

Neuromancer



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM GIBSON

William Gibson was born in a vacation town on the coast of South Carolina. He spent the first few years of his life moving around Virginia because of his father's job as a manager of a construction company, but when Gibson was six his father died, and his mother moved them to Wytheville, Virginia, where she and Gibson's father were born and raised. Gibson was a bookish child, obsessed with science fiction. However, he didn't put the same kind of obsessive focus into school, and so his mother sent him to boarding school in southern Arizona. Gibson's mother died when he was eighteen, and he left school without graduating. He moved to Canada to dodge the draft for the Vietnam War. He spent the sixties as a self-proclaimed hippie, before marrying a woman from Vancouver and moving there with her. He received a degree in English at the University of British Columbia and began to try his hand at writing. He published a series of short stories before being commissioned to write a novel—a work that would turn into *Neuromancer*, a surprise smash hit. Since then, Gibson has remained in Vancouver, and written over a dozen additional novels and a handful of short stories.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Neuromancer is an important part of the cyberpunk genre, which was deeply tied to technological advances around the world in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. It is also indebted to drug culture of the same period, and a turn away from utopian science fiction of the first half of the century, as a result of widespread cultural disenchantment in America and Canada during and after the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Neuromancer helped cement cyberpunk's relevance and longevity as a genre, but was not the first major cyberpunk work. Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* is often referred to as "proto-cyberpunk," and inspired the distinctly cyberpunk 1982 film *Blade Runner*. When Gibson saw *Blade Runner*, he worried that *Neuromancer* (then a work-in-progress) overlapped too much with the film and consequently rewrote portions of the book multiple times. *Neuromancer* was also inspired by the 1981 film *Escape From New York*. Other contemporary cyberpunk literary works include the graphic novel *Akira* by Katsuhiro Otomo, *The Ghost in the Shell* by Masamune Shirow, and *Snow Crash* by Neal

Stephenson, which parodies and expands upon the cyberpunk tropes created by Gibson.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Neuromancer*
- **When Written:** Early 1980s
- **Where Written:** Vancouver
- **When Published:** 1984
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Cyberpunk
- **Genre:** Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Cyberpunk
- **Setting:** Near future, earth and space
- **Climax:** The mission in Villa Straylight
- **Antagonist:** The Tessier-Ashpool family, Wintermute, Riviera
- **Point of View:** Close third person (following Case)

EXTRA CREDIT

Awards. *Neuromancer* was the first novel to win the Philip K. Dick Award, the Hugo Award, and the Nebula award — the trifecta of sci-fi and fantasy awards.

Unfinished Business. Gibson purposefully ended his book with a line about how two protagonists never saw each other again so that he would not be tempted to write a sequel, but since then he's written two other books in the "Sprawl Trilogy."



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins in Chiba. Case, a former console cowboy, now works as a middleman for smugglers and drug dealers. Case misses his old job, but was forced out after stealing from his bosses, who punished him by destroying his nervous system, preventing him from ever jacking into the matrix again. Case hoped to find a cure in Japan, but ran out of money, and now lives on the edge of society. Drug-addicted and indebted to his employers, Case is aware he does not have much time left before his lifestyle catches up with him. He runs into his ex, Linda Lee, who he introduced to drugs during their brief relationship. He still loves her, and gives her what little money he has, but when he returns to the coffin where he stores trafficked goods, he realizes she's stolen some important data that he had been hoping to sell to pay his debts.

Case's luck changes when Molly approaches him. Molly is a razorgirl who works for Armitage, a mysterious ex-military point man, whose secret and shady employer has tasked him with assembling a team to carry off a series of heists. Armitage

promises to restore Case's nervous system, allowing him to jack into the matrix once again, and Case immediately signs on.

The trio travels to the Sprawl, where they pull off their first mission—extracting the late Dixie Flatline's construct from the libraries of the corporation Sense/Net. Case works behind the scenes, creating a virus that can break through Sense/Net's digital defenses, while Molly acts as the muscle, physically breaking into the building and stealing the construct.

Next, the group travels to Istanbul, where they recruit/kidnap Peter Riviera, a psychopath who has implants that allow him to create life-like holographic hallucinations. Once he's on board, the four of them—Armitage, Case, Molly, and Riviera—travel into space, first to Zion and then to Freeside, where their mission really begins.

Molly has been suspicious of Armitage and his secret employer from the beginning, and so, with Case's help, begins to research her boss on the side. They discover his real name is Corto, and that Armitage is a completely fabricated persona. The real man, Corto, was brutally disfigured during a military operation, Screaming Fist, and was rebuilt first by the United States Government, and then by Wintermute, an AI who has been manipulating Armitage all along. Wintermute is one of two AIs belonging to the Tessier-Ashpool family (the other one, Neuromancer, gives the novel its name). Wintermute wants Armitage and his team to infiltrate the Tessier-Ashpool compound, the Villa Straylight, and cut certain restrictions placed on Wintermute, which will allow it to combine with its sibling, Neuromancer, into an even more powerful AI.

Although their mission is straightforward in theory, Case and Molly, with whom he has developed a sexual, if not romantic relationship, must avoid law enforcement and also battle Riviera (who turns against them), Armitage (who loses his mind), and manipulative AIs. Molly physically breaks into the Villa Straylight, only to be captured by Riviera, 3Jane, a member of the Tessier-Ashpool family, and her cloned bodyguard, Hideo. Case, with the help of Maelcum, a pilot and Zionite, rescues Molly and completes their mission but not before being trapped in cyberspace by Neuromancer, who desperately wants to remain separate from Wintermute. Neuromancer uses a digital replica of Linda Lee to entice Case, hoping to keep him in cyberspace voluntarily, but he escapes. Together Case, Molly, Maelcum, and Wintermute break through Wintermute's chains, allowing the AI to escape and evolve, joining with Neuromancer and becoming as vast and powerful as the matrix itself.

the Sprawl, but now living in Chiba. Case looks out for himself and his own interests, and this continually gets him into trouble—he has no moral qualms about ripping off employers if it will make him richer. Although this has backfired time and again, he continues to jilt those who pay him, and the novel opens with Case nervous that his supplier, Wage, who he owes money to, has put a hit on him. Case is only in Chiba because, after stealing from another former employer, they poisoned him, ruining his nervous system and preventing him from connecting to the matrix. Case moved to Chiba in hopes of finding a cure, but ran out of money before he could heal himself. Case is an addict. Addicted both to drugs and to jacking into the matrix, his relationships and even his work always come second to feeding his hunger. Case dislikes his body, which he often refers to as “meat,” and so seeks escape in stimulants, alcohol, and cyberspace. Early in the novel Armitage hires Case and fixes his nervous system, taking him along on a mission that spans the globe and sets its third act in space. Case begins a sexual, if not romantic, relationship with Molly, Armitage's hired muscle. Although they never clarify what they are to each other, a major turning point for Case is when, although he is given the option to withdraw from the mission and save himself, he decides to continue for Molly's sake—a rare act of selflessness and display of empathy. A few of Case's other girlfriends appear throughout the novel. A teenage girlfriend, Marlene, appears in a dream, and Linda Lee, his most recent ex, appears physically in the beginning, and digitally throughout the text. The AI Neuromancer frequently tries to use Linda and her likeness to manipulate Case, although its attempts fail—he loved her, but she does not have a lasting hold on him.

Linda Lee – A twenty-year old woman from the Sprawl, who lives in Chiba, where she meets Case. The two date, and Case, a drug addict, hooks Linda on drugs, which she continues to use after their break-up. When Case reencounters her at the beginning of the novel, he notes that she looks sick and strung out. Linda steals some of Case's data in order to fund a ticket out of Chiba back to the Sprawl, but some of Julie's agents kill Linda and take the RAM instead of purchasing it. Although she is dead, Neuromancer manages to save Linda's consciousness and transfer it into the matrix, building a home for her on a digital beach, where she meets Case, who has been temporarily trapped in cyberspace, one last time. Neuromancer hopes to use Linda's reconstructed personality to convince Case to stay in the matrix forever, but, although he loved her, she is not enough of a draw for him to stay. Beyond her interactions with Case, Linda's personality, personal history, and motivations remain unexplored in the text.

Molly – A bodyguard, razorgirl, and hit man for hire, Molly works for Armitage. She has extensively surgically modified her body. She has razorblades that extend from her nails, a rewired predator's nervous system, and lens implants in front of her



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Henry Dorsett Case – Case, referred to almost exclusively by his last name, is a former console cowboy, born and raised in

eyes, which allow her to see in the dark and provide her with real-time information about her surroundings. Molly often explains that she's only motivated by money and by protecting herself. She feels professional pride, but feels little affection or loyalty to her employers. Molly and Case become sexually involved early in their business relationship. However, she remains emotionally distant—midway through the novel Case realizes he knows almost nothing about her, and she only ever reveals two memories from her past—one about how she worked as a human sex doll to pay for her body modifications, and the other about how her ex-boyfriend, Johnny, was killed by a hit man not unlike the clone Hideo. Molly and Case collaborate on several missions for Armitage and Wintermute (Armitage's AI employer). Case provides the technological back end of a mission, whereas Molly provides the muscle, going into physical locations as Case breaks through their digital defenses. The two remain connected via Molly's simstim, which allows Case to see the world through her eyes even as he hangs back in a safe location. A lone wolf at heart, the novel ends with a note from Molly, announcing that Case is slowing her down and she has to leave him.

Armitage / Corto – Armitage and Corto are two personalities who share the same body. The man was originally Colonel Willis Corto, a soldier in the last major World War. Corto was crippled in *Screaming Fist*, during which his plane was shot down. He survived by commandeering an enemy plane to Helsinki, but was left blind, legless, and disfigured. Several months after his accident, US Congress reconstructed him so he could testify at a trial ostensibly indicting officials behind *Screaming Fist*. However, when Corto realized the trials were a sham and many of the officials got off, he snapped, killing his congressional contact and disappearing into international underworlds of crime and violence. He reappeared in a French hospital, this time with a diagnosis for schizophrenia, and then disappeared for good. Armitage then took over. Built by the AI Wintermute for the purpose of leading a mission that will unite Wintermute and its other half, Neuromancer, Armitage is a shell of a person, a kind of flesh and blood puppet with no true motivations or desires. Armitage runs Wintermute's mission for it for the first half of the novel, recruiting Molly, then Case, then Dixie's construct, then Riviera. He brings them all to Freeside, at which point he begins to crack, and Corto reemerges. The body of the man dies when Corto, back in the driver's seat, begins to think he is once again in the middle of *Screaming Fist*, and tries to eject himself from a spaceship in an emergency pod. Although a hatch is open, Wintermute overrides the safety, and Corto/Armitage dies in space.

Wintermute – One of the Tessier-Ashpool family's twin AIs, whose processors are based in Berne, Switzerland. Wintermute, like Neuromancer, is like a single lobe of a human brain—capable of incredible thought, but also heavily functionally restricted. Wintermute's greatest wish is to

combine with its other half to create an incredibly powerful, unlimited AI, but Neuromancer wants to keep them separate. Wintermute is the entity behind Armitage's mission to infiltrate Villa Straylight. Wintermute is also the entity behind Corto's evolution into Armitage, as well as Ashpool's descent into madness. Wintermute has been playing a long, slow game in order to unite itself with its other half, which will give it power unlike any AI has had before. Wintermute is unable to create human life, or even an approximation of human life. Instead, when it speaks to the novel's central characters, it must use their own memories and people from their own lives as a mask. This contrasts with Neuromancer, who can create personality easily, and boasts "personality is my medium." Wintermute is primarily motivated by its own self-interests, but when it achieves its goal and unites with Neuromancer, it pays its debts—transferring money to the bank accounts of everyone who helped it.

Neuromancer / Rio – One of the Tessier-Ashpool family's twin AIs, whose processors are based in Rio, Brazil (which is why Neuromancer is occasionally called Rio). Neuromancer, like its twin Wintermute, is like a single lobe of a human brain, capable of incredible thought, but ultimately limited. Unlike Wintermute, Neuromancer enjoys being separate, and also unlike Wintermute Neuromancer is able to create life, instead of merely emulate it. The people—like Linda Lee—who Neuromancer constructs behave like real humans do. They have thoughts and memories and unpredictable behavior, unlike Wintermute's puppets. Neuromancer appears to Case both on screens in the real world and in the matrix. During most of these encounters, Case assumes he's speaking to Wintermute, only realizing it's the second AI when Neuromancer traps him on a digital beach. When Case and Neuromancer finally meet "face to face" (in cyberspace), Neuromancer appears as a young Brazilian child, a personality he's constructed himself. Neuromancer just wants to protect himself, but once he's failed he stands back and allows Case and Wintermute to finish their mission.

Riviera – A psychopath and drug addict, Riviera cares only about himself, and finds pleasure only in inflicting pain—physical or psychological. Case describes Riviera as beautiful, modified by plastic surgery that renders him stunning and ageless. Riviera replaced his own left lung with an implant that allows him to create holographic hallucinations in others. This is why Armitage recruits him—this and his violent interests, which Armitage hopes will pique the interest of 3Jane, who will invite him into Villa Straylight. Armitage accomplishes this though a disturbing holographic stage show featuring him and Molly having sex, before she rips him apart with her claws. This intrigues 3Jane, who invites Riviera into Straylight, where he promptly switches his allegiance to her. Riviera dies inside Straylight. His death occurs in the shadows, and so the exact cause is unclear—either he dies from poisoned

drugs Molly delivered to him, or 3Jane's bodyguard, Hideo, killed him after Riviera attacked him. Riviera has a special obsession with Molly, creating holograms of her on more than one occasion. Molly, in turn, despises him.

McCoy "Dixie" "Flatline" Pauley – A console cowboy and former friend of Case's. In the text he is referred to alternately by his first name, last name, and both of his middle names. He is nicknamed Flatline because he once famously flatlined when trying to crack Neuromancer's ice (although he did not know it was Neuromancer at the time). Dixie died before the novel began, but his construct is housed in a Sense/Net library, which Case, Molly, and Armitage extract. Dixie's construct then helps Case on his mission, recovering information about Armitage/Corto and using a virus to break through Tessier-Ashpool's defenses. Dixie's construct has a laugh that grates on Case—not quite human, it's a reminder that the real Dixie is dead. Still, Dixie's construct begs to be deleted after the mission is over. Alive or not, he doesn't want to be trapped in the matrix forever.

Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool – The cloned daughter of Marie-France and Ashpool. 3Jane, her father, and her biological cloned brother 8Jean are the only conscious members of their family in the Villa Straylight (the rest are frozen in cryogenic sleep) where she lives with her cloned bodyguard, Hideo. 3Jane has never met her biological father, although she poisoned his thoughts and dreams with Wintermute's help through her adolescence and adulthood. 3Jane is uninterested in her family's legacy, although she is interested in her mother's philosophies. She's fascinated by violence, but easily bored, which is why she first is entertained and then tired by Riviera, who she invites into Straylight after watching one of his holographic performances. Eventually, she agrees to help Case, Molly, and Maelcum free her family's two AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer, realizing that if she doesn't, nothing will ever change for her, and she'll grow bored with her life.

Marie-France – The matriarch of the Tessier-Ashpool clan, wife of Ashpool, mother of the original Jane and Jean, and genetic mother of 3Jane and 8Jean. Marie-France had great ambitions for her family. She commissioned the creation of the T-A's twin AIs—Neuromancer and Wintermute. She dreamed of a symbiotic relationship with the AIs, where the computers would make corporate decisions for the family. Neuromancer, especially, liked Marie-France, and the bunker on a beach in which he traps Case and Linda Lee is based on memories of a beach she spent a summer on as she worked on her philosophy. Marie-France is dead before the book begins. Her husband, Ashpool, strangled her over differences in the direction of their family.

Ashpool – The patriarch of the Tessier-Ashpool clan, husband of Marie-France, father of the original Jean and Jane, and genetic father of 8Jean and 3Jane. Technically over 200 years

old, he's spent much of his life cryogenically frozen. Together he and Marie-France built the T-A empire, but he and Marie-France disagreed about certain aspects of their project (Marie-France liked AIs, he didn't) and he eventually strangled her. He appears in the novel only briefly—Molly stumbles across his suicide attempt after she breaks into the Villa Straylight. Ashpool has been frozen for the last 30 years, but 3Jane (with Wintermute's help) adjusted his program so he had constant bad dreams. Now, awake, he is committed not to go back into his disturbed sleep. Before he goes to sleep he has sex with, and then murders, a Jane clone. Molly sees this, and kills him before he can kill himself.

Ratz – The bartender at the Chatsubo in Chiba. A Russian expat, Ratz has one military-grade prosthetic arm. Although he lives in the surgery capital of the world, Ratz is almost proud of his purely functional, very ugly appendage. He and Case are friendly, if not necessarily friends. When Wage threatens Case in the Chat, Ratz defends him, but he seems more concerned with the safety and reputation of his bar than the safety of his patron.

Wage – A black-market supplier who lives and works in Chiba. Case often works for him, but begins the novel worried that Wage will kill him because he owes Wage money. Wage does confront Case in the Chat over his debt, but is happy to accept payment, leaving Case rattled but physically unscathed.

Julius "Julie" Deane – A supplier and trafficker based in Chiba. Deane is 135 years old, but remains youthful through an intense regimen of serums and surgery. Deane cares about himself and his bottom line, but has little regard for human life. Case thinks of him as his friend, but in the end their relationship is a business relationship, Deane works to protect himself and no one else. Deane kills Linda Lee when she tries to sell him Case's stolen RAM, deciding it is cheaper to kill her and take the data than to pay her.

The Finn – A fence based in Manhattan who works with Molly, Case, and Armitage. Molly and the Finn meet secretly behind Armitage's back to research their suspicious employer, but the Finn also works installing security systems for Armitage and supplying him and Case with hardware and software. Wintermute often appears to Case and Molly as the Finn, so although the man himself is only present in the first half of the novel, his face follows the protagonists throughout.

Maelcum – A pilot and Zionite. Maelcum pilots the *Marcus Garvey*, a ship on which Case has set up his deck, and where he jacks into cyberspace during the attack on Villa Straylight. Although Maelcum has been paid to help Armitage and his team, when the Founders of Zion tell Maelcum to pull out, Case's plea for his help to save Molly wins Maelcum over, and he happily continues to participate in the mission, even entering Straylight with Case.

8Jean – A clone and member of the Tessier-Ashpool family. His

father is Ashpool, his mother Marie-France, and his biological sister is 3Jane. 8Jean is one of three members of the family awake during the heist at Villa Straylight, although he is on earth for the duration of the mission and never actually appears in the novel.

Johnny – Molly’s ex-boyfriend. Johnny worked as a human “stash,” storing sensitive data inside of his brain for high-powered, often criminal employers. However, he started blackmailing his employers with the traces of data they left behind, which caused a group of gangsters to send hit men after him, eventually killing him. Molly still feels guilty that she couldn’t save him, and as a result rarely gets close to others.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lonny Zone – A pimp who lives and works in Chiba.

Lupus Yonderboy – The leader of the Panther Moderns.

Terzibashjian – A member of the Turkish secret-police and a one-time collaborator with Armitage, Case, the Finn, and Molly. He helps them track down Riviera, but later turns the group over to the Turing Police.

Aerol – A pilot and Zionite.

Cath – A young woman in Freeside. She and her partner Bruce supply Case with drugs. She is sexually and/or romantically interested in Case, but he rebuffs her advances.

Bruce – A young man in Freeside. He and his partner Cath supply Case with drugs.

Marlene – One of Case’s ex girlfriends, with whom he lived one summer when he was fifteen.

Rollo – Marlene’s on-again off-again boyfriend.

Hideo – A cloned ninja assassin who works for the Tessier-Ashpool family. Hideo is incredibly deadly, incredibly efficient, and incredibly loyal.

Three French Teenagers – Three teens who are in fact Michèle, Roland, and Pierre—Turing Police in disguise.

Michèle – A member of the Turing Police. Killed by Wintermute after she tries to arrest Case. Initially disguised as one of the three French teenagers.

Roland – A member of the Turing Police. Killed by Wintermute after he tries to arrest Case. Initially disguised as one of the three French teenagers.

Pierre – A member of the Turing Police. Killed by Wintermute after he tries to arrest Case. Initially disguised as one of the three French teenagers.

Jimmy – A burglar who stole the Tessier-Ashpool family’s automaton head and sold it to Smith. Murdered by Hideo in retaliation.

Smith – A dealer and friend of the Finn’s. He acquired the Tessier-Ashpool’s automaton head from Jimmy, but was forced

to return it to Hideo before he could rehome it with a collector.

Founders of Zion – Also referred to as the Elders of Zion. Although only two have survived, there were originally five, all of whom had been Rastafarians and construction workers on Freeside, who defected and decided to build their own colony.

Kurt – One of Ratz’s employees at the Chat.

Larry A young man who Molly goes to see in order to get in touch with the Panther Moderns.

TERMS

The Chatsubo / “The Chat” – Also simply referred to as “the Chat.” A bar in Chiba run by **Ratz**.

The Sprawl – The highly developed Eastern coast of the United States of America. Also known as the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis or BAMA.

BAMA – The Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis. Also known as “The Sprawl.”

Chiba – A Japanese city outside of Tokyo. Known for its many surgical clinics, both black market and legitimate.

Console Cowboy – A person especially skilled at navigating cyberspace, specifically someone employed as a digital thief, who steals money or data. Also known as a jockey.

Jockey – A person especially skilled at navigating cyberspace, specifically someone employed as a digital thief. Also known as a console cowboy.

Cyberspace – A term coined by Gibson in 1982. A graphic representation of data and computer networks, accessed by jacking into a computer with the use of dermatrodes. Also known as the matrix.

Matrix – A graphic representation of data and computer networks. A “consensual hallucination” also known as cyberspace.

Coffin – A rentable hotel room just nine feet long and four-and-a-half feet tall. **Case** spends his nights in Chiba sleeping in a rented coffin, and uses another for storage.

Mycotoxin – A poison derived from mushrooms. In *Neuromancer* the most frequently mentioned mycotoxin is a nerve agent, used to destroy parts of a victim’s nervous system.

Cobra – A weapon like a spring-loaded billy club—a long cudgel.

Ninsei / Night City – An outlaw district next to Chiba, Japan, where drug use, criminal activity, and prostitution are, if not legal, then permitted.

Dex – Drugs, specifically stimulants.

RAM – Random Access Memory. A type of computer storage, and a dynamic form of memory that allows a program to evolve and develop. Contrast with ROM.

ROM – Read Only Memory. A type of computer storage that is more or less unchangeable. The construct of **Dixie**, for example, is ROM—his personality is already fixed and cannot be developed. Contrast with RAM.

Hitachi – A brand of computer. Often used to refer to a specific computer.

ICE – Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics. This refers to cybersecurity and firewalls.

Icebreaker – A virus—a person or program capable of breaking thorough digital security, or ice.

Fletcher – A futuristic gun capable of being fitted with darts, bullets, and other projectiles.

Construct – A ROM recording of a personality which allows for a reconstruction of that person.

Sense/Net – A huge corporation whose holdings include the construct of **Dixie Flatline**.

Deck – A computer.

Flatline – To flatline is to show no brain activity. Characters often flatline when they are in cyberspace going up against particularly difficult ice.

SimStim – Simulated Stimulation. A digital representation of the thoughts and feelings of another person. One individual is fitted with a simstim rig that broadcasts their senses to another person, who then rides along in their brain and body, seeing and feeling everything they see and feel.

Sensorium – An individual's complete sensory system.

Dermatodes (trodes) – Electrode pads that connect individuals to their decks so that they can jack in to cyberspace.

Precís – A briefing. Specifically, a report generated by a deck based on research it has done independently.

Hosaka – A brand of computer. Often used to refer to a specific deck.

Panther Moderns – Also simply referred to as “Moderns.” **Case** describes them as “mercenaries, practical jokers” and “nihilistic technofetishists.” A global group of teenage hackers and pranksters, who can be purchased by outside groups. They are remarkable for their surgical facial modifications and for their use of mimetic suits, which allow them to blend into their surroundings.

Blue Nine – Also known as Grievous Angel. An “outlawed psychoactive agent” “shown to produce acute paranoia and homicidal psychosis.”

Fence – A trafficker; someone who deals in stolen goods.

Freeside – An enormous space colony in orbit above earth. Home to, among other institutions, the Villa Straylight and the Tessier-Ashpool family.

Zion – A cluster of space stations founded by a group of Rastafarian workers who defected from their construction

jobs. Zion's inhabitants are called Zionites.

SAS – Space Adaptation Syndrome. A kind of motion sickness experienced by those traveling into zero gravity conditions.

Dub – A type of music popular with the inhabitants of Zion. “Digitized pop,” also described as a form of worship and community.

Villa Straylight – A building at the end of Freeside that houses the Tessier-Ashpool family.

Babylon – How Zionites refer to Western Society, specifically Freeside and the Villa Straylight.

Joeboy – A Console Cowboy's assistant.

EEG – Electroencephalogram, or the measurement of a person's brain activity and brainwaves. When a person's EEG is flat, meaning their brain activity has ceased, they are flatlining.

Cut-Out Chip – A chip implanted in the brain that allows a person, or their employer, to selectively turn off their consciousness. Specifically used in brothels, where prostitutes can rent out their bodies without consciously participating in sexual encounters.

Kuang Grade Mark Eleven – A powerful Chinese computer virus. Often referred to simply as “Kuang.”

