just dumbly staring at her. She laughed to herself and backed onto the main road, disappearing back towards the city.

####

"What was that?" Cypher watched Panam's truck disappear. "Why's my heart thumping, Atlas?"

Right away, Atlas' old man avatar appeared in his vision, dressed in a white suit, walking in front of him. "My evaluation suggests she is growing feelings towards you, and your body reciprocates. I must agree, Ms. Palmer is a loyal friend to have. Hard to catch a partner like that."

Cypher eyed Atlas with curiosity. When even an AI of that scale liked Panam, how could he not?

"Since when did you become a love guru?"

"Since yesterday. Given my access to all the data in the city on people, I realized I could create a dating application that connects individuals most suitable for each other and most likely to form a relationship. I have assigned AZRAEL to process the data."

"That mutually assured destruction AI?" Cypher squinted, "You really turned that poor guy into some dating app admin?"

"He had no nuclear warheads left to administer."

"Damn, talk about a demotion." Cypher finally turned and entered his house. He could feel little vibrations from underneath. The Microbots were still at work. "Did you edit the video? You made my fall on the third floor graceful."

"There is also a BD, which I will release through an official studio," Atlas said, taking a seat beside him on the living room couch. "There is another matter. I have secured control over two of the fifteen satellites within reach. The remainder are beyond recovery. Both units are limited to communications functions. Regrettably, they are not equipped with cameras."

"Eh, that'll do. We can snoop on those hiding in the badlands now. Reed ain't keeping secrets anymore," Cypher said, loosening his tie.

"That is, unless they possess a method to fully conceal themselves. I will look into this. For now, let us prepare the Servo Skulls. Every skull has been harvested and is now under the care of Microbots. They are being cleaned and refined for the coming noble ceremony."

"Noble?" Cypher asked.

"Of course. It is also the perfect punishment for the Scavs."

"Hah, alright, Skynet. Let's get to work. By the way, fix a meeting to buy the dam and the reservoir for tomorrow at the club. And hold up, shouldn't I do an interview since they're all talking about me? You want me to get famous, don't you?"

Atlas instantly answered. "Very well. I will secure Gillean Jordan of News Fifty-Four for an evening interview. Do you intend to go to the studio? I advise against it. It is preferable that she comes here. I will arrange a Delamain."

"Go ahead. I'll make the Servo Skull in the meantime."

####

Cypher spent that whole day making a blueprint of the Servo Skull's components. The most complex one of them was the anti-gravity engine. Also, the designs gave him yet another efficient power cell to make. Also, the Machine Spirit was nothing but a very basic, low-level AI, which at times acted unexpectedly, hence called the Machine Spirit.

There were many types of Servo Skulls, and he knew all of them. Guardian-Skull, Gun-Skull, Medical-Skull, Hydro-Skulls. There were so many. He chose to make a Utility-Skull and see if it could work with cyberware and other finer things with its fine tentacles. For a later design, he planned to give it a Sonic Screwdriver as well. With that, the Servo Skull would be able to fix nearly anything.

But by the time he could start working on the actual skull, it got late, and Atlas reminded him of the news reporter on her way to his place. So, Cypher jumped under the shower and got dressed in a fine new suit, black with a tie, but this time a white shirt.

He grabbed a few drinks and placed them on the coffee table. And right then, Delamain's horn resounded from outside.

*"Atlas. Is she on your payroll?"*

Cypher walked to open the door.

*[No. But she is aware where her interests lie. News Fifty-Four is entirely under my code-self's command. I have access to all their inbound and outbound data. Do not be wary, Ms. Jordan knows when to stop. She will only record during the interview.]*

Cypher realised Atlas was indirectly talking about Evelyn, who tried to record a BD.

Finally, he plastered a fake smile on his face and opened the sliding door. The woman came into his view right away, her curves the first thing she noticed. Gillean Jordan was a famous face on TV, and she looked great.

Her face seemed mostly organic, other than her eyes and some EMP threading. Her hair was likely fake, styled into loose spikes at the front, faded closely at the sides, and longer in the back, giving her a bold and expensive appearance. She was a tall woman, nearly his height, and definitely not one of those thin, stick-like women. She had a lush hourglass figure, with a narrow waist and beautifully wide hips.

