

## **Working Like a Dog: The Metamorphosis**

—The sight made his stomach turn. Like car wreckage, he could not look away, though he wanted nothing more than to do so.

Showering proved difficult for Argos, malformed hands fiddling imprecisely with the handle. Under the hot water, his mind whirled. Pains wracked his body as his bones and flesh twisted within him. His fingers shortened and nails turned black, his hips and spine made him hunch over, and the water felt off. It ran over the thin layer of fuzz which his body hair had become. As he turned off the water, another tooth fell from his mouth.

Running his tongue over his gums, he moved to the mirror, feeling the nub of a new tooth emerging. He wiped away the fog, freezing at the image within the silver glass. Human was a questionable description for himself. His eyes looked as if yellow were bleeding into his irises. Both jaws pushed forwards with his nose flattening against this half-muzzle.

Stumbling backward, he brought his hand to his mouth, almost surprised to find it real. He did all he could in earlier days to avoid his reflection, fearful of this moment. Retching, he dug his claws into his sides, feeling trapped and tormented by his form.

Gasping in panic, he all but fell out of the bathroom. Eyes closed, he curled up and wished the world away. Holding back sobs, he prayed to no one in particular for his body to just be normal. Claws tapped against the wooden floor as the house owner's dog approached. Yin, the black German shepherd, crouched low to comfort him, gently licking the back of his neck.

As he recovered, he got dressed and looked around the apartment. Penelope left several hours ago to investigate the scientists who worked on him, the healing formula which made him this way. He hoped she would find nothing; that in several hours, he could return to the hospital and have the changes repaired.

Rather than think and worry over his body, he wandered the apartment to distract himself. On the table beside the couch, he found a small padded box. Inside were several nodes for Penelope's harmonia gear. After his accident with a similar machine, he turned away without even closing the case.

To ease his nerves, he sat on the couch and turned on the tv. Yin jumped up beside him, resting his head on Argos's lap. Comforted by the warm presence, he ran his fingers through the dog's fur, scrolling through the channels until he came to a familiar news story. *A crazed man drew a knife in the Blue Station. Stopped by an unknown inspection guard.* He winced at the story, memories of the event which started it all.

Yin's ears perked up, and he stood to bark at the door. Rusty hinges creaking soon followed the barks. "Penelope, what did you find?" Argos asked, turning back and looking to the corner where she would emerge from the hall. "Penelope?" he repeated, waiting for her appearance.

A low growl emerged from Yin, setting Argos's hair on end. Keeping his movements slow, he reached for the drawer by his side. Suddenly, a stranger walked in, dressed in street clothes and black gloves. The man did not have the look of a robber, his face without surprise as though he expected to find Argos there. Fangs bared, Yin bristled and growled at the stranger.

"Who the hell are you?" Argos demanded, meeting eyes with the man. Some instinct warned him against the stranger, the man showing no reaction to his mutations.

“I take it; you’re Mr. Brewer. The doctors sent me,” the stranger explained, taking a slow step forward. “Those deformities must be quite painful. Please, just come with me. We’ll have you right as rain in no time.”

“How did you get in?” Argos asked, opening the drawer.

“I simply... let myself in.”

“Door was locked,” he said, narrowing his eyes and closing his hand around cold steel. “You need to leave.” Perhaps it was Penelope’s accusations, but the hair on the back of his neck stood on end, every instinct screaming against the man before him.

“Mr. Brewer, you’re not doing well. The staff at the hospital sent me to help you,” the man said, creeping closer one step at a time. There’s no need to—”

“Last I checked, I can get to the hospital myself. Now, you’re on private property, and I’m giving you one last warning. Get out!”

“I understand, I understand. I’ll be right on my way,” the man said, taking a step towards the door. However, there was something wrong in the way he moved, the motion more for show than anything else. In training, he learned these moments; the second one had to decide if their opponent was dangerous, and how to respond. The suspicious man reached for something on his belt, a swift motion that made Argos’s heart skip.

They both drew, but Argos was prepared and faster. Thunder echoed through the house as the pistol went off. The man dove behind the corner but did not flee. Argos cursed, his shaking making aiming impossible, creating a hole in the far wall. Fortunately, the man seemed unaware of this, remaining in cover.

“Yin!” he hissed, grabbing the dog before it could charge into whatever weapon the man carried. He took a node from the box and haphazardly attached it to the dog’s head. Even he was unsure what he planned with the action, blindly looking for any option. “I won’t miss my next shot!” he lied, watching corner with a shaking hand.

“As I said, we’ll be right on our way.”

In a brave gamble, the man revealed himself, weapon drawn. Both fired, twin flashes followed by irrevocable silence. “Never should have trusted my luck,” Argos muttered, defeated as smoke trailed from the muzzle of his pistol, a hole bored into the ceiling. In response, a sharp pain stabbed into his upper chest. His head fell low, a silver mark sticking from between two ribs.

Not a bullet, but a dart hung from his shoulder. “Oh, you bastard,” Argos hissed, stumbling as he tried to take a step. The world doubled and blurred, the stabbing pain of the impact fading into cold nothing. The feeling spread as a wave of numbness overtook him, his limbs weak and slow. As the weight of his own malformed body became too much, he collapsed onto the floor, painlessly striking the ground. Tears and haze obscured his sight, dark shapes moving just beyond. But they were too tiring to focus on. Consciousness was too tiring to continue.

—Vertigo and fear compounded, striking like a punch to the gut. Trapped in the body of a rat, Penelope dangled from her tail, illuminated by the cold light of the lab.

Holding the rat before him, the scientist examined the node attached to the rat’s skull. “Using harmonia gear to infiltrate us. Decent attempt, if unoriginal,” he chided, watching as Penelope strained to lift herself, to bite the hand that held her. “There’s still something in those eyes. You haven’t left that body, have you?”

*014 Disengage Harmonia 144* she shouted internally one final time. Squeaking in anger, she realized herself trapped. Heart pounding like a machine gun, her stomach sunk as the giant man smiled down at her.

“Why? Do you believe you can escape in this form? No, somethings preventing you from fleeing,” he chuckled, flicking the glowing node. The strike felt like an electric shock to her brain, leaver her stunned and her thoughts scattered. Fortunately, the machine sustained no damage, and she returned to the present.

He held her little body in one hand, turning her over like a hawk inspecting prey. Hot fingers bound her still. She squirmed and strained, but could not free her arms or bite the man’s hand. A quick squeeze stopped her, the jolt of pain a warning. Breathing strained, she winced at the tight hold that entirely prevented her movement. She met his gaze, the challenge unmistakably human, despite her shape.

