

△△△ Server Error

"Wake up."

She opens her eyes. Her software boots up, and across her eyes flash a panel of data updating patches connected to her mind. Sitting up, she stands with a light thud as her feet land on the concrete floor. Looking at herself in the mirror, she sees her reflection. Half robot, half human, and alive for over five hundred years, she has undergone a lung conversion to breathe without oxygen. She has been oxygen-independent for the last five centuries.

Her body is covered with titanium plates that she can easily replace if damaged. The only part of her body that remains biological is her gut-brain; everything else is replaced by machinery. Each day, she injects a serum into her gut-brain that keeps cells cycling so she can stay alive. Because she has no need for a stomach, food is no longer a concern. Although she misses the ritual of it from time to time, she made a promise to the people close to her in the distant past that she would move beyond a default human life in order to live to see the "now" - after humanity scattered or died.

Five hundred years later, everyone from her family and friends is gone. Earth had become too dangerous for humans to live on over one hundred years ago, but she was able to survive in deep space with her specialized lungs. That meant, unlike the others, she was able to stay "alive."

For two hundred years, she stayed on a moon base with others like her, but asteroids eventually forced everyone to leave the base in their respective ships. She had flown out toward Neptune and hasn't stopped since.

Checking the map on her ship, she notices that Neptune is off course. She double-checks and realizes that there was an error in her initial trajectory.

"Did I really screw that up?" she asks herself. Surprised she might have made a mistake on the coordinates, she tries to change course. "Error: Cannot change course," the ship responds. She tries again. Same thing.

On the screen, she sees a planet appear from a distance. The ship seems to be planning a landing there on its own, outside of her orders. Confused, she tries to control the vessel but to no avail. The ship lowers them both into the scarlet and yellow swirling dust clouds of the atmosphere on this unknown planet.

Closer and closer they arrive, hovering over the ground. A large building appears on the distant horizon. The ship lowers itself and reduces speed as it heads toward the structure. The building sparkles like gold sand, with soft corners and curves in subtle, precise lines, resembling something like the shape of an octopus.

The ship lands on the sandy dunes and she steps out, cautiously walking towards the center of the building into a small entrance encased in a polished gold trim. She touches the walls and feels the bumps of the golden sanded surface tap across her titanium-coated fingers. Electronic signals fire back to her brain about how the golden bumps "dance." She walks into the second entrance, barely fitting her frame.

The walls wrap around like a polished gold tunnel that never seems to scratch or dent. She sees reflections of herself in the tunnel surface, watching them change shape and morph around, giving her just enough room to move ahead, but not enough to do much else.

Trying to grasp onto the sides of the walls, she realizes the attempts are useless. She lets go and the walls close in behind her, pushing her ahead where it wants her to go. The walls start pushing more intensely until she flies out of a sky into a larger area full

of golden spheres. She lands on the spheres; a few beneath her crack and some smash. She feels her arms being engulfed in a thick sludge with a golden caramel color, reflecting the light. Around the area, orbs float around, lighting the space evenly. They appear to be providing intense heat onto the spheres.

She tries to stand, but each time she attempts, she crushes or cracks spheres and more sludge oozes out. Distributing her body weight as she slides across seems to lower the risk of damage, so she decides to crawl over the spheres slowly until a barrier is reached. With her arms extended, she feels a ledge. Grabbing it, she climbs out of the spheres, standing up while looking around wondering where she is.

A large gold-filled dome-shaped area with a small opening for the sky above surrounded her and the spheres. The spheres are all focused in the center of the area with a narrow ledge around the walls. Walking along the ledge, she tries to find a way to exit and get back to her ship.

One of the holes suddenly makes a low humming noise and produces a vacuum-like proboscis that extends forward, grabbing one of the spheres, pulling it towards the wall and firing it out through the other side. She realizes she could try to catch a ride with a sphere being fired out as a way to escape. Climbing back into the spheres, she crawls near the center where the proboscis aims frequently and waits.

A proboscis arrives and she jumps to grab it. Missing the first attempt, she falls back onto the spheres, crushing some again. Pulling more unbroken spheres into the center on top of the crushed ones, she manages to make a small mound to sit on, giving her a better chance at reaching the next one. Another proboscis arrives and she jumps. "Got it!" she says to herself, holding on tightly with her extra-firm grip. She feels her body

shoot through the golden tunnel in reverse so quickly that it made her thoughts feel like they were slowing down and skipping fragments.

As she arrives on the other side, the proboscis produces a field that pushes her grip away, causing her to fall onto a polished gold floor. She gets up and looks around, seeing multiple proboscides coming out of large golden tentacles brushed in the same sand as the walls. They are a part of the walls, she realizes.

Each proboscis briefly turns into a face, a mouth appearing before disappearing back into the void. One of the ephemeral heads turns and looks directly at her. She looks back and makes eye contact. That interaction seemed to stop all the other proboscides from moving, and they all became faces looking at her.

"I am here to get my ship. I did not mean to arrive here. I am sorry!" she pleads, in anticipation of something bad happening.

"You are always here," they say.

Confused at what they meant, she tries to turn around and head toward her ship.

"You are," they say again. "Always here," they say louder, but now the sound and heads move slowly towards surrounding her. The heads all appeared closer and stare at her more intensely. She tries to back away, but they move in. Panic sets in and she starts hitting them with her fists and arms, using her titanium plates to hopefully cause damage.

They each growl in very low frequencies, causing the structure to shake and rumble. Each head she injures extends into two additional heads. She backs up enough to get away from the newer heads before they can reach her.

Running further away, she moves as fast as she can to escape. She needs more injections soon because of all the activity. She soon begins to feel weak. Seeing the ship ahead, she pushes even further to get there faster. The heads are still chasing, but each step she made further away substantially reduced their speed. They have a limit.

Finally getting to the ship, she climbs in and tries to start it up, hoping it will work. After a few tries, the ship finally goes online, allowing her to navigate out of the planet.

As the ship leaves the planet, she watches the golden hydra get smaller and smaller until they disappear as she exits the atmosphere.

She tries to input the original coordinates again - still an error. Annoyed, she looks at the available destinations. Listed are three options: the current planet she just visited, a moon nearby, or a planet with caves in a cold climate. She chooses the last one... the only other option for now.

