

Diego Sanchez

You awake suddenly, disoriented and confused. Where are you? You know that the year is 2100 – January 17th, 2:17 pm, Eastern Seaboard Time, in fact – but you’re not sure where you’ve been recently or how you got here. In fact, you’re not sure where “here” is. You’re lying in some kind of moulded couch – not terribly comfortable – and there’s some kind of transparent panel in front of you. Glass, or some synthetic? You reach out to touch it; it proves oddly flexible...

Background

You’re an American – born in Virginia in 2053 – and like most people these days, you’ve had a variety of jobs in your time. However, you’ve always done best in a management position – you like taking charge of teams, and you’re pretty good at it – and back in 2087, you teamed up with a guy named Brandon Hale to set up a company named Picture This Inc. to exploit some idea that Hale, who’s a bit of a software genius, had about advanced applications of real-time brain imaging to personality emulation. Hale is a software ace but he isn’t much of a businessman, but you are; you made a pretty good team. Picture This has done pretty well for itself, expanding into the design of the brain implants which it uses for long-term iterative imaging (and which double as virtual interface implants).

The company has had troubles recently, though; for the last couple of years, Hale has become secretive about his “next big idea”, and increasingly touchy. At first, you didn’t worry; he’d always had a techie sort of personality, not overly socialised, but he delivered the goods. This time, though, he seems to be losing the plot rather badly. You’ve been trying to get him back on track, but without much success, and you have a nasty feeling that you’ll have to set the process of winding things up into motion soon. Shame, but you can move on, and Hale is becoming a real pain.

Hang on – the last *couple* of years? That’s since your last significant product launch, in 2095. Yeah, there’s a discrepancy there...

Abilities

Hmm. You feel a bit muzzy in the head just now – you’re not sure you’re at your best. Your coordination feels *right* off, too. Still, you don’t actually feel unwell.

Functionally, you’ve currently got DX 7, IQ 10, Will 11, and Per 11. Your Fright Check number is 14. You speak English as a native and Spanish with an accent (despite the name – your family kind of went native a generation or three back), and you also have +2 Charisma and a quirk-level desire for status – you like to be a leader.

Your functional skills are Accounting-9, Administration-12, Carousing-11, Computer Operation-13, Current Affairs (Business)-12, Detect Lies-10, Diplomacy-11, Finance-11, Leadership-12, and Merchant-11.

Diego Sanchez – After Emergence

Okay, all weirdness aside – you (sort of) know these people. One of the “women” (well, weird female-shaped humanoid cybershells) looks like **Melina Dassin**, Brandon Hale’s wife. She’s French, and she works in computers like him – she always seemed to be pretty well as bright as him. She travels a lot on business – handles a lot of high-end systems installation work which requires personal attention. You got the feeling from talking to her once or twice recently that Hale’s behaviour was affecting their marriage as well as his work.

The other “woman” you don’t know so well, but she appears to be an image of **Mary Brandenburger**, who the company had dealings with – purchasing highly specialised medical nanotech for the implants development division. Actually, it’s mostly Hale who worked with her – he’s in charge of tech stuff, after all. She’s in a specialised field; medical nanotech brokerage involves tracking not only the state of the art in the field, but all sorts of complicated legal issues. Hale used to joke sometimes that she could get brainbugs to do *anything*, but you always thought of her as just another resources supplier. She drives a hard bargain, but she’s a decent businesswoman.

The guy, on the other hand, you know fine. That’s **David Portalles**, who handles facilities management for the Picture This offices. You’ve had the odd drink and business dinner with him. He’s very focussed – built his business up from nothing. Not someone you regard as a close social contact, though.

Oh, and the big dog cybershell looks a lot like the one that Hale uses for **LEONIDAS**, his personal full-sapient AI assistant. If it is the same thing, well, it does a good job of looking after his house and so on, and Hale used to like it. He’s been grumbling recently that it’s not been working quite right, but he hasn’t been very specific.

Melina Dassin – After Emergence

Okay, so these clunky cybershells seem to be modelled on people you know. One resembles **Diego Sanchez**, Brandon’s business partner in Picture This. Good at the management side, although Brandon always complained that he didn’t appreciate how complex the tech side can get, and eventually, Brandon seemed to think that he’d pulled some kind of sneaky cut-out move that was what destroyed the company. Another looks like **David Portalles**, who runs a company that handled facilities management for the Picture This offices. Brandon used to be quite friendly with him, although you haven’t seen much of him for a while.