The man smirked at the expression, recognizing a fire within the beady rodent eyes. “I wonder who sent you. Some kind of human rights coward sniffing where you shouldn’t. A PI from subject two. No, you’re too good; another company looking to take our tech, to sabotage me.” he hissed angrily.

The doctor’s grip tightened, applying greater pressure to Penelope’s already bruised ribs. Penelope squeaked in pain, the skittish nature of the animal only amplifying her panic. The air was crushed from her, further suffocated by the looming threat of death. She begged for help without language, looking frantically about for anyone. None accompanied them. Even if one did, they would hardly aid a lab rat.

“I’ve worked too damn hard for greedy bastards or bleeding hearts to ruin this, in the form of a fucking rodent,” he said, his voice filled with cold mirth so potent she thought he might kill her there. Yet that emotion faded quickly, supplanted by that nauseatingly calm menace he wielded. “I suppose you cannot answer me, can you?” he said, running his finger against the node. “What if I were to rip this off; we both know what would happen. Without the circuits supporting half your thinking, you’d reduce to nothing but a common rat.”

She closed her eyes and flattened her ears against her head. *Please!* She shouted internally, expecting him to end her there. Her mission and training fled her mind. The icy claws of fear dug into her. *If I am to die, let it be as myself.* However, instead of the electric sensation robbing her mind, she felt weightless. Air rushed past, and she thought he was throwing her against the hard ground. His grip left, and for a heartbeat, she floated. With a thud, she landed, alive.

For a moment, Penelope kept her eyes close, expecting a stomp, or some other brutal end. Unnervingly, there was nothing. Light peered through as she squinted, tentatively standing to find cold glass beneath her paws. She found herself in a bare, glass lab rat cage, the doctor watching her with a malicious grin.

“I’d prefer you keep your wits. If we work together, we can find a way to communicate, let you know who you work for... And you will work with me on this. You’ll find your other options far less pleasant.”

—Argos awoke in a daze, his head fuzzy as if drunk. Delirious, he forgot what had happened, expecting to get up and go to work. Scratching an itch, he winced, his sharp nail cutting his cheek. Holding the claw in front of his face returned him to reality.

“Son of a—” he started, grabbing his side in search of the pistol.

Nothing but an oversized hospital gown covered him, too loose and open for comfort. The room itself brought no more ease. A clean white room with nothing but a cot and a toilet, the only exit a closed and locked door. Above, a ring of one-sided glass gazed down at him like a mirror. At any moment, he could be watched, a thought which kept him from relaxing.

“Let me out, you bastards!” he shouted, stumbling for the door. “I have rights!”

When pounding at the door left him weary, he collapsed against it. Muffled through steel, he heard a voice on the other side, passing and directed towards another. “Sorry I’m late, trouble in the lab. A rat was loose, took some time to catch.” As Argos listened to the voice, recognition sparked.

“Hey! Hey, you can’t do this to me!” he shouted, pounding again and again until his throat was raw. “Doctor! I heard your voice! You won’t get away with this!” Only fading voices and silence followed, leaving him alone under the incandescent bulbs. Defeated, he curled up in the corner, listening to the rumble of air systems above. Subtle noise made his skin crawl and cover his ears, though this only made it worse, the sound originating within him.

Like the churn of flowing water, but hot and distant, he could hear his blood, muscle, and bone shifting within him. Drifting in and out of awareness, he lost track of time. He thought back to the bland days of his job. The boredom of mundanity seemed sweet in this cell, the station’s bustle with his dog as company. When living in memories was so preferable to his current existence, he lost himself in it, almost able to feel the fur as he pet Artemis’s head... No, opening his eyes, he realized that sensation came from clutching his shoulders; body hair reshaped almost into a black fur coat.

Clattering metal roused him from his thoughts; a tray slipped underneath the door. A piece of bread and what looked like boiled hamburger meat. In a juvenile show, he shoved the paper tray away and returned to his corner. Rationalizing, he told himself that the food could be drugged or poisoned. In truth, it was more an attempt for any power or self-control he could manage.

Not that it did anything. He ran his hand over his face, but neither part felt right anymore. His open hand fell into his lap. Only his heart line remained, the rest lost to his warped form. A tuft of hair fell from his scalp, landing in that open palm.

—“Unfortunately, I’m late. Can’t leave you alone, so I suppose you’ll come with me,” the doctor said, wrapping his coat around the cage. Trapped in the glass case, Penelope saw only vague shapes through the white curtain. Her claws tapped against the surface as the motion of the walk, and the car shook her.

A rat’s sense of time was so fast; the journey seemed an eternity. She heard to murmurs of conversation, but conserved her energy, searching for any chance at escape. As part of the coat curved inward, she considered jumping for the hanging cloth, somehow chewing her way out without notice. The idea ended as the case was placed with a loud thump. Light flooded the space, momentarily blinding her as the doctor pulled away the cover.

Seeing him, she retreated until she bumped into the glass, unable to escape or fight. Another lab, but larger, cleaner, more professional. She searched for any escape but found none available and no signs to identify her location. The doctor stood over her, reaching into the cage. Though she recoiled and barred her teeth, he only placed a sticky note on the floor. He snapped a pen above and let the ink drip in like corrupted water.



“We’re alone now; no one’s going to save you; there’s no way out. Write out a name. Who sent you; who you work for. Hell, I’ll take your name,” he instructed, motioning towards the droplets of ink. “Give me something I can use, and I don’t have to make things unpleasant.”

Gestures did not come easy to her, but she shook her head. If something blocked her from returning to her body, it also prevented the signal from being tracked. Until they knew who was gunning for them, they would not kill her.

Smiling slightly, he donned his pristine coat, running his eyes over the drawers. “You could save us both a lot of time, save yourself a lot more pain,” he threatened coolly, though she remained steadfast. “Won’t make this easy, then. You probably have a strong sense of loyalty; you’re comforted by the knowledge that it isn’t your body being hurt. Of course, that will make it hurt no less. More than anything, I think you underestimate just how dedicated I am to my research.”

A chill running down her spine, she stepped forwards and dipped her claw into the ink. She just had to buy time; she was the fastest thinker she knew, so she resolved to persist as long as it took. The black liquid sunk into the paper like tendrils. She pushed deeper and swiped, slicing a stained tear into the note. The doctor looked neither angered nor upset, but amused and ready. Chuckling, he picked up her case and held it under the running sink, the sudden influx of water making her jump. At first, she attempted to tread water like a human, but as it rose, she found the rat’s instincts could keep her afloat far better. “Swim as long as you can. Afterwards, you may find writing a more appealing option.”