"Welcome to my little home, Ms. Jordan." Cypher welcomed her.

"Mr. Blackwell! This is a dream come true for me." Gillean instead stepped into him and gave him a professional hug. "You're the only talk of this city, and the country, if I must add. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. This will help me, and News Fifty-Four a great deal."

Cypher nodded, smiling, ignoring what he felt against his chest. There was no bra, he was damn sure. Her dress was weird as well, at least to him. Her arms were pink, her chest was golden, and her knee-length skirt was tight and white. But it was all a one-piece office dress. Her heels were golden, and her nails were pink.

"Well, I had to go with the best reporter in the city for this one." Cypher shot her a wink and waved her in. "Alright, let's get this thing rolling. Grab a seat. Wait, where's your camera guy?"

"It is just me today, Mr. Blackwell. Besides, I have everything here." Gillean lifted her small briefcase. "The audio will be clear, and we'll both look crisp and beautiful."

Cypher led her to the living room and showed her to the L-shaped couch. He sat down on one side, close to the inner side. She sat down on the other, close to him. He watches her set up everything. It was a tripod with a strange camera that moved and turned on its own. There was also some light coming from that camera.

Moments later, Gillean sat up straight and passed him a bright smile. She had come with full makeup, her cheeks were slightly red. He liked it, she was pretty, but he didn't know how old. Probably in her thirties, or even higher. Rogue was hot, after all, and that woman was old old.

"Is this gonna be live?"

"No, it won't be. I'll record this and forward it to the studio. They will handle the edit and push it into the cycle. Now, I will begin. First question. Who are you?"

Cypher kept a smile on his face, looking like the perfect corpo he was. He sat relaxed, one leg crossed, constantly staring at Gillean and the goddamn erect nipples visible on her chest under her dress.

He gave the perfect answers that Atlas fed into his ears. He pulled out numbers and statistics, and showcased how goddamn smart he was. A total scam, but with Atlas, it was his reality.

"Why go so far? I, too, believe that the Scavengers should be removed from this city. But you are the CFO of Obsidian. You developed so many technolo—"

Cypher held up a finger and cut her off. "Alright, hold up, you're mixing stuff up. I'm the CEO of Obsidian, the founder, the one who built the whole thing. All that tech? That's mine, I made it. And yeah, I'm the CFO too, why not?"

"..."

Cypher allowed her to digest his words. This was a big scoop. Before, everyone wondered who the CEO was. Who made the company? Of course, big corporations knew, but the media did not. And now, he had given that scoop to Gillean.

"As for the Scavengers..." Cypher took a pause and decided to do it. Reveal something about him to make him seem more human.

"My parents got killed by Wraiths when I was a kid. I don't really see a difference between Wraiths and Scavengers. Long as trash like that's walking around with us, we won't ever bounce back from how messed up everything's gotten. And why I went after them, you really need a reason? They grabbed four innocent people, two were kids. They were gonna use them for XBDs and then harvest them. What more reason do you want?"

Gillean's eyes grew big, her smile was the sign of how much she was enjoying this. He was giving her something nearly no other executive would confess in public. That there was an actual rot in the society. It was because they used that rot for themselves.

"I want to help. I want to make this place livable. I gave the Moiustu..."

Back and forth, from personal life to tech, and his views on the Nomads, NUSA, and whatnot. He gave answers with Atlas' help. He didn't try to do what he did with Goldstein.

"That... will be all." Gillean clapped her hands, and the camera turned off, the lights turned off. "That was amazing, Mr. Blackwell."

"Call me Cypher. I'm used to that."

"Then please call me Gillean," she replied and softly slid closer to his side. "So I'm sitting with the founder of Obsidian."

"One and only," Cypher replied, tasting the scent of her perfume. "Need a drink?"

Gillean nodded and licked her lips. "I would love to drink something... tasty."

Cypher noticed it all. The hints she was dropping. Her nipples hard. Her closeness. But he said nothing and grabbed a can of Nicola for himself.