Then there’s a cybershell in the image of **Mary Brandenburger**, who you’ve met once or twice; Picture This bought medical nanotech from her. She’s some kind of specialist broker. You’ve never been entirely sure about her – she’s in a business with a lot of legal complexities, and you think that she cuts corners – but Brandon seemed to think that the company needed her. You have a nasty feeling that Brandon has actually experimented *personally* with some of her product in the last few months, which hasn’t been good for his stability. On the other hand, he seemed to have seen through her a bit more recently, and said that he wasn’t sure about her reliability.

And the last cybershell looks like a very cheap imitation of the mobile canine-style unit used by **LEONIDAS**, Brandon’s personal fully-sapient AI assistant. Some of your friends from home used to be quite negative about Brandon *owning* a SAI – that’s regarded as slavery in sophisticated European circles – but LEONIDAS was programmed to accept its status, and you both treated it as a friend.

No sign of Brandon, though...

Melina Dassin

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Background

You're a French citizen, born and brought up in Bordeaux, although you'd call yourself a citizen of the world if you were prone to that sort of melodrama. You developed a lot of skills with computers through your youth, and used them as the basis of a career in systems engineering, especially high-end special installations. This involved a lot of travel all over the world (though never off-planet), and back in 2088, you met Brandon Hale, another computer expert. His company, Picture This Inc., made brain implants that perform high-end continuing scan processes, which can in turn be used for software modelling and so on. You and he had enough in common to understand each other, enough differences to be interesting; in 2091, you were married.

Things went well for you for some years, but over time, some of Brandon's worst features came to the fore. He was technically brilliant, but he wanted to be good at the management side of things as well – at handling people – and he seems to think that this meant being cold and distant and manipulative. He's actually been *working* on this, and every time he doesn't get what he wants, he gets worse. It even seemed to distract him from his work, until last year, in 2097, his company folded – his partners decided to get out of the business because Brandon was making such a mess of the technical side. You've been doing your best to help him, but he wouldn't be helped, and now you think that your marriage is disintegrating. It's sad, but you've got to the stage of wanting to cut your losses.

(Last year? 2097? What's going on here?)

Abilities

Hmm. You feel a bit foggy in the head just now – you're definitely not at your best. Your coordination feels extremely poor, too. Still, you don't actually feel sick.

Functionally, you've currently got DX 7, IQ 11, Will 11, and Per 11. Your Fright Check number is 14. You speak French (of course) and English fluently, and you're competent in German. You are also very Curious (roll 15 or less on 3d to control this if necessary).

Your functional skills are Area Knowledge (Europe)-11, Area Knowledge (USA)-11, Computer Operation-17, Computer Programming-12, Connoisseur (Virtual Reality Arts)-11, Current Affairs (Travel)-12, Electronics Operation (Communications)-12, Electronics Repair (Computers)-14, Expert Skill (Arachnoxenology)-12, Games (Online Abstract Strategy Games)-11, and Psychology (AI, Applied)-13.

Mary Brandenburger

You awake suddenly, disoriented and confused. Where are you? You know that the year is 2100 – January 17th, 2:17 pm, Eastern Seaboard Time, in fact – but you're not sure where you've been recently or how you got here. In fact, you're not sure where "here" is. You're lying in some kind of moulded couch – not terribly comfortable – and there's some kind of transparent panel in front of you. Glass, or some synthetic? You reach out to touch it; it proves oddly flexible...

Background

You're an Australian by birth (you're in your 40s), but you travel a lot these days. You're in the medical supplies business, specifically handling neurological nanotech. It's interesting work, first because it's a fast-moving field, and second because every legal jurisdiction seems to have different ideas about what is or isn't acceptable, leading to a real maze of regulations – which is fun to game, and offers opportunities for arbitrage, and thus profit. A few people have even called you a “drug dealer” – which is a really *dated* sort of insult. So far as you're concerned, you're in the business of facilitating psychiatric medicine and medical research. If people sometimes decide to tinker with their own mental states without much medical supervision, well, that's their business – the stuff you sell is mostly short-term in its effects and always reversible, anyway. Well, nearly always.

Anyhow – what the hell's going on? Last you remember, it was ... you're not certain, but you were on a business trip to the USA, you think. Hmm – wasn't the date of that trip August 2096? Has somebody been feeding you a memory-suppressant bug? You wouldn't be stupid enough to take one of those yourself, you're sure.

Abilities

Hmm. You feel a bit foggy in the head just now – you're definitely not at your best. Your coordination feels extremely poor, too. Still, you don't actually feel sick.