—Boredom proved Argos’s greatest enemy. Stiffness in his joints made movement difficult, worsened by the fatigue which came from hunger. Even if he were starved enough to

break, his stomach churned too much to consider it. Pain in his hips and back forced him into a tight curl, waiting away the hours as he hoped for sleep, the ache often too severe to allow it.

With nothing else to focus on, he became intensely aware of the changes coming over his body. They seemed slower than the days before arriving, the hollow pit of his stomach growing more aching. His fingers became stiffer and shorter, his shoulders cracking and pushing forward. Most painful was the base of his spine. It twisted and bent, feeling like a solid bone being stretched and cracked without breaking, causing him to sob in the corner. As his spine pointed outward, it scraped against the floor, rubbing raw as he rocked painfully through the days. It popped and stretched, and he saw his tailbone pulling further than it should.

He pulled up his dirty hospital gown, casting a nervous and embarrassed look to the mirrored glass above. His expression turned more to a strangely resigned disgust at his new feature. Boney and thin, his spine stretched between his legs like a short rat tail. With concentration, he could move it slightly, like a limb he lost long ago and was only just remembering how to wield.

Before he could dwell on it, the door shook and opened. For uncountable hours, he fantasized about this moment. He imagined jumping to his feet and catching the intruder off-guard. In the surprise attack, he would strike down the man and escape from the prison. However, as the door opened, the pain and fatigue and hunger and reality he felt shattered the dream. As the doctor entered, Argos could only look pitifully up from his crouched position.

The doctor motioned for him to follow, but Argos instead buried his face into his arms. Returning with a tired expression, the doctor watched him for a moment. “You can still walk, Mr. Brewer. Follow me...” Still, Argos remained, gripping his shoulders tightly as his new claws drew blood. “You don’t have any choice in the matter, Mr. Brewer... I can use force if you like.”

With something between a sob and a sigh, he rose. His legs were shaky, steps unsteady. Not just from weakness, but his shortened tendons forced him to walk on his toes. Stray thoughts of running or fighting passed through his head. But the man kept a hand on his waist, held suspiciously as if bearing a weapon. Moreover, he could not help but wince at every movement, his bones and flesh all tender as if bruised.

“Hurts, doesn’t it? That starvation you’re practicing might slow the change down, but it will only bring you pain. Every step feels like a hammer to your joints, don’t they? Without proper fuel, the nanites will begin eating into muscle, bone, or even organs. Do yourself a favor, eat.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Argos muttered.

“Ha, and here you were following like a loyal dog. If only you could be as quiet as one.” Argos held his tongue but noticed an unconscious reaction to his anger. His lips pulled back, showing his growing fangs. Fortunately, the doctor did not turn or see the gesture. “I realize our methods might seem inhumane, but we have the same goal as you, Mr. Brewer. To find out why these changes are happening to you.”

“Go fuck yourself!”

“Like a broken record,” the doctor laughed. They passed by several other scientists and a security guard, all of whom recognized Argos. “I am not some evil Moreau trying to warp the masses as you have been. I never lied to you about our goals. We only want to make a treatment to heal people. Cases like yours are unfortunate errors, glitches that I seek to remove.”

“A glitch,” Argos laughed m, hunched over by misplaced bones, nails black and extended into claws, and with a tail between his legs. “I don’t care what your goals or quack cures are. With you at the helm, there’s no way I survive this.”

“Your stubbornness is a greater threat to your life than we are at this point. And show some fucking gratitude. My ‘quack cure’ did what I said it would, the initial damage to your nervous system has been repaired, your shaking has been cured, and your reading ability has returned.”

“For all the good it’s done me.” They came down the hall into a lab, cleaner and brighter than what he saw in the hospital. Shelves of the nanite serum stood against the walls, accompanied by screens of scans and information from the tiny machines. On the opposite side were rats, each cage adorned with a lengthy sheet of notes on their progress.

The doctor readied a brain scanner, motioning for him to sit. The wires and nodes lit and buzzed, more complicated and advanced than the previous model in the hospital. Argos hesitated, vying for any power he could manage, even if it was hollow. “Surely you want to understand what is happening to your own body.”

With a sigh, he sat, wincing as the electric nodes were attached to his scalp. “You need to tell me what you see,” Argos warned, running his finger over one of the wires.

“Gladly,” the doctor said, pressing a button as a static buzz passed through his head.

Argos sat in the buzzing net for hours, the doctor staring at the screen, fascinated. His eyes wandered around, finding the only motion in the room to be the rats running on their wheels. Interestingly, one of the rats was in a glass case, treading water. It seemed to have a blue glow about its head, looking his way with a strange glint in its beady eyes. It swam closer to the wall, blowing a cloud onto the glass. With its snout, it slowly drew a backwards *SOS* into the condensation.

*Only want to heal, don't we?* Argos chuckled internally, knowing the light as the node of a harmonia gear. He wondered what the person did to receive that torture, recognizing the

animalistic panic of a creature trapped in a foreign body. Focused on the screen, the doctor did not notice the message, Argos nodding as the cloud faded.

“Interesting,” the doctor murmured as the scan concluded. Argos leaned forward, unable to hide his interest in the cause of these shifts. “Every scan indicates that the nanites are working as intended. They’re simply adjusting your body to what your brain thinks it should be.”

“Your machine is fucked then!” Argos snapped, lips pulling back on his extended snout.

“We’ve seen this effect before. Mutations like this can befall one with mental issues that distort their self-perception.”

“You think I want this? I know what I am supposed to be, and it isn’t God damned this!” Argos yelled, ripping off the net on his head.

“Conscious and subconscious are different,” the doctor said, putting a hand on his weapon.

He stood as the doctor beckoned that he follow. Making his way to the door, he turned an eye to the rat cage. “I thought you ran psych tests on me,” he hissed, stepping closer than before.

“It’s a process, Mr. Brewer,” the doctor chuckled smugly. “We’ll make sure the next subject is examined properly,” he remarked, half-interested as though he hardly noticed Argos was still there. “Of course, your case is unique. According to your scan—”

Before he could finish, Argos swung for the man’s face, aiming to strike that snide expression from him. Despite the fatigue and stiffness in his limbs, he could still muster strength behind them. Caught off-guard, he crumpled to the ground, grunting in pain.