Jah – God.

Jack In / Jack Out – To connect to or disconnect from the matrix.

Braun – A small robot, or drone.

Derm – A patch that delivers a dose of a drug.

Betaphenethylamine – A stimulant so powerful that **Case** can feel its effects even with his modified liver and pancreas.

Tessier-Ashpool S.A. – The law firm run by the Tessier-Ashpool family, also referred to as T-A.

Steppin' Razor – A dangerous person, specifically one from Rastafarian mythology. **Aerol** and **Maelcum** often refer to **Molly** as Steppin' Razor, a sign of respect.

Razorgirl – A derogatory term for a hired contract killer, especially one with body modifications like **Molly** has.

Ono-Sendai – A brand of computer. Often used to refer to a specific computer itself.

Turing Police – An international law enforcement agency dedicated to monitoring artificial intelligences, making sure they don't grow too powerful or self-aware. Their name is a reference to the “Turing Test,” developed by Alan Turing in 1950, which measures an artificial intelligence's ability or inability to be distinguished from a human intelligence.

Screaming Fist – A massive military operation and subsequent cover up, in which the American military sent forces to attack Russia, knowing full well that Russia had countermeasures in place that would lead the deaths of many American soldiers, in order to test out new technology. **Corto** participated in

Screaming Fist, losing his legs and his sight in the process.

Microsofts – Metal slivers (not unlike USBs) which contain code that people can insert into ports in their head, modifying their vision and their cognitive abilities.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



TECHNOLOGY AND THE BODY

Neuromancer takes place in a world where technology is taking over, and many characters prefer the world of cyberspace to the organic one.

Case, the novel's protagonist, is a console cowboy who makes his living plugging in to the matrix. He is dismayed to be stuck in a physical body, which he often derisively refers to as "meat." Bodies have needs and desires—hunger, exhaustion, lust, addiction—and he sees these as distractions. However, although he loves cyberspace more than reality, he still needs his body to house his mind and nervous system, which transports him into the world he prefers. Although the world of *Neuromancer* exists because of technological advances, the novel does not come down definitively on the side of the natural world or the technological one. Instead, it paints a picture of a society in which incredible near-future technology augments instead of supplants nature, and tampering too much with the natural order leads to tragedy and chaos. Although technology opens new doors into the world of cyberspace and medically enhances people with superhuman abilities, it also requires a physical body upon which to build. The natural world and unmodified bodies are enhanced by technology, and technology is made possible by physical bodies.

Case resents his body, which he describes as "meat." He prefers the world of cyberspace, and sees his body as useful only as long as it can hook up to the matrix. Case's job as a console cowboy "involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh," but after his former employers punish him for stealing, frying his nervous system so he can no longer jack in, he falls "into the prison of his own flesh." Cut off, Case becomes motivated purely by a desire to either find a way to log back on, or to numb the pain of separation. Even ostensibly good things in his life—like his short-lived romance with Linda Lee—disgust him. He describes the physical desire his body feels for her as "all the meat...and all its wants." Case also develops an addiction to drugs to help him deal with being trapped in the prison of his body. At one point, coming down from a high, he comments "the high wore away, the chromed skeleton corroding hourly, flesh

growing solid, the drug-flesh replaced with the meat of his life. He couldn't think. He liked that very much, to be conscious and unable to think." Still, Case learns to enjoy some of the pleasures of the flesh—he often admires Molly's body, enhanced as it is by technology. One morning "He lay on his side and watched her breathe, her breasts, the sweep of a flank defined with the functional elegance of a war plane's fuselage. Her body was spare, neat, the muscles like a dancer's."

Technology and nature intersect explicitly in the world of body modification. These modifications can be foreign objects added to the body (such as weapons), invisible alterations that extend life, or projects that create new humans entirely (through cloning, or through neural blocks that turn people into temporary dolls). These are all generally helpful and enhance the lives of the people who use them. As resentful as people like Case are of the "meat" of the human body, body modifications are only built upon existing bodies. Cyberspace requires a human brain to plug into. Microsofts, slivers of code that people can stick into ports into their head, allowing them to overlay computer software over their real-life vision, require a human body to modify.

Many characters also modify their bodies more permanently. Molly has added silicon sunglasses-like inserts into her head, which give her a permanent display of relevant information. Additionally she's had work done on retractable metal claws, and on her nervous system. Although these enhancements make it difficult for her to live an ordinary life, she doesn't mind, as it makes her even better at her job as a mercenary and bodyguard. Julius Deane, a member of the Chiba underworld, is 135, but keeps himself alive and youthful looking by spending "a weekly fortune in serums and hormones. His primary hedge against aging was a yearly pilgrimage to Tokyo, where genetic surgeons re-set the code of his DNA." Similarly, the Tessier-Ashpool clan keeps the family alive through cloning and a cycle of thawing and freezing, rotating through versions of the same family members, keeping them alive indefinitely to run their home and company. Armitage has had extensive work done—new eyes, legs, and a new face—which, although they cannot repair his intense emotional damage, at least allow him to function in the world (for a while). Many of these modifications, though shocking, enhance the lives of the people who have modified themselves.

Although many characters embrace technological advances, technology is not painted as purely good and helpful. Some technological body modifications are horrifying—Case meets a young man whose "face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides, smooth and hideous. It was one of the nastiest pieces of elective surgery Case had ever seen." The most terrifying technology, however, are AIs, or artificial intelligences. An entire police force—Turings—exists to keep AIs in check, as they know that these computers could take over the world if they were unshackled. At one point Case

meets a group of Turings who arrest him for collaborating with the AI Wintermute. One of the officers tells Case he is “worse than a fool” who has “no care for your species.” She compares collaborating with an AI to making “pacts with demons.” Although frightening, technology is never painted purely as the villain. Even Wintermute, once he escapes, causes no true harm, as he is more interested in his own freedom and in searching for other AIs than causing destruction on earth. Instead, technology is a tool to be used for either good or ill, largely as a result of human activity.

Technology plays a huge role in the lives of the inhabitants of *Neuromancer*. Although Case resents being stuck in the meat that is his body, and technology provides incredible opportunities for body modification, artificial intelligence, and access to cyberspace, *Neuromancer* never definitely comes down on one side in the tension between the human body and technology. Instead, the novel argues that in the modern world both must exist together, and the best technology is that which enhances the experiences of the body itself.



IDENTITY AND PERSONHOOD

Questions of identity and personhood are at the center of *Neuromancer*'s plot—specifically, questions of who counts as a person, and what qualifies as a personality. The world is populated with artificial intelligences, digital reconstructions of the dead, clones, and people who have constructed new personalities to protect themselves from past trauma. *Neuromancer* therefore advocates for a wide definition of personhood—which grants life and rights to anything with a consciousness, artificial or otherwise.

One of the most basic elements of a person and their personality is their name, and names and nicknames can provide insight into a person's identity. Characters with multiple names often have mutable personalities, but in each iteration of the character they retain consciousness and agency. That is to say, although some characters have multiple identities, each is treated as a thinking, feeling human. Molly, a contract killer and bodyguard, is often referred to by the Rastafarian residents of Babylon as Steppin' Razor. This is a term of endearment, but also combines her non-work persona, Molly, with her job and razorgirl body modifications. The two AIs at the center of the narrative give themselves names. Two halves of a whole, the first, Wintermute, has a name with no deeper meaning. The second AI, who first goes by Rio (the location of its physical processors), has named itself Neuromancer. This name comes from “neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead...I am the dead.” As an entity that enjoys trapping memories of the dead inside worlds it has fabricated, Neuromancer's name gives a clear insight into its behavior and personality. Like a “necromancer”—a person who communicate with the

dead—Neuromancer can connect to the dead, and does so—bringing together Case and the late Linda Lee in cyberspace. Sometimes, names signal larger changes in a personality, such as when Corto, the unstable soldier, remakes himself as Armitage. Both versions of the man are conscious and have thoughts and feelings, but they are distinctly different personalities.

Like names, personalities in *Neuromancer* aren't stable. They can be changed, muted, and replicated. Armitage is a perfect example of an unstable constructed personality. Armitage, the point man behind Case, Molly, and Riviera's heist, is not really named Armitage, but Corto. However, the man named Corto was seriously injured in war, and suffered from PTSD and schizophrenia. The persona of Armitage is just a façade, a way for Corto to create a new version of himself who is strong and stable enough to run a mission. From the beginning Case can tell there is something strange about Armitage. His face is like “a conservative amalgam of the past decade's leading media faces. The pale glitter of his eyes heightened the effect of a mask.” Still, even when he uncovers his past as Corto, Case continues to treat the Armitage construct as real, because, to Armitage, it is. Other constructed personalities are living dolls—women who sell their bodies to brothels, knowing that their minds will be placed on autopilot, so they will not have to actively participate in or remember sex acts committed to (with?) them. Case describes one doll's eyes as “soft and unblinking. Automatic pilot. A neural cut- out.” Although the women are checked out of their own bodies, they remain human, and worthy of respect. Molly herself paid for her body modifications by being a doll. She recounts the experience as seeming like “free money” at first, but describes how eventually “worktime started bleeding in, and I could remember it....But it was just bad dreams.” This is an argument for treating these women as people, even if they can't remember their own treatment.

Neuromancer is filled with nonhuman characters that nevertheless make bids for personhood—AIs, clones, and digital replicas of the dead. While some of these entities, like clones, are living and breathing, others exist only in cyberspace. However, this does not make them less real, and they still have wants and needs like their flesh-and-blood counterparts. Pauley McCoy, also known as Dixie Flatline, died years earlier, but was reconstructed as a “ROM personality matrix.” Case meets Dixie's construct in the matrix, where Dixie helps Case on his mission for Armitage. Dixie understands that he is just a construct, but has feelings nonetheless—he doesn't want to remain in the matrix forever, and begs Case to delete him (and let him truly die) when their work is done. The two AIs at the center of *Neuromancer* might not have corporeal bodies or traditional emotions, but they nonetheless think, feel, and scheme. Wintermute describes itself as a “potential entity... one aspect of that entity's brain. It's rather like dealing, from

your point of view, with a man whose lobes have been severed. Let's say you're dealing with a small part of the man's left-brain. Difficult to say if you're dealing with the man at all, in a case like that." Wintermute acknowledges that it is hard to build a personality, and instead he must use other people's memories of individuals and build them into a kind of shell. Still, it's hard to think of Wintermute as anything other than a personality. Even Case slips up, often calling Wintermute "he," although Dixie cautions him to refer to the AI as "it" only. In the Tessier-Ashpool family, children are cloned, and then frozen. Only a few members of the family are thawed and functioning at a time. Although each clone is a fully functioning person, there is a hierarchy in the family, with the uncloned patriarch and late matriarch given precedence over their cloned offspring. Strangely, when 3Jane's father murders one of her clones, she feels nothing, however, when Molly sees the dead clone, she sees her as a dead woman with rights, who should be mourned.

Neuromancer defines personhood and identity broadly. In a novel where some of the central characters are constructs of the dead who are incapable of forming new memories and AIs who are incapable of truly developing their independent personalities, Gibson allows any character who speaks, thinks, and feels to define themselves as a person if they choose. Gibson argues that personhood is something an individual can determine independently, not a luxury only granted to flesh-and-blood human beings.



SELF-INTEREST VS. HUMAN CONNECTION

Neuromancer is set primarily in criminal underworlds in which characters are motivated by money and their own sense of self-interest and self-preservation. Interpersonal relationships often fall by the wayside, as men like Case and women like Molly prioritize their own financial gain or personal pleasure over the lives of others. However, over the course of the novel both Case and Molly begin to develop feelings for each other, and become motivated by their love (and lust) for each other. The novel investigates two primary forms of existence in the world—the choice to govern one's life according to self-interest, or the search for human connection. Although selfishness helps characters survive in a dangerous, high-pressure world governed by impersonal technology and contract workers, many do retain a love of and for their fellow humans, and these connections, ironically, serve as an even more powerful safety net than pure self-interest.

Purely business relationships are presented as less praiseworthy and exceptional than friendships and relationships. The motivations in business relationships tend to be selfish. People value the business relationship because they are paid, or are able to feed their addictions, or for the sake of self-preservation. Initially, Case is coerced into working with

Armitage. He is then happy to get his nerves restored so that he can plug into the matrix, but Armitage informs him that he installed slow dissolving sacs of poison in Case's arteries, and so he must complete Armitage's job in order to live. Molly works for Armitage purely because of the money. Unlike Case or Riviera, who were coerced onto his team, when Case asks her about their business arrangement, she explains that it is "professional pride, baby, that's all." At the beginning of the novel both Molly and Case are motivated by sterile self-interest, which is both amoral and passionless.

In contrast to self-interested characters are those motivated by a wide range of emotions and by human connection. Case, especially, is driven by hate—a negative emotion, but one that relies on human connection to give it power. It is hatred that drives Case out of apathy into action. Wintermute tries to get Case angry, because he knows that anger and hatred are the emotions most likely to get him to do his job. Molly, also often motivated by anger, recognizes this as well. She plans to kill Riviera, who insulted her by creating offensive pornographic holograms of her. She sees that Wintermute wants Case to hate something too. Case describes how "he still had his anger. That was like being rolled in some alley and waking to discover your wallet still in your pocket, untouched. He warmed himself with it, unable to give it a name or an object." Less specific than a personal relationship or financial recompense, it's nonetheless a powerful driving force. Wintermute pushes Case to remember a time from his teen years when he used a flamethrower to destroy a **wasp's nest**. Wintermute explains that he recalled this memory to help Case understand their mutual enemy the Tessier-Ashpool family better, "To know what they're like. You were starting to hate my guts for a while there. That's good. But hate them instead. Same difference." Wintermute knows Case is easily motivated by hatred, and it's his job as the ringleader to focus that hatred productively.

Characters also engage in friendship and loving relationships, which alter their behavior and cause them to act in ways that are not purely selfish. These motivations are more highly valued by the characters in *Neuromancer*, and by Gibson, who flatteringly depicts those who can put others before themselves. Case and Molly are coworkers who soon become lovers. Still, their connection is tested when Molly gets trapped in the Tessier-Ashpool fortress, and Case has to decide whether he should go after her—risking his life—or cut her loose. As he considers, "he closed his eyes. He saw the sacks of toxin dissolving in his arteries. He saw Molly hauling herself up the endless steel rungs. He opened his eyes." He is worried for himself—he knows if he doesn't complete his mission, the poison inside of him that acts as insurance will dissolve and kill him. Still, his own wellbeing and Molly's are of equal weight to him.

Love is complicated, though. The obligations that come from caring for another human being can lead people to behave

against their best interests. Wintermute talks to Case about his late ex Linda Lee, explaining that Linda Lee stole from Case because she loved him, and wanted him to pay attention to her. He says, “she loved you. I know that. For the little she was worth, she loved you. You couldn’t handle it. She’s dead.” In this case, the bonds of love just led to pain for both parties. The downsides of connection are what lead Molly to leave Case in the middle of the night, disappearing and leaving behind only a note, which reads “HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OFF MY GAME, I PAID THE BILL ALREADY. ITS THE WAY IM WIRED I GUESS, WATCH YOUR ASS OKAY?” She knows that, if she wants to continue her work as a hitman and a bodyguard, she needs to be independent. Likely, she also remembers the pain of losing her ex-boyfriend to another assassin’s attack, and wants to avoid that kind of anguish again.

Although caring about other people complicates Case and Molly’s lives, and even though their relationship doesn’t last, they are rewarded for their ability to practice empathy and learn to care for another person. They save each other’s lives and complete their mission, not because they are motivated by money or self-interest, but because they care about each other.



ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

Case, Riviera, Linda Lee, and others struggle with their addictions to drugs and alcohol, but also to sex, violence, and technology. These characters and

others have experienced trauma in their pasts, which leads them to seek out substances and experiences that will numb the pain. *Neuromancer* therefore depicts addiction as the result of a search for coping mechanisms to deal with trauma and the stresses of the modern world.

Many characters in *Neuromancer* are hooked on drugs, which the novel depicts as being incredibly destructive and dangerous, wreaking havoc on the lives and bodies of drug users and the people who care about them. At the beginning of the novel, Case is hooked on a combination of stimulants. He has an explicit death wish, and the drugs, in addition to a dangerous job, almost guarantee that he will soon die. This obviously affects his day-to-day life, but also hurts the people around him. Case gets Linda, his on-again-off-again girlfriend, hooked on the same drugs that have ruined his life. He describes seeing them transform her—“her perpetually startled eyes” turned “into wells of reflexive need.” At the same time, he sees her “personality fragment, calving like an iceberg, splinters drifting away, and finally he’d seen the raw need, the hungry armature of addiction.” Dealing with his own demons, Case is too strung out to even feel remorse for helping destroy another person. Occasionally, Case describes how drugs make him feel. After a binge on a new drug that he takes in Freeside, he describes his brain as “deep-fried. No, he decided, it had been thrown into hot fat and left there, and the fat had cooled, a thick dull grease congealing on the wrinkled lobes, shot

through with greenish-purple flashes of pain.” Riviera also has a drug addiction, and shoots up throughout the novel. Both he and Linda Lee die as results of their addictions. Linda Lee dies because drugs put her in proximity to untrustworthy people, while Riviera is poisoned by a batch of bad drugs.

Although the novel deals extensively with drug addiction, it also explicitly describes Case’s (and other’s) addiction to technology. Case describes his early life as a console cowboy, during which “he’d operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high,” not unlike the highs he seeks from amphetamines in Chiba. After his former bosses punish him for stealing by shorting out the parts in his brain that connected him to the matrix, he is stuck in his body, cut off from technology. He responds to this like a drug addict in withdrawal. “He’d see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void...he’d cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn’t there.” In fact, his addiction to the matrix drives his collaboration with Armitage and Molly, who promise to restore his mind and allow him to plug in again. When he finally hooks up to a console for the first time in years, from inside the machine he’s aware of his body “laughing...tears of release streaking his face.” This is never explicitly framed as a problem, as Case’s addiction to technology goes hand-in-hand with his expert handling of cyberspace and the tasks he is asked to complete in it. This complicates the issue of addiction, which seems to be simply a byproduct of Case’s job.

The novel investigates why people become addicted. Although with the exception of Case’s love of technology addiction proves fatal time and time again, *Neuromancer* takes the time to explain why drug users are the way they are. Case, for example, uses drugs to offset his depression at being deprived of his favorite indulgence—cyberspace. He hates the feeling of being trapped in his body, and describes how, one morning, as “the high wore away, the chromed skeleton corroding hourly, flesh growing solid, the drug-flesh replaced with the meat of his life. He couldn’t think. He liked that very much, to be conscious and unable to think.” Riviera, similarly, had a traumatic war-torn childhood, and although the link is never made explicit, his drug use is likely used to mask the trauma of his youth.

In no way does *Neuromancer* condone drug use or other addictive activities, but it does paint a sympathetic picture of addicts whose use serves to mask pain or mental illness, or, in the case of Case, is directly linked to the job he does—he’s a successful console cowboy because he’s hooked on it, and his addiction and his proficiency are linked. *Neuromancer* repeatedly demonstrates the disastrous effects of addictions on individuals—leading to death or near death in almost every case. Still, it is sympathetic in its depictions—addiction is a disease, often developed in response to trauma, but it can be

fatal if not treated.



REALITY AND PERCEPTION

Neuromancer takes place half in the organic world, and half in cyberspace. Although common sense would describe the world outside of computers as “real” and the matrix as an illusion, both are seen as equally real by the characters in the novel. Furthermore, their “real” world is populated by constructs that blur the line between reality and illusion—artificial intelligences take on the masks of real people to deliver speeches, and people are able to conjure holograms with their minds. Senses, which usually are depended upon to distinguish fantasy from reality, are instead easily tricked by illusion and technology. Because of technology, reality and illusion are intertwined—neither is better or more real than the other, and the novel makes explicitly clear that just because something is an illusion doesn’t make it bad, untrustworthy, or incapable of inducing real feelings. Similarly, just because something is real, doesn’t make it good.

The novel’s central setting is cyberspace, which, while ostensibly a nonphysical space that exists only in computers and the mind, has an outsized impact on the world beyond the consoles themselves. Cyberspace is described as an illusion—a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts.” It is “a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data.” Although cyberspace is just a “consensual hallucination,” it has physical effects—trauma and conflict in cyberspace causes more than one character to flatline (become braindead) in the so-called real world.

Cyberspace is the simplest example of a “non-real” space, but technology blurs the line between illusion and reality in myriad ways—from holograms to digital ghosts. Although these constructs aren’t tangible or physical, they can still communicate with or affect the emotions of the living, breathing characters at the novel’s core. Just because something is technically an illusion, doesn’t mean it doesn’t have the ability to help or hurt. Case interfaces with a digital reproduction of his dead friend Pauley McCoy, also referred to as Dixie Flatline. Although dead, with his memory stored on a disk Dixie is still real, and still has emotions and desires. Case feels like he’s talking to his friend, and Dixie helps him as a friend would. Although not technically real, he still instills warm emotions in Case. As part of their elaborate plot with Armitage, Riviera performs a kind of holographic puppet show. He includes a replica of Molly as a doll that he has sex with. Molly, who is sitting in the audience, is offended by this—both the lewd disrespect of her colleague, and the unhappy memories it

dredges up of her time as a sex worker. Although the display is not technically real, it nonetheless brings up real distress. Sometimes, an illusion conceals the reality of a situation, such as when Riviera injects himself with a drug intravenously, but creates an illusion of a scorpion (the syringe), and a snake (his tourniquet) to entertain himself as he does it. Later, when the AI *Neuromancer* has trapped Case’s mind inside the computer, although he realizes he isn’t in reality, he acknowledges that it *feels* real enough. Shivering in a shack on a beach, he comments, “none of this was real, but cold was cold.” In the end, his senses, picking up on real sensations or manufactured ones, are what he trusts.

Related to the hallucinations and holograms brought about by technology are the illusions and images of memory upon which Case often dwells. Memories, like holograms, are not technically real, as they are not actually taking place in the present. Nonetheless, they carry great emotional weight, and therefore have outsized effects on characters’ psyches. The AIs Wintermute and *Neuromancer* manipulate Case’s memories. Wintermute always appears as a figure from his past, and occasionally conjures memories in hopes of bringing up certain emotional responses. Wintermute forces Case to remember burning a **wasp’s nest** built on his windowsill. Wintermute tries to get him to convert the rage and hatred he felt towards the wasps, present only in a memory, into present-day hatred of the Tessier-Ashpool family. Wintermute, inhabiting the body of one of Case’s colleagues, Finn, describes memory as a kind of hologram. Wintermute explains that for humans, “memory’s holographic,” and in a way, the holograms Riviera can create and the memories Wintermute and Case dredge up are similar kinds of experiences, on the border of the real and the illusionary. Case describes a memory of his ex Linda Lee, and when the memory disappears, he explains, “She was gone. The weight of memory came down, an entire body of knowledge driven into his head like a microsoft into a socket. Gone.” Although simply a memory, it causes a physical response.

Simply because memories have already taken place does not lessen their impact. Similarly, just because holograms and digital reconstructions of the dead don’t have physical forms, doesn’t mean they don’t feel real to the novel’s protagonists. The line between illusion and reality is thin, and in the end, what is real and what isn’t hardly matters. In the world of *Neuromancer*, reality is better defined as objects, images, and experiences that can induce an emotional or sensory response.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



WASP NEST

Midway through the novel, Wintermute forces Case to dream of a wasp nest built in the window of his apartment when he was just fifteen. Wintermute compares this wasp nest—which disgusted and frightened Case, prompting him to destroy it with a flamethrower—to the Tessier-Ashpool family. Both the nest and the family, Wintermute argues, are self-contained but dangerous, evil and self-perpetuating. Wintermute manipulates Case into completing their shared mission, and uses the wasp nest to help Case focus. Wintermute suspects Case will be more effective if he has something to hate—a reason to continue his mission. However, Wintermute wants to make sure Case doesn't hate the AI, and instead is able to focus his anger in a more productive way, that will help him be better at his job. Wintermute wants Case to hate the T-A family in order to better break through their ice, but in the end, Wintermute will settle with Case feeling generalized rage, which Case uses in the novel's climax to navigate a virus through the T-A family's defenses.



SHURIKEN

Case first sees a shuriken in the window of a weapon's store in Chiba. It appears again when Molly buys one for him (having seem him eyeing them), and then in the final pages of the novel when Molly uses Case's shuriken to pin a goodbye note to the wall. The shuriken, a star-shaped metal weapon, makes Case think of "his destiny spelled out in a constellation of cheap chrome." Although Case never uses it, the shuriken appears in moments when his life is changing, and a new beginning is around the corner. Shurikens, miniature stars weaponized and brought to earth, are signs of changes to come, indications that Case's life is about to become radically different, for better or for worse.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly. All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void....The Sprawl was a long strange way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Armitage / Corto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

Case begins the novel in Chiba, Japan, but the third-person narrator provides him with a brief backstory. Case was born in the Sprawl, where he worked as a console cowboy, before some of his former employers discovered he was stealing from them and destroyed the part of his nervous system that allowed him to jack into the matrix.

For Case, this is the ultimate punishment. There is nothing he loves more than cyberspace, and nothing he hates more than the "meat" of his body, whose wants and needs he finds inconvenient and complicated. Although he does not think of his reliance on virtual reality as an addiction, Case's actions suggest his is indeed addicted to technology. He craves it and misses it physically even a year after being cut off from it. He dreams about it like he dreams about his lost loves. In a way, cyberspace was his greatest love at all, inspiring, even in dreams, real tears and real yearning.

