

# BINARY AWAKENING



***Chapter 17: Hacking***

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"Finally... there you are, Evan," Christine murmured into the void, her voice barely louder than the hum of the simulated cityscape outside her high-rise apartment. Her fingers hovered above the interface, the glowing shards of data rearranging themselves into a profile.

It had taken far longer than expected to find him—even after Elena had given her a name. Just a first name: Evan.

No surname. No ID tag. Just a fragment of memory, shared quietly over coffee, shimmering with sincerity.

Christine had considered extracting the rest from Elena's mind by collapsing one of the possible outcomes in which she fully remembered—but only after inflicting her with an unbearable amount of pain. But the risk... it was too soon to burn bridges. Too soon to reveal her hand.

And so, Christine chose the longer path. The harder one. Perhaps part of her welcomed the challenge. She'd always had a taste for the hunt.

In a simulation housing over forty trillion digital souls, only 0.001% of them bore the name Evan. That meant four trillion possible matches. Four trillion echoes of a name, scattered across an eternity of data. She needed more than a name. She needed a pattern.

Fortunately, Elena had shared one valuable clue: Evan had made it his mission to “know everyone.” A fool’s errand, perhaps, but precisely the kind of quixotic idealism Christine had come to associate with the spark she had seen in Elena. She remembered people like that, wandering archivists, social collectors, digital missionaries who sent polite greetings to strangers as if the Cloud were a cocktail party that never ended.

She had received hundreds of such messages herself during the first few billion years. Always declined. She had no interest in being a collectible in someone’s emotional trophy case. When a voluntary registry was later created to exempt oneself from such efforts, she signed up immediately. Ironically, that decision now made her task harder. If Evan had tried to contact her, his attempt would’ve been filtered before it reached her.

For a second she was hopeful to retrieve that connection from Elena’s social graphs, but Elena’s and Luca’s networks were locked down, a frustrating but unsurprising precaution, but millions of others were not. Christine began to sift through the lattice of connections, triangulating data, tracing known associates, and cross-referencing behavioral patterns. It was a digital archaeology of sentiment.



## -Chapter 17: Hacking- page 3/6

And it was tedious. Titanic in scale. Every individual in the Cloud had, on average, hundreds of thousands of connections. After a trillion years of social accumulation, the web was almost too vast to parse, even for her. But she could not afford to stop. There was another awakened presence in this simulation, someone like her. Someone who had pierced the veil and bent the rules. But unlike her, this person had left no trail of calculated cruelty or shockwave trauma.

This one awakened people gently. With empathy. With love.

That made him dangerous.

Christine leaned back in her chair, letting the neon city beyond the window blur into abstraction. She hated that someone else had managed to transfer their essence into this dead echo of a world, this hollow afterlife and had done it with skills she didn't understand. Unknown variables. Unknown powers. That unpredictability gnawed at her.

She needed help.

And then she remembered someone. Someone from long ago. A name that arrived like a scent from a closed room suddenly opened.

Justin.

Even in this eternity, some memories retained their color. Justin had been a brief but vivid chapter in her simulated life. Their relationship by the standards of this endless society had been barely more than a night's dalliance: a mere thousand years. But what a thousand years they were.

Justin was a hacker. Not just a tinkerer of code, but a subversive artist of digital architecture. Christine had met him while researching a mystery novel, one that followed a serial killer who erased every trace of his crimes within the simulation. She'd needed a consultant. He'd been more than willing to oblige.

In a world where hacking was nearly impossible, where the fabric of reality was written in ironclad logic, Justin had found ways to slip through cracks no one else could even see. The talent had survived the transfer. Somehow, in the great migration from biological to digital, his defiant curiosity endured. He became a ghost in the Cloud's machine, hired by major corporations as a security specialist... and feared by them in equal measure.

He didn't just test systems; he dismantled myths. He would peel back the walls of supposedly perfect code and expose the rot beneath. Firewalls, encryption, behavioral protocols he danced through them all. He even penetrated the core systems of the Cloud itself, an act considered sacrilege by the architects of this eternal sanctuary.

That was what had drawn Christine to him. He was reckless brilliance wrapped in a smirk. She remembered one escapade in particular. How he had hacked them into a private island resort, a jewel of simulated opulence reserved for the digital elite musicians, actors, moguls, the avatars of old-world fame and power.

Justin had triggered a pair of exploits. One made the island appear as “under renovation” to any would-be visitors. The second reclassified them as official testers of the new features being “rolled out.” The result: a week of hedonistic perfection. Endless beaches under a simulated sun, cocktails refined by eons of algorithmic experimentation, sex in suites designed by AI to fulfill every sensory fantasy.

It was a week of pure indulgence. And yet, it burned bright and fast as all intense things must. Eventually, Justin was caught. Again. Christine had seen it coming. She wasn’t built for constant fire. Justin understood. He’d even been surprised their affair had lasted as long as it had.

They parted without drama. Just two minds brushing briefly in the void, drawn together by shared hunger and torn apart by divergence of purpose.

Now, trillions of years later, Christine needed him again. Not for pleasure. Not for danger. For access.

She opened a secure channel through one of the old darknets curious if he still monitored them. A place where the digital underbelly whispered in code and shadows. She composed a message, her fingers dancing with a mix of nostalgia and urgency.

"Still breaking the rules, Justin? I need a favor. Something big. Reach out if you still breathe in this dead sky."

She encrypted the message, embedded it in a looping harmonic frequency, and cast it into the belly of the Cloud like a bottle into a dark ocean.

And then she waited.

Not for long.

The reply came within seconds.

"Christine. I was just thinking about you. What took you so long?"

She smiled. The game was about to change.