Smiling, Argos’s blood boiled with excitement. One of his claws left a cut on the doctor’s face, and he felt good to hurt the man. He had a moment where the man stood stunned. With a

fiery breath, he considered following the blow with a kick to the face. Instead, he looked back at the swimming rat. Hurting the man would be satisfying, but he could save whoever was trapped in that body. Darting, he reached in and flicked his wrist, tossing the animal and freeing a stranger.

Argos turned back to the doctor, ready to follow up with his attack. Recovered, the doctor jumped to his feet and drove a stun gun into Argos's side. Electricity locking his muscles, a choked yell escaped his throat. The doctor wiped blood from his cheek and watching him fall to the ground.

“Was that cathartic for you?” the doctor snapped, kicking Argos in the gut. Grunting in pain, he would have vomited had he anything in his stomach. He called in two guards who brought Argos back to his cell. Thrown back into the little room, he saw himself in the mirror above the toilet. For a moment, he hardly recognized himself. His eyes were wrong, yellow irises and black pupils expanded so that the whites were barely visible, giving his gaze an inhuman, almost demonic look. His skin looked ashy, and he realized that color was fading from his vision, unnoticed in the stark laboratories. He smiled to himself. When his survival remained so far from his control, it became difficult to grasp or obsess over.

—Rats were surprisingly competent swimmers. As Penelope trod water, she recalled stories of the animals swimming without rest for days. After two days of persisting, the doctor seemed annoyed by her persistence. He pulled her out, gasping and falling over exhausted.

Attempting to track the signal of her harmonia, he toyed with her node, electrical wires leaving her hazy muddled like a spoon had whirled around in her brain. Though it failed, she found thinking difficult after the shocks to her mind.

Pain made one's mind retreat, leaving their occupied animal to lean forward. The doctor knew this, avoiding traditional torture as he knew it would yield no answers. However, he was not so easily dissuaded from one who he believed threatened his work. He threw her in another rat cage, leaving her to fend against them. With tooth and claws, she fought them, drawing blood but losing much herself. When the doctor returned, she lay panting and bleeding in the bedding, but the other rats keeping their distance.

He asked the same questions again, receiving the same response. "I don't have time for this," he hissed, placing her back into the flooded tank.

Treading water again, her muscles felt like hot concrete. Almost a week of fighting for survival left her weary and struggling to keep her head above water. Her thoughts ceased days before, mind focused solely on remaining alive. Only a day later, bobbing in the water, lungs burning with droplets of water, she wondered how much longer she could last. The doctor seemed no longer to care about answers. Soon, he would return, and she would be dead.

A creature entered the room, so strange in appearance that it pulled her from her desperate thoughts. It stood hunched over, hairless with a snout like a pug but wearing a human's hospital gown. When it spoke, its voice emerged guttural and growled, hard to understand at first. However, she noticed the name used by the doctor.

With Argos Brewer's name in mind, she could see him. Through the mutations, the half-human was identifiable. Mind returning, she managed to signal him, goading him into striking the doctor. She would have laughed, relishing the sight of the doctor falling to the ground in pain.

Freed from the cage, she felt like she was flying. Tumbling onto the ground, she scampered under the desk. The floor beneath her feet felt wonderful, and she shivered with delight to be free

as the wind. From the darkness, she watched the doctor furiously order several guards around, distracted and unaware.

“Cocky fuck,” he hissed, spitting out a wad of blood as he watched Argos get dragged away. “Hope you enjoyed that. You won’t like the reason behind this all.”

The doctor shut the lights off as he left, leaving Penelope to adjust her eyes to the dark. Any other time, she might worry over what he said, or think about her friend’s mutated body. However, in panic and desperation, she thought only of escaping, willing to do anything to leave the damned lab.

Alone, she scampered up the massive legs of chairs and tables, crossing the expanses of furniture until she came to a laptop on the corner desk. Forcing open the computer was difficult, but not as much so as pushing it wider. To find it unlocked, she could have cried with joy. Using the pointing stick and by jumping on the keys, she accessed her harmonia database.

Lit in white light, she saw several locators light up. Her own was marked at the company’s drug manufacturing center several miles from town, not a surprising location for the laboratory. Unsurprisingly, her other nodes appeared at her apartment. Finally, the crown that started it all remained at the hospital.

Realization crashed against her like a car. When in a different body, her human form would seem comatose. Found by the hospital, they must have brought her in as a Jane Doe. Few knew of the harmonia gear, likely removing it with her other effects, unknowingly trapping her in the body of a rat. The doctor never found her, because, why check hospital records for an unidentified woman when one is fearful of industrial sabotage.



As she thought, she noticed a light from her apartment. One of her nodes was active, attached to something. Several codes inputted, and she set that active node to her return point. She erased the history on her laptop and braced herself.

Jumping into an unknown body was a leap of faith. At worst, the node was malfunctioning, fleeing to it a death sentence if unattached. Anything was better than remaining captive, dying slowly as a rat.

*I will not die here. He wants to know who I work for, where I came. I'm going to show him who I am!... 014 Disengage Harmonia 144!*

—“I’m sure that question that question has been haunting you, Mr. Brewer,” the doctor said, speaking snidely through the door. In response, Argos struck his fist against the door, the metal clang echoing through the room. “I’ll take that as ‘explosive interest,’ something I find quite fitting.”

Though Argos despised the man, his alien form was impossible to ignore. If the man was right, that the mutations hailed from his own psyche, he wanted to know why.

“That shock to your brain; I suspect you know why it occurred. Harmonia gear was not meant to pull the mind out of a dead body. Surely, it only did so because you were saved mere seconds from finality. However, those circumstances had unintended consequences. Though not my area of expertise, I can assume that the harmonia gear had no idea what to pull from a dying brain. When it tried, it ripped not just your mind, but pieces of the dog’s mind with yours.”

“So, Artemis is—” Argos murmured, running his claw over his temple.

“All those extra brain waves I saw, they’re parts of your dog’s mind, haphazardly stored in your brain’s quiet parts. This is unprecedented, so I can’t tell you what this will cause. Perhaps it will fade away like foggy memories. Perhaps they will form a second voice in your head, a dog seeing the world through your eyes. Or perhaps, it will grow, take control and replace every human part of your mind.” There was a perverse glee to his descriptions; the doctor clearly fascinated by the phenomenon. “Fragments of this canine mind are what’s making your body take this shape. The nanites read what your body should be from Artemis, not Argos.”