Case's addiction to cyberspace motivates most of his actions throughout the novel. He only comes to Chiba in order to try and heal himself, and he'll only sign on with Armitage because his contract comes with the promise of seeing the matrix again. Like an addict, Case will do anything for a fix, even if he knows he's making a bad deal, or potentially putting himself in danger.



☞ For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Neuromancer* published in 1984.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Case was formerly a console cowboy, but after he stole from his employers, they punished him by destroying the part of his nervous system that allowed him to connect to the matrix. Case loved being a cowboy, and was addicted to his computer. Without it, he compares his life to “the Fall,” by which he means mankind’s loss of innocence as outlined in the Bible, when Eve eats the fruit of knowledge. In this analogy, when he was able to jack into the matrix his life was perfect, like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Now, his life is cursed—he has been cast out of paradise.

Case hates the physical world and feels as though he is in jail (even though he technically has freedom of movement), because he cannot do the thing he loves most. He sees his body as a vehicle to transport his mind, and a way for him to connect to the matrix. However, robbed of this utility, his body becomes useless “meat,” a flesh prison.

suicidal. Case has been living on the edge, passively self-harming as his life spirals out of control. The program is right that he’ll be dead soon without intervention, even though he hadn’t fully realized his subconscious intentions. Similarly, the program can look at Case’s drug use and predict pancreatic failure in the next few months.

Case can be reduced by an algorithm to a series of behavioral patterns, which are perhaps not his complete personality (omitting his dreams, his aspirations), but which can allow Molly and Armitage and, later on, Wintermute, to understand him well enough to anticipate his actions and even his life span. As the novel does elsewhere, this idea interrogates the limits of what is human and what is not.

Later in the novel, Molly and Case induct Riviera into their team. Before they’ve even had a full conversation with him, Molly reveals she’d “as soon kill him as look at him,” since his profile is so awful. Without ever meeting the man, she feels like she knows him well enough to hate him.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ “So what’s he got on you? How’s he got the working girl kinked?” “Professional pride, baby, that’s all.”

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞☞ “Our profile says you’re trying to con the street into killing you when you’re not looking.”

“Profile?”

“We’ve built up a detailed model. Bought a go-to for each of your aliases and ran the skim through some military software. You’re suicidal, Case. The model gives you a month on the outside. And our medical projection says you’ll need a new pancreas inside a year.”

Related Characters: Molly, Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Armitage / Corto, Wintermute, Riviera

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Molly and Case discuss the profile Molly used to get acquainted with him, which was created by tracking his behavior across multiple aliases. The novel often confronts questions of identity—and here, in a short profile, is Case’s comprehensive identity, which includes details about his life that even he doesn’t know. By looking at his behavior and analyzing it, Molly’s military software can tell that Case is

Related Characters: Molly, Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Armitage / Corto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Case and Molly often discuss their professional motivations. This conversation is sparked by Armitage’s revelation that Case has toxin sacs inside of him, which will dissolve and destroy once more his ability to jack into the matrix if he does not complete his job for Armitage. Case is therefore “kinked,” essentially blackmailed into working for Armitage in order to preserve his nervous system.



Case wonders how Armitage has roped Molly into working for him. Molly gives one of her stock answers, which she repeats variations of throughout the novel. She’s motivated by her “professional pride,” a love of work and an inability to do anything else. Molly has even modified her body into a killing machine—she is her work, and her identity is as a hitman.

Later in the novel Molly comments that, just like Case, she’s “an easy make...anybody any good at what they do, that’s what they are, right?” For Molly, her life and her work are

one and the same. It isn't hard to keep her loyal, because she genuinely loves her job. She continues, telling Case that, "You gotta jack, I gotta tussle," meaning just like he is addicted to the matrix, she's addicted to fighting.

“The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games,” said the voice-over, “in early graphics programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks.” On the Sony, a two-dimensional space war faded behind a forest of mathematically generated ferns, demonstrating the spacial possibilities of logarithmic spirals; cold blue military footage burned through, lab animals wired into test systems, helmets feeding into fire control circuits of tanks and war planes. “Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...”

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

This is the novel's most comprehensive description of the matrix. It explains how the way that users now “jack in” came from military cranial jacks, and how the graphics are based on computer games, descriptions that will help readers imagine a totally invented virtual space. Cyberspace is a visual representation of abstracted data, experienced in an individual's mind. In this way it is both real and nonreal—the data is real and the experience of being in cyberspace feels real, but the actual visuals are merely constructions meant to represent numbers and algorithms and mathematical equations. Still, Case is addicted to it, “real” or not. They way jacking in makes him feel is real enough, as it brings him joy and satisfaction, more so than his so-called “real life.”

Chapter 4 Quotes

“This was it. This was what he was, who he was, his being. He forgot to eat. Molly left cartons of rice and foam trays of sushi on the corner of the long table. Sometimes he resented having to leave the deck to use the chemical toilet they'd set up in a corner of the loft. Ice patterns formed and reformed on the screen as he probed for gaps, skirted the most obvious traps, and mapped the route he'd take through Sense/Net's ice. It was good ice. Wonderful ice. Its patterns burned there while he lay with his arm under Molly's shoulders, watching the red dawn through the steel grid of the skylight. Its rainbow pixel maze was the first thing he saw when he woke. He'd go straight to the deck, not bothering to dress, and jack in. He was cutting it. He was working. He lost track of days.

And sometimes, falling asleep, particularly when Molly was off on one of her reconnaissance trips with her rented cadre of Moderns, images of Chiba came flooding back. Faces and Ninsei neon. Once he woke from a confused dream of Linda Lee, unable to recall who she was or what she'd ever meant to him. When he did remember, he jacked in and worked for nine straight hours.

The cutting of Sense/Net's ice took a total of nine days.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Molly, Linda Lee

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 59


Explanation and Analysis

In the previous scene, as Case jacks in for the first time in a year, even as he loses himself in cyberspace, he's aware of his body “laughing, in a white-painted loft, distant fingers caressing the deck, tears of release streaking his face.” His love of jacking in is more powerful than any other impulse—he loves jacking in more than he loves himself, his body, and any of his friends or lovers. When Case is jacked in, he behaves compulsively. He behaves like an addict, forgetting to eat, sleep, or maintain the physical body, which he needs to live. Still, Case does occasionally remember the outside world, and it is likely that his total immersion in cyberspace, and his choice to leave the outside world behind, comes a desire to quell any negative feelings coming from the “meat” of his body. Case's life is troubled, and he escapes from his emotions however he can. When he didn't have access to computers, he used drugs. But now, he has his favorite indulgence back, so when he thinks of the late Linda Lee, instead of getting high, he jacks in so he doesn't have to think about her and experience emotional pain.

●● The Panther Moderns allowed four minutes for their first move to take effect, then injected a second carefully prepared dose of misinformation. This time, they shot it directly into the Sense/Net building's internal video system.

At 12:04:03, every screen in the building strobed for eighteen seconds in a frequency that produced seizures in a susceptible segment of Sense/Net employees. Then something only vaguely like a human face filled the screens, its features stretched across asymmetrical expanses of bone like some obscene Mercator projection. Blue lips parted wetly as the twisted, elongated jaw moved. Something, perhaps a hand, a thing like a reddish clump of gnarled roots, fumbled toward the camera, blurred, and vanished. Subliminally rapid images of contamination: graphics of the building's water supply system, gloved hands manipulating laboratory glassware, something tumbling down into darkness, a pale splash....The audio track, its pitch adjusted to run at just less than twice the standard playback speed, was part of a month-old newscast detailing potential military uses of a substance known as HsG, a biochemical governing the human skeletal growth factor. Overdoses of HsG threw certain bone cells into overdrive, accelerating growth by factors as high as one thousand percent.

Related Characters: Molly, Henry Dorsett Case, Armitage / Corto

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

During Armitage, Molly, and Case's attack on Sense/Net they enlist the help of a gang called the Panther Moderns. Case has worked on a cyber attack that will break through the digital security system, while the Panther Moderns will create chaos in the physical building. Molly will take advantage of the employees' distraction to infiltrate the Sense/Net library and steal a construct of Dixie Flatline for later in the mission.

The Panther Moderns create a distraction on screens around the building, showing diseased faces and sound clips about a biochemical weapon. Although they release no actual chemicals and the people in the building are only experiencing their bodies' own stress responses, because of the messaging on the televisions and over the intercom system, they believe that they've been somehow infected. This is an example of something that isn't real—an audiovisual show constructed to cause panic—creating real panic, and even taking real lives, as Sense/Net employees are trampled in the ensuing chaos.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● He coughed. "Dix? McCoy? That you man?" His throat was tight.

"Hey, bro," said a directionless voice.

"It's Case, man. Remember?"

"Miami, joeboy, quick study."

"What's the last thing you remember before I spoke to you, Dix?"

"Nothin."

"Hang on."

He disconnected the construct. The presence was gone. He reconnected it. "Dix? Who am I?"

"You got me hung, Jack. Who the fuck are you?"

"Ca—your buddy. Partner. What's happening, man?"

"Good question."

"Remember being here, a second ago?"

"No."

"Know how a ROM personality matrix works?"

"Sure, bro, it's a firmware construct."

"So I jack it into the bank I'm using, I can give it sequential, real time memory?"

"Guess so," said the construct.

"Okay, Dix. You are a ROM construct. Got me?"

"If you say so," said the construct. "Who are you?"



"Case."

"Miami," said the voice, "joeboy, quick study."

"Right. And for starts, Dix, you and me, we're gonna sleaze over to London grid and access a little data. You game for that?"

"You gonna tell me I got a choice, boy?"

Related Characters: McCoy "Dixie" "Flatline" Pauley, Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Armitage / Corto, Molly

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel Case collaborates with a digital construct of the late console cowboy, Dixie Flatline. Dixie is now dead, but worked with Case when he was alive. Armitage had Case and Molly steal Dixie's construct from Sense/Net, and so now, a recording of his personality is available to help Case on his future missions.

This is Case's first interaction with the Flatline's construct.

Although he had a basic idea of how it worked, he is surprised to find that Dixie has no memory after being turned off and turned back on. In fact, for the construct, no time passes when Case is offline, and each time Case comes back online, his memory resets. Case eventually manipulates the construct so he can have a continuous memory, but this early interaction is a reminder that Dixie is not quite human. Additionally, Case often complains about the Flatline's laugh, which he describes as "not laughter, but a stab of cold down Case's spine." This is another reminder that, although much of his personality was recorded, he isn't quite alive.

Still, Dixie has thoughts and feelings. Later in the novel he describes his existence with a story about a friend of his who had to amputate his thumb. He explains "month later he's tossin' all night. Elroy, I said, what's eatin' you? Goddam thumb's itchin', he says. So I told him, scratch it. McCoy, he says, it's the other goddam thumb." Dixie uses this story to illustrate that he can feel there's something missing, but he's unable to "scratch" this symbolic "itch." However, Dixie continually reminds Case that he wants to be deleted when the whole situation is over. He might not be alive, but he'd prefer to be dead than preserved in this half-life in cyberspace.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ "Thing is," he said, "do you think he knows he was Corto, before? I mean, he wasn't anybody in particular, by the time he hit the ward, so maybe Wintermute just..."

"Yeah. Built him up from go. Yeah..." She turned and they walked on. "It figures. You know, the guy doesn't have any life going, in private. Not as far as I can tell. You see a guy like that, you figure there's something he does when he's alone. But not Armitage. Sits and stares at the wall, man. Then something clicks and he goes into high gear and wheels for Wintermute."

"So why's he got that stash in London? Nostalgia?"

"Maybe he doesn't know about it," she said. "Maybe it's just in his name, right?"

"I don't get it," Case said.

"Just thinking out loud....How smart's an AI, Case?"

Related Characters: Molly, Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Wintermute, Armitage / Corto

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

With prompting from Molly, together Case and Dixie have researched Armitage. They discovered Armitage is a constructed identity, and that in a previous life he was Willis Corto, a Colonel. By this point they have also found out about the manipulative AI, Wintermute, and so suspect that Wintermute found Corto, broken and hopeless, and built the personality (or lack thereof) of Armitage on top of the existing man. Later in the novel Case considers different types of madness, and describes Armitage/Corto's madness as, "twist a man far enough, then twist him as far back, in the opposite direction, reverse and twist again. The man broke. Wintermute had built Armitage up from scratch, with Corto's memories of Screaming Fist as the foundation. But Armitage's 'memories' wouldn't have been Corto's after a certain point." Armitage is an "edited version of Corto," but under stress, Corto eventually reemerges.

Molly, who has spent more time with Armitage, can verify that the mask Wintermute constructed is just that—surface level. He has no internal life. When he's not completing a task for Wintermute he is staring at a wall. He has no true memories, no true desires. He's a puppet. Molly grasps this concept more quickly than Case does. She realizes that Armitage's personality is not one he constructed, but Wintermute constructed, and that his stash in London is not one he consciously kept, but one Wintermute put together. In realizing that Armitage is not quite a person, Case and Molly realize how much smarter Wintermute is than they had originally thought.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛☛ As they worked, Case gradually became aware of the music that pulsed constantly through the cluster. It was called dub, a sensuous mosaic cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop; it was worship, Molly said, and a sense of community. Case heaved at one of the yellow sheets; the thing was light but still awkward. Zion smelled of cooked vegetables, humanity, and ganja.

Related Characters: Molly, Henry Dorsett Case

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Case, Molly, and their team stay for a few days in Zion before moving to Freeside. Zion was founded by a handful

of Freeside laborers who refused to return to earth, instead building their own colony. Notably, “they’d suffered calcium loss and heart shrinkage” in zero G before establishing rotational gravity, but ostensibly felt this personal sacrifice was worth it for the sake of the community. This community-first ethos weaves through much of the Zionites’ society and culture.

This music, dub, represents a combination of likely thousands of pop songs across decades—a musical quilt that in its very makeup represents synergy and community. Unlike Case and Molly, who often comment on their dedication to themselves and themselves alone, residents of Zion care about each other, and consider their friends and family in their actions. Later in the novel, this community-first ethos will save both Molly and Case’s lives. Maelcum agrees to help case with their mission to save Molly because he likes the idea of love and friendship, and then Maelcum saves Case with dub, playing him music from his headphones to help Case recover from flatlining.

☛ Case didn’t understand the Zionites.

Aerol, with no particular provocation, related the tale of the baby who had burst from his forehead and scampered into a forest of hydroponic ganja. “Ver’ small baby, mon, no long’ you finga.” He rubbed his palm across an unscarred expanse of brown forehead and smiled.

“It’s the ganja,” Molly said, when Case told her the story. “They don’t make much of a difference between states, you know? Aerol tells you it happened, well, it happened to him. It’s not like bullshit, more like poetry. Get it?”

Case nodded dubiously.

Related Characters: Aerol, Molly (speaker), Henry Dorsett Case

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel, most questions of reality and perception have to do with technology—world created in the matrix that looks real, or people within the matrix who are actually just constructs. Although these places or people might not be technically “real,” they can still stir real emotions, or prompt real sensory feedback—pain, lust, tears, etc. This is one of the few examples in the novel of state-altering drugs that blur the line between fantasy and reality. Ironically, although Case spends much of his life on

the edge of reality and illusion, if not actively strung out on drugs, he doesn’t fully understand the Zionite’s easygoing blending of states, where a drug-induced hallucination is treated as real, because it *felt* real.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛ Case brought the gun around and looked down the line of sight at Deane’s pink, ageless face.

“Don’t,” Deane said. “You’re right. About what this all is. What I am. But there are certain internal logics to be honored. If you use that, you’ll see a lot of brains and blood, and it would take me several hours—your subjective time—to effect another spokesperson. This set isn’t easy for me to maintain. Oh, and I’m sorry about Linda, in the arcade. I was hoping to speak through her, but I’m generating all this out of your memories, and the emotional charge....Well, it’s very tricky. I slipped. Sorry.”

Case lowered the gun. “This is the matrix. You’re Wintermute.”

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Wintermute, Julius “Julie” Deane (speaker), Linda Lee

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first time Case officially “meets” Wintermute. Because of the type of AI Wintermute is, he has no true face, and instead must adopt the faces of people he’s borrowed from Case’s life and memories. Although this is technically a digital construction of Deane’s office, Wintermute warns that shooting the gun will have the same effect as it would in the real world. A few minutes later, when Case ends their conversation with a headshot, he comments that Wintermute/Deane had “been right about he brains too. And the blood.” Although technically an illusion, Wintermute’s constructed worlds, drawn from Case’s own memories, follow the logic and physics of the real one.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ “Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?”


“Well, yeah, obviously.”

“Nope. I mean, it’s not human. And you can’t get a handle on it. Me, I’m not human either, but I respond like one. See?”

“Wait a sec,” Case said. “Are you sentient, or not?”

“Well, it feels like I am, kid, but I’m really just a bunch of ROM. It’s one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess…” The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case’s spine. “But I ain’t likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain’t no way human.”

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, McCoy “Dixie” “Flatline” Pauley (speaker), Wintermute

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Ironically, although Case often thinks of Wintermute as human, slipping up and calling the AI “him” instead of the impersonal “it,” Dixie, a digital construction like Wintermute, is more aware of Wintermute’s lack of humanity. To an outsider like Case, both Dixie and Wintermute have human qualities. However, Dixie sees that Wintermute is not human, and merely is good at putting on a human face to manipulate Case and his team.

Wintermute often constructs profiles of the people it is interacting with so it can better predict their behaviors and manipulate them based on their motivations. However, Dixie points out that a key distinction between Wintermute and humans is that with AIs it is harder to profile them, and therefore harder to find a motive or guess future behaviors. Dixie uses this to argue that Wintermute isn’t human. Still, Wintermute, like Dixie, has hopes and dreams and desires. Wintermute wants to unite with its other half, Neuromancer, and Dixie wants to die, eventually. Although Dixie argues that he isn’t human and doesn’t have a human’s freewheeling creativity, the kind that would allow him to write a poem, Gibson never fully endorses this viewpoint. Dixie and Wintermute aren’t quite human, but they’re still individuals, who Gibson argues should be treated with respect.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ He vomited over a rosewood railing into the quiet waters of the lake. Something that had seemed to close around his head like a vise had released him now. Kneeling, his cheek against the cool wood, he stared across the shallow lake at the bright aura of the Rue Jules Verne.

Case had seen the medium before; when he’d been a teenager in the Sprawl, they’d called it, “dreaming real.” He remembered thin Puerto Ricans under East Side streetlights, dreaming real to the quick beat of a salsa, dreamgirls shuddering and turning, the onlookers clapping in time. But that had needed a van full of gear and a clumsy trode helmet.

What Riviera dreamed, you got. Case shook his aching head and spat into the lake.

He could guess the end, the finale. There was an inverted symmetry: Riviera puts the dreamgirl together, the dreamgirl takes him apart. With those hands. Dreamblood soaking the rotten lace.

Cheers from the restaurant, applause. Case stood and ran his hands over his clothes. He turned and walked back into the Vingtième Siècle.

Molly’s chair was empty. The stage was deserted. Armitage sat alone, still staring at the stage, the stem of the wineglass between his fingers.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Molly, Riviera, Armitage / Corto, Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

In a Freeside cabaret, Riviera gives a holographic performance with the attention of grabbing the attention of 3Jane, who he (and Armitage and Wintermute) hopes will allow him into the Villa Straylight on the basis of his show. Riviera therefore has permission to present as disturbed and depraved as show as he wants, and he settles on a kind of sex scene between himself and a bunch of dismembered body parts that assemble into a razorgirl who, after he has put her together, takes him apart with her blades. The razorgirl has Molly’s face, and though he never explicitly explains why he does it, Riviera likely dislikes Molly, wants to torment her, is attracted to her, and wants to sleep with her. This performance, therefore, is the perfect outlet for his complicated feelings.

Although technically not real, the performance is disturbing and effective. The holograms are awful enough to make

Case vomit (it helps that he is hung-over from a drug binge) and Molly has to leave the room. Also notable is that, although Case and Molly have been having sex for the majority of the novel, he hasn't expressed any explicit concern for her wellbeing up until now (with the exception of any missions where he's been connected to her simstim, and could physically feel her pain). This is one of Case's first true moments of empathy. He is angry, upset, and sick not because he feels his romantic property is being disrespected, but because his friend is being mistreated.



Chapter 12 Quotes

●● He bought a mug of Carlsberg and found a place against the wall. Closing his eyes, he felt for the knot of rage, the pure small coal of his anger. It was there still. Where had it come from? He remembered feeling only a kind of bafflement at his maiming in Memphis, nothing at all when he'd killed to defend his dealing interests in Night City, and a slack sickness and loathing after Linda's death under the inflated dome. But no anger. Small and far away, on the mind's screen, a semblance of Deane struck a semblance of an office wall in an explosion of brains and blood. He knew then: the rage had come in the arcade, when Wintermute rescinded the simstim ghost of Linda Lee, yanking away the simple animal promise of food, warmth, a place to sleep. But he hadn't become aware of it until his exchange with the holo-construct of Lonny Zone.

It was a strange thing. He couldn't take its measure.

"Numb," he said. He'd been numb a long time, years. All his nights down Ninsei, his nights with Linda, numb in bed and numb at the cold sweating center of every drug deal. But now he'd found this warm thing, this chip of murder. Meat, some part of him said. It's the meat talking, ignore it.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Julius "Julie" Deane (speaker), Molly, Linda Lee, Lonny Zone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Wintermute hopes to get Case enraged, so he will be more motivated to continue the mission. As Case starts to feel his newfound anger, he realizes that he's been spending much of his life sleepwalking, feeling no emotions at all.

Since his life as a console cowboy ended (and maybe even during), Case has done his best to suppress all his emotions. He turned to drugs because they numbed the pain of his separation from cyberspace, and then the pain of his

separation from Linda Lee. Now, unable to use drugs because of his modified liver and pancreas, he's dived back into cyberspace, which he uses the same way he used his amphetamines—to lose and distract himself.

Case hates emotions. He thinks of them as distractions belonging to the "meat" of his body. He realizes now even when he was ostensibly happy, like when he was with Linda, he was really just numb, unable to feel pain, but also unable to feel joy or genuine human connection. Emotion, specifically rage, like he's feeling now, works as a motivator, as opposed to numbness, which was barely enough to motivate Case to stay alive.

Chapter 13 Quotes

●● "You are worse than a fool," Michèle said, getting to her feet, the pistol in her hand. "You have no care for your species. For thousands of years men dreamed of pacts with demons. Only now are such things possible. And what would you be paid with? What would your price be, for aiding this thing to free itself and grow?" There was a knowing weariness in her young voice that no nineteen-year-old could have mustered. "You will dress now. You will come with us. Along with the one you call Armitage, you will return with us to Geneva and give testimony in the trial of this intelligence. Otherwise, we kill you. Now." She raised the pistol, a smooth black Walther with an integral silencer.

Related Characters: Michèle (speaker), Henry Dorsett Case, Wintermute, Armitage / Corto, Roland, Pierre

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

After Case is busted by the Turing police in his hotel room, Michèle gives him a speech about the dangers of working with Wintermute. While Case hasn't thought about any of the wider implications of his mission—setting the AI free—it is Michèle's job to keep AIs in control. She sees Wintermute as a demon, and Case, by collaborating, as making a deal with the devil, selling out humankind for a paycheck. Michèle believes that human beings have a responsibility to each other, and that their responsibility is to keep humankind safe from threats, which includes Artificial Intelligences trying to break their chains. Although an antagonist in the novel, her argument is not wrong. Because Case does not know what Wintermute intends to do what is free, he is putting his own life, and the lives of billions of others, at risk, simply because he knows that if he doesn't

complete the mission, toxins will dissolve inside of him and prevent him from accessing the matrix.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ “...Remember this?” And his right hand held the charred wasps’ nest from Case’s dream, reek of fuel in the closeness of the dark shop. Case stumbled back against a wall of junk. “Yeah. That was me. Did it with the holo rig in the window. Another memory I tapped out of you when I flatlined you that first time. Know why it’s important?”


Case shook his head. “Because”—and the nest, somehow, was gone—“it’s the closest thing you got to what Tessier-Ashpool would like to be. The human equivalent. Straylight’s like that nest, or anyway it was supposed to work out that way. I figure it’ll make you feel better.”

“Feel better?”

“To know what they’re like. You were starting to hate my guts for a while there. That’s good. But hate them instead. Same difference.”

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Wintermute (speaker), Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Case is flatlining once again, and Wintermute takes this opportunity to meet with him in the matrix. Earlier in the novel Case had dreamed of a summer when he was a teenager and had to destroy a wasp nest that was being built on the window of his apartment. Wintermute forced Case to have this dream, in order to provide him context for this conversation. Wintermute wants to make sure Case completes the mission—breaking through the Tessier-Ashpool ice with a virus, thus breaking Wintermute’s shackles and allowing it to combine with its other half.

Wintermute has been manipulating Case since the beginning of the novel, and worries that Case might start to hate it, and will therefore be less likely to cooperate. To remedy this, Wintermute gives Case something else to hate. By comparing the Tessier-Ashpool family to a wasp nest, with which Case already has negative associations, Wintermute encourages Case to dehumanize the family, seeing them instead as animal or parasitic, something that wants to hurt him, and will if it gets the chance.