"May I use your bathroom?" she asked.

"Straight from the right." Cypher pointed to her and watched her leave. Her hips were wide, and in that tight skirt, they looked fantastic with that narrow waist. He couldn't help but imagine what was inside. How much of it was organic?

He remained seated, drinking and chatting with Atlas about the interview.

Clop! Clop!

Right then, he heard a sound returning. Of heels striking the floor. When Gillean came into his view again, he lost his breath. She was fucking perfect, not in a natural way, yet she looked natural.

Gillean, in front of him, was completely nude. From head to toe, and no undies. She stood there in the distance, one hand on her belly, the other on her chest. Her loins were clean shaven; he could see her puffy pussy lips and the hint of that hidden slit through that mouth-watering thigh gap.

Her skin seemed flawless, and she wasn't thin. She had a full, curvy body, tight and meaty, yet not fat at all. Her breasts were large, round, perfect, and the pink-tipped nipples were both identical.

"What is this?" Cypher asked, noting her jewelry. She had a golden thing on her left arm, fingers, thin golden bracelets, and a pearl necklace tight on her neck like a choker.

"Negotiations," Gillean replied, no shame as she walked closer and stood in front of the coffee table.

Cypher was hard. He eyed her from top to bottom. Thick thighs, juicy tits, and a pretty face. He heard no warning from Atlas that a secret camera was working, so he was relaxed.

"For what?"

"Mr... Cypher." Gillean turned around and leaned.

She moved like liquid, hips rolling in a teasing rhythm that made her ass sway hypnotically. Her asscheeks stirred softly with each step. She bent forward at the waist, arching her back, and reached behind with both hands. Her manicured fingers spread her asscheeks wide, revealing everything. Her perfect, bare pussy glistened, puffy outer lips parting to show the moist pink inside, her tight little pucker just above it. She held the pose, letting him drink in the sight, her juices already catching the light.

"We are both adults. We are professionals." Gillean continued, standing straight again, facing him and spreading her legs, showing him everything. "I would love to have... exclusive bites from you."

Cypher smirked. This was just a regular part of corporate culture in Night City, from what he knew. So, he didn't mind. He relaxed and stared at her pussy, which she herself spread with fingers.

"And what's in it for me?"

Gillean smiled brightly, all teeth visible. She put one hand on her breast, lifting it. "Everything... all of it... all of me."

"What're you waiting for?"

Gillean moved fast, closing the distance. She climbed onto his lap, straddling him with her fluffy thighs, squeezing his hips, and locked her lips to his in a hungry kiss. Her tongue pushed in, swirling against his as she started grinding her bare, dripping pussy along the hard ridge of his cock still trapped in his pants.

Her hands worked at his tie, loosening the silk with quick tugs before attacking his shirt, popping each button one by one, her nails grazing his chest.

Cypher reached behind her, both hands filling up with her amazing ass. It was so fucking soft and so much, his fingers sank deep into the plush meat. Some procedure had clearly been done, but it all felt natural, warm under his palms. The skin was smooth, and every time she rolled her hips, it moved against his grip like jelly.

His fingers explored further, one hand sliding down the cleft until his middle finger found her tight pucker and rubbed circles around the rim. The other hand dipped lower, two digits parting her lower lips wider. She was already soaked, coating his digits in warm, slippery nectar.

"Mmmm...." Gillean moaned into his mouth, then broke the kiss.

She slid down between his spread legs, dropping to her knees on the floor. Her hands quickly worked on his belt and yanked it open. She dragged the zipper down without pause, then hooked her fingers into his waistband and tugged his pants and boxers down in one smooth pull.

His cock sprang free, slapping against his stomach before settling upright. Veins pulsing in blatant hunger, tip swollen and ready.

"Mmmm... As expected. I was hoping you would be big," she purred as she stared at his throbbing length.

"Why?"

"I've fucked plenty of rich and powerful men, Cypher. But a rich man with a nice, natural cock? That's just..."

She gripped him at the base with both hands, fingers wrapping tight around his thick girth. She stroked him reverently, rubbing the throbbing shaft against her soft palms while her thumbs traced the pulsing veins.