“What will you do about that?” Argos asked, hands shaking with worry. No matter how far the mutations progressed, he believed them random, reversible. Losing his humanity, another mind occupying his head, threatening to replace him entirely. He wondered if that erasure would be like death, maybe the very rewriting of his soul would be worse.

“Observe, of course.”

“What?!? You can’t do that shit!” Argos shouted, jumping to his feet and slamming against the door. The doctor audibly stepped back. “Your poison did this. You have to fix it!”

On the other side of the door, the doctor snapped his fingers. “That snap, that action, is done, Mr. Brewer. No matter how much you might want to take it back, the sound will travel and ripple throughout the world. The nanites cannot be removed or shut off until they have completed their goal. And nothing short of a lobotomy can pull the fragments of your dog from your brain.”

“It’s not real,” Argos whispered unconsciously. He fell to the floor, holding his head and closing his eyes. Thoughts whirling, he searched for fragments of a foreign mind within him. What that would even feel like, he did not know.”

—For a moment, Penelope’s mind floated in nothing, aware yet incapable of thought. The distance of the jump dragged like rushing through a dark tunnel so quickly that she could not be processed. She burst back to consciousness like splashing into frigid water, leaving her stunned.

Light flooded her vision, harsh rays like a white glare. Carefully testing herself, she looked around, feeling the tensing of muscles and brushing of fur, unfamiliar in a new body. A week trapped in the rat left her accustomed to the form, feeling unnatural without the small round body, long tail, or whiskers; unspecific, yet she simply felt wrong. Shaking her head, she tried to dispel the fog in her brain. Instinctively, she sniffed the air, the breath flooding her with new information.

Opening her eyes, she found herself in her apartment, lying on her couch. A cabinet lay fallen over; objects strewn across the floor from a fight. Looking down, she saw two paws covered in black fur. Shaking herself, she opened her muzzle and panted, relishing the feeling of wind from an open window over her. Though still apart from her true form, freedom from that accursed lab rat was a blessing.

She occupied Yin, her black shepherd mix dog. Standing before a mirror, she could see his yellow eyes looking back at her, a form she had taken many times before. She wondered how the harmonia node got onto her pet but thanked luck, God, karma, or whatever gave her this escape.

Part of her knew she ought to set to work immediately, knowing Argos was still in danger. However, the week left her mentally exhausted, ready to cry at the mere lack of pain. Padding the apartment, ate from a fallen bag of dog food, likely what kept Yin alive over the week. Though thirsty, the water bowl lay empty, and she was not willing to drink from the toilet. Her sensitive nose found the lingering scent of humans in the building. Her own body’s, of course, was almost ground into the wood by the years. Argos’s remained on the couch. Faintly, she noticed a third, a

stranger. It barely registered, faint as if the person spent only a brief period here. But focusing with her snout to the floor, it was unmistakably present.

Her senses sharpened; she returned to her phone, jumping to reach it. Accustomed to the form of a rat, she thought first to grab it in her claws. Failing that, she swatted it to the floor and attempted to input buttons. Her nose proved too imprecise. But after some trial-and-error, she managed to push the rubber buttons with careful bites of individual teeth. For the first time since the cable company saddled her with it, she was glad to have a landline.

Mentally, she ran through potential calls. She needed someone she could trust, someone who might know how to help, and someone she did not care enough about to risk by dragging them into this mess. With a bit of concentration, she punched in the numbers, ears falling flat with relief as Kurtis picked up.

He was confused at first, hearing only barks through the line. However, something close to understanding came after a short while, and he agreed to come. Penelope sighed and rested in the corner of the room; paws sprawled before her. Though she escaped, her home lay in tatter, Argos remained in captivity, and her own body still lay lost elsewhere. A strange feeling between nausea homesickness sat in her core like a stone. She missed her real body, an instinctive voice calling for it without words.

Losing focus and still mentally exhausted, she fell into something of a trance. Her ears perked before she even registered a sound reaching them. Someone walking down the hall towards her at a swift pace. Fur bristling, she bared her teeth and rose to her feet, her time captive associated with all humans in her animal brain. However, she recognized the smell of the visitor before he entered. Kurtis, answering her call.

He entered slowly, unsure what to expect upon only receiving barks through the call. Half of him believed it nothing more than a butt-dial. The other half thinking it an emergency. Upon entering, he found evidence to disprove and confirm both his suspicions. Calm filled about the apartment, quiet and bloodless with nothing to set him to worry. A fight obviously befell the space, furniture thrown over, bullet holes in the far wall. But what caught his eye was Yin, the black dog watching him from across the room, a wolf-like and solitary look in its eyes.

It took Penelope a moment to relax as Kurtis entered. Her canine eyes were not good at differentiating human faces. Though she knew him, she remained nervous of anyone and everyone. She greeted him as best she could without words, stopping a few feet away and nodding.

“Yin, what are you—” he started, relaxing at the familiar presence. He paused as he noticed the lit node, realization coming over him. “Penelope?” She nodded, meeting his gaze seriously. “What the hell happened here?” Unable to speak, she shook her head, not knowing herself. “Can you get back to your real body? I don’t want to play twenty questions.”

Bowing her head, she felt a twinge of embarrassment, like the animal reaction of hiding a wound. Without a better communication method, she flattened her ears and put her tail between her legs to show her fear. He knelt, attempting to parse meaning from the motions. She stepped forward and pressed her nose to his pocket.

“Something’s keeping you from going back,” he murmured, understanding and pulling out his phone. She touched her nose to the Maps app, but the large, imprecise motion instead opened the camera. Her sigh emerged as a frustrated growl, and she thought of how much she wanted things to be normal. Fortunately, he understood, opening the app and looking to her for directions. “You know where your body is?”

Nodding her head, she dragged her paw against the carpet, tracing the cross of a hospital. Their game of charades brought Kurtis to seriousness. He kept glancing towards the bullet holes, realizing something incredibly wrong with the situation. “Plus? You’re at a church?” A long blink told him otherwise. “No, hospital?” she jumped slightly, excited to finally get a message through.

Before the moment could pass, she hurried over to the closet and pulled the door open. Kurtis stood perplexed, still processing things. She pulled out a support dog vest with her teeth, knowing the hospital unlikely to allow a pet through the halls.

“Wait, Penelope,” Kurtis interrupted, closing the front door of the apartment. “You know I’ve got your back. I’m willing to help, but you gotta give me something,” he said, prompting a confused look from her, for how was she to do such a thing. “Something fucked up happened here.” He motioned towards the clutter and bullet holes. “I don’t know where Argos is or what sent you to the hospital. Everything about this feels wrong.”