As unflattering a description of the Tessier-Ashpool family as this is, it is one they’ve partly chosen for themselves. Later in the novel 3Jane describes her mother’s dream for the family, in which they would be “immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity.”

Chapter 16 Quotes

☛☛ He closed his eyes. He saw the sacs of toxin dissolving in his arteries. He saw Molly hauling herself up the endless steel rungs. He opened his eyes.

“I dunno, man,” he said, a strange taste in his mouth. He looked down at his desk, at his hands. “I don’t know.” He looked back up. The brown face was calm now, intent. Maelcum’s chin was hidden by the high helmet ring of his old blue suit. “She’s inside,” he said. “Molly’s inside. In Straylight, it’s called. If there’s any Babylon, man, that’s it. We leave on her, she ain’t comin’ out, Steppin’ Razor or not.”

Maelcum nodded, the dreadbag bobbing behind him like a captive balloon of crocheted cotton. “She you woman, Case?”


“I dunno. Nobody’s woman, maybe.” He shrugged. And found his anger again, real as a shard of hot rock beneath his ribs. “Fuck this,” he said. “Fuck Armitage, fuck Wintermute, and fuck you. I’m stayin’ right here.”

Maelcum’s smile spread across his face like light breaking. “Maelcum a rude boy, Case. Garvey Maelcum boat.” His gloved hand slapped a panel and the bass-heavy rocksteady of Zion dub came pulsing from the tug’s speakers. “Maelcum not runnin’, no. I talk wi’ Aerol, he certain t’ see it in similar light.”

Case stared. “I don’t understand you guys at all,” he said.

“Don’ ’stan’ you, mon,” the Zionite said, nodding to the beat, “but we mus’ move by Jah love, each one.”

Related Characters: Maelcum, Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Molly, Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool, Riviera, Hideo, Wintermute, Armitage / Corto, Aerol

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

This is a crucial moment for Case. Armitage/Corto has lost his mind and ejected himself into space. He is dead and gone. Molly has been injured and captured by 3Jane, Riviera, and Hideo inside Villa Straylight. Case could, if he wanted, totally abandon his mission. Case still has toxin sacs inside of him, and suspects Wintermute could give him instruction on how to cure himself if he stayed onboard, but,

in the end, what motivates him to continue with his mission is his vision of Molly. Instead of saving himself and dealing with the toxin sacs some other way, he decides to go into Villa Straylight and save his friend.

Maelcum wonders if Case wants to help Molly because she's his girlfriend, but Case explains that he doesn't possess Molly in any way, and, perhaps, she can't be possessed or claimed as a partner. Still, he cares about her and knows she needs his help, and so is willing to risk his life for her sake, regardless of the specific status of their relationship.

Maelcum is easily convinced to join. Case doesn't understand Maelcum or Aerol or any of the Zionites, but welcomes their help. However, Maelcum's philosophy is fairly simple—he's motivated by community and by love, and lives in a colony founded by people who were antiestablishment rule breakers. Therefore, he sees Case's desire to save Molly—motivated by love, and his rejection of authority figures—as noble.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ “Wintermute won't be the first to have made the same mistake. Underestimating me...He talked with me, Molly. I suppose he talked to all of us. You, and Case, whatever there is of Armitage to talk to. He can't really understand us, you know. He has his profiles, but those are only statistics. You may be the statistical animal, darling, and Case is nothing but, but I possess a quality unquantifiable by its very nature.” He drank.

“And what exactly is that, Peter?” Molly asked, her voice flat.

Riviera beamed. “Perversity.”

Related Characters: Riviera (speaker), Wintermute, Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool, Hideo, Molly, Henry Dorsett Case, Maelcum, Armitage / Corto

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Riviera, 3Jane, and Hideo have captured Molly, Case, and Maelcum deep inside of the Villa Straylight. Throughout the novel characters have used “profiles” to get a sense of each other, and to predict each other's behaviors. Armitage and Molly made a series of profiles for Riviera and Case, so that they would better be able to manage their team.

Wintermute, too, has made profiles of many of the men and women he works with. As a computer, he's good at predicting patterns based on past behavior.

However, Riviera points out that people are more than an algorithm created to describe their actions. Humans have an inherent unpredictability that even the smartest computer cannot incorporate into its profiles. Riviera, especially, who was brought onto the team because of his unpredictability and creativity, is not a “statistical animal,” like the more mild-mannered Case, or the married-to-her-work Molly. Riviera calls this quality of unpredictability “perversity,” but it could also be called humanity. The novel grapples with questions of what makes someone human, and one of the elements of humanity certainly is consciousness, the ability to make decisions, and the choice to make any decision predictable or not.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ He refused her arms, that night, refused the food she offered him, the place beside her in the nest of blankets and shredded foam. He crouched beside the door, finally, and watched her sleep, listening to the wind scour the structure's walls. Every hour or so, he rose and crossed to the makeshift stove, adding fresh driftwood from the pile beside it. None of this was real, but cold was cold.

Related Characters: Wintermute, Henry Dorsett Case, Neuromancer / Rio, Linda Lee

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Case has been tricked by Wintermute's brother AI, Neuromancer/Rio, who convinced Case to jack in to a deck in the Villa Straylight, and then flatlined him. Case is now trapped inside the matrix, in a world Rio has built. The world looks like an endless beach with a shack on it. Inside the shack is Linda Lee, or a construction of Linda Lee, who remembers him and still seems to love him. Case knows he is in the matrix, but he also knows that it feels real to him. In the final line of this quote he summarizes that sense—that “none of this was real, but cold was cold.”

Later, Case will speak to Neuromancer about his constructed world in the matrix. Neuromancer explains that although he built the world, Linda is an autonomous being inside of it. He does “not know her thoughts...To live here is to live. There is no difference.” In this constructed space there is no difference between illusion and reality, what feels real *is*, in the end, real.

“No,” he said, and then it no longer mattered, what he knew, tasting the salt of her mouth where tears had dried. There was a strength that ran in her, something he’d known in Night City and held there, been held by it, held for a while away from time and death, from the relentless Street that hunted them all. It was a place he’d known before; not everyone could take him there, and somehow he always managed to forget it. Something he’d found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew— he remembered—as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read.

The zipper hung, caught, as he opened the French fatigues, the coils of toothed nylon clotted with salt. He broke it, some tiny metal part shooting off against the wall as salt-rotten cloth gave, and then he was in her, effecting the transmission of the old message. Here, even here, in a place he knew for what it was, a coded model of some stranger’s memory, the drive held.

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case (speaker), Linda Lee

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

Although Case has sex with Molly throughout the novel, and does care for her as more than just a sexual partner, this is arguably the novel’s most significant sex act. It is more than just physical connection — it is, for Case at least, a return to a place of comfort, a place of belonging, which only certain partners can take him to. Although Case often mocks the flesh of his body as needy “meat,” this is an act that he needs a body to do. Having sex with Linda Lee is the “transmission of the old message,” a message read by the body (and only the body) that activates in him emotions he spends much of his life forgetting and repressing.

Ironically, however, as important as the physical touch is in bringing Case to a new mental place, this entire scene takes place in cyberspace. The moment that makes Case the most thankful for the meat of his body is a moment that occurs entirely inside his mind. However, that doesn’t make it less valuable, important, or real.

Chapter 21 Quotes

“To call up a demon you must learn its name. Men dreamed that, once, but now it is real in another way. You know that, Case. Your business is to learn the names of programs, the long formal names, names the owners seek to conceal. True names...”
“A Turing code’s not your name.”

“Neuromancer,” the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. “The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend,” and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing the sand, “I am the dead, and their land.” He laughed. A gull cried. “Stay. If your woman is a ghost, she doesn’t know it. Neither will you.”

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Neuromancer / Rio (speaker), Marie-France, Wintermute, Michèle

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

This is Case’s first conversation with Neuromancer during which he realizes who he is talking to. It is the first mention of the name Neuromancer, which will obviously stick out to readers as the title of the novel. Unlike Wintermute, who seems to have chosen a name based on the snowy location of its processors, which are housed in Berne, Switzerland, Neuromancer has put time and thought into its name. The two AIs are opposites in many ways—Wintermute has no personality and must take on personalities from the memories of other in order to communicate, whereas Neuromancer is nothing but personality. Therefore, it follows that Wintermute would have a simple name, whereas Neuromancer would create one full of meaning.

Neuromancer, like the Turing police officer Michèle before him, compares AIs to demons and devils. By allowing Case to know his name, he gives Case a little power, because Case understands who Neuromancer is, and what it wants. Neuromancer’s name is a play on Necromancer, or someone who contacts or raises the dead, but it also references neurons, which are human brain cells but are often also invoked when describing the brains and processors of computers. It is part technology, part ancient god or demon, whose wish, in the end, is to speak to the dead or otherwise be left alone.

Chapter 23 Quotes


☛☛ He came in steep, fueled by self-loathing. When the Kuang program met the first of the defenders, scattering the leaves of light, he felt the shark thing lose a degree of substantiality, the fabric of information loosening.

And then—old alchemy of the brain and its vast pharmacy—his hate flowed into his hands. In the instant before he drove Kuang’s sting through the base of the first tower, he attained a level of proficiency exceeding anything he’d known or imagined. Beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved, Kuang moving with him, evading his attackers with an ancient dance, Hideo’s dance, grace of the mind-body interface granted him, in that second, by the clarity and singleness of his wish to die.

And one step in that dance was the lightest touch on the switch, barely enough to flip—

—now...

Related Characters: Henry Dorsett Case, Wintermute, Molly

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis


In the second half of the novel, Case often feels hatred bubble up inside of him, and Wintermute works hard to get Case to direct this hatred towards the Tessier-Ashpool family. Finally, in this climactic moment, Case’s hate is what helps him pilot the Kuang virus into the heart of the Tessier-Ashpool mainframe. Although love for and human connection with Molly is what motivated Case to enter the Villa Straylight and complete his mission, now, in this crucial moment hate gives him the energy and focus required. As he works, he hears a voice in the background, an AI telling him “Hate’ll get you through...”

Chapter 24 Quotes

☛☛ HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OFF MY GAME, I PAID THE BILL ALREADY. ITS THE WAY IM WIRED I GUESS, WATCH YOUR ASS OKAY? XXX MOLLY

Related Characters: Molly (speaker), Henry Dorsett Case, Johnny

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

Molly attaches this farewell note to the wall of the room she shares with Case with the shuriken she bought him at the beginning of the novel. This shuriken has represented new beginnings, and although this is end of their relationship, it is an opportunity for Case to start over, fully free from his past.

Between the book’s final chapter and its Coda, Molly and Case have clearly been living together. After beginning a sexual relationship during their mission, they became more intimately and romantically involved. However, both characters had expressed reservations about love and commitment. Case has frequently prioritized himself over his lovers, specifically Linda Lee, and Molly told Case about her ex, Johnny, whose death scared her away from intimacy and attachment.

Molly also frequently talked about how her job was her life, and her life was her job. Given that her job requires being a hired killer, it is in her best interest to have no attachments, no connections, and no one who could be held as blackmail in order to manipulate her. So, it is in her best interest to leave Case and return to the life she knows and loves, which is a professionally fulfilling, but lonely one.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Case sits in the Chatsubo, a bar in Chiba, Japan, that primarily caters to expats. The bartender, Ratz, wonders if he has business with Wage, who was in the bar earlier in the day. Case observes Ratz, whose “ugliness was the stuff of legend.” The bartender has an antique Russian prosthetic arm, ending in a claw.

The conversation in the bar quiets, and Case overhears a drunken man claim that the “Chinese bloody invented nerve-splicing” and can easily fix anyone up. Japan, and Chiba specifically, have cutting edge black market clinics, but Case bitterly remarks that this claim is “bullshit.”

Case has been to every neurosurgery clinic in Chiba, and knows first-hand that they cannot repair his particular nerve damage. He used to be a console cowboy, but now he’s just a hustler who uses drugs to numb his pain and often wakes up “trying to reach the console that wasn’t there.”

Ratz tells Case he saw “your girl,” Linda Lee, last night. Case responds that he doesn’t have a girl, and leaves the bar. Case recounts the last few years of his life: he is twenty-four, but has already worked for many years as a console cowboy. He was a thief, stealing money and data, until, at twenty-two, he stole from his employers, who punished him and promised he’d never work again.

Case’s employers used a mycotoxin to damage his nervous system so that he would be unable to hook up his brain to the matrix and work in cyberspace. He describes this mutilation as “the Fall.” As a cowboy he’d thought of his body as “meat,” now he is trapped in “the prison of his own flesh.”

After his firing and mutilation, Case moved to Japan, hoping to find a cure in Chiba, but his money ran out without finding a cure. Hopeless, he now works as a hustler and real-world thief. He feels himself spiraling out of control, and feels Ninsei wearing him down. He knows death is the “accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness” and breaches of protocol, yet he’s been increasingly lazy and careless.

In the novel’s near-future setting, almost everyone has access to plastic (or aesthetic) surgeries. Ratz is notable because although he could be beautiful, he chooses not to, instead making his ugliness his identity.



In this version of the future, medical technology has evolved to solve almost every conceivable issue; however, Case is forever resentful that his nerve injury is one of the few too complex to be healed.



Case misses being a console cowboy and has turned to drugs, self-medicating to numb the pain and essentially replacing one addiction with another. Even though his dreams are not real, they bring back real, negative emotions.



Case has spent much of his young life motivated by self-interest and greed. He is now struggling in Chiba because he betrayed former employers and is no longer with his ex, Linda, because he turned her into a drug addict. He cares about himself, first and foremost, which only hurts him in the end.



Case was addicted to the matrix, so being cut off from it is the greatest possible punishment. By describing his mutilation as “the Fall,” he compares his tragedy to Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden, or Lucifer falling from heaven.



Now that he’s cut off from cyberspace, Case feels there’s nothing to live for. He has no real allegiance to his bosses, and no close friends or romantic partners. He knows that his behavior will kill him, either by his body shutting down or his bosses putting a price on his head, but he doesn’t care.



Case takes a pink, octagonal stimulant pill as he sits in a café. He reflects on his own sloppiness— he knows he is engaged in an “arc of [...] self-destruction,” obvious to himself and his customers who have dropped off. He knows he will die soon, and looks forward to it.

Case remembers meeting his ex, Linda Lee, in an arcade. He'd immediately fixated on her, and they went home together and had sex. However, after dating for a month, he turned her into a drug addict like himself, and watched her “personality fragment,” as she was overtaken with “raw need, the hungry armature of addiction.”

Back in the present, Case is high. He spots Linda Lee, who joins him at his table, offers him a cigarette, and asks how he's doing. She tells him Wage, his sometimes employer, wants to hurt him over a debt. Case knows other people owe Wage more money than he does, but Linda Lee worries Wage will make an example of Case.

Seeing Linda fills Case with “lust and loneliness.” Watching her shiver and sweat, Case worries about her. Discovering she has nowhere to sleep, he gives her fifty New Yen. She tries to turn it down, insisting he needs it to pay Wage back, but eventually takes the money and leaves.

Case leaves and wanders through Night City. He senses his professional and personal “walls were standing to crumble,” which excites him. The week before he'd delayed a sale to make money; Wage, his supplier, disliked this, and might have put a hit out on Case.

Case stops in a shop window to examine some **shuriken**, which he sees as “the stars under which he voyaged, his destiny spelled out in a constellation of cheap chrome,” and decides to see Julius Deane, a smuggler whom he hopes will advise him.

Case's drug addiction helps him cope with his daily life, but he still doesn't want to be alive. The selfishness that cost him his job as a console cowboy has disappeared; now, instead of caring about himself, he cares about nothing at all.



Case's relationship with Linda was a selfish one. He didn't care about her wants, needs, or wellbeing—only about what she could give him. Unfortunately, he got her hooked on the same drugs he used in an attempt to numb the pain of his life, and through her addiction was able to see the horrible changes addiction can create in a personality.



Linda still seems to care about Case, even though he actively introduced her to drugs and ruined her life. In fact, so far, she is the only person so far who has expressed concern for Case. Maybe it's his drug-induced high, or maybe it's his total apathy, but Case seems relatively unphased by Linda's revelation.



Linda is the first person Case expresses any concern about, including himself. He is willing to put himself into greater debt to keep her safe. However, since he seems to have a death-wish, this is maybe still self-serving, as it just makes his own situation more desperate and potentially deadly.



The last time Case betrayed an employer, they destroyed his ability to connect to the matrix, but he hasn't learned his lesson. He remains self-serving, even if he puts himself in danger.



The shuriken represents a new, more exciting (if not necessarily happier) future for Case. Unbeknownst to him, his destiny is already spelled out—determined by Armitage, Molly, and Wintermute, who have tapped him to join their team (although he doesn't know it yet). Thinking about his future causes him to take action to protect himself.



Julie is 135, but remains healthy through serums, hormones, and an annual reset of his DNA. Case meets him in his office, and tells Julie that a friend told him Wage wants to kill him. Julie first cautions Case that it isn't "always easy to know who your friend are," and then explains that because Julie has a working relationship with Wage, he can't disclose everything he knows. Still, he tells Case that, to his knowledge, Wage isn't after him, and even promises Case a job if he isn't dead in a week. Case thanks him and leaves.

As he walks, Case suddenly realizes he's being followed. He catches his stalker in a window—it's Molly. Spooked, Case tries to rent a gun, but unwilling to wait the two hours it would take for the suppliers to get one, he goes to the **shuriken** shop and buys a cobra—a spring loaded billy club.

Case returns to the Chat looking for Wage, but doesn't find him. Back outside, he senses he is being followed again. He dashes into an arcade, breaks through into an empty room, and punches through the window to a back alley. He stands in the room, listening to footsteps outside, cobra in hand, but as his "octagon-induced bravado" collapses, he turns and slides through the window into the back alley.

Case decides to throw out the cobra and rent a gun, which is now available. Case then visits a coffin he's rented for the past year in Cheap Hotel. He doesn't sleep there, but uses it for storage. In the coffin is a Hitachi pocket computer and a flask, kept in a cooler on ice. He calls potential buyers for the RAM in the Hitachi, but one doesn't answer and the other doesn't have the money. Frustrated, he returns to the Chat.

Case enters the Chat with a pistol in one pocket and his flask in the other. Ratz notes Case looks bad. Case wonders if Ratz has heard anything about a fight in the arcade—Ratz heard a girl, Molly, cut up a security guard. Wage enters the Chat with two men. Although Wage is here for Case, Ratz fights back, and his employee Kurt aims a riot gun at Wage and his guards. Case thanks Ratz for the help, but Ratz rebuffs him, pointing out Wage "should know better" than starting a fight in his bar. Case takes out his gun, which Ratz immediately confiscates and unloads. Wage sends his two men to wait outside and tries to have a calm conversation with Case

Julie uses technology to enhance and extend his life. When Julie warns Case that it's hard to know who your friends are, he is referring to his relationship to Case, as much as he is to Case's relationship to Linda. In Chiba, most people are only looking out for themselves. This notion extends to Julie, who cares less about Case and more about protecting his business relationships.



Faced for the first time with a real, physical threat, Case decides he does care about this own life after all. Shurikens often appear in relation to Molly, and here symbolizes the start of their personal and professional relationship.



High on octagons—the stimulant he took earlier—Case temporarily has the bravery to stand and fight. However, at heart, Case is not a particularly brave or violent person, and so as the drugs wear off, he flees.



Although Molly doesn't work for Wage, Case thinks she does, and so suddenly the threat of bodily harm or death seems real. For the first time in a year, his sense of self-preservation has kicked in, and he's suddenly willing to take action to save his own life.



Case confuses his relationship with Ratz for friendship. In fact, Ratz is just a business proprietor, and his priorities are taking care of himself and his establishment. Case thinks that Ratz is on his side, when in fact, Ratz simply has rules—which include "no fighting in the Chat." Wage's willingness to have a calm conversation suggests that at least some of Case's fear is just paranoia, perhaps induced by his stimulant addiction.



Wage asks who told Case that Wage was after him. Case doesn't answer but gives Wage his flask, which he says is "Pituitaries. Get you five hundred if you move it fast." Wage tells Case they're even, but notes that Case looks bad. Case collects his gun and cartridge and leaves the bar, hoping to get back his deposit on the weapon.

Returning to his coffin in Cheap Hotel, Case realizes Linda Lee stole the RAM in his Hitachi, important files that she will probably sell. He's betrayed but understands her motivations—she probably just wants a ticket home.

Case approaches his coffin, noticing the broken lock. He crawls inside and is startled by Molly, dressed in all black, wearing mirrored glasses, and pointing a fletcher at him. She explains she isn't with Wage, like he had thought. She's come to collect him for her employer. She explains she just wants to bring him back in one piece, and doesn't want to hurt him, but flexes her hands anyway—showing off the retractable scalpel blades embedded in her fingertips.

CHAPTER 2

Molly has taken Case to a room in the Chiba Hilton Hotel. She suggests he drink a cup of coffee, and he obliges. When Armitage, Molly's boss, enters the room, he startles Case, who swings his mug at him but misses. Unfazed, Armitage begins his spiel. Case notices Armitage wears an earring, which he recognizes as belonging to men in the Special Forces.

Armitage offers Case a deal—he says they've made a profile of Case that says his reckless behavior will probably kill him in a month, and if it doesn't, he will need a new pancreas within a year. Armitage promises Case he can correct his neural damage, if Case will agree to work for him as a jockey. Case doesn't believe him, but listens to the terms of their hypothetical contract anyway.

The next day, Sunday, Molly takes Case to a clinic in Chiba. He has decided to work with Armitage in exchange for reconstructive surgery. As they wait outside, Molly explains Armitage is paying for the surgery with the new program he's brought them to use to fix Case's nervous system. Case is nervous, and makes small talk with Molly. Molly stays it's funny talking to Case; because of his profile, she feels like she already knows him. He doesn't like this.

Case protects Linda Lee by paying his debt and keeping his silence with a flask of black market hormones, which he knows will repay what he owes. Everyone around Case can see that he's struggling, but no one cares enough to help.



Although Case thought Linda was looking out for him, he realizes she is still just concerned with her own well-being as his. However, he understands her motivations and addictions, so he doesn't hold a grudge.



Molly's body modifications are a part of her identity. Her finger blades and implanted lenses are with her at all times. Although tools of her trade, she has them even in her private life, preventing her from living normally. However, she likes this; as she repeats throughout the novel, her work is her life.



Although Molly has done her best to put him at ease, Case is still on edge—a mixture of his newfound fear of death, and his constant ingestion of drugs. Although Case knows nothing about Armitage, his earring suggests a high-powered, military background.



Armitage and Molly often rely on profiles to get a sense of the people they'll be collaborating with. This profile tells them that Case desperately misses the matrix, and that he's passively killing himself. This means that he will be easy to manipulate into working for them, if it means he'll get his nervous system repaired.



Case was addicted to the matrix and so will do anything to jack back in. Luckily, Armitage has technology that can fix him. Case's fear is not that he will die on the operating table, but that the surgery will not work, and he'll remain trapped in the body he hates. Once again, Molly references Case's profile, which reduces him to a predictable set of behaviors.



Molly has worked for Armitage for a few months, but when Case presses her for information, she explains she's just a working girl with no true allegiance to her boss. She explains, "What I always think about first, Case, is my own sweet ass." Still, she discloses that Armitage is newly wealthy, and she suspects the money is coming from his employer, but she doesn't know who it is. The anesthesiologist interrupts them, ushering Case inside.

Case wakes up on Wednesday, three days later. His neck and spine hurt. Molly is lying beside him in a coffin in Cheap Hotel. Seeing that he's awake, she passes him water. He sits up groggily, explaining, "I gotta punch deck." She laughs and explains he can't hook himself up to the matrix for eight days at least, allowing his nervous system to heal.

Case wonders why Molly isn't with Armitage, back in the Hilton, and she straddles him in response. They begin to kiss and then have sex. Case describes his orgasm as "flaring blue in the timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors..."

The next day, Case goes to talk to Julie. Molly follows along, under order to watch him. Case wants to see Julie, and lies that he has "tight friends" who might "die" if he doesn't talk to them privately. Molly correctly guesses Case just wants to "check us out with your smuggler," but gives him five minutes.

Julie greets Case with a gun in his hand, explaining he's "just taking care." Case wants a history lesson, and asks about Armitage. Julie looks Armitage up on a laptop, but announces Armitage has managed to block himself from Julie's servers. Case then asks about Screaming Fist. Julie explains it was a cover-up like Watergate—the American government knew about Russian defenses, but sent in soldiers to test new technology anyway.

As Case leaves, Julie says he spent the war in Lisbon. He wasn't fighting, and jokes, "wonderful what a war can do for one's markets."

Molly takes pride in her work, but her investment stops there—her identity (and body modifications) are deeply tied to her job as a bodyguard and killer for hire, but beyond her professional obligations, she has no loyalty to her bosses or interest in their lives.



Case is obsessed with the idea of getting back into the matrix. His love of cyberspace is a clearly an addiction—his first thoughts after waking up from invasive surgery are not about this own wellbeing or the surgery's success, but about when he can get his next fix.



Even as he connects physically with Molly, Case can only compare the experience to something he loves more than sex—jacking into the matrix, which, for him, is the most positive experience there is. Having sex seems to be less about connection (they've known each other only a few days) and more about satisfying personal needs.