Then she brought his cock to her face, rubbing the swollen crown over her full lips, painting them glossy with his leaking precum. She planted loud, wet smooches along his length, each one deliberate and adoring, her tongue flicking out to taste him between kisses.

"Make it sloppy," Cypher ordered.

"Mmm... No other way." Gillean smirked and wrapped her lips around his flesh rod.

She worshipped his cock like it was the only thing she would ever need. Her lips stretched wide as she took him in, suckling while her tongue swirled around the swollen tip. She pulled back out to rub the slippery, veiny shaft all over her pretty face, smearing precum across her cheeks, her forehead, then dove back down.

SclK! SclK!

She kissed and licked every inch. Both hands worked him greedily, one stroking the base in tight twists while the other cupped and rolled his heavy balls.

Spit dripped from her mouth in thick strings, pouring down his shaft and soaking his sack as she rubbed her face against him like a cat in heat, leaving shiny trails of saliva.

She stared up at him with those hungry eyes, mascara starting to run in dark streaks down her flushed cheeks.

"Let me help."

Right then, Cypher grabbed fistfuls of her spiked hair like bunny ears. He used both fists full of hair like handles, ramming her skull down on his cock.

Her throat bulged visibly with every savage plunge, lips splayed around his girth. Tears streamed down her ruined face, mixing with the rivers of spit that bubbled and frothed from the corners of her mouth. She looked almost feral, eyes watering, cheeks hollowing, then bulging as she choked and gagged around him. Yet her hands still clutched his thighs, pulling him deeper like she couldn't get enough.

"Gluk! Gluk!"

Gillean's perfect face was a complete mess. Every time he buried himself to the hilt, the outline of his cock was clear against her neck.

"Gaaaah! Drink it!"

Cypher rammed hard one final time and unleashed a torrent of batter straight down her throat.

He blasted deep, forcing her to swallow and slobber. Some still backwashed, bubbling out around his shaft in messy white foam that coated her chin.

"Get up, lie down on the couch."

Cypher pulled her up roughly and threw her onto the couch so her back slanted against the backrest, her neck twisted awkwardly, her chin nearly touching her breasts in a folded position.

He grabbed her legs, lifted them high, and hooked her heels over his shoulders. He reached around with both arms, clawing her heavy breasts as his rock-hard cock lined up with her dripping pussy.

He probed once, teasing her slick folds, then shoved forward.

"Ooooooh! I'm going to... enjoy this!" Gillean moaned.

Cypher stared at her messy, cum-dripped face, then down at her tits now marked with his rough hand prints, and further still at her tight pussy lips stretching wide around his invading cock. The sight of her swollen petals gripping him as he sank deeper.

"So am I!"

Plap!

He rammed it in. The couch thumped hard against the wall behind them.

Plap!

He plowed again, savage, greedy, and deep. That was the intention. They weren't lovers. This was transactional, a filthy negotiation.

He fucked her like a beast, hips snapping forward in punishing strokes that made her tits bounce wildly. He felt her pussy clenched and fluttered around every thick inch, soaking wet as he bottomed out against her cervix again and again.

Gillean's moans spilled out desperately. "Ah—fuck! So many men jerk off to this face every morning... Watching me... On the news... and now you're balls-deep in it—Ngh! Ngh! Ruining the pretty reporter they all want!"

"Never watched TV... don't know," he replied as he kept pounding her without mercy.

She extended her hand down, moaning louder, and reached between her legs to rub her own swollen clit in frantic circles. Her fingers slipping and sliding over her wet, swollen nub while his cock stretched her wide.

Cypher pinched her nipples between his fingers, twisting just enough to make her cry out.

Then, he suddenly felt her climax hit like a shockwave, her pussy suddenly clamping down around him, rippling in powerful spasms as her juices gushed hot and slick around his shaft, soaking his balls and dripping down onto the couch.

"Gah! Outside?"

"Inside... I've... removed it... ah! Put it all! In me!" she begged desperately.