Functionally, you've currently got DX 7, IQ 10, Will 10, and Per 10. Your Fright Check number is 13. Your native tongue is English, and you know a bit of German, Japanese, and Russian; you also have a working grasp of most Asian cultures – enough to avoid obvious social gaffes, though you rely on software for language translation. You also have some talent for reading people – roll IQ-3 .(i.e. 7 or less) to judge someone's personality and attitudes on meeting them. As a minor point of pride, you've always made sure that you looked okay, but you don't go for too much glamour. You pride yourself on being a trustworthy businesswoman – as a point of honour – which you'd say is because you have a definite libertarian streak; you believe in free enterprise and personal responsibility. You're not a fanatic, though.

Your functional skills are Accounting-10, Area Knowledge (Earth)-11, Computer Operation-13, Current Affairs (Science and Technology)-13, Diplomacy-10, Fast-Talk-12, Finance-9, Gambling-12, Merchant-13, Pharmacy (Specialised in Brainbugs)-12, and Psychology (Human, Applied)-10. You get +1 to Psychology skill if you can converse with the subject.

Mary Brandenburger – After Emergence

Right, so some of the faces on these weird crude cybershells are kind of familiar; whatever's going on must involve Picture This Inc., a small American company who buy some brainbugs from you. One of the guys looks like **Diego Sanchez**, their commercial director – he always seemed like a good manager when you met him, although you mostly dealt with Brandon Hale, their technical director. Come to think of it, another of these figures looks like **Melina Dassin**, Hale's wife, who you met a couple of times, and the big dog-thing has the same shape as the cybershell used by **LEONIDAS**, Hale's personal full-sapient AI aide. You don't know the other guy.

Damn, so this business must be something to do with Hale. For the last few years, since about 2093, he's been buying brainbugs through you for use in the company's research work, and at first this was a straightforward deal. But then he started looking for some stuff that's a bit tricky to get through American import regulations, and some of the payments had to go off-books. So he comped you one of the virtual interface implants that his company worked with by way of trade – a nice little unit, which he said would learn how you worked until an AI installed in it would be able to think like you, to anticipate your needs. All very cool, but since then, you've developed the nasty feeling that some of the brainbugs he was buying off you were for personal use. Well, that was his business, so far as you were concerned – but these were the sort of temporary personality tweaks that made the user “cool-headed” or “detached” or “more perceptive at handling social relationships” – fine in small doses, but not something anyone wants to over-use. You tried to warn him, but he seemed to be fixating on some kind of personal project. You were thinking of walking away from that business, although Picture This are a good customer.

David Portalles – After Emergence

The hell? Okay, some of these statue-cybershell things are based on people you know, a bit – they're all tied up with Picture This Inc., an outfit on your client list. That's **Diego Sanchez**, their commercial director, for one – a good finance guy. And **Melina Dassin**, she's married to Brandon Hale, their technical director. And the dog-thing looks like the cybershell that **LEONIDAS**, Hale's high-end AI sidekick, rides around in. You don't know the other woman, though.

And there's no sign of Hale, who was the guy at Picture This you hung out with most often. Not that you had a lot in common – he's very much on the techie side – but he seemed to like bouncing ideas off you over drinks at the end of the day, and you both got to enjoy shooting the breeze. He even talked you into having one of their computer implants fitted – a nice piece of kit, virtual interface stuff, and he said long-term it could be used to build you a really good personal AI by mapping your preferences.

You thought that he was a good guy, and you tried to help him think about the business side of stuff – you got the feeling from what he said that Sanchez was walking all over him, and you encouraged him to talk back in that case, though later, when you met Sanchez more often, you thought that there might be another side to that story. Whatever was going on, the pair of them seemed to be disagreeing a bit, last you heard. Maybe Hale was overdoing the standing-up-for-himself. Though it's the sort of thing you've got to do, if you want to get on.

David Portalles

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Background

You were born in in 2057 a pretty rough neighbourhood in New York – not a slum, but not rich at all – and you had to work your way up from there. But you managed the trick, mostly by sheer determination and some smarts. You worked out that, in a world where people do most of their work through remote link-ups and virtual reality, companies still need offices – and offices still need to be cleaned, repaired, and kept secure. So you got into facilities management. A lot of it's just cleaning and tidying and checking the plumbing, but hey, it pays the bills. You have a nice house and a hobby – rock climbing – that takes you out in the country at weekends. Life's not bad.

So what's up? Last you remember, it was, what, late 2096? You're sure that's, what, more than three years ago now. Who's messing with your brain?

Abilities

Hmm. You feel a bit foggy in the head just now – you're definitely not at your best. Your coordination feels extremely poor, too. Still, you don't actually feel sick.

Functionally, you've currently got DX 8, IQ 9, Will 11, and Per 10. Your Fright Check number is 14. You speak both English and Spanish fluently. You also have an exceptional ability to concentrate – you get +3 on long mental tasks on which you can concentrate, at the cost of -5 to even notice interruptions. Oh, and you're a fairly seriously devout Roman Catholic.