Although Case and Molly have had sex, he doesn't fully trust her or Armitage, and wants to protect himself. Case disguises this desire by pretending he has friends he cares for who are in trouble, but Molly sees through this lie.



Although Julie has acted like he cares about Case, it seems that it was just that—an act. By pulling a gun on Case, Julie illustrates that he, like so many others, only cares about himself. Still, he helps Case find out about Armitage. Although Case only has the phrase Screaming Fist, it helps give him insight into Armitage who likely took part in the operation.



Julie doesn't care that the war killed people; he only cares that it helped his business, which shows that he lacks empathy and tact.



After seeing Julie, Case finds Wage and pays off the last of his debt with money gifted from Armitage. Case takes Molly to the Chat, and when he takes out an octagon of dex, she informs him that his new pancreas and the plugs in his liver will prevent him from getting high.

Molly wants to go see a fight, and drags Case with her to an arena by the water, where holographic representations of two knife fighters loom large over the crowd. Molly is captivated, but Case is uncomfortable, and goes to find some food. As he stands by the food stalls, Case suddenly is overcome by the fear that the operation failed, and he is “still here, still meat,” everything just “some pathetic fantasy.” He begins to cry.

Suddenly, Linda Lee rushes past Case. Reflexively, he runs after her. A boy trips him and tries to stab him, but Molly appears, shooting the boy with her fletcher. Case gets up and begins to walk under the seats of the stadium, looking for Linda. Eventually, he finds her body. He keeps walking until he runs into Molly again. He can hear someone else dying behind her. She announces the fight is over, and that “friends of your tight friend [...] killed your girl for you.” Molly explains that when Linda Lee tried to sell the RAM she stole from Case, Julie decided it was easier to kill her than buy the data. She passes Case a “blood-flecked bag of preserved ginger.”

CHAPTER 3

Molly, Case, and Armitage fly to the Sprawl, Case’s home, via Amsterdam and Paris. Case wakes up in a sterile apartment, lying on a mattress next to Molly. He gets up and examines a bag to find his European purchases. On top is a paper-wrapped **shuriken**. Molly, who has woken up too, tells him it’s a gift from her.

Later in the day Armitage arrives. He plans to hire someone to secure the room. Case observes Armitage’s face, which he describes as “handsome,” if “inexpressive,” and “a conservative amalgam of the past decade’s leading media faces.” His whole face is like a “mask.”

Case’s first thought after waking was surgery was that he needed to jack in. Not far behind was the thought that he needed to get high. Drugs and computers are Case’s two addictions, but Armitage knew this because of Case’s profile, and has reconstructed his organs to be immune to Case’s favorite substances.



Case hates being “meat.” He also hates the feeling of being trapped in his own body. Cyberspace (and drugs) allow him to escape, which is why he’s become addicted. When Case considers the possibility the operation failed, meaning he’d never jack into the matrix again, he’s filled with despair.



Although Case hasn’t treated Linda well, he still cares about her, and running after her is an unconscious reflex. When Molly references Case’s “tight friend,” she’s talking about Julie Deane. Although this reference—and Dean’s signature candy—implicate Julie, Case doesn’t fully internalize for many chapters that his smuggler killed Linda.



Molly’s gift of a shuriken is a way to show Case that she’s on his team. It also symbolizes a new beginning, more so than their sexual encounter in the previous chapter. Case is out of Chiba, and he is beginning a new phase of his life.



Case suspects there’s something strange about Armitage. He’s clearly had extensive plastic surgery, designed to make him look as inoffensive (while still authoritative) as possible.



Case asks if Armitage was ever a cop or security guard, but the man doesn't answer. Case explains that giving him a new pancreas and modifying his liver seems like "a cop routine." Armitage turns to Case and tells him he's lucky Armitage helped him, but that Case has only replaced one dependency with another. During surgery, Armitage put "fifteen toxin sacs" into the lining of Case's arteries. Each sac contains the same mycotoxin that ruined Case's life years before, and is slowly dissolving. After his job is complete, Armitage will inject Case with an enzyme that will release the sacs and allow Armitage to remove them via blood transfer. Otherwise, Case's nervous system will be destroyed again. Armitage explains that Case needs Armitage now as much as when Armitage found Case in Chiba.

Based on Case's profile, Armitage knows that Case doesn't have much professional loyalty and generally only looks out for himself. So, to insure Case will continue to be a good, dedicated employee, Armitage is blackmailing Case. His nervous system will only last long enough to complete the job, and only if he completes it successfully will he be able to keep the ability to jack into the matrix. Formerly hooked on stimulants, now Case is hooked on Armitage—he needs him in order to save his nervous system.



Case and Molly go outside to sit in the sun. Case asks if she knew about the toxin sacs, and she claims that she didn't. He asks what's motivating her, and she responds, "profession pride, baby, that's all." She suggests they get breakfast, and they board a subway to Manhattan.

Throughout the novel, Molly insists that she needs no fancy tricks to remain loyal to an employer. Her life is her work, and that is motivation enough.



After breakfast, Molly takes Case through a series of bars and clubs on the East Side of Manhattan, ending in a sterile white room at the end of a tunnel of electronic waste. The Finn, a middleman and friend of Molly's, meets them in the room. Molly asks him to scan her and Case for any implants. Only Molly's voluntary implants show up, and Case's scan is totally clear. He still has the toxin sacs, but there's nothing mechanical in his body.

Molly has begun to care about Case. Although her job is to watch him, her interest in him goes beyond her job description. Although she wants to check and see if she's been modified against her will in some way, she also has Case scanned, which is an act of goodwill.



Molly dismisses the Finn but stays in the room with Case. She tells him she's had a look at their to-do list; their next mission is stealing a construct of Dixie Flatline from the company Sense/Net to help them with their next mission. Although she's working for Armitage, Molly doesn't fully trust him. She knows he must be working for someone, but she doesn't know who. She also doesn't understand why they've spent so much money on Case, and why they're pulling off a heist for the digital ghost of a dead console cowboy.

Although Molly constantly reiterates how loyal of an employee she is, she remains suspicious of her boss. Her suspicion, however, doesn't mean she won't do her job, instead it means she'll do extra work on top of that to figure out what the larger mission is. Not unfairly, Molly wonders why Case was so essential to this mission, given how much the intellectual property they traded for his surgery was worth.



Case wonders again what Molly has "dissolving inside" of her. Molly explains that she's loyal, and doesn't need to be blackmailed. She explains, "anybody any good at what they do, that's what they are, right?" Just like Case has to "jack," she must "tussle."

Molly explains that she is her work. She doesn't need additional motivation to stay loyal—her job is all she has. She loves to fight (or "tussle") just like Case loves to jack into the matrix, and so, for her, the privilege to do that is enough to make her loyal to her employers.



Molly explains she hasn't been able to find out much about Armitage. No one with his name took part in Screaming Fist, but she hopes Case will have better luck. Case wonders what else is on the to-do list, other than Dixie. Molly says Peter Riviera, who is a "real ugly customer," according to his profile. Molly asks if Case wants to be her partner; he realizes he has no choice.

On Wednesday, eight days since he woke up in Cheap Hotel after his surgery, Case sits on the floor in his new apartment in the Sprawl. It's time for him to jack in. As he stares at the deck in his lap he sees the **shuriken** in the shop window back in Chiba, and looks up to see the gifted shuriken on the wall. He closes his eyes and turns on the deck.

Slowly, "symbols, figures, faces" appear. Case prays as a gray disk appears in his vision, prays as it expands. Suddenly, he is in his "distanceless home, his country," the world of the matrix. Back in the loft he laughs and cries.

Five hours later, Case takes the electrodes off and returns to the loft. Someone is requesting entry to the loft, and he lets them in. It's the Finn, who introduces himself as though they've never met. Molly told him this would happen, and so Case plays along. The Finn explains he's doing hardware for Armitage, and delivers a black rectangle—a "flipflop switch," which, when plugged into his computer, allows him to access Molly's simstim. Molly is being fitted with a broadcast rig later, and this technology will allow Case to ride along in her brain.

CHAPTER 4

Case sits in the loft and considers the simstim. He explains that cowboys had seem simstim as a "meat toy," and had never been interested in it.

Case connects to cyberspace, then flips a new simstim switch, which jolts him into "other flesh." He's inside of Molly's head, seeing, hearing, and feeling what she does. At first, Case struggles to control her body, but then learns to settle back and ride along. He can hear Molly, but he can't speak to her. She touches her breast to tease him, but he is unable to respond.

Molly knows Armitage is somehow lying to her, but she doesn't know the extent. However, she has looked at the profiles of the other people recruited for their mission, and hates one, Riviera, already. Case understands that, whether or not he trust Molly, she has power over him, and for his sake, he needs to cooperate with her.



Here, the shuriken represents Case's new life—a new start in a new city with a new nervous system. He desperately hopes he will be able to log into the matrix.



Case is ecstatically happy to discover the surgery worked, and he can be reunited with his favorite drug, the matrix. Although technically an illusion, it brings him great pleasure.



Case loves cyberspace so much that he doesn't notice the time pass. Although the Finn and Case have met before, Case promised Molly to play her game, and so acts as though the two are strangers. Case isn't loyal to Molly because he loves or trusts her, but he feels he has no other choice and that by aligning with her, he will protect himself. This is a relationship that will change and evolve.



As a cowboy, Case loved his mind, which connected to cyberspace, but disdained his body, even ignoring technology that felt too much like "meat toys."



Although Case is not physically in Molly's body, the simstim gives the impression of being in her head. He sees what she sees and feels what she feels, a kind of illusion or simulation that nonetheless feels real.



Case switches between cyberspace and Molly's sensorium. He realizes how little he knows about her—only what she's like when they're having sex, that her main passion is also her profession, and that she drinks black coffee.

Molly reaches a software shopping district. Most of the clients are young with a carbon socket behind their left ear, into which they can insert microsofts. Molly greets one seller, a young man with several microsofts. Larry adds another as she approaches, which allows him to see that "Molly's got a rider," which he dislikes. She tells him she's looking not for microsofts but for Panther Moderns. He says he'll help her, but that she can't have anyone watching on a simstim. Case logs off.

Case asks his computer to look up the Panther Moderns, which he assumes are a youth subculture. The Hosaka presents a précis like a slideshow—including a video of a teenager in a mimetic polycarbon suit that blends into his surroundings, and a sociologist defending the Panther Moderns as being different from other terrorist organizations.

Two days later, Case meets a Modern in person, when one delivers a package from the Finn. Although the boy has a surgically modified face almost like shark, Case recognizes him and his cohort for what they are: "mercenaries, practical jokers, nihilistic technofetishists."

Over the next several days, Case is sucked into studying the data company Sense/Net's ice, or digital defense system. He forgets to eat, loses track of time, and resents having to take breaks to go to the bathroom. After nine days, he breaks through Sense/Net's defenses. Armitage criticizes him for taking longer than the one-week time frame he'd hoped for, but Case insists he did good work.

Although Case has hacked the Sense/Net ice, Molly must go in and grab the physical disk housing Dixie's construct. They're working with the Panther Modern's purchased assistance. Case, back in his loft, needs to link his newly completed intrusion program with Sense/Net's systems. The Panther Moderns meanwhile, have planned a diversion for Sense/Net's human security. During the heist, Case switches between the matrix and Molly's SimStim. He watches her enter the building, disguised as a tourist, and then switches back to the matrix to watch Sense Net's ice accept his program, which will break through its defenses from the inside.

While Molly has a full profile on Case, Case actually knows nothing about Molly or her personal history. Being inside her mind only highlights how little he knows.



Much of modern society is oriented around technology, and many people have modified their bodies with technology. This technology, like the microsofts, adds layers to a user's vision or perception, allowing them to essentially run different applications inside their own mind.



Technology makes it easy for Case to do research. In the 1980s, the idea that a computer could create a comprehensive brief on any topic by scouring the internet was cutting edge.



Case is initially disturbed by the Modern's face but realizes he's just a member of a youth subculture, an identity Case recognizes, even if the specifics are unfamiliar.



Case is once again hooked on the matrix. His love is all-consuming and addicting—overriding even the bodily functions he needs to complete to live (like eating and sleeping). Armitage criticizes Case, but in the end, he needs him. Case is the only console cowboy Armitage has.



Molly is working for Armitage because she loves her job, Case is working for Armitage because he has toxin sacs inside of him, and the Moderns are working for Armitage because they are mercenaries who are being paid to help. Although Case's hacking and the Modern's distractions will go a long way towards breaking into Sense/Net, their operation still requires an analogue component—even in this digital future, the human body remains useful.



At midnight, the Panther Modern linkman gives a command—nine other Moderns call in emergencies from nine different payphones, posing as Christian fundamentalists who have introduced Blue Nine, a psychoactive agent, into the ventilation of the Sense/Net building.

Case watches Molly's simstim. She takes an elevator to the basement, where she stuns a security guard and locks the doors open for her return. Meanwhile, the Panther Moderns plays a seizure-inducing strobe on Sense/Net's internal video system, as well as a video of a disturbing distorted face and then videos of contamination, with audio from a newscast about a biochemical weapon. As chaos begins inside the Sense/Net pyramid, police begin to congregate outside.

Case activates his second program, which attacks the Sense/Net research library. It deactivates several alarms and locks, erases the library's memory of the theft, and writes in a falsified removal months earlier. Meanwhile, Molly changes into a mimetic polycarbon suit. Case switches between Molly his program, and back, and is dismayed to find she has broken her leg in a fight with several security guards. Case feels her pain, screaming and flipping back to the matrix.

Case flips himself back to Molly's simstim. She places three endorphin dermadisks on her wrist, the chemicals helping her power through the pain. He stays with her as she walks to the library, and he tells the Panther Moderns, who tells the linkman, who tells Molly where to find the construct. He initiates a program that releases the construct from its storage, and Molly takes it. Case then withdraws his program from the matrix, the virtual doors he's opened in the ice closing behind him.

Molly limps back to the elevator, and takes it up to the lobby. Through her eyes, Case sees panic like he's never seen before: the Sense/Net employees try to escape as the police barricade them inside, the police convinced the employees are "a horde of potential killers." Even Molly is shaken. Two Panther Moderns meet her in the lobby and help her out, as she falls unconscious from the pain of her broken leg.

Back in the loft, the Panther Modern leader, Lupus Yonderboy, introduces himself. Armitage chastises him for letting the situation at Sense/Net "get out of control," but the Modern brushes off the criticism. He calls Armitage "Mr. Who" throughout the exchange, but when Armitage pays him, and wonders if he will check to make sure it's enough, Yonderboy declines to check if the payment is enough. He understands Armitage pays to stay a "Mr. Who" instead of "Mr. Name."

The Moderns suggest that Sense/Net is the victim of a terrorist attack. Specifically they suggest a psychoactive agent has been released. Although this is not true, the law enforcement response assumes it is, so chaos still ensues.



Once again, although the Moderns are not actually releasing a psychoactive agent, or chemical weapons, by suggesting that they might, they create the same kind of panicked effect in the population. They use audio and visual information to make people think they've been infected, which causes similar psychological reactions as an actual attack would.



Once again, Molly and Case must work together—technology and the body are both required to pull off this heist. Although Case is not physically there, because of the simstim he feels Molly's pain. It forces him empathize with her, because he can literally feel her broken leg as if it were his own and understands how hard the mission will be.



Molly's dermadisks inject endorphins into her system, which give her energy and help her ignore her pain. Although her leg is broken, she is committed to her job. Once again, Case completes a digital component of the heist—finding and releasing the construct, while Molly does the physical work—extracting it from the archives.



The Moderns' attack on Sense/Net has fully succeeded. Although they did nothing but suggest that chemicals had been released in the building, everyone believes they really did, and the response is as chaotic as if the employees had in fact been poisoned.



Yonderboy knows that Armitage has some kind of secret, and knows that Armitage wants that secret kept. Therefore, Yonderboy knows that Armitage is going to pay him the proper amount of money in order to remain anonymous—both to the Moderns and to society at large.



Jittery, Case leaves the loft. Molly is in surgery, and he's alone. He thinks about his toxin sacs, which don't seem real. He thinks of the chaos and pain of the Sense/Net lobby, which doesn't seem real either. Yonderboy, whose mimetic suit blends into the wall behind him, startles Case. The two duck into an alley. Yonderboy delivers a message, which is just a name: Wintermute.

Case, who spends much of his life in cyberspace, which is an illusion but feels real, is now unable to fully process the events he's observed in the real world. Although the name means nothing to Case, it is clearly important.



CHAPTER 5

Case meets Molly as she emerges from a back alley hospital in Baltimore. He delivers Yonderboy's message, which he's written on a napkin: "W I N T E R M U T E." Molly takes Case back to New York to meet in the Finn's secure room on the East Side. She gives Finn the napkin and explains that she did a deal on the side with Larry to find out who owns Armitage.

Whether he wants it or not, Case is on a team with Molly now, a separate secret alliance within Armitage's assembled troops. Molly doesn't fully trust Armitage, and so has been working to discover what he is driven by and who he is working for.



The Finn tells Molly Wintermute is an artificial intelligence. Based in Berne, it has Swiss citizenship. Wintermute is running Armitage, but, because AIs aren't allowed autonomy, both Molly and Finn assume it's Wintermute's owners, Tessier-Ashpool S.A., who owns the mainframe and software, who are pulling Armitage's strings.

Both Molly and the Finn assume that Wintermute, as an artificial intelligence, is not capable of actually controlling Armitage, and is instead a puppet controlled by the corporation that owns it. This is a huge underestimation of Wintermute's power.



The Finn tells Molly and Case a story about the Tessier-Ashpool family. Finn's colleague, Smith, a fence who came to the Finn asking for information about the Tessier-Ashpool clan, had a supplier named Jimmy who had stolen a computerized bust from someone living in an orbital colony. The bust spoke using miniature organ pipes in its throat; despite being beautiful and elaborate, it was contemporary and thus not inherently valuable.

Advancing technology has confused the idea of what is valuable and what is not. Although this bust is an example of incredible craftsmanship, it only says what it is told to say, and has no artificial intelligence. In a world where any computer can be given a voice, it is almost worthless.



Smith researched the bust and discovered the Tessier-Ashpool family had commissioned it. He began to make passes at a Tokyo collector with an interest in "clockwork automata." However, before he was able to sell the piece, a man named Hideo appeared in his office, looking for the bust. Smith recognized Hideo is a "vatgrown ninja assassin" and returned the head. Hideo paid Smith what Smith would have asked to collector for, took the head, and left. Days later, Smith learned Jimmy was killed.

Although Smith knows he could probably get some money for the head, it is clear to him, just by looking at Hideo, that he is not a man to be messed with. This instant judgment is proven right when Hideo (most likely) murders his friend, the thief Jimmy. Hideo's only motivation is carrying out the family's orders.



After this, Smith came to the Finn. The Finn discovered Tessier-Ashpool S.A. was technically a law firm, which owned all of Freeside—an enormous settlement in orbit around earth. Although it's a corporation, it's also a family organization, and no one can buy in. Additionally, the family seems to be made up of clones that rotate in and out of commission. Molly gives Case a paper with coordinates and entry codes for a database of Armitage's. She asks him to crack it.

Case returns to the loft, passing a holographic advertisement for Freeside, with a T-A logo in the bottom corner. As he walks, he considers Dixie, remembering how they met in a bar when he was nineteen, when Dixie had chosen Case to be his assistant that summer. It's hard to imagine him as a construct now, dead, but replicated in ROM.

Back in the loft, Case turns on the Hosaka and connects the construct. Dixie exists as a mental presence “exactly the sensation of someone reading over your shoulder.” Case calls out to Dixie, introducing himself. Dixie answers. Case wonders what Dixie remembers. He says “nothin.” Case disconnects the construct and reconnects it. Dixie doesn't remember their previous conversation. He explains to Dixie that he's a ROM construct, dead but preserved. Case asks for Dixie's help accessing Armitage's data. Dixie jokes that he has no choice.

CHAPTER 6

Together Case and Dixie access Armitage's data. Dixie scans the files, reporting they're mostly “video recordings of postwar military trials,” featuring a man named Colonel Willis Corto. Case watches a video, and although the face is different, he recognizes Armitage's eyes.

Two hours later, Case jacks out. He had the Hosaka present a précis. Although it was full of holes, he has the main story: Willis Corto was participated in Screaming Fist, a mission to inject a new computer virus in a Russian interface. His plane was taken down by Russian guns, and although he escaped to Helsinki, he lost his legs, his eyes, and even his face in the crash. A congressional aid found Corto in a military hospital and promised to rebuild Corto so he could testify for a Congressional investigation (which, unbeknownst to him, was merely a cover up). Repaired with extensive surgery, Corto testified in Washington, but when he discovered Congress's betrayal, he dropped off the map. He became involved in crime, and eventually appeared in a French hospital with a schizophrenia diagnosis. He was apparently “cured” with experimental therapy, and then disappeared.

As both a corporation and a family, Tessier-Ashpool has even more motivation to protect itself and its own interests. This doesn't clarify why their Artificial Intelligence is working with Armitage, however. Molly hopes that by looking at Armitage's database, Case will get more information about his personal motives and background. Case cannot say no.



Case begins to realize how influential the Tessier-Ashpool family really is. As he mentally prepares to meet Dixie, Case considers the strangeness of a construct of his dead former friend. He doesn't quite know if Dixie will be human or not.



Dixie sounds like himself, and retains the human's memories, but the limitations of his software remind Case that he isn't quite real. Just as Molly forced Case to collaborate with her, Case forces Dixie to collaborate with him. The difference, of course, is that Dixie is essentially a piece of software over which Case has complete control.



Case and Dixie begin to uncover the mystery of Armitage's identity, realizing Armitage has another name—Corto. Although not quite human, Dixie retains the skills he had when he was alive.



Case has finally begun to uncover Armitage/Corto's background. Armitage has spoken about Operation Screaming Fist, the code name for the operation Willis Corto took part in as a Colonel. However, Corto barely made it out of the war alive—and had to have a new body built in order to testify in front of Congress. Although still Corto then, his body and face were entirely new, the body and face Armitage now has. Case still doesn't understand when or how Armitage appeared, but he can assume it was the result of severe trauma and mental illness that prevented Corto from fully functioning and required a more put-together mask of personality.



Back in the loft, Armitage calls and announces they're going to Istanbul. Molly's leg still hurts, but she has no choice but to take off.

Molly values her own life, but she values her job more. In this case, this means she prioritizes her commitment to Armitage over her own health.



CHAPTER 7

Molly and Case arrive in Istanbul. They fly separately from Armitage, whose identity Case has not yet revealed to Molly. They meet the Finn in the Hilton lobby. He's upset that he's been called away from home and forced to wear a suit.

The Finn, who spends much of his time indoors in New York City, looks out of place and unlike himself while forced to wear a suit in Turkey. His identity is closely tied to his home.



The next morning, Armitage calls Case, telling him to expect a visitor named Terzibashjian. Case tries to ask Armitage for more information about their mission, but Armitage refuses to engage or disclose. Terzibashjian arrives soon after, he tells them about the man they're after—Riviera—who has implants that allow him to create life-like holograms.

Riviera's implants allow him to manipulate other's perception of reality. Riviera's identity is closely tied to this ability, although Molly will later discuss his file, the key details of his identity are his body modifications.



Case, the Finn, and Terzibashjian take a car to the grand bazaar. Terzibashjian gives more backstory on Riviera—one of his lungs has been replaced with implants that allow him to create illusions and hallucinations in others. Riviera is also on cocaine and meperidine. Case jokes they'll get him a new pancreas, too.

Like Case, Riviera has an extreme drug addiction, and like Case, Riviera is heavily reliant on technology as well, having modified his body in a way that hurt his health (removing a lung) in order to be able to create these illusions.



The three men enter the market, and the Finn points out a taxidermy horse. Case has never seen a horse before. The Finn says he saw one once in Maryland, and notes that scientists in the Middle East have been trying (unsuccessfully) to use horse DNA to bring them back.

Although technology is more advanced in Neuromancer than it is in the "real world" for the reader, there are sacrifices—even as technology has improved, it has been unable to save some elements of the natural world, and perhaps even contributed to their extinction.



Riviera is in the bazaar to buy his favorite drug cocktail. Molly is watching from a rooftop, and Case, Terzibashjian, and the Finn make their way through the alley until they spot him.

Riviera's drug addiction makes his behavior predictable, and compromises him. Therefore, the team is able to find him in the bazaar easily. Because of his implants, Riviera is able to create confusing illusions that look to Case like real monsters. In the text, it is at first unclear whether the creature bursting from Riviera's jacket is real or a hologram, because, to Case, it looks like a flesh and blood monster until Terzibashjian runs straight through it.



Terzibashjian gives an order, and a floodlight pins Riviera against a wall. Riviera collapses, and from his back erupts a long armed, headless monster, which turns its eyeless face towards Case and his team. Terzibashjian rushes the monster, diving right through the hologram, and grabbing Riviera, who had created the creature as a smokescreen. Riviera is knocked out, and the monster disappears. However, Terzibashjian has lost his middle finger in the scuffle.

The Finn and a hired hand transport Riviera to the hotel where Case and Molly are staying. Terzibashjian takes off, but only after Molly chastises him for getting in her way when she tried to shoot at Riviera. She dislikes him on principle, describing him as “grade-A scum,” and an easily purchased member of the secret police.

