

Chapter 2: First Steps

When the bell rang the next morning, Rachel's cell door opened itself. She got up and cautiously approached the door. When she opened it, Amell was standing there, arms crossed.

She asked, "What's this about?"

He replied, "You will have more freedom here. You and all the others have free run of the block, with the exception of the exit. If you attempt to leave, you will be punished."

Rachel cocked her head before something hit her back, and she felt indescribable pain. She fell to the ground, gasping for breath.

When the pain subsided, she got to her feet and noticed that Amell was holding what looked like a cattle prod. He twirled it and said, "Not pleasant, is it? That's only the beginning of what will happen if you try to escape. Understood?"

Unable to speak through her rapid breath, Rachel only nodded as Amell's form seemed to go translucent for a moment before the baton was gone.

He said, "I'll show you to the gym."

They walked in silence, Rachel still reeling from his show of dominance. They passed other people as they did, both masked, armed guards, and prisoners. Some of the prisoners glared at Amell, others looked at Rachel with pity.

They soon came to a large, open room with fitness equipment on one side, and a series of blue floormats on the other.

Amell gestured at the nearest mat and said, "Wait there. Your partner will be in shortly."

Rachel did, and he vanished.

For a moment she thought he had left her alone. Then she noticed a camera on the nearest wall, and a pair of guards standing on a balcony overlooking the room. Both

were holding some sort of rifle, and Rachel didn't fancy getting shot so she decided not to act up.

Within minutes she could hear footsteps approaching, and she turned as the last person she expected to see walked in.

"Ayane?" she breathed.

Her former cellmate smiled as she approached the mat, and said, "It's good to see you Rachel."

Rachel took a moment to process this before pulling Ayane into a hug. Her friend chuckled, and waited until she pulled back before nodding at the mat, asking, "Ready?"

Rachel glanced at the mat before looking up at the guards and nodding.

She walked to the mat and got ready as Ayane followed her.

Amell appeared and said, "This is practise, for both of you, in combining your skill with your augmentations. You may begin."

Ayane lunged, and Rachel knew that if not for the procedure, she would have been too fast to track. Yet she could see her, so she sidestepped to avoid her lunge before sweeping at her legs.

Ayane responded by jumping over her sweep and throwing a punch. Rachel moved to avoid it before being hit by another.

Ayane backed up as Rachel rushed forward, throwing a barrage of punches as Ayane tried to avoid them.

Ayane then got in close and threw Rachel over her hip. Rachel rolled over and got to her feet as Amell stepped between them.

“Impressive,” he said. “You both show great promise. It is time for a new challenge, I think. You must strike me. I will not leave this mat, although you may if it aids your efforts.”

Ayane looked at Rachel, who nodded before lunging. Amell was gone, and Rachel could

feel him standing behind her as she stopped herself from colliding with her friend.

Ayane looked at Rachel before lunging. Amell vanished, and Rachel realised what Ayane was thinking. She lunged forward as Amell reappeared before abruptly vanishing and appearing beside the pair.

“Very good,” he said. “But you will have to do better.”

Rachel lunged, and Ayane predicted. Like the last time, they failed. Amell came to a stop and said, “Good. You have the only real plan one can employ to defeat someone such as myself. Unfortunately, neither of you are fast enough, nor are you strong enough to defeat me.”

Rachel’s anger flared at hearing that, and for a moment this anger awakened her hope of escape as she said, “If we were, you’d be dead and we’d be at home.”

“I’m sure you would, my dear,” he said. “You’re finished for today. You may shower

and go to the mess hall. Ayane, I trust you can show Rachel where to go.”

He vanished as Ayane looked at Rachel and said, “Come on.”

Rachel nodded, and followed her friend from the room.

As they walked towards the showers, Rachel asked, “How’ve you been? Other than kidnapped, I mean.”

Ayane chuckled and replied, “Okay. Amell’s a dick. He softened up a bit on the day of my procedure but ever since he’s always been laying down the law and showing who’s boss. Despite it, he never seems to enjoy it. I think he wants us to hate him.”

Rachel raised an eyebrow and asked, “What would he gain from that?”

Ayane shrugged before asking, “What does he gain from having us here?”

Rachel replied, "I don't know, but he stands to lose a lot. One day he won't be able to control us, and we'll stop us."

Ayane said, "He's almost unstoppable. We couldn't even land a hit on him."

Rachel shot back, "We'll find a way to get out."