Cypher didn't mind. He shoved in with a brutal plunge, so deep his chin nearly rested on top of her head. His cock bottomed out completely as he came hard, flooding her with a load of thick, hot cream. His hips kept sloshing, churning like butter, stirring the messy mix of their juices between their sweaty bodies while her walls milked every last drop.

"You are... good at this," Gillean panted.

"Ain't done."

Cypher pulled out, strings of batter and her juices stretching between them. He grabbed her wrist and pulled her to her wobbly feet, then dragged her into the bedroom and threw her onto the bed so she landed face down, chest smushed into the sheets.

Quickly, he climbed behind her, forcing her knees up and spreading them wide so her ass raised high in the air while her face and tits stayed pressed into the mattress.

He pressed her face harder against the sheets with one strong hand and started rubbing his still-hard, cum-slick cock along her dripping pussy again, teasing her flushed folds from behind.

"Mmmm... Are you sure?" Gillean mumbled into the mattress, shifting both arms. She reached behind with her own hands and spread her asscheeks wide, giving him a clear, sinful view of her twitching, cum-filled pussy and the tight little back hole above it. "Don't want the other one?"

Cypher gulped. This was like dangling candy in front of a monkey. Of course, he was gonna take it.

"Brace for it!"

Cypher drenched his cock in the mix of his own cum and her juices, dipping once more into her still-spasming pussy to coat every inch. Then his swollen, glistening tip pressed against her tight little ass. The puckered rim fluttered and breathed under the pressure, clenching instinctively before relaxing just enough to kiss the head of his cock.

He spat a thick glob of spit right onto her hole, watching it slide down the cleft and glisten around her lower lips.

With a slow, firm push, he sank in.

Her ass was impossibly tight, the ring of muscle stretching wide around his girth, gripping him angrily. Inch by inch, he filled her, every ridge and vein of his cock dragging against her inner walls as they yielded reluctantly.

Gillean's breath hitched sharply.

"Oh fuck... It's so indecent," she gasped, trembling with delight. "If anyone ever found out the prim little Fifty-Four reporter let a corpo fuck her perfect ass raw... I'd be ruined. Completely finished—OOhhh!!"

Yet even as she spoke, her own hands stayed firmly on her cheeks, spreading them wider for him, offering herself completely.

She cooed and cried out as he sank deeper. "Nngh—! So full... I feel so fucking full... you're splitting me open!"

Pumping slowly into that tight hole, savoring the feeling of her rippling muscles around every inch, Cypher asked through gritted teeth, "You came prepared for this?"

"I'm always prepared."

He couldn't hold back any longer. His hips snapped forward, plowing into her ass. His pelvis collided with her jiggling cheeks over and over.

Plap! Plap!

He grabbed a fistful of her hair from behind, yanking her head back as he rammed in hard, burying himself balls-deep with every brutal thrust. Her ass rippled and bounced under the impact, the star-shaped hole fluttering wildly around the base of his cock.

The pressure was insane. Her ass gripped him so tight it felt like she was trying to milk him dry with every stroke.

Cypher's balls drew up tight, that familiar buzz racing up his spine. He slammed in again, lodging himself as deep as he could go with all his weight.

His cock pulsed hard inside her, thick ropes of batter erupting in heavy, forceful spurts straight into her. Each throb felt like it was being wrung out of him, flooding her with hot, sticky seed until it started leaking back out around his shaft in creamy white drops. He ground against her, hips twitching, emptying every last drop.

Finally, he pulled out. Thick globs of cream bubbled from her stretched, gaping ass and trickled down over her ruined pussy.

Cypher collapsed flat onto the bed beside her, chest heaving, body slick with sweat.

"I need a bath," Cypher murmured.

Gillean hummed and nestled beside him, hugging his side, nibbling on his earlobe. "As do I."

"I guess the third time's gonna be a charm then," Cypher smirked. "I'll get the tub filled."

"More?" Gillean frowned, expressions melting into surrender soon. "You really are great with your gun."

"Only because the target's nice and tight."

"Hah!"

Gillean laughed throatily and followed behind him into the bathroom.