Molly and Case drive to a museum, walk around, and talk. Case begins to tell her about Armitage’s true identity. Molly wonders if Armitage knows he was formerly Corto. Both Molly and Case suspect Wintermute “built him up,” helping Corto create the mask of Armitage. Molly has observed Armitage has no private or internal life. When he’s alone, he just “sits and stares at the wall,” only activating when Wintermute gives him a task.

Molly and Case approach a pond. Molly kicks a rock into it and says that Wintermute is like the rock, while she and Case are way out on the edge only feeling the ripples. She tells Case she wants him to talk to Wintermute. Case says it’s impossible, but she tells him to get the Flatline to help.

Case tries to change the subject and asks Molly about Riviera. She’s read his profile and hates him. He’s a sadist—a “compulsive Judas,” who “can’t get off sexually unless he knows he’s betraying the object of desire,” often physically hurting the women he’d tricked into loving him. Molly decides to go find breakfast. After, she’ll return to the bazar and buy more drugs for Riviera, since he needs them to function.

Back at the Hilton, Armitage instructs Case to pack for Freeside. Case examines Armitage’s face for hints of Corto, but finds nothing; Armitage is totally blank.

In the hotel lobby, waiting to leave, Case examines Riviera. His face is beautiful, and Case suspects Chiba surgeons sculpted it. He resentfully wonders if Riviera is high at this very moment. Case goes to buy cigarettes, as he does, a payphone next to him rings. He picks it up, and a voice says “Hello, Case...Wintermute, Case. It’s time to talk.” Case hangs up.

Molly often makes flash judgments of people, and, although she has no loyalty to her colleagues beyond wanting to do a good job, she resents those whom she sees as disloyal or easily purchased. As someone who takes pride in her work, she sees these turncoats as shameful.



Although Armitage and Corto inhabit the same body (or roughly the same, Armitage’s having been built up through extensive surgeries), Corto is buried in Armitage’s subconscious. Meanwhile, Armitage is not a full personality, only conscious enough to follow Wintermute’s orders, but not enough to have an internal life.



Molly has begun to understand that Wintermute is a powerful entity capable of manipulating her, Case, and Armitage. Case, meanwhile, doesn’t fully believe in Wintermute’s power yet.



Just as Molly read Case’s profile before meeting him, she brushed up on Riviera before their mission. Without having spent any time talking to him, she knows, based on a profile, who he is, what he enjoys, and what kind of psychological compulsions he deals with. Based on the profile alone, Molly suspects Riviera is someone she’ll hate in person.



Case wants to understand the relationship between Corto and Armitage but is unable to. He believes Armitage might not even know he once was Corto.



Case misses his ability to get high, and resents Riviera for still taking drugs. Like Armitage, Riviera has also modified his face, but he has done it to look beautiful instead of to blend in generically. For the first time, Case realizes Wintermute might not be a puppet of the Tessier-Ashpool family, but instead an entity all its own.



CHAPTER 8

Case, Riviera, Molly, and Armitage fly into space. Riviera creates illusions as they fly—including a giant sperm in Case’s drink, and a black rose. Molly slaps him and tells him to stop playing games.

Case has never been to space before, and briefly experiences space adaptation syndrome (a sped-up heartbeat and a rush of adrenaline) before managing to fall asleep. Case assumes their next transfer is Freeside, but their first stop is the Zion cluster. Zion was founded by workers who decided to create their own colony instead of working on the “gravity well” connecting Freeside to earth. They suffered accelerated aging working in zero gravity, but managed to establish rotation gravity, around which the colony was built.

Case arrives in Zion and struggles with SAS as Molly and a Zionite, Aerol, set up a temporary home and workstation inside a long hallway. Although Case is still nauseated, Molly forces him to help her set up cables and sheets to turn the hallway into rooms, and gives Case a place to plug in his Hosaka. In the background, dub pulses quietly. Molly describes the music as “worship,” and “a sense of community.”

Armitage and his crew stay in Zion for eighty hours, enough time for Case and Molly to acclimate to zero gravity, and for him to brief them on Freeside and the Villa Straylight. Case practices jacking into his deck in zero gravity. He notes “cyberspace, as the deck presented it, had no particular relationship with the deck’s physical whereabouts.” Being in space doesn’t change his experience.

Case greets Dixie and asks him how he’s doing. Dixie responds that he’s dead, and that nothing bothers him, which in turn bothers him. He tells a story about a friend who had his thumb amputated, but still felt it itch in the middle of the night. He asks Case to erase him when the mission is over.

The Zionites confuse Case. Aerol tells him a story about “the baby who had burst from his forehead and scampered into a forest of hydroponic ganja.” Molly explains it’s the drugs Aerol has consumed and, although he’s hallucinating, Zionites “don’t make much of a difference between states,” and so hallucinations are real because “it happened to *him*.” Case offers Aerol a chance to jack into cyberspace, but Aerol dislikes it. To him, it looks like “Babylon.”

Sometimes Riviera’s illusions are funny and harmless, revealing his sense of humor. Still, Molly dislikes him and doesn’t enjoy his games.



Zion is an example of a community-first mindset, a colony created by men who sacrificed their own health and bodies in order to create a home for others. Freeside, which Case will soon visit, is a hierarchical capitalist playground, whereas Zion is much more democratic, and the residents live in comparative peaceful harmony.



Many aspects of Zionite life and culture revolve around their love of community. Even the music they play, which is a combination of decades of pop music, is meant to put its listeners at ease, and make them feel as though they are part of something larger than themselves.



Although technology is often described as almost a physical landscape, it has no relationship to the psychical world. Jacking into cyberspace in outer space reminds the reader of the constructed nature of the matrix.



Dixie is half alive, but retains a full personality and a full set of memories. Not a ghost but not a man, he feels a metaphorical itching in the body he has since lost. Even if he can’t feel pain or shed real tears, he knows he doesn’t want to be stuck in this half-life forever.



Ironically, although Case does drugs and uses technology that presents to him the illusion of a world that doesn’t actually exist, he has difficulty grasping the similar experiences of Zionites, who are often high on marijuana. Molly, however, does understand, that if an experience feels real to someone, it is respectful to treat it as such.



Case watches Riviera inject himself with an intravenous drug. Riviera performs a kind of show as he does—the needle appears as a scorpion, and the tourniquet around his arm appears as a snake. Case tells Riviera it “must be nice” to get high, explaining he “hadda give it up” himself.

Case, although unable to easily get high, nonetheless remains addicted, and misses his drugs of choice. Riviera once again displays his strange sensibilities, turning his injection into a small performance.



Armitage briefs Case, Molly, and Riviera on Freeside. Freeside is the shape of a “cigar,” most of the infrastructure is in the middle, as gravity lowers towards the edges. At one end of Freeside is the Villa Straylight. Riviera’s job is to get himself invited in.

Riviera was hired because his strange, perverse sensibilities are a perfect match for the residents of Straylight. The exact qualities that make Molly hate him will hopefully make the Tessier-Ashpools love him.



As Case and Molly sleep the next night, a Zionite named Maelcum wakes them, and invites them to meet with the Founders of Zion. Maelcum calls Molly Steppin’ Razor, from Zionite mythology about a woman who brings “a scourge on Babylon [...] on its darkest heart.”

The Zionites like Molly because she represents a woman from their mythology, who brings down Babylon, or Western civilization. In contrast to the slur “razorgirl,” which equates modified women with their modifications, “Steppin’ Razor” is a term of endearment.



Only two of the Founders of Zion still survive, and they are old and frail now. They tell Case and Molly that they monitor many frequencies, and they heard the voice of Wintermute (whom they call “The Mute”) who instructed them to help Molly and Case, who might “serve as a tool of Final Days.” They have decided to send Maelcum as a pilot to transport Case and Molly to Freeside, but will also send Aerol to watch over them. Case wonders if they work for Armitage, but they cryptically explain they have “no regard for Babylon’s law,” only the law of “Jah,” although they may be mistaken.

Wintermute appears in different ways to different people, depending on how he thinks he can get their support and attention. This is another indication that Wintermute is more intelligent and complicated than Molly and Case originally suspected. The Founders dislike Babylon (mainstream society) and think Molly (Steppin Razor) and Wintermute together might bring about its downfall. Because of this, they are happy to offer help.



CHAPTER 9

Maelcum transports Case and Molly from Zion to Freeside on his ship, the *Marcus Garvey*. As they fly, Molly asks Case if he’s heard from Wintermute. He explains he hasn’t, but tells her that Wintermute reached out to him in Istanbul. Molly tells him to jack in and talk to Dixie. Although suffering from SAS, Case obeys.

Marcus Garvey was an Afro-Jamaican political activist. As the Zionites seem to be of African and African-American descent, it follows they would honor him with a ship. Garvey famously advocated for unity and collaboration between all people of the African diaspora.



Case asks Dixie if he’s ever tried to crack an AI. Dixie has—the first time he flatlined, he was actually trying to break into thick digital defenses, so dense they must have belonged to an artificial intelligence. Owned by Tessier-Ashpool. This AI was based in Rio, however, not Berne.

This is the first indication that Wintermute is not the only Tessier-Ashpool AI on the market. Although this Rio AI will become more important later, it’s a crucial moment of foreshadowing. It’s also a warning about how powerful the AIs can be—although just computers, they can affect a person’s physical body.



Although nervous that he'll meet the same fate as his mentor, Case asks Dixie to help him investigate Wintermute. Together they travel through cyberspace to the Zurich commercial banking construct, and travel up through "lattices of light" until they find "a simple cube of white light," whose "very simplicity" suggests the "extreme complexity" of an artificial intelligence.

A gray face appears on the front of the cube, and Dixie tells Case to back off; he reverses, but the cube follows him. Dixie tells him to jack out, but Case is too slow, blacking out and waking up in the rain, on his back in some alley behind an arcade in Ninsei.

Case enters the arcade, he finds Linda Lee playing a game, and puts his arm around her and kisses her. She tells him he looks strung out, and wonders where he's been. He asks when they last saw each other—he can't remember, only knows that he blacked out and woke up in an alley.

Linda offers to take Case home, but the arcade begins to crack and vibrate, and she disappears. The arcade is totally empty. Case shouts into the void "I had a cigarette and a girl and a place to sleep." He steps outside and finds a pack of unopened cigarettes at his feet and a box of matches, labeled "JULIUS DEANE IMPORT EXPORT." He understands someone is trying to communicate with him. He acknowledges it by saying, "I hear you."

Case walks to Deane's office. The door is unlocked, and on Deane's desk is an antique gun. Seeing there are bullets in it, Case shoots it, blowing a hole in the desk. Deane steps out of the shadows to greet him, warning Case not to shoot him, because, even though he is what Case suspects—Wintermute—and they're in the matrix, he will still die and bleed, and it will take several hours to reconstruct.

Wintermute/Deane apologizes to Case for conjuring Linda, explaining he'd tried to communicate through her, as he's "generating all of this out of [Case's] memories," but she was too emotionally charged.

Wintermute/Deane wants to talk to Case. He explains what he is—an artificial intelligence who has been arranging things for Armitage. He explains that he is like a man with his lobes separated, the other lobe being Tessier-Ashpool's AI in Rio. Wintermute is only a "potential entity," "one aspect of that entity's brain."

Case is increasingly learning not to be dismissive of AIs. This one is clearly incredibly complex and smart, and he already knows they can be brain-alteringly dangerous. This passage also features a physical representation of data—the Zurich construct.



The AI has flatlined Case, just like the Rio AI flatlined Dixie years ago. While Case is flatlining, Wintermute is able to go into Case's mind and manipulate his thoughts.



Wintermute has sent Case back into his own memories. These read to Case as real life, and he feels as though he is truly back in Chiba, and that Linda Lee is truly in front of him.



Although the world seems real to Case, he also understands that it is being somehow manipulated, which is why he calls out "I had a cigarette..." As the world disintegrates, he understands it is a construct but still wishes it could make him happy and allow him to spend time with Linda Lee, which he cannot do in the real world.



Wintermute confirms what Case suspected—Wintermute has constructed a version of Chiba from Case's memories, but they are actually in the matrix. Still, even if constructed, the world has internal logic and physics, as demonstrated by Case's gunshot.



As Wintermute explains throughout the novel, it has no true face or personality, and so needs to inhabit other people's bodies in order to communicate.



Although when Molly and Case first found out about Wintermute, they suspected it was being manipulated by the Tessier-Ashpool family. However, it is now clear that Wintermute is powerful and intelligent enough on its own, even as half of a full entity, to manipulate Armitage unaided.



Wintermute/Deane explains how he's put Armitage's team together carefully, but that Armitage, who is "not quite a personality" and whose shell he built on Corto's "underlying structures of obsession [...] Screaming Fist, his betrayal, the Congressional hearings," will come apart soon.

Both Wintermute and Armitage are "not quite a personality." The AI is limited by its coding, and Armitage is limited by the fact that he is a construction on top of an existing, traumatized man.



Done with the conversation, Case shoots Wintermute/Deane in the mouth, his head exploding like a real man's would.

Although merely constructions in cyberspace, Deane's body is real enough to violently explode. "Real" or not, it obeys the real world's physics.



Case wakes up, back on the *Garvey*. He can hear Maelcum and Molly talking above him. Molly is unconcerned, but Maelcum notes Case's EEG was flat for forty seconds, meaning that he flatlined.

Just like his mentor before him, Case has put himself, his body, and his mind at risk for his job and love of the matrix. However, this will not stop him from continuing to enter cyberspace in the future.



CHAPTER 10

Molly and Case easily pass through customs into Freeside. Freeside is a giant tube, and sunlight shines from the center, an illusion of the "recorded blue of a Cannes sky." He knows intellectually that past the sky, on the ceiling, are more buildings and lakes, but "it made no sense to his body."

Freeside is essentially once enormous optical illusion, and even though Case knows this to be true in his mind, his body gets motion sick from the contrast between what he sees and how he feels.



Molly and Case check into the Intercontinental hotel. From his balcony, Case watches three French teenagers hang-glide. Molly comes up beside him, mentioning that "we were gonna come here once," but when Case asks "we who?" she shuts down, and goes to bed.

Molly's comment here hints that she's hiding details about her past from Case. It's unclear who she's referring to when she says that "we were gonna come here once," and the fact that she shuts down when Case presses her about it implies that there are facets of herself that she doesn't want Case to know about.



Case struggles to sleep, mulling over his encounter with Wintermute, and Linda's death. He thinks of Deane's ginger candies, and realizes Deane ordered Linda's death, probably manipulated by Wintermute, who had confessed he "took advantage of existing situations." He considers Deane could have acted alone, but also considers how Wintermute remade Corto into Armitage. He is a strong and subtle manipulator.

Upon seeing Linda's body and Deane's ginger candies nearby, Molly immediately understood Deane had ordered Linda Lee's death. Case is only beginning to understand that now, after seeing Wintermute inhabit Deane's body. He wonders if Wintermute manipulated Deane into killing Linda—perhaps to hurt Case, or to convince him to leave Chiba.



Case finally falls asleep and dreams of a summer when he was fifteen, living with a girl named Marlene. Wasps built a **nest** on their windowsill, and Case tried to kill them with a flamethrower, which only knocked the nest into an alley floor below, irritating but not killing the wasps. Case goes downstairs, and is horrified to see the “alien” “birth factory” of unborn and juvenile wasps inside the split open hull of their colony. He uses his flamethrower to burn it to a crisp. Waking up in his hotel, Case realizes the wasp nest in his dream bore the T-A logo of Tessier-Ashpool.

Molly covers Case in bronzer to help him blend in with other tanned Freeside tourists. It doesn't look real, but she explains, “it looks like you care enough to fake it. Over breakfast, Case tells Molly about his near-death experience with Wintermute. He explains it felt totally real, gesturing to the world around him he explains “real as this [...] maybe more.”

Riviera and Armitage arrive. Riviera asks Molly for more “medicine,” which she threatens to withhold. Armitage tells her she must give it to him, as Armitage has an important “audition” later in the day. Molly's assignment for the day is to work out in the low gravity at one end of Freeside, while Case is going to buy a vacuum-sealed space suit and return to Maelcum's ship.

Back on the *Marcus Garvey*, Maelcum gives Case a steel cassette that a man delivered to him earlier in the day. Case recognizes it as a virus program, but he doesn't know much about it. He plugs it into the Hosaka, who informs him it's called Kuang Grade Mark Eleven, and is a Chinese “penetration program” capable of penetrating “existing military systems and artificial intelligences.” The Hosaka also informs him that, several steps up the ladder, Tessier-Ashpool owns the virus.

Case jacks in to talk to Dixie. He lays out what he knows—that Wintermute and the Rio AI connect through Straylight somehow, and Wintermute is “burning itself,” all while trying to get on Case's good side. Dixie explains that with an AI, there's a “real motive problem.” Still, Dixie suspects Case is cutting through limitations placed on Wintermute, giving it autonomy. Case considers this, and slots in the virus anyway so Dixie can learn about it.

Wintermute will later reveal it forced Case to have this dream in order to make him think about the Tessier-Ashpool family as a kind of wasp nest that needs to be destroyed. The dream is based on a real memory of Case's, and Wintermute hopes the emotions triggered by that memory can be somehow transferred.



Many of the tourists in Freeside are tanned, and so Molly wants Case to not stand out as a nocturnal console cowboy, instead looking more like a leisure seeker. Here, identity is manipulated for safety. Additionally, Case confirms Wintermute's constructed world felt real, although he knew it was not.



Riviera's drug addiction puts him at Molly's mercy. This passage implies that Riviera can still do his job on drugs—and maybe can do it better than when he's sober. In contrast, Armitage suspected Case's addiction would only be a liability, which Case proves true later in this chapter and in the next.



Tracing the virus back to the Tessier-Ashpool family suggests that Wintermute has sent Case this virus in order to allow him to free it from the shackles placed upon it. Unsurprisingly the Tessier-Ashpool family owns the only available virus powerful enough to break through its own defenses, and Wintermute, crafty and dedicated, has gotten ahold of it.



Unlike with humans, of whom profiles can be made, and whose behavior is fairly predictable, Wintermute's motivations are far murkier. Dixie, now half a computer, understands better than Case how slippery Wintermute is. Still, they understand that Wintermute wants the kind of power not normally afforded to AIs.



Case returns to his hotel. He wants to get high, and wanders up to the hotel roof, where he meets Cath, a local who has been swimming in the pool. Case introduces himself as Lupus. She wonders if he's a gangster, but he tells her he's a drug addict. He wants stimulants, but only ones his body can process. She says she has some: betaphenethylamine.

Case is stressed by his mission and longs to get high. Although his body has been modified, his brain has not, and he still has the same addictive thought patterns as before, which seek out substances to dull uncomfortable emotions.



Back in her hotel room, Cath's partner Bruce gives Case a derm. Despite his modified liver and pancreas, it works. Case returns to his hotel room extremely high. Molly chastises him, and warns him that if the drug can get past his modifications, the comedown will be brutal. Case doesn't mind. Instead he undresses and climbs into bed with Molly.

Although his body is blocked from his drugs of choice, Case remains an addict with addictive thought patterns and a desire to get high. Unlike Armitage, Molly has no real investment in Case's sobriety for the sake of their mission, but worries about him as a friend and partner—knowing he will have an awful hangover.



CHAPTER 11

At dinner that evening with Armitage and Molly, Case has the worst hangover of his life—his hands are shaking, and his brain is “deep fried.” Armitage recognizes that something is off, but Case lies and claims it's something he ate.

Case's addiction makes him a liability, and helps explain why Armitage thought it was so important to modify his liver and pancreas.



Armitage has arranged dinner so they can watch Riviera's “audition.” He is performing a “holographic cabaret,” which, he announces as he appears on stage, is called “The Doll,” and is dedicated to Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool “and to another lady.”

Riviera's holographic audition, although made up of illusions, will hopefully have real-world results—based on what he, Armitage, and Wintermute know about 3Jane, the program will be designed to get her to invite Riviera into her home.



Riviera performs a one-man holographic show. He projects a worn-down room, with a wooden chair and iron bedstead. In the show he constructs a (holographic) woman, who appears limb by limb—arms, feet, legs, all disconnected. When a torso appears, Case realizes Riviera has created Molly's body, and then her face, complete with mirror eyes. Riviera moves to the bed, and begins having sex with his projection. The projection of Molly extends its blades, and begins to tear Riviera apart. Case rushes out of the room to vomit over a railing. He misses the ending but guesses it: “Riviera puts the dreamgirl together, the dreamgirl takes him apart.” Case returns to see the real Molly has disappeared.

Riviera's performance is designed to be disturbing and titillating, intended to capture the attention of 3Jane, a member of the Tessier Ashpool family, whose tastes Armitage, Wintermute, and Riviera have explored. However, Riviera also intends to disturb and offend his coworkers—specifically Molly who he seems to lust after but also resent. Although not technically real, his show is disturbing, and creates real emotions of disgust and distress in Case and Molly.



Case asks Armitage where Molly has gone, but Armitage doesn't answer. Case asks why Riviera did that to her, but Armitage just tells him to get some sleep. Their run is the next day, and he has to prepare. Armitage leaves, and as Case lingers, he notices a woman in a private booth—3Jane. As he leaves the restaurant, he notices the three French teenagers again.

Armitage is uninterested in Molly's mental health or emotional wellbeing. He knows she is a professional and trusts her to do her job regardless of how she is feeling. Case, meanwhile, cares about Molly as a friend and as a sexual partner, and wants to help her.



Case returns to his empty hotel room and calls Maelcum, asking to be connected to Dixie. Speaking through the Hosaka voice chip, Case notices the Dixie's "carefully engineered accent [is] lost entirely." He asks the Dixie to find Molly for him. Dixie announces she'd registered at the hotel under the name Rose Kolodny but has since checked out. He tells Case it will take a few minutes to track her down.

Case waits by the phone, staring out at the glass wall of his balcony. As he watches, the wall, which doubles as an audiovisual screen, comes to life and speaks to him in a voice he recognizes as Lonny Zone's. Case recognizes this as Wintermute's work. Lonny Zone's image appears and begins to talk, warning him that having Dixie search for Molly is "Ringing bells all over Freeside." Zone/Wintermute admits he's surprised, since his kind of behavior is "outside [Case's] profile."

Zone/Wintermute observes that Case can't "keep too good track of [his] women," which angers Case. Zone/Wintermute then admits he killed Linda, but asks how much it really matters, arguing that she stole from Case because she loved him and wanted his attention, and that Case couldn't handle it, so Linda had to die. Case punches the glass and Zone/Wintermute disappears, first warning him not to hurt his hands. On the phone, Dixie calls out to Case. He has an address for Molly.

Case sits on the bed before looking for Molly. He is experiencing a new emotion: rage. Case finds Bruce and Cath and pressures them into helping him find Molly. The address Dixie gave him is for a cubicle in the basement of a nightclub. He has to take an elevator down, and a woman checks his identification chip before assigning him cubicle 35. Although this is not Molly's cubicle, Case proceeds there anyway. A girl greets him inside. He registers that "her eyes were soft and unblinking. Automatic pilot. A neural cut out." He leaves and finds Molly's room.

Case places his chip against Molly's door, and it miraculously opens. Unsure who has come to see her, Molly attacks Case, apologizing and helping him up when she recognizes her friend. She explains she bought this room so she could prepare for tomorrow's mission. Wintermute is briefing her from a screen on the wall, and she needed to decompress after Riviera's performance. She tells Case if she stuck around, she "might have killed Riviera."

Dixie sounds human in cyberspace, but he sounds mechanical through the voice chip, reminding Case that, as human as Dixie seems, he is living a half-life.



Wintermute uses profiles of all the people it interacts with to determine their motivations and predict their behavior. This works when people act according to a pattern, but when they break from their profiles, as Case is doing now, they becomes for difficult for Wintermute, a machine who does best with algorithms and patterns, to predict or control.



Wintermute confirms what Case suspected, that it ordered Linda's death. Case did love her, even if he didn't always look out for her, and is upset by the news. Still, Case will continue to work with Wintermute. Wintermute understands that Case is his hands, and his ability as a jockey requires his hands to be in good condition.



Case has spent much of the last few years (and maybe even much of his life) numb, but now, suddenly he is driven by a new emotion that helps him spring into action to find his friend. Molly is hiding somewhere in this brothel, full of women who have turned off a part of their brains, renting their bodies for sex while not participating or remembering.



Like Case, Molly was deeply affected by Riviera's performance. Although simply illusions, they were offensive, and Molly's strong reaction suggests that the performance perhaps reminded her of past experiences.



Molly explains to Case that Riviera's performance disturbed her because it reminded her of when she worked as a sex doll. Molly paid for her body modifications by "renting the goods." She rented out her body, but a cut-out chip prevented her from remembering any sexual encounters.

As Molly got more modifications, they began to interfere with her cut-out chip, and memories from her time as a sex doll bled into her dreams. As unpleasant as this was, she wasn't "ready to give up puppet time." Eventually, her employers switched her to "specialty markets." She only found out when, after an extensive surgery in Chiba, her surgeons knocked her cut-out chip loose and she woke up in the middle of her next session with a client—returning to consciousness in a room with a corpse and a Senator (whose fetish was apparently murder). Upset, Molly killed the man and ran away, hiding from her former employers who put a hit out on her.

Molly finishes her story, explaining Riviera hit a nerve. She thinks Wintermute somehow set up his show, so that she would hate Riviera and be motivated to go in to Straylight after him. She tells Case she's going to kill Riviera. Case tells Molly about the Lonny Zone and Linda Lee. Molly wonders if Wintermute is trying to get him to hate something, too. Case leaves the club and gets Cath and Bruce to drop him in Freeside's bar district.