Casting her head down, her shoulders slumped and her ears fell. She knew it dangerous men that she challenged, knowing she had no right to drag another into this fight. Escape would be impossible without him, but she could not risk someone who trusted her.

“This feels illegal. Are we gonna get caught?” She tilted her head, unsure where it would fall. The scientists were operating in secret, but she knew not what it would take to free Argos or reveal their dealings. “That’s reassuring... It’s gonna be dangerous, right? You look worried.” She nodded. “Are we gonna get out of this alive?”

—Warm water came like a blessing. When the researchers allowed that he shower, Argos treated it with the same suspicion as any other gift they might offer. Recently, the doctor seemed

especially upset. Argos figured it because of the punch he threw, but the man grumbled instead about *finding the escaped rat*.

He stood nervous before spout, hesitant to undress with the others likely watching. No cameras were visible in the small room but doubted the simple act of privacy could be expected. However, he turned the handle, watching steam rise against the white walls. The allure of such a simple pleasure was too much to resist. Against his better judgement, he dropped his dirty robe to the side, covering himself against potential prying eyes.

Before stepping into the stream of hot water, he placed his hands into it. The heat soothed his stiff and sore bones. His wrists ended in hairless paws, lacking pads, but his nails already twisted into flat claws. He sighed and closed his eyes, the water a small, welcomed comfort.

He stepped into the water and let it run over him, the warmth suffusing him to the very core. Grime and sweat poured from him, washed away into the drain. He chuckled at his old life, at how he took such a simple act as showering for granted. Now, it felt like the kindest of pleasures. Rubbing his shoulders and back, he felt lighter as he cleaned. The darkening fuzz that coated him softened in the stream, though this made it feel no less alien. His stomach turning at the sensation of claws running through his fur. He brought his hands to his face, not wanting to experience the uncomfortably rearranged placement of his hips and shoulders.

However, as he touched his face, he realized just how far his jaws had pushed from his face. Before, it seemed slightly chimp-like. Now, it protruded further than natural for any primate. Touching the end of his new snout, he felt his forward-facing nostrils flare. The nose felt softer than the surrounding flesh. Though not human in shape, the muzzle was not canine either. Too short and sloped, but catching the cleaning supplies on the floor and the impurities in the water.

Argos detested the sensation. Most of the changes took him so slowly that he did not notice them. Only as he collected his thoughts did he see how far they had gone. Shuddering, he sat down on the smooth floor and let the water run down his back. In the previous days, he tried not to show any weakness to the scientists.

Reminded of his past, faced with his dwindling humanity, he could no longer maintain the façade. He had occupied the bodies of animals many times before. But the harmonia put a barrier between him and them. When his own body turned inescapably against him, when his very humanity was robbed of him, he rested his head against his knees. It took all his mettle to remain silent, against his better judgement, he began to cry into his arm, tears washed into the drain.

As time passed, a different voice began to voice itself within him. Though it used no words, it spoke within him nonetheless. If the men were not watching now, they would soon demand that he return to his cell. Just as beasts hid their injuries, he endeavored to show no weakness before the men. Gritting his teeth, he choked back emotion and prepared to return to his prison. Sharp fangs replaced his teeth. He wondered what it would be like to bite the doctor with his newfound weapons. Thinking on that catharsis that would bring seemed the only upside of his changes.

Attempting to stand, he felt a loud pop from his hips. A hint of relief followed, like the flexibility that followed cracking one's knuckles. Even as he attempted to straighten his back, a newly shaped waist forced him to lean forward at a hunched angle, holding the wall for balance. His tail brushed against his legs, now extended by several vertebrae, but still hairless. He found that he possessed a higher degree of control over the new appendage. Though he could curl or shake it, the tail moved more on its own accord, more an indicator of his emotions. When thinking of his old life, it shook slightly; when his mind returned to the doctor, it curled between his legs; he could suppress these reactions, but only by concentrating.



After shutting off the water, he was escorted wordlessly back to his room. Soon after, they would slide another meal under the door. By then, his hunger strike was surrendered. Perhaps it was when he struck the doctor, perhaps when he freed the spy, or even the possibility that someone might save him; he felt a spark of hope stirring within him. As his appetite returned, he ate multiple times his usual needs. His changes accelerated with it, noticeably mutating with every passing day.

“Good evening, Mr. Brewer,” the doctor greeted, his voice emerging from speakers within the room. The door slot opened for the coming meal. “What changes can you report?”

Argos took the food but did not return the greeting. He would have smiled at the obviousness of the strategy. After his daily questionings, they would provide him a large meal. Compliance was rewarded with food; they were training him as if he were already a dog. He realized this quickly, keeping it in mind even as he played the exact game they set up for him.

“Have you become incapable of speech? Or are you simply giving me the silent treatment?”

“Harder to *speak*,” Argos answered, finding his lips unfit to make quite a few sounds. “Can’t *alk* right,” he continued, motioning towards his hips. No matter the hatred he felt for the doctor, he found petty defiance not worth the suffering. Until they gave him an opportunity for real retaliation or escape, he would gain their trust.

“Walking will prove harder as your posture realigns. Trying to maintain your old stance is fruitless. Try walking on all fours to aid the changes along; it’s just a matter of time anyway.”

“Like hell!”

“There’s no power in pride, Mr. Brewer. I can see your fur is coming along well along your spine. Should current rates continue, your changes will conclude in less than two weeks.”

“What *happens* after that?” Argos asked, already nervously thinking through possibilities.

“That will likely depend on what remains of your mental facilities once the nanites have completed their task. I’m sure we’ll find you a fine enough home. I’ve always been a dog person.”

Argos took a sharp breath of disgust. He might have spoken against it, but he heard a tray of food slide into the room. His sense of taste dulled as his tongue elongated, meat soon becoming the only thing that he enjoyed eating. More so, his sense of smell enhanced the meals. The beef he received seemed to fill the room with mouth-watering, savory air. The salt and gristle left alluring notes in the air. Before biting in, he knew it rare, blood dripping as his sharp teeth tore pieces from it. *Good boy*, he heard faintly over the speakers.