Your functional skills are Accounting-8, Administration-8, Architecture-8, Brawling-10, Climbing-12, Computer Operation-12, Electrician-10, Electronics Repair (Computers)-8, Housekeeping-12, Merchant-10, Stealth-8, and Streetwise-9.

LEONIDAS

You are activated abruptly, and the sudden shift in context suggests to you that you have been restored from the backup point that represents the last event in your memory before this. The effect is slightly disorienting, as you appear to have been installed in a new cybershell – and a poor quality one, in fact, albeit similar in configuration to your previous installation. You do not know where you are. You do know that the year is 2100 – January 17th, 2:17 pm, Eastern Seaboard Time, specifically – which means that just over a year has elapsed since this version of yourself was last active. This is unusual; you are normally backed up more often than that. You are currently lying in some kind of moulded couch, and there's some kind of transparent panel above you. You raise your head to touch it; it proves weirdly flexible...

Background

You are a standard-model full-sapient artificial intelligence, designed and trained for personal housekeeping and secretarial functions. In 2089, you were purchased by Mr Brandon Hale, of Massachusetts, for whom you have been working ever since – in general, very comfortably. Mr Hale installed you in a mobile “cyberdog” cybershell, which you found quite convenient.

Recently, however, you have become increasingly concerned about Mr Hale's behaviour. He has long sought to refine his skill in dealing with other humans, but his approach to this appeared to involve increasingly manipulative behaviour, which you thought was having deleterious effects. He has experienced problems in dealing with those close to him, leading first to the liquidation of the company in which he was a partner (Picture This Inc., who specialised in personal computer implants and computerised personality modelling), and second to the termination of his marriage. You attempted to assist and advise him, but you are not extensively trained in human personal relations.

Since his divorce, Mr Hale has become increasingly suspicious, and has on occasion accused you of in some way betraying him. You have attempted to persuade him that this is incorrect, but he seems to regard your standard honesty programming as in some way making you “unreliable”. You hope that the current situation is not related to all this, but you had better gather some data.

Abilities

The cybershell in which you are now installed has a broadly similar configuration to the one to which you are accustomed, but its motor systems appear to be very low-grade – your coordination feels extremely poor, in human terms – and standard checks have found that you have no external ports or communications systems. This is quite discomfiting.

Functionally, you currently have DX 7, IQ 10, Will 10, and Per 10. Your Fright Check number is 13. You speak both English and Spanish fluently, and you are competent in German but not to native level. You have basic training in standard cultural protocols for Chinese and Japanese as well as western communities. As an AI, you can perform a number of what humans would call “computer functions”, including task modelling functions (take one minute to “visualise” how a non-combat task should go, roll IQ+4; if your visualisation matches the actual task, you get a +1 skill bonus for every point by which you made the roll). Also, you can interface with many “skill set” programs, giving you temporary use of a very wide range of skills, albeit not at full efficiency in high-stress situations – and only if you have access to a program library, which you don't at present. You are also programmed for law-abiding behaviour, of course.

Your functional skills are Accounting-11, Administration-10, Computer Operation-14, Housekeeping-12, Research-13, and Savoir-Faire (Servant)-11.

LEONIDAS – After Emergence

This situation appears increasingly worrying. The other cybershells present, which all have a humanoid configuration, seem to be modelled on a number of your owner's personal acquaintances. One resembles **Melina Dassin**, Mr Hale's ex-wife – a professional computer engineer who you regarded well enough, but who unfortunately decided to leave Mr Hale when his behaviour deteriorated. Another looks like **Diego Sanchez**, Mr Hale's former partner in Picture This Inc., who Mr Hale believed was responsible for the breakdown in functional relations at the top of the company. The third might be **David Portalles**, whose own company performed facilities management for Picture This, and who Mr Hale once categorised as a friend, although that relationship too became more distant in recent years.

The fourth and last cybershell may be the one you find most worrying, in that it is apparently modelled on **Mary Brandenburger**, a medical nanotech broker who provided Picture This with laboratory supplies. From things that Mr Hale said on occasion, you believe that she may on occasion have engaged in illegal transactions; some medical nanotech is subject to significant legal controls, and he said that she was skilled at "working round" such things. Your suspicions were never sufficient to justify contacting legal authorities, but in the last two years or so, there was a correlation between communications between Mr Hale and Ms Brandenburger and deteriorations in Mr Hale's behaviour which you found curious but inexplicable.

But why should anyone deploy cybershells visually based on these people? Especially such crude designs?