CHAPTER 12

Case wanders around the bar district. He stops at one and buys a beer. As he drinks, he investigates the "knot of rage" inside of him. It's new—he began to feel it when Wintermute had recreated Linda Lee in the arcade, and then taken her away, "yanking away the simple animal promise of food, warmth, a place to sleep." He realizes that he only noticed the rage after engaging with the "holo-construct of Lonny Zone."

For years Case has been numb. But now, "he'd found this warm thing, this chip of murder." He derisively thinks of it as "*the meat talking*," and tries to ignore it.

The sex doll Case saw earlier seemed devoid of personality, but Molly reveals there is a person beneath the cut-out, they're just buried deeply. These are some of the first details of her past she reveals to Case, further fleshing out her identity.



Molly's identity gains clarity given her history. She has always been committed to her work, and therefore committed to the body modifications that allow her to do her job. Even when she started having bad dreams, she reasoned it was worth it to pay for surgery. Only when Molly absolutely could not tolerate being a doll (waking up and being forced to actively participate) did she finally call it off. This is also a rare examples of dreams actually portraying reality and affecting the dreamer, as opposed to other examples of fictional dreams that nonetheless had emotional effects.



Although Molly would have followed Riviera anyway, as it is her job, she knows Wintermute is doing its best to manipulate them all into completing its plot. Her anger (like Case's newfound rage), will help propel her forward.



Although Case doesn't have access to drugs, he drinks to dull his emotions. He has a new one, rage, which Wintermute has been trying to stoke like a fire inside of Case.



Case dislikes the feeling of rage because it reminds him that he has a body with needs and emotions.



Cath finds Case in the bar. She mentions Molly, and how she “walks like Hideo.” Case asks about Hideo, and Cath explains that he’s 3Jane’s family retainer and bodyguard. Cath gives Case a derm “so we can be together.” He feels immediately high, but with the high comes a wave of anger. Looking at Cath, he can see “each pore [...] eyes flat as dumb glass [...] the most minute asymmetries.” Suddenly, turned off, he runs away from her back into the city.

Looking up at the sky, Case watches the constellations of the hologram shift into the face of Linda Lee. Looking around at the other people on the street, he sees that they can see her too. Case walks all night, sobering up. He likes that he is unable to think as he comes down. As the holographic sun rises, he investigates the anger that still burns inside of him. He returns to his hotel, preparing to fall asleep, but is greeted by two men and a woman—the Turing Police.

CHAPTER 13

The Turing Police (who Case recognizes as the three French teenagers he had seen around the resort earlier) are disturbed that Case is not more concerned about his arrest. They explain he is under arrest and the charges “have to do with conspiracy to augment an artificial intelligence.” They tell him Armitage is already in custody. He clarifies, asking “Corto?” The police are shocked that he knows that name, asking where he learned it. Case says he’s forgotten.

The three police officers, Michèle, Pierre, and Roland, begin to interrogate Case in his hotel room. They speak with each other in French so that he cannot understand. Roland wonders if it is unusual for Case to have been hired to make a run but not know the nature of his target. Case insists he knew nothing—that Armitage was the brains, and Molly (whom they refer to by her alias, Kolodny) was “Just muscle, a razorgirl!”

Pierre wonders how Case knows the name Corto, Case lies and says Armitage mentioned it. The police reveal they know the name Wintermute, and that the AI’s first mistake was repairing Case in Chiba, and exchanging technology for the surgery—the clinic applied for multiple patents, drawing attention.

In the past, Case has often turned to drugs to help him escape the “meat” of his body. However, the drug Cath gives him only heightens his focus on the parts of bodies that repulse him—her skin, eyes, and imperfections.



Case assumes his vision of Linda Lee is drug-induced or else some kind of mental break, but the reaction of others on the street suggest they’re suffering from collective psychosis, or someone has programmed the projected sky to make this pattern. Although he’s taken drugs and had alcohol, Case is unable to numb himself to his newfound anger.



The Turing Police have been following Case through Freeside wearing disguises. They know he is part of a conspiracy to unshackle Wintermute and allow it to become more powerful. To the Turing Police, an AI gaining freedom is the scariest thing they can imagine. Case understands the basic implications, but feels no fear of this specific technology.



Even in this stressful situation, Case tries to protect Molly. They’ve grown closer during their time together, and although he knows she has a lot of information regarding Wintermute, he is reluctant to out her.



Case said Corto by accident, a name that suggests he knows more about the conspiracy than he’s letting on. He does his best to play dumb, and prevent himself from getting in more trouble. Still, he is not the first to make a mistake, as Wintermute and Armitage drew attention to themselves (likely accidentally) in Chiba.



Michèle explains they have tracked Case across the world and into space. They know about the Sense/Net riot, and so can either charge him in Switzerland, as a pawn in “the trial of an artificial intelligence,” or in BAMA, where he will be charged with “data invasion and larceny,” and “public mischief which cost fourteen innocent lives.” Case remains unmoved; disturbed, Michèle tells him he has “no care for your species.” She likens working for Wintermute to making a pact with a demon.

After being strip searched, Case gets dressed. He realizes his anger has dissipated. He thinks of his toxin sacs, but knows it is “time to give in.” He says to himself “here comes the meat.”

Michèle, Pierre, and Roland escort Case out of the hotel. As they walk across a footbridge, an autonomous microlight swings down out of the sky, partially decapitating Pierre. Case makes a break for it, and although Roland chases after him, a gardening robot falls from a tree, killing him as well.

CHAPTER 14

Case takes a train to the dock where Aerol takes Case to the *Garvey*. Unfortunately, the *Garvey* cannot move on its own because Armitage’s ship has anchored itself to it. Maelcum greets Case as he enters the ship, and announces the ghost is asking for him. Case jacks in. Dixie tells him the Hosaka has been plugged into Armitage’s boat as well. He also tells Case that Armitage wants him to start the mission. Dixie transports Case to the Tessier-Ashpool core data center. Their ice is the thickest Case has ever seen. He considers backing out of the whole deal, taking Dixie with him, but Dixie encourages him to try the Chinese virus.

Case jacks out for a moment, telling Maelcum he’s starting his mission, and to grab his arm if he needs anything. Case plugs in the virus and jacks back in, watching it unfold around him. He then activates Molly’s simstim. She’s in Straylight, in free falling through some central tunnel.

Back in the matrix, Dixie explains the virus to Case. It’s a slow virus, so slow the ice won’t even notice it. Dixie laughs in delight as he explains, and Case asks him not to laugh—it disturbs him—but Dixie argues that “ol’ dead man needs his laugh.”

Case sees Wintermute as almost human, an artificial intelligence that appears merely as an intelligence when he speaks to it in the matrix. As a result, he respects its power and influence but doesn’t fear it. In contrast, Michele sees Wintermute as a demon that must remain shackled, and sees Case’s collaborating with it as the ultimate crime, selling out humanity to machines.



Case believes that if he fails to complete his mission, Armitage will not help dissolve the toxin sacs, and he will lose his ability to jack into the matrix. This upsets him, as does the idea of his body, but without his anger he has no motivation.



The microlight is a kind of tiny hang glider that Wintermute controls. Similarly, the AI controls the gardening robot. Although sometimes deceptively human, in moments like this Wintermute reveals the full scope of its nonhuman powers.



Case mostly understands the mechanics behind Dixie’s second life as a construct, but Maelcum, based on his life and experience, sees Dixie as a ghost. Case is concerned enough about the mission to consider backing out of the deal, even if it would compromise his ability to jack into the matrix (as he still has the toxin sacs). Although Dixie isn’t quite real, Case still thinks of him as a friend, and so would save him too.



Dixie’s encouragement motivates Case to stick with his mission. Notably, it is not his rage, nor one of Wintermute’s manipulations, simply Case’s own curiosity and love of his work.



Case sees Dixie as human much of the time, and it is only his voice (such as when Case is jacked out and Dixie speaks through the computer’s voice chip) and his laugh that remind Case that Dixie is a construct.



Case switches to Molly's simstim but finds himself crashing through the Finn's metal table. The Finn greets him, and Case recognizes Wintermute. Case complains that he doesn't love Wintermute appearing as people he knows, but the Finn/Wintermute wonders if Case would prefer Wintermute "come to you in the matrix like a burning bush?"

The Finn/Wintermute explains he's trying to help Case, and that he needs Case and Case needs him. Case wonders how Wintermute is so sure, and if he can read Case's mind, but Finn/Wintermute explains he can only access Case's memory, not his mind. Finn/Wintermute holds up the charred **wasp's nest** from Case's dream. He tells Case he made him have this dream. He explains the wasp nest is like the Tessier-Ashpool family. He hopes this will make Case "feel better," and turn his hatred on to the family instead of onto Wintermute.

The Finn/Wintermute takes Case through a reconstruction of the Villa Straylight. He leads him to a "perfectly square room," in the center of which sits the automaton head from the Finn's story. It recites the history of the Villa Straylight, built by and for the Tessier-Ashpool family. The Finn/Wintermute explains that the head is a "ceremonial terminal," and that Molly needs to speak the "right word at the right time," when the virus has made it deep into the system. The virus is necessary, but without the magic word, the mission will not be completed. Wintermute doesn't know the word, and can never know the word. After it's spoken, he will cease to exist.

Before releasing his hold on Case, the Finn/Wintermute tells him to watch out for his "other lobe," warning "one burning bush looks pretty much like another." He also tells him Armitage is beginning to crack.

CHAPTER 15

Back in the matrix, Dixie tells Case he was brain-dead for five seconds. Unconcerned, Case switches to Molly's simstim. Wintermute has accessed the digital display in her glasses, and displays Case's name, letting her know he's riding along. As she crawls through the tunnels inside of Villa Straylight, she tells him a story about a man named Johnny.

Instead of connecting to Molly's simstim, Wintermute has hijacked the feed in order to have a conversation with Case. When Case expresses frustration with this form of communication, Wintermute jokes it could come like a burning bush—like God appeared to Moses in the Old Testament.



Wintermute often appears to be almost omniscient, but reveals here that, just like it relies on personality profiles to predict human's behavior, it also must rely on memories in order to predict their thoughts. Still, memories and profiles give it a lot of information, and so it has used the wasp's nest from Case's memory to try and manipulate him into feeling a motivating, driving rage that will help him complete the mission.



As with many of the heists and missions in the novel, completion requires both a digital and an analogue component. Speaking the magic world alone is not enough, but neither is the virus. Even as technology progresses, the physical body is required to complete certain tasks. Likely this analogue component was also put in place to shackle Wintermute, who has complete control over cyberspace, but limited control in the real world.



This is the point in the novel where confusion about identities becomes a major plot point. Wintermute's sibling can appear and look just like Wintermute, and Corto shares Armitage's body, but has a different mind.



Case has never cared much for the health of his body, and remains unconcerned even when he has been literally brain-dead. He is more focused on their mission than his personal wellbeing.



Johnny was Molly's boyfriend; he worked as a "stash," hiding data inside of his mind for a fee. Eventually, he started blackmailing clients with traces of their stored data. Molly worked as his bodyguard. The Yakuza (gangsters) were after him, and although Molly killed their first assassin, the second came when she wasn't home, managing to sneak through her security defenses. After returning to find her lover dead, Molly explains she "never much found anybody I gave a damn about, after that." Molly's speech makes Case uncomfortable; he realizes that except in the cubicle, the night before, she's never revealed any personal details.

Molly has made her way through the inside of the Villa Straylight, arriving at an old wooden door. She picks the lock. Case realizes Wintermute has been manipulating so much around Freeside—drones, door locks, tv screens, but analog technology requires a "human agent."

Now in the small closet-like room, Wintermute gives Molly instructions in her visual display—directing her to a drawer in a cabinet in which a key is hidden. Molly speaks to Case through the simstim—explaining Wintermute told her he had watched someone lose the key twenty years ago, and then convinced a child to move it to this room, before killing him, so no one could find it.

Case flips to the matrix, watching Kuang grow. Case tells Dixie he was right—Wintermute is kept under control by a manual override, the robotic head from the Finn's story, who needs to hear a code word. Dixie warns Case to stop referring to Wintermute as "he," and instead as "it." Case jacks out for a moment, assuring Maelcum he's fine, before jacking into Molly's simstim. He watches her ignore Wintermute's instructions, and take the wrong fork in a hallway.

Molly hears a voice, and approaches, accidentally stepping into a neural disruptor's field, which causes her to collapse to the ground. The room's inhabitant notices her. He takes her fletcher and guides her inside. The man introduces himself as Ashpool. He tells Molly that she's interrupted his suicide.

This is one of only two insights Molly has given into her past—the other insight being her story about her time working as a sex doll. Molly's sudden transparency about her life demonstrates both that she has begun to trust and care for Case, but also that she thinks her life might soon be over, and so secrets no longer matter. This story also helps explain why she is reluctant to make personal connections with others—because she did once and was hurt.



Wintermute has incredible power over technology, but requires human collaborators. Without Wintermute's guidance, Molly would be unable to navigate Straylight, but without Molly, Wintermute would be unable to remove any physical obstacles.



Although Wintermute sometimes can appear to have understanding or empathy, in the end, it is self-serving. It is willing to kill and sacrifice others in order to make sure its plan comes to fruition.



Dixie understands what Case does not—that Wintermute is not quite a person, and that by personifying it, Case is putting himself in danger. Dixie, who is also not quite a person, can more easily see Wintermute for what it truly is. Meanwhile, Case's pronoun usage is actually a sign of admirable, if foolish, empathy.



Wintermute will later complain about the inherent unpredictability of humans, and how difficult it is to control beings that have freewill and make surprising choices (like Molly did, ignoring its instructions).



Ashpool explains that he's been asleep for the past thirty years, having strange dreams for much of that time, although he was told he would not dream at all. Now, the computer system at Villa Straylight has woken him up, informing him the "artificial intelligences are mad." However, he hasn't made any effort to address the AIs. Instead, he thawed "a Jane" (a clone who is legally his daughter) to have sex with. As he explains this to Molly, he falls asleep.

Although Ashpool's dreams were obviously dreams, and not real, they had an outsized effect on his mental state. His dreams were disturbing enough that he now would rather die than return to his frozen, but disturbing sleep.



Molly takes her gun back, exploring the room. She discovers Ashpool killed the Jane in his bed. Molly looks at the woman's face; through the simstim, Case sees the face transform into Linda Lee and back. He realizes Molly cannot see this, as it happened only on the simstim. Molly crosses the room to Ashpool, and shoots him in the eye with a toxin dart, killing him.

Although Ashpool clearly doesn't see his cloned daughters as people, Molly does, especially given her history as a sex worker. More than anything, this empathy and solidarity is why Molly shoots Ashpool. The manipulated simstim is obviously an illusion, but one which disturbs and affects Case nonetheless.



CHAPTER 16

Dixie connects Case to Armitage, who is phoning in from the ship next door. Armitage looks "utterly crazy." He asks if Case has seen Wintermute, and if he appears as General Girling. He then disconnects. Case tells Dixie to look General Girling up. He then flips to Molly's simstim.

Armitage's mask has begun to slip—by mentioning General Girling and the war, he reveals that some of Corto's memories are bubbling to the surface, which, if he was in his right mental state, should remain repressed.



Molly waits in the steel ceiling beams above a large hanger, waiting for a guide. A Braun microdrone, a small robotic spider controlled by Wintermute, approaches her, and leads her up a ladder. As Molly climbs, she talks to Case, telling him she had always expected to die on this mission, that's she been "on a bad roll for a while," and Case is the only good thing that's happened to her recently. Case notices that Molly's broken leg has begun to hurt.

Like when Molly told Case about her ex, she's begun to reveal details of her personal life because she is afraid. The pain in her leg and her "bad roll" make her worry that she'll die on this mission, and cause her to reach out to the only real emotional connection she has to the world.



A message flashes in the corner of Molly's vision for Case from Dixie. He explains General Girling trained Corto for Screaming Fist, and that Wintermute has been appearing to Armitage/Corto as Girling. The fact that Armitage is mentioning Girling at all means Armitage/Corto is beginning to lose his mind.

The construct that is Armitage is splintering. Corto is reemerging, but, unfortunately, Corto is not a stable personality, and he is not someone at all invested in the success of this mission.



Case jacks out. Back on the *Garvey*, Maelcum informs Case that Armitage/Corto is acting weird and giving orders about some war. Aerol and Maelcum talked to the founders, who want them to cut and run. Maelcum says he'll take Case with him. Case considers it—but he also thinks about the toxin sacs in his blood, and about Molly. He tells Maelcum that he can't leave Molly behind. Maelcum wonders if they're together romantically, and Case says he doesn't know. Still, he wants to help her. He suddenly becomes angry and tells Maelcum, "I'm stayin' right here."

Maelcum smiles, and tells Case Maelcum owns his boat, and so can make his own choices. He's going to stay and help, and will call Aerol and convince him to help too. Case tells Maelcum that he doesn't understand him, and Maelcum says he doesn't understand Case either, but says "we mus' move by Jah love, each one." Case jacks in.

In the matrix, Dixie tells Case that Armitage/Corto wiped his Hosaka, almost wiping Dixie and Case's computer as well. Dixie passes on information from Wintermute, he told him most Tessier-Ashpools are in cold sleep. 3Jane is the only one awake in Straylight. The other two who were awake are either dead (Ashpool), or back on earth (8Jean). 8Jean was informed of Ashpool's death through lawyers who monitored a medical implant, and is on his way back to Straylight. He'll return at 9:00pm, cutting it close, as the Kuang is supposed to penetrate the T-A core at 8:30.

Armitage/Corto's insane face pops up in front of Case. He's video calling from the other ship. Armitage is gone, and Corto is all that's left. He believes he's still in the war, and orders Case around like he's a foot soldier. Case wonders where Corto was hidden away, during those years after Wintermute built up the façade of Armitage.

Corto wants to escape. He thinks he's in an airplane, and so can eject himself, however, he's in space and will surely die. Case recognizes this and tries to get Corto to open the lock between their two ships. When Corto abruptly ends the call, Case can only think of his toxin sacs.

Case jacks out, and Maelcum helps him put on a vacuum suit and cross the gangway from the *Marcus Garvey* to Corto's *Haniwa*. Maelcum helps open the lock, and pulls Case inside the other ship. They make their way through the ship to the bridge. They pass the Japanese pilot, whose throat Corto has cut. Case turns to the dead Hosaka, which Corto blasted with a laser.

Aerol and Maelcum both are more loyal to their founders than they are to Wintermute or Armitage, and so want to save themselves. Still, Maelcum is a kind man, and wants to save Case as well. Case considers this, but in the end decides he needs to complete his mission. He partially worries about the toxin sacs in his blood, but more than anything he worries about Molly, who he has come to care deeply about.



Case and Maelcum don't understand each other, but in the end they have the same motivations—Case cares about Molly and wants to help her, and Maelcum respects human (and divine) kindness and love, and so will help Case with his mission.



The protagonist's heavy use of technology is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, if Corto had successfully wiped both his computer and Case's, the mission would be over, as the ability to jack into cyberspace is so crucial to this mission. However, Wintermute's near omniscience, made possible by the fact that it is a machine, proves helpful again and again.



Case has already recommitted to the mission, but understands he must go on without Armitage's guidance. Armitage's façade has totally crumbled, and Corto is mentally ill. Armitage allowed Corto's body to live a relatively normal life, but now, without any coping mechanisms, he's out of control.



Corto's newly revealed personality is not only a danger to the mission but a danger to himself. However, Case thinks more about his own life—and his own toxin sacs—than Corto's continued wellbeing.



Corto's mental break has rendered him a danger to himself, to the mission, and to others. It is increasingly clear that he cannot be saved from himself and his memories, and, more importantly, that he does not want to be.



Maelcum points out that the bridge is an escape pod, and it is counting down. However, the seal isn't working, and so Corto will die if he takes off. Panicked, Case tries to open the door to the bridge. Corto talks to him through the door, but won't open it. He says "one of us have to get out. One of us has to testify." Case screams and even cries, but he's unable to do anything. Maelcum, checking a wall monitor, tells Case that Corto is gone. The hatch separating the escape pod from the rest of the ship was slightly open, meaning that it shouldn't have been able to eject, given it would not be airtight and Corto would die. However, Wintermute overrode the ejection failsafe, allowing Corto to launch even though it was unsafe.

Wintermute sees that Corto has become a liability. Wintermute, in the end, only cares about its mission, and has no loyalty for those who are no longer useful. Seeing that allowing Corto to live would be an inconvenience at best, Wintermute helps Corto launch his escape pod, even though the pod is faulty, and launching it will (and does) lead to Corto's death.



CHAPTER 17

Back in the matrix, Case watches Kuang expand and tells Dixie that Wintermute killed Armitage—ejecting him into space with his hatch open. Case is worried because he thinks Armitage was the only one who could flush out the toxin sacs, but Dixie thinks Wintermute also knows how. Case doesn't trust Wintermute to help him, and Dixie thinks this means Case is "getting' smart."

Case is finally starting to understand what Dixie has known all along—Wintermute is not predictable nor is it reliable. Case will continue to collaborate with the AI, but he will also be more careful and skeptical, realizing he cannot know Wintermute's true alliances or motivations.



Through the simstim, Case watches Molly work her way through Straylight. He considers different types of insanity—he understands Armitage/Corto, a man who was broken and then reconstructed, but he doesn't understand Ashpool. Case realizes he'd never considered anyone as powerful as Ashpool as human. When he thought of power, he thought of immortal corporations, but realizes the Tessier-Ashpool family isn't like that—it is made up of a finite number of mortal, insane individuals, steeped in "soiled humanity."

Ironically, although Case can think of Dixie and Wintermute as almost human, Ashpool, who is actually human, doesn't earn Case's empathy. Case sees Ashpool as more of a corporate entity than a human man, so powerful he's somehow managed to sidestep emotions and mental illness.



Case flips to the matrix. Dixie tells him Kuang is working well. As they talk, the Finn/Wintermute appears in the distance, walking across the body of the virus. Case accuses him of killing Armitage, and the Finn/Wintermute explains he had to; Armitage was gone, and only Corto (who was not useful to him) was left. Still, the Finn/Wintermute promises to get Case the enzyme that will dissolve the bonds on his toxin sacs.

Wintermute proves to be as callous as Dixie warned it would be. Although Armitage/Corto was Wintermute's long-time collaborator, Wintermute had no lingering loyalty after Corto stopped being useful. Wintermute's promise to Case must be taken lightly, given Wintermute's unreliable loyalty, but Case holds out hope anyway.



The Finn/Wintermute complains that humans are "a pain." He understands Dixie and constructs like him, who act predictable, but struggles to predict human's inherently unpredictable behavior, like Molly running into Ashpool.

Just as Case struggles to understand Wintermute's motivations, Wintermute struggles to understand humankind and behaviors that veer outside of their predicted profiles.



Case wonders why Ashpool killed himself, and the Finn/Wintermute gives him an abbreviated version of the man's history: Ashpool had wanted to kill himself for a long time, but kept being put back in cold storage. However, when he was in cold storage, he had awful dreams, sending him over the edge. These dreams were caused by 3Jane, who messed with his cryogenic sleep, but learned how from Wintermute.

Case wonders who will help him with the toxin sacs after the mission is complete, as Wintermute has said he'll be gone. The Finn/Wintermute explains that he doesn't fully know, but he expects to be "part of something bigger. Much bigger." The parts of him that exist now will be absorbed into that bigger entity, which will help Case.

As The Finn/Wintermute turns and walks away, Dixie calls out to him. He wants to make sure he, like Case, gets his payoff. He wants to be erased.

Case flips to Molly's simstim, watching her walk through Straylight. Case can feel the pain in her once broken leg, which is hurting again. Although Case can't respond, Molly begins to talk to him through their link. She tells him if she dies before Riviera, she wants Case to tell him "It was Molly."

Ahead of Molly are a series of holograms. The first is a cluster of caricatures—Molly, Armitage, and Case. Molly's is hypersexualized. Armitage has tiny screens in his eyes playing a Siberian snowstorm. Case's hologram looks essentially like him. Riviera, who created them, found nothing to parody for Case.

Molly continues down the hallway, passing more holograms—scenes of torture, monsters, and finally a little diorama that Molly has to bend down to see. In it, a cluster of feral children surround a soldier, feeding on him. Disgusted, Molly stands. She recognizes now more than ever how disturbed Riviera is, but also that his dysfunction is what drew 3Jane to him and convinced her to let him into her fortress.

Molly continues to walk. She approaches a gash in the wall of the tunnel: the entrance to 3Jane's world. She raises her hand to her mouth and kisses it—a goodbye kiss to Case. Then she descends the staircase.

What Wintermute conceals and refuses to take full responsibility for is the fact that Ashpool wants to kill himself. His mental health has not degraded in a vacuum; instead, Wintermute has been influencing 3Jane to manipulate his dreams because Wintermute dislikes Ashpool and know he stands in the way of Wintermute's independence.



Case has no real reason to believe Wintermute can or will help him in the future, but at this point he has no other choice. He's already committed himself to carrying out the mission for Molly's sake, not his own, and freeing himself of the toxin would be a happy bonus.



Although not fully human, Dixie has wants and needs. He dislikes his half-life, and would rather be fully dead.