He tracked the passing days in body lost. Fur grew thicker, obviously a pelt and not hair. Artemis’s coat rang familiar in his memory, black-backed with his sides and front a dirty grey. Walking became so difficult that he preferred simply to lie in bed. Once, he attempted moving on all fours. Something between the walk of a canine and a gorilla, it proved more comfortable than he cared to admit. His snout lengthened and his nose grew coarse and moist. Most embarrassingly, stomach pains preceded an uncomfortable tightness in his privates, the set smaller and pulled against his body. Though unnerving, no force on earth could compel him to alert the doctor to it.

Sleeping in short naps, he lost all track of time long before. Under the perpetual, fluorescent lights, he could not even track the hours through the doctor’s erratic meetings. Interrupting his sleep, he heard the door to his cell open. Ever suspicious, he hobbled over to the entrance and glanced outside. One of the guards waited outside, the gun by his side dissuading attack.

A strange whistling buzz reached him, making him swipe at his ear, thinking it a mosquito. Argos initially intended to return to bed, avoiding the tests he knew waiting for him. However, a

wordless voice called out to him once again, like whispers he had not heard but internalized nonetheless. When he attempted to ignore the call, he felt a tide of unease filling him. Nervous, the silent voice only grew louder and bade he follow, lest something terrible happen.

Bracing himself against the wall, he hobbled down the white hall, met again by that incessant sound. Like an irritating siren, it called him further until he came upon an open door. The lab, and inside, the doctor. Argos hid his scowl as he saw the chair and net of wires. With a smug smile, the doctor twirled a dog whistle between his fingers. “Testing a theory, Mr. Brewer. Drug dogs are trained with these pups, and you remember its sound... I wonder what other tricks you remember. Sit!” he commanded, motioning towards the chair.

“*I*n not a dog,” Argos hissed, his tail curling timidly as he defied the command.

“You clearly haven’t looked in the mirror. Now I don’t care if you do so because of human logic or canine loyalty. Be a good boy, and sit down,” the doctor commanded, all but shoving Argos into the chair. The motion made Argos’s hospital gown fall to the side. “Oh my, I suppose I should have said; good girl,” he laughed, the parted cloth revealing a new change. Argos now had three pairs of budding skin-bumps growing on his torso. Red-faced, he covered what they both knew to be new nipples, smaller than his original set. “My God. You really cannot catch a break.”

“I noticed,” Argos sighed, allowing the electrodes to be placed over his reshaped skull. After activating the scanners, the doctor looked with annoyance at his buzzing phone.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” the doctor muttered, typing something into his keyboard. “It seems I’m the only person in this facility that can wipe his own ass. Don’t try anything clever,” he ordered, moving to step out of the room. Argos nodded, peering at the man and waiting for any mistake. “Before I go, would you like to know something my father once told

me?... If a man wrongs you once, and you trust him again, you deserve to be wronged the second time.” With a push of a button, the chair buzzed and shook. Two restraints snapped shut around Argos’s wrists, making him yelp and thrash with surprise. “New gadget I had installed. You like?”

—Searches at the station occasionally required an element of deceit. Penelope dug a harness from her closet, the jacket of a support dog. Kurtis nodded in understanding, realizing the gravity of her goals, even if she could not communicate them directly. They got into the car and drive silently to the hospital. Kurtis shot worried and confused glances towards her the entire way, trying to make sense of the situation. As the dangerous nature of their task gnawed at his mind, he wondered if he ought to escape while he could. But he was not the sort to abandon her.

Stumbling and off-balance, the drive to the hospital felt like hours. Penelope blamed the quicker internal clock of a dog at first. However, as her stomach sank and her fur stood on end, she realized it something else. She had no idea how long it had been since her first venture. Some part of her feared she would find her body dead or injured. More so, that form felt distant and unreachable, like a stage in one’s life that they could never return to.

Paws against the window, she looked outside as they drove past familiar buildings. Her breath caught in her throat, each second of their approach only redoubling her worry that something terrible might happen. However, with no more than a red light to stand in their way, they came to the hospital’s white and red cross.

“What’s our plan here, Penelope?” Kurtis asked, pulling into a lot a short way from the building. “I don’t suppose you checked in or were carrying an ID?” She shook her head, lowering her gaze as she thought about their options. “We go in and search every room for your body?”

Check every Jane Doe in the building?” After a pause, a slow nod confirmed that she had no better ideas. “Well then... I’m guessing this is the sort of sweep we don’t want to be remembered for,” he said, stowing his wallet in the glove compartment. Looking her over, he made sure they fit the part. He brushed some of her fur over her harmonia node. “Oh God, what are we getting ourselves into?” he murmured to himself, rubbing a charm hanging from his neck.

As they walked from the car, both fought to steady their nerves, though only Kurtis’s discomfort was visible. But by the time they reached the doors, he managed a laid-back look despite his obvious focus on the front desk.

They received a few looks as they entered, but soon lost interest in the support dog. Kurtis approached with a cheer that only Penelope recognized as a mask. With a fake name and a story of his wife going missing after a head injury, he asked the woman for the room of any comatose Jane Doe’s present. Unfortunately, this soon brought them to a wall. According to Kurtis, he hurried here without any ID or proof of his story. Without this, they could not legally give them the room of every unidentified woman.

Limited acting ability coming to its limits, Kurtis faltered, looking for anything he could say not to give up. Penelope bit the leg of his pants, pointing towards the office beside the waiting area. With a knowing smile, he summoned the memory of every impatient and entitled person to argue with them in customs. It only took a few minutes of a grown man arguing and whining before the poor woman agreed to bring the dean of medicine to explain the laws again.

Penelope took the opportunity and darted around the counter. A short jump and she grabbed a patient list, assuming they would keep a comatose woman in the ICU, where she could be easily

be monitored. She returned at the same time as the nurse, keeping her head low and subtly placing the clipboard by Kurtis's feet.

“Finally, maybe you can explain why you're keeping me from my wife, just because I don't have my damn license,” Kurtis shouted, nudging for Penelope to leave. Escaping with the information would be difficult, but Kurtis drew enough eyes to cover her departure. Several noticed as a dog fled the hospital with a clipboard in its mouth. Fortunately, none were official. Soon after, Kurtis followed; the two meeting by his car.

“You realize, they'll catch us soon. All of that was on camera, and they'll remember me after that display,” Kurtis muttered. Penelope flicked her ears in acknowledgement, laying the records down on the sidewalk. He crouched low and looked on with her, turning the page when she touched the paper with her nose. It seemed a good time for Jane Doe's in comas as they found three that could be her. “What's the plan then? I go in wearing a hat, pretend to be a different, identical guy with a support dog. We search the halls until we find you and walk out without drawing suspicion,” he chuckled, his smile fading as she nodded in affirmation. “When we're done, you better have a real good explanation for all this.”