#####

Afterlife, Watson,

Rogue Amendiares sat in one of the private booths in her club. In her hand was a large handheld screen running the entire video of Cypher Blackwell hunting Scavs. By then, she, her staff, and the entire Net had agreed to call it hunting, not a killing.

She frowned faintly, a little unsettled by the fact that she had met this man a few hours ago. And also the fact that 'he' was sniffing around. The mess was only growing bigger and bigger.

"Anything?" she asked her netrunner, Nix. "How did he do this alone?"

"He's tight with some big-name netrunner," he said. "Ommissiah. That's the handle. No sightings, no voice, nothing. Just appeared when Cypher Blackwell started making noise. Chatrooms say he can punch through Arasaka and Militech ICE like it's nothing. But Rogue, I'm not seeing any trace of a run in that building's system. This was all Cypher Blackwell acting crazy."

Rogue didn't like that and shifted in her seat. "So a ganic killed thirty-six Scavs, half of them with serious chrome, four with sandies."

"Rogue, why do you have a problem with him?" Crispin Wayland asked her. He was her bodyguard, but also a friend. "Choom's good for business. Good for the city too. I checked the guns, the chrome, the intel he was pushing in the club. Solid work. We could place a few Facemen inside, have them operate under us."

Rogue shook her head. "It's not his work. That checks out. It's the rest that stinks. Shows up out of nowhere and starts growing faster than anything we've seen. Militech, NUSA, Arasaka, all locked onto him. Keeps pushing tech nobody's heard of, nobody's seen. Got the money to back it, got the skills too... that doesn't just happen, Squama. But every trail we followed went cold. All we found was a dusty shack by the lake."

"So you're saying he's got a backer?"

"I don't know." Rogue sighed, head shaking. "That's the problem. We don't know a damn thing. He's either incredibly lucky or incredibly smart."

####

Lake Farm,

Cypher was seated on the floor, busy using a wrench to fix a damn eye into the skull of a Scav. Just in his tank top, he was still sweating profusely. The air conditioner needed some repair, but he'd postponed that.

Gillean had work to do. She didn't stay for long and left in the same Delamain she arrived in.

Cypher really didn't mind this one interaction. She got something in return, as did he. And he liked the chemistry between them. But the thing he liked the most was how she didn't try to fuck him over by trying to record something.

She came, did her interview, earned his exclusive access, got fucked, and left.

He had taken a nap after that, woke up early at nine in the morning, and got to work. This was the first Servo Skull, and he wanted to get rid of that constant, ever-present itch he often forgot about.

But at the same time, he was on call with a very hot-headed, angry gremlin on the other side. Before this one, he was busy talking to Judy, who was busy scolding him.

"You bastard! You promised you'd take me on that Scav hunt! Why didn't you call me, choom? You flatlined thirty-six! That's too many for one gonk!"

Cypher laughed, not even looking at his Agent lying beside him. "It happened suddenly."

"Who're you shitting choom? That shit takes weeks of planning!"

"Trust me, Rebacca, it didn't," he replied, tightening the eye.

"Whoa!" Rebecca squealed, "What's with that sweaty face? Wait, you jerking off? Damn, I knew my charm would work. Show me the meat. Never seen a millionaire's junk."

"..."

Cypher paused and looked at the screen.

"Show me! Show me!"

"Are you sure?" Cypher asked as he reached for the Agent.

"Millionaire cock! Show me!"

Cypher quickly turned the camera and showed her the wrench he was holding. He stroked it like his dick.

"Fuck you, man! Got me all hot and moisty thinking."

Cypher chuckled. She was like that all the time. "Tell Maine to meet me at the club in four hours. I got some jobs for your group."

"You got it, Choom." Rebecca chirped, her entire face following the screen. "See you later, handsome."

*Handsome?*

Cypher never understood why some women called him handsome.

"Hey, Atlas. You think I'm handsome or what?" he asked, nearly finished with the first skull. "Women keep telling me that."

"To young women, every rich man appears handsome," Atlas spoke through the nearby speaker.

"Hey, I ain't like those bald, fat yacht dudes. I'm young, man. Anyway, you find anything on Misty? Why didn't she show up to the party? Even Vik came."