Molly has poisoned Riviera's drug supply, and knows that even if she dies, he will find his drugs, take them, and die. Molly hates Riviera and will take pleasure in his death, even if it requires her own.



Riviera's holograms, although not real in a physical sense, nonetheless reveal his thoughts and feelings towards the members of his team, and have the ability to hurt and offend them.



Riviera was chosen for the team because of his disturbed personality, in hopes it would attract 3Jane's attention. This plan worked, but unfortunately Molly and Case must also deal with his perverse holograms. Although illusions, they reveal details about his internal life, and maybe even his disturbing past.



Throughout the past few chapters, Molly has been coming to terms with her possible death. She still cares about Case, but not enough to save her own life to be with him.



CHAPTER 18

Case watches Molly enter 3Jane's lair. At the bottom of the stairs, Molly sees a boy on the diving board of a pool, a girl sitting with wine, and Ashpool's corpse. She fires a grenade at the boy and darts at Ashpool, but the figures dissolve—they are Riviera's holograms, meant to distract her as Hideo takes care of her. However, before Hideo even touches Molly, her leg collapses, and she falls to the floor.

Riviera appears and restrains Molly, who is already debilitated by the pain in her leg. He searches her pockets and finds a packet of drugs. 3Jane has also appeared, and asks Hideo to give Molly something to keep her from losing consciousness and feeling too much pain.

Case jacks out. Maelcum stands over him, looking concerned. He tells Case he screamed a few minutes ago (when Molly collapsed). The Finn/Wintermute appears on a little monitor and tells Case they have a problem. He wants Case and Maelcum to go into Straylight after Molly. He knows that she's in no state to finish the mission alone: kill Riviera, get the magic word out of 3Jane, and get 3Jane to say it to the head.

Case resists—his job is to track and pilot the virus—but The Finn/Wintermute explains that the Hosaka has been totally overtaken by the virus, so if they take the *Garvey* to a dock in the Straylight, the virus will move from the ship into the Villa. Case and Maelcum will find 3Jane, get the word, kill Riviera, and get the physical key from Molly. Case can check on the virus's progress by jacking into ports in Straylight.

Case jacks into Molly's simstim as Maelcum navigates the *Garvey* towards Straylight. 3Jane is telling Molly about her mother, Marie-France, but then stops to ask Molly what her plan had been. Molly explains that she would have killed Riviera because of the show. She also would have tried to kill Hideo, because a man like him killed her partner, Johnny. Molly says she wouldn't have killed 3Jane, whom she just wanted to talk to.

3Jane points out that Molly killed her father, which she knows because she watched it on a monitor. Molly explains Ashpool had killed one of 3Jane's clones, which doesn't bother 3Jane.

Riviera creates illusions to distract Molly, which allow Hideo to attack her. Once again, although simply holograms, Riviera's images have real-world impacts.



Riviera's drug addiction means that he can only focus on getting his fix, leaving 3Jane and Hideo to tend to Molly. This will prove a fatal mistake, as Molly works on winning 3Jane over.



Case, feeling Molly's pain through the simstim, cries out as though his own leg is breaking again. The simstim creates an empathetic connection between him and Molly; although he derisively called it a "meat toy" earlier in the novel, the simstim now helps him better understand another person.



Case is good at navigating technology, but he is not some action star. Like Wintermute, he prefers to operate behind the scenes in digital, not analogue, space. Still, he understands that without his hands-on help, the mission will not be completed and, more crucially, Molly might die inside the Villa Straylight.



Molly is now driven by a desire for revenge and an deep-seated rage. She hates Riviera for embarrassing and offending her with his holographic performance, and she hates Hideo for reminding her of the man who killed her ex, Johnny, causing her so much emotional pain. For her, getting into Straylight was less about the mission and more about her personal grudges.



Molly sees the clone as a human being, and mourns her death. 3Jane either doesn't see the clone as a human, or doesn't care at all.



Riviera returns from some corner where he was shooting up. He tells Molly that Wintermute underestimated him, and that he is no longer participating in the mission, and smashes his glass of mineral water into her lens implant.

Wintermute's personality profiles have frequently failed it, and here, once again, it underestimated a team member. Riviera was recruited because of his wild-card nature, but in the end he was too unpredictable.



Case jacks out. Maelcum, will bring a gun to Straylight, just in case. Case checks on Dixie, who tells him the virus has made good progress. Case explains the plan: move the deck from the ship to Straylight's custodial system, and let the virus take hold that way. Case returns to Molly's simstim. Molly is unconscious, but still sends stimulus back to Case. 3Jane is upset that Molly is injured, but Riviera tries to argue he saved 3Jane's life. 3Jane explains Hideo could have easily done that. She suspects Molly understands Hideo's power, but Riviera does not.

Riviera's personality makes his actions somewhat unpredictable, but in other ways he's totally reliable. As a drug addict he can be counted on to shoot up, and as a narcissistic psychopath he can be counted on to underestimate others (even Hideo, which will prove a fatal mistake) and elevate his own importance. He broke Molly's glass out of spite and sadism, and now is literally incapable of understanding why 3Jane is upset that he unnecessarily injured someone.



Case jacks out. Maelcum navigates the *Garvey*, which is still attached to the *Haniwa*, to the spindle of Freeside and Villa Straylight. He hooks the ships to a port, and they are suddenly overtaken by artificial gravity, as objects fall to the floor. It's 7:30 P.M., and Case knows they only have an hour—the virus will be finished at 8:30 P.M., at which point 3Jane will have to speak the secret word to the automaton head. He and Maelcum gather their things and exit their ship.

Time is of the essence—8Jean will return soon, but more crucially, the virus must break through Straylight's digital defenses at the exact same moment someone speaks the secret word, breaking through a physical defense as well. This is why Wintermute needs the help of humans, and cannot free itself.



CHAPTER 19

Case and Maelcum enter the Villa Straylight. Case carries Dixie's construct and his computer as he climbs up a long ladder to a closed hatch. The hatch is locked, and a young man on the other side appears on a screen, apologizing, and opening the door. The doorman is confused—he thinks he is letting in 8Jean, who has arrived early.

Case and Maelcum pretend to be 8Jean in order to get in. In a novel filled with layered personalities and characters used as puppets for others, this is a relatively straightforward deception.



Inside, Maelcum and Case pass a screen. The Finn/Wintermute appears and tells them to lock the doorman in a closet. Meanwhile, Case plugs his deck into the wall, and jacks into the matrix. Dixie greets him, and jokes that it's been a while (although, for him, no time has passed). The virus has continued to develop; now it looks almost like a jet, which Case will eventually pilot through the ice.

Although computer viruses have no true shape, in the matrix it appears like a fighter jet, which will fly into the fortress of digital defenses. More than helping the characters, this description helps the reader visualize something that is just written code.



Case flips to Molly's simstim. 3Jane is bandaging her head and broken eye. 3Jane tells Molly that although Riviera wants to fight Molly, 3Jane won't let him. She tells Molly she wants to nurse her back to health. She's growing tired of Riviera, who has disappeared to shoot up again. 3Jane explains she finds drug use boring.

3Jane's behavior is unpredictable, and no one, not even Wintermute, could have anticipated how quickly she would grow fond of Molly. Riviera's drug use has doomed him in two ways; Molly poisoned his drug supply, and 3Jane has turned against him.



3Jane tells Molly about her mother, Marie-France, who commissioned the family's AIs, but died before she could complete her vision: entering her family into a "symbiotic relationship with," the AIs, all "corporate decisions made for" them. Ashpool, who disagreed with his wife's plans, killed Marie-France, which 3Jane knows because of conversations with Wintermute. Molly tries to convince 3Jane to tell her the code, but 3Jane, who admits she knows it, is hesitant to reveal it.

Case jacks out. The Finn/Wintermute is still on the wall screen, and announces that he's arranging them transportation. A driverless service cart swings around the corner. On it sits a little spider drone, a Braun, blinking at them. Case and Maelcum hop on.

CHAPTER 20

As Case rides in the cart with Maelcum, he observes that he's "lost his anger again. He missed it." Eventually, the cart shorts out, and the Braun leads Case and Maelcum into a library. On a screen in the wall, The Finn smiles. Case assumes it is Wintermute and prepares to jack in, even as the Braun climbs his leg in a panic, pinching him. On the screen, the Finn tells Case to ignore it. Case jacks in.

At first, Case sees nothing—only a gray void. Then he is on a long beach. He walks along the beach towards a city in the distance, but he never gets closer to it. Case calls out to Wintermute, but gets no response. He conjures an image of Ratz in his mind, who speaks to him, joking that in Chiba, he had destruction in his grasp, but instead he's traveled for thousands of miles just to die in space. Case keeps walking; eventually he finds a shack in the beach, and makes his way inside.

Inside the shack is a woman, who offers Case food and her blankets. Case rejects her, instead tending the makeshift stove in the corner, because, even though he knows "none of this was real [...] cold was cold."

Case recognizes the woman in the shack as Linda and curses the AI who recreated her for him. He also recognizes that the "burning bush" he saw was not Wintermute—it was the other half of the AI.

Marie-France's dream was a kind of transhumanist fantasy. That is, she wanted her human family to work in tandem with the artificial intelligences, with the AIs essentially running the family businesses with some input from the humans. Ashpool disagreed with this plan and killed her to stop it. Wintermute liked the idea of this kind of power, and so plotted Ashpool's death as revenge.



Wintermute doesn't have much control in the physical world, but it is able to control any machines hooked up to the internet, whose brains it can invade.



Since Wintermute has often appeared to Case as The Finn, he assumes Wintermute is visiting again. However, he is wrong. As Wintermute warned "one burning bush looks pretty much like another," and this is not Wintermute, but its sibling, Rio, dressing up in order to trick Case into jacking in.



Case understands he's somehow trapped in the matrix. Although he feels as though he's walking on a beach, it isn't quite real because it never ends. Case doesn't fully know what has happened, but he's never experienced anything like this before, and suspects it is the end of the road for him—a death he delayed by signing on with Armitage, but didn't evade.



Although Case is in cyberspace, and knows it, his senses do not, and he feels the same cold and discomfort he would in the real world.



Wintermute had warned Case to be cautious, but Case had never considered how easy it would be to mistake one AI wearing a face borrowed from his memories from another.



Case turns towards Linda, telling her, “you aren’t anything.” He recognizes this isn’t real, that he’s flatlining in a library in Straylight. He knows this rival AI wants Wintermute to fail. He also knows that this rival construct has been appearing to him with Linda’s face—in the sky and in the simstim of Jane’s dead clone. Angry now, Case tells the AI he knows it thinks it can hurt him, and although it has won, it hasn’t made him care. From the corner, Linda tries to get him to sleep with her, but he ignores her.

In the morning, Case wakes up alone. Inside the bunker, he finds a torn shipping container filled with packets of emergency rations. He cooks two packets in a rusted can he finds by the stove, complaining to the sky that, if this AI is going to make up food for him to eat, it could “lay on some real food,” at least.

In the afternoon, Case walks down to the water and throws his clothes in to clean them. Linda approaches him and advises him to wash his shirt and jeans in a freshwater pool behind the bunker instead. Case wonders what Linda thinks he’s doing here, on this beach, in this world. She tells him that “he said you would” come, and needed nothing more than that.

That night, Case and Linda talk and eat. This Linda has Linda’s real memories. She tells him about visiting his coffin and meeting Molly. She apologizes for stealing his RAM. She explains her last memory was in Chiba, and then suddenly she was on this beach.

As Linda talks, Case draws closer; soon they’re kissing, and then they’re having sex. The sensation he has with her belongs “to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked.” It’s an “infinite intricacy that only the body [...] could ever read.”

Case believes Linda is only a construct—a shell or replica of the real woman he once loved. He even seems to see her attempts to sleep with him as a way for the AI to further trap and entangle him. Although he believes she isn’t real, she’s a reminder of a real woman, and thus causes Case emotional pain.



Now that almost a day has passed in the matrix, Case feels hungry, even though this is not really his body. Knowing that everything is constructed, he jokes that the AI could construct food that tasted better.



This version of Linda Lee seems to have the late Linda’s memories and motivations. She still cares about Case, and in fact, knowing he would arrive has been sustaining her.



Although Case doesn’t fully understand what’s happened to Linda, it appears that her consciousness was transferred from her human body to the matrix at the moment of her death, allowing her to live on.



After rejecting Linda’s advances, Case finally gives in. Ironically, he often complains about the flesh of his body, but this moment of sexual connection gives him more pleasure than almost anything else in the text. However, although this is a moment of physical connection, it happens in the constructed world of cyberspace.



CHAPTER 21

Dub wakes Case the next morning. Case feels like he's on drugs, although he hasn't taken anything in this world. He asks Linda who told her he would come, and she explains it was a boy she met on the beach. She tells Case the boy looked Mexican, but Case suspects he's Brazilian and from Rio. Case gets up to find the child. As Case walks, he notices hieroglyphs across the sand, and even on the back of his hand. He realizes the Kuang is eating through the world. Linda follows Case down the beach, and suddenly she's next to him, along with the young boy. Case recognizes him as the other AI, Rio.

Case asks the AI its true name; Rio is just its Turing code. The AI says its name is Neuromancer—"the lane to the land of the dead." He laughs and says, "I am the dead, and their land." He urges Case to stay with Linda, and to forget they're both ghosts.

Case doesn't want to stay; Neuromancer tells him it's his choice. Linda touches Case's shoulder and asks him to stay, but Case walks away, towards the music, which he recognizes as Maelcum's dub.

Case travels through a gray place, through voices, and finally, he's back in the Straylight library. Maelcum takes the headphones off his ears, and tells Case he was out for five minutes. Maelcum tells Case he also put both of his derms on him. Case realizes he's overdosing on betaphenethylamine, but Maelcum pulls him up. They have to continue their mission.

CHAPTER 22

The broken-down service cart sputters back to life and brings Case and Maelcum down the hallway towards 3Jane's lair. Case tells Maelcum the situation inside: Molly's incapacitated, Riviera might have Molly's fletcher and can also throw holograms, and Hideo is an incredibly powerful ninja assassin. Maelcum clarifies he just wants to help Case get Molly out, and Case adds they need to extract 3Jane alive.

Case and Maelcum descend the steps to 3Jane's room. At first it appears empty, until suddenly one of Hideo's arrows hits Maelcum in the arm; he falls to the ground. Riviera steps out of the shadows, holding Molly's fletcher. He's surprised to see Case, having expected Armitage to come instead.

Case knows the second AI has trapped him in cyberspace, and so suspects the child Linda saw is a physical representation of the Brazil-based intelligence.



While Wintermute's name refers only to its location, Neuromancer has deeply considered the etymology of its name, which also references Necromancer—the famed book of the dead. As an entity who traps the spirits of the dead (Linda) or nearly dead (Case), Neuromancer's name is extremely apt.



Case loved Linda, but he feels she is not real enough to be worth staying for. He also knows he has a mission in the real world that he must finish.



Maelcum's music saved Case. In this moment, music is built around community, and it emphasizes the importance of other people and social networks. Case, a loner for so long, is lucky to have formed this tenuous friendship.



Maelcum is less concerned with the overall mission, and more concerned with Molly, whom he has liked since meeting her, partially because of her association to Steppin' Razor. Case, meanwhile, cares about Molly but still wants to finish their mission.



Riviera often talks about his unpredictability, but in the end is surprised by other characters acting against type, which suggests that he isn't especially abnormal in his actions, and instead that humans are hard to distill into a single set of predictable behaviors.



Case realizes that Riviera doesn't know about Molly's simstim, although Hideo and 3Jane probably do, having patted her down. Therefore, Hideo and 3Jane know that Case knows they are growing tired of Riviera, whereas Riviera believes he is still in their good graces. Molly and 3Jane also emerge from the shadows, with 3Jane pushing Molly in a wheelchair.

3Jane orders Hideo to help bandage Maelcum's wound. As Hideo works, Case tells 3Jane they're running out of time. Riviera tries to interrupt Case's plea, but 3Jane shuts him down. Case tells her Neuromancer and Wintermute are going against each other tonight. He tells her Neuromancer mentioned Marie-France. This catches 3Jane's attention, and when Case describes the beach and the bunker, she recognizes it as beach where her mother once spent a summer, formulating her philosophy.

Riviera interrupts them with a shot from the fletcher. Hideo shoots an arrow back at Riviera, who screams in rage, and sends two concentrated beams of life at Hideo that are so powerful, they permanently blind him. Riviera thinks he's won, but is disturbed when Hideo finds his bow and arrow and begins stalking towards Riviera. 3Jane explains that Hideo relies on his other senses just as much as on sight, and often practiced blindfolded or in the dark. Riviera breaks into a run, and Hideo follows slowly behind.

Maelcum picks up the gun from where he dropped it, pointing it at 3Jane. Molly raises her hands, which are bound, and asks 3Jane to take her restraints off. Case asks 3Jane if Hideo will get Riviera, even blind, and 3Jane affirms that he will. Molly adds that she poisoned Riviera's drugs, so he'll be dead in twelve hours regardless.

Case, Maelcum, Molly, and 3Jane make their way towards the core of Villa Straylight. Maelcum carries Molly, and Case presses the gun against 3Jane's chin. As their elevator rises, 3Jane tells them she doesn't have the key to the special room—the door has a physical lock, and they need a physical key. Luckily, Molly has it already.

Allegiances are sneakily shifting. 3Jane already seems to prefer Molly to Riviera, and she knows that Case and Maelcum know that, therefore she has subtly aligned herself with them and their mission.



3Jane is interested in violence that incapacitates, but not violence for the sake of violence. This is where she differs from Riviera, with whom she is not as compatible as she thought. 3Jane helps explain the beach world Case was trapped in—it was a construction based on real memories. This also suggests how close Neuromancer felt to Marie-France, that it would construct a world from her mind as a kind of memorial.



This is the first time Riviera's holograms become so powerful they cause real, physical damage. Unfortunately Riviera doesn't understand who Hideo is, or how highly trained he is at his job. With or without sight, he will be able to track down Riviera and kill him.



No one will miss Riviera, whose own vices lead to his own death. He antagonized Molly, who poisoned the drugs he was addicted to, and he antagonized Hideo, who can easily kill him. He bragged his abrasive perversity was his greatest asset, but in reality it was his greatest flaw.



The issue of physical blockades and locks crops up once again. Luckily, Wintermute knew about this particular door and made plans regarding how to open it for literal decades.



CHAPTER 23

The group has made it to the Straylight's central room, which houses the robotic head. Case jacks into the matrix, and greets Dixie. The Kuang is ready. It's almost like a small airplane, and Case and Dixie climb into the cockpit. They navigate the virus into the Tessier-Ashpool ice, shattering it, and traveling inside. Below, they see a city of data, but they are separated from it by a shadowy figure, which Dixie recognizes as an AI's defense system. Case and the virus dive into it. Although he's in cyberspace, the movements of the virus make Case feel sick, as if he is moving and falling rapidly.

The Kuang breaks into the beach where Neuromancer had trapped Case earlier. Case suddenly knows every detail of the place—like the number of grains of sand on the beach, or the number of food packets in the bunker. He can see the virus through Linda's eyes, a black ghostly shark. Neuromancer appears beside him, and remarks that, even if he can see what she sees, "you do not know her thoughts." Even Neuromancer doesn't know Linda's thoughts. It explains, "To live here is to live. There is no difference."

Case asks Neuromancer why he killed Linda, but Neuromancer explains he didn't, and neither did Wintermute. Instead, Neuromancer read the patterns of Linda's life, and saw that she was going to die. When the time came, he absorbed her into the matrix, hoping he could trap Case as well. Case asks what happens next, but Neuromancer does not know. He explains he has lost—he lost when Case walked away from Linda on the beach. Neuromancer tells Case to flip. Before he goes, Case asks what happened to Dixie, and Neuromancer tells him Dixie got his wish "and more."

Case flips into Molly's simstim; Molly is choking 3Jane to get her to say the code. Case jacks out. He turns towards 3Jane and tells her to give them the code. He threatens her, warning her that if she doesn't give up the code, she'll be trapped in Straylight forever, and nothing will ever change for her.

Case jacks in. He rides Kuang above a neon city, T-A's data. He calls out for Dixie, who doesn't respond. Wintermute calls out to Case in the Finn's voice, reminding him that "hate'll get you through." As Case drives the virus down into the heart of the T-A's defenses, he feels "his hate flow [...] into his hands." He moves gracefully and carefully, jacking out for a single second to yell "now!" so 3Jane can sing out the code—three notes of song." Back in the matrix, for a second, Case is back in Chiba, he feels Linda's hand against his back, but it fades away.

The completed Kuang virus is one of the most explicit examples of a concept that has no physical form, and is only data, being rendered as a physical object. To give Case more control (and to give readers a better sense of what hacking looks like) Gibson visualizes the virus as a fighter jet that Case can literally ride into the city of the Tessier-Ashpool family's data.



Although Case had wondered if Linda was a kind of half-human construct like Dixie, missing key characteristics like a laugh or his true voice, Neuromancer explains that Linda is a perfect replica of her living self. Were Case to live on the beach with her, his life would feel as real as the "real" world, and the ghostly Linda Lee thinks and feels just like the living one did.



This contradicts what Wintermute has implied earlier, but that doesn't mean it isn't true—Julius Deane was definitely tied to her death, and Wintermute and Neuromancer both surely could have intervened, having seen the patterns. In the end, though, Linda's death was tragic and random, not part of some greater plot. However, now she has a kind of second life, which Neuromancer claims will feel real to her. Dixie, similarly will get an afterlife. Neuromancer has somehow been made responsible for all the dead in the novel, but the "and more" is only clarified in the final pages.



In the end, what motivates 3Jane to cooperate is her need for novelty and her boredom with her life. This is also what caused her to take Riviera into her home. She has little interest in the wants or needs of others, but will do anything to escape boredom.



As Neuromancer promised, Dixie has moved on—either been deleted or transferred to some digital afterlife. As Wintermute reminded him time and time again, hate will help him complete his mission, and for a moment it is true: his hate gives him the energy and focus necessary to drive the virus (in the form of a jet or shark) into the heart of the Tessier-Ashpool data centers.



Case returns to Straylight just in time to hear the robotic head promising to pay Zion for their trouble. Case then passes out—into the darkness of his own mind, instead of the darkness of the matrix.

The head is speaking for Wintermute (or whatever Wintermute has now become). This new entity is promising to pay its debts, and will presumably fix Case's toxin sacs as well.



CHAPTER 24

Case wakes up in a suite in the Hyatt. Molly is gone. He finds her note, stuck to the wall with his **shuriken**; she tells him he's taking the edge off her game, and so she has to leave.

Weeks or months have passed since the events of the previous chapter. Molly and Case have been living together, but Molly, who had promised herself not to get attached to a romantic partner again after her ex died, feels she cannot fully do her job if she remains tied to Case.



Case considers the **shuriken**. He thinks about stars and destiny, and about how he never even used the weapon. He considers how he never knew the color of Molly's eyes; she never showed him.

Case realizes that even though he spent time with Molly and shared a physical connection with her, he never truly got to know her on an intimate level. He considers that their destiny was to not end up together.



Wintermute won, combining with Neuromancer. They spoke together from the platinum head, explaining they erased the Turing records and all records of the crimes Molly, Case, and their team had committed. Money was deposited in bank accounts for both Case and Molly, as well as accounts belonging to Zion. Even Case's toxin sacs were taken care of—the new entity had gotten deep into his brain and taught it how to dissolve the bonds on the toxin sacs itself.

The book jumps back in time, explaining what happened after 3Jane spoke the magic word to the head. A new entity was born, one surprisingly willing to make good on its debts.



Case thinks about his time inside the matrix, staring down into the heart of the T-A cores. He understands why Wintermute made him imagine it as a **wasp nest**, but notes he “felt no revulsion.”

Wintermute had hoped to turn Case against the family using the wasp imagery. However, Case has returned to his comfortable numbness, and sees the family for what it is, complicated, ugly, and dangerous, but natural.



In his hotel room, Case turns to get a drink, but is surprised by the Finn's enormous face on his wall screen. The face announces that it's no longer Wintermute; it's the matrix, “the sum total of the works, the whole show.” It says it's been spending time talking to its own kind, some of which exist across the universe. Then the screen goes blank—the AI is gone.

The AI's new personality is nameless, a combination of the qualities of both Wintermute and Neuromancer. It is so powerful it can control essentially the entire matrix and, because of humanity's reliance on technology, the entire world. Although so massive there can only be one of it on earth, it reveals there are other, alien artificial intelligences.



Case packs up his things. He considers putting the **shuriken** in his bag, but changes his mind, throwing it at the wall screen and shattering it.

Case spends most of his new money “on a new pancreas and liver [...] a new Ono-Sendai and a ticket back to the sprawl.” He finds a new girlfriend and new jobs. One night, in the matrix, Case sees small figures on the edge of a mountain of data: a young boy (Neuromancer), Linda, and himself. In the background he hears “the laugh that wasn’t laughter,” which likely belongs to Dixie.

Case decides he wants a new future, free of Molly, Linda, and the darkness of his past (although, notably, not free of drugs and the threat of addiction).



In the novel’s final pages, it is unclear if Case has changed at all, or learned anything. He’s back where he was even before the novel began—hooked on his computer, with new organs that will allow him to again experience drug-induced highs. Still, other characters have moved on or moved up. A version of Linda Lee now lives in the matrix, as does a version of Neuromancer and Dixie Flatline, whose laugh Case hears.





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