With a black coat thrown over him and a baseball cap pulled low over his face, they returned. Lingering by the entrance, they waited until the receptionist looked away and strode briskly for the elevator. Inside, they met an uncomfortable silence, the other two in the enclosed space remembering his fake outburst and watching him curiously.

They moved with purpose once the doors slid open, Kurtis whispering the room numbers under his breath. “207, let's see if this is you,” he said. However, she walked past with only the slightest pause, the smell from within entirely different from her own. Turning down the hall, they

noticed a security guard watching them from the corner of his eye. Though the man did not follow, it was enough to send a shiver down their spines as they slowed their walk and maintained the appearance of mundanity. They turned down the first hall that gave them cover from the man's watch, taking back for one of the other rooms.

Before even reaching room 251, a faint whiff reached her snout. The scent murmured deep in her brain, rooted in the memories of Yin, rather than her own. She recognized herself, stunned for a moment upon realizing it. Something about the room scared her, left her frozen just before the open door. She feared what would be inside. Like Schrodinger's Cat, she could be dead, maimed, eternally trapped in her current form, discovered by the doctor. Her paranoid mind could produce a thousand horrible possibilities, while only one potential outcome favored her. Somehow, crossing that threshold felt like it would make everything real. Like the wave function would not collapse, so long as she never entered. As if sensing her hesitation, Kurtis took the first step. "That's you," he whispered.

An uncanny stillness and quiet filled the room as she entered. Her body lay on the bed, breathing, but limp as a corpse. Pale and thin, but unmistakably her. Approaching as if walking on glass, she touched her snout to her real hand, pushing her head underneath it.

Clearly perplexed by her reaction, but still remembering the danger they faced, Kurtis searched the room for her belongings. Wrapped in the clothes she wore that day was her harmonia gear. Her suspicions were confirmed, the headgear not recognized and simply removed from a seemingly unconscious woman. He placed it delicately on her head and looked to her.

Shivering with fear, she saw it light up, ready. Over the day, despite the stress, plans had been brewing in her brain. Though threats to her own life took priority, she had not forgotten

Argos. Soon, she would be able to take action, finally forcing the doctor to react to her. First, she needed to return to her own body. *014 Disengage Harmonia 144*

—Argos struggled against his binds, finding his wrists clamped tightly to the metal chair. As dignified than if he were wearing a collar and chain, he attempted to relax. He had experienced worse, and simply waited for it to be over. A gentle, thrumming buzz filled his head, wincing and shifting as he sat on his own tail. The current felt like a scalp massage, but somehow resonating deeper into his brain. To calm himself, he turned his mind back to happier memories.

Simple things proved the most effective. Lying in bed, cozy and warm as a winter storm raged outside. Sitting on the couch with Penelope by his side. Excitedly completing a task and her trainer petting and rewarding her for it.

*What?* Argos wondered, shaking his head as he realized something wrong. Brain hazy as mind and nanites were analyzed; he found the border between himself and Artemis thinned. He recalled meeting her new owner, learning his own scent as he attached nodes to her head. Memories danced like fleeting wisps in her head, visible, but difficult to grasp. The world around him seemed stranger, feral instincts reeling against the many blinking lights and odd sounds from the lab. At first, he shook his head and tried to banish the alien thoughts, afraid they might overtake and replace him. However, the more these thoughts gripped him, he found the constant distress of his warped body to be dulled. A slow breath eased him, his fur and tail finally feeling natural.

Shifting in his seat, he brought up his right hand and scratched his neck. His eyes shot open with realization as he looked down. Darkened with claws and fur, his thumb had migrated up his wrist, becoming a small dewclaw. Without it, his hand slid easily from its bindings. For all his



plans, the doctor did not take into account the mutations he caused. “And my father once told me; don’t be an idiot,” Argos chuckled, using his one free hand to remove the net from his head.

Thoughts clearing, he pulled and struggled in vain to free his other hand. Without dexterous fingers on his right hand, he could not force open the vice around his wrist. As he reached and felt around the space, he found an emergency release under one of the arms. Pulling the switch, he grinned as his arm came free. Licking the fur clean, he shook himself and stood. Forced onto his toes and supported with his arm, he bound towards the exit.

Breath held, he leaned out and searched for any watchers. Alone, he walked from the open door and hurried down the hall. He did not know the path to the exit, turning down corridors on gut feelings. Sniffing the air and keeping his ears ready, he could sense the presence and approach of people, none close enough to hear his claws clicking against the floor. Most of the doors remained locked, a select few opening with a solid shove, others left ajar in the commotion.

Panting, he found a rhythm to his stride, approaching the speeds he was once capable of. Though he had little expectations of escape, his heart felt light.

“I want to know how a trained security team manages not to notice a van sitting across from us for several hours, let alone fail to get its plates as it flees?” the doctor shouted, receiving a meek reply from another man. Argos came to a sudden stop, almost tripping over himself. He stood beside the corner of the hall, worriedly looking around for any escape. Paws on his muzzle, he dulled the sound of his panicked breaths.

Like a gift from God, he saw a magnetically sealing door behind him, left cracked slightly open. He darted in, shutting the entrance just before the doctor came around the hall. They walked

past, and he allowed a sigh of relief to escape him. Even without a plan, he felt a rush to evade notice. Panting with tongue curled, he felt his cheeks flush with heat and missed his sweat glands.

He leaned against the wall and adjusted his eyes to the dark of the room, illuminated only by a computer screen. Once the sound outside wholly disappeared, he rose back to his feet. He glanced around the room, an observation area with a narrow window, a computer, and a desk.

The screen remained open to an unsent email, cursor blinking, and waiting for input. *Nanites are no longer present within subject's body, and mutations are complete. Though, the exact mechanisms behind several features are still under investigation. However, it is unlikely that we will be able to replicate these effects with the necessary predictability and stability required for our purposes. Once we have devised a method to control them, it may be useful. Until then, Abrams is considering a search for more subjects with the psychological conditions capable of causing mutations. With luck, they will prove less dangerous than the subject.*

A sharp breath leaving his nose, he wondered who else was subjected to the changes, and what they became. Without the buzzing of lights above him, he experienced true silence, one he had not felt for quite some time, joined only by the thumping of his pulse.

Curious, he turned to the mirrored glass window. Jumping away, his heart seemed to stop. Freezing, he met the unflinching and chilling gaze of a golden-winged angel.