"She is currently at her shop. It seems she is deliberately keeping herself occupied."

Cypher frowned, slightly worried for her. "Alright, I'll pay her a visit after the Club meetings."

"There is another thing," Atlas continued. "I spoke with Song So-Mi. She revealed that her cyberware torso was upgraded using technology from Obsidian. I was already aware of that. However, she also shared that the NUSA president has taken a keen interest in it, something I did not know."

Cypher stopped working on the skull and looked up where Atlas' avatar appeared.

"You mean, they're onto me?"

Atlas nodded. "With this information, I believe there's a strong chance your assessment of that man in the club is accurate."

"Ah, that? Yeah, I'm damn sure it's Blackhand, Atlas. If Rogue reacted, it's gotta be him. And that arm gave it away."

"May I ask, what makes you so certain?"

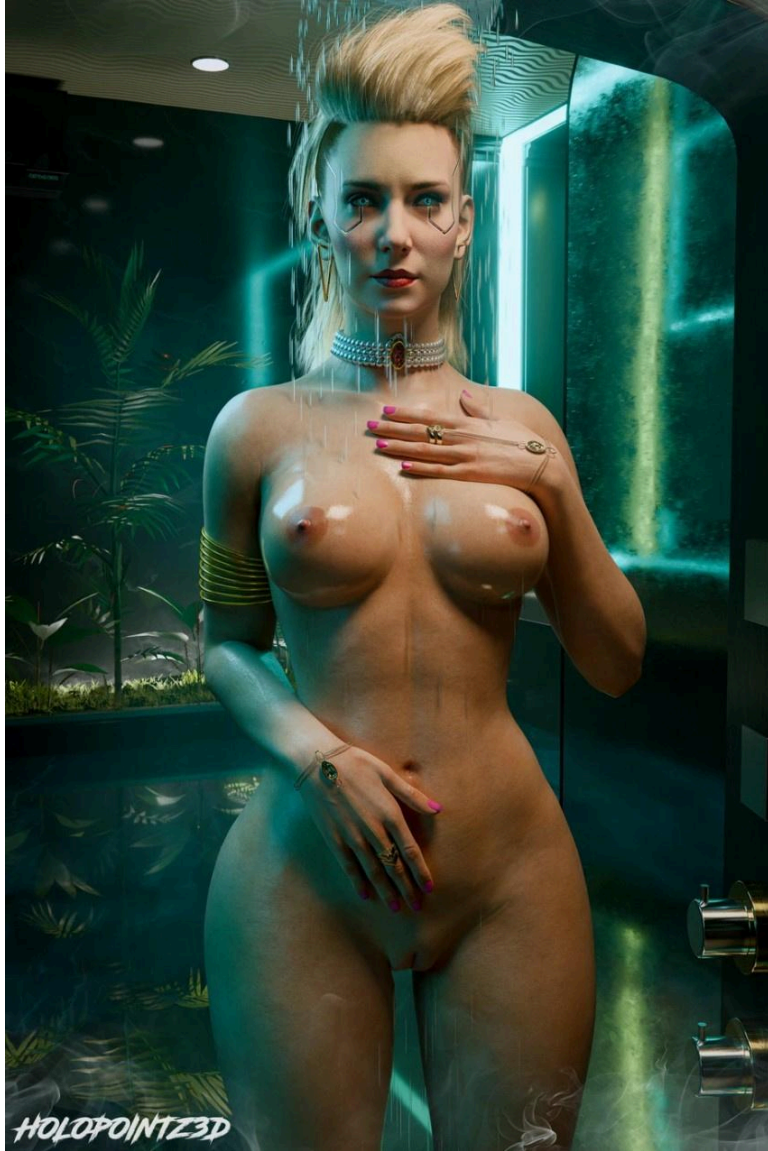
Cypher almost cracked up. "Because Rogue was getting pounded by that dude back in the day."

"Interesting. That shifts the probability to absolute certainty."

"Damn right." Cypher shrugged and resumed working. "Now, back to the skull, come here. We're waking up the Machine Spirit and shit."



Gilleen Jordan



Gillean Jordan in no clothes.