

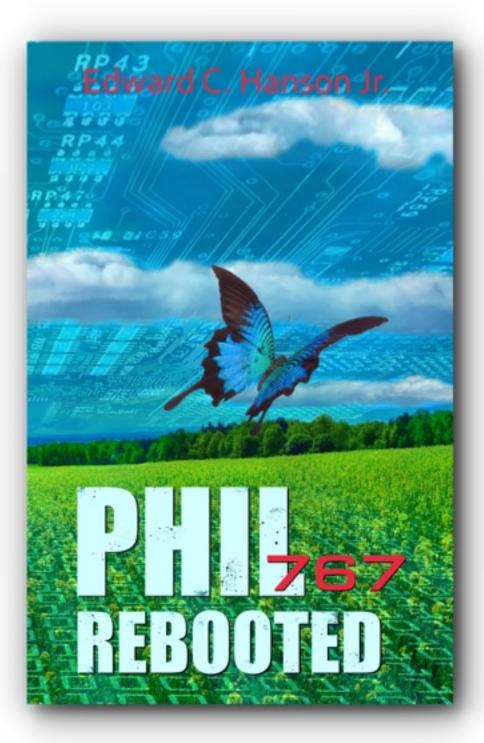
In 2243, two are lost in a struggle to secure a firm grasp of reality - Missy Jen And Phil767. She is a fugitive from authorities, compelled to rescue the man that was once her trusted companion. He is threatened by the physical and mental separation created by the controlling oppressor and loses his sense of self when he is rebooted.

PHIL767: Rebooted By Edward C. Hanson Jr.

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CHAPTER ONE: LORQUINIANUS FIELDS

On April 16, 2243, Dylan's tantrum was interrupted by a knock at the door of room 143. *Was it the new Nurse, Jndo568?* he pondered, looking to the door in anticipation.

Why even knock? he thought. You see everything I do in here anyway. He just stood there, looking, not knowing why no one had entered.

"Come in?" he said, questioning the new formality of the moment. Now irritated, he started walking over to the door, confused and defiant. This was an intrusion of his emotional breakdown. He can't simply resume acting out mental distress. It has to be built up and released. Who would do such a thing?

Outside the door, in the hall, was Jndo568. Someone tapped her on the shoulder, just after she'd knocked.

"Excuse me, Jndo568. I need to speak with you please?" It was Nurse Glri834. She was known as nurse Gloria by the patients. She was well-dressed in professional clothes and holding a clipboard and some papers. "We've made some changes in your schedule for today." She took Jndo568 gently by the elbow and led her away from the door. "You'll need to go up to the second floor. Start with room 221 then continue from there."

"But I need to do this room," Jndo568 said assertively. When she saw the expression on her supervisor's face, she tried to soften her response. "I mean, I thought I was scheduled to do this room." "Room 221," Nurse Glri834 said. She stepped in closer, positioning herself between Jndo568 and the door to room 143. She removed a paper from her clipboard and handed it to Jndo568. "Here's your amended work detail. We switched some patients around. You can resume your regular schedule tomorrow."

"Okay, I'll just quickly finish this room up; that would make it easier to keep track of where I left off."

"That's quite all right, my dear," Glri834 said sharply. "We know where you left off. Move on to room 221, thank you."

"Um, right." Jndo568 backed off and headed toward the elevator. Her cart followed.

Nurse Glri834 pushed open the door slowly. "Well, hello there, Dylan," she said, then glanced back at Jndo568, who was still watching, trying to see Dylan. Glri834 stepped into the room, shutting the door behind her. Jndo568 rushed back to the door. She peered in through the door's small rectangular window.

Peeking in the window, she saw Dylan face. "Hello, nurse Gloria," he responded glumly. Dylan caught a glimpse of Jndo568 from behind Nurse Glri834.

Noticing Dylan's interest in something behind her, Nurse Gloria snapped her head around but didn't see anyone. Jndo568 had quickly pulled her head away from the window. She rushed down the hall to resume her altered work detail.

"Good news, Dylan," Nurse Gloria continued.

"I know, solid food, big deal."

"Oh no. More than that. We're going to prep you for your Reboot today," Nurse Gloria said with an upbeat tone.

"What?"

"Yes, you're doing very well and your progress has been reevaluated. You're going to be leaving us."

"But I—"

"Oh! I know, Dylan; we're all going to miss you too."

"Yeah, but..." He couldn't help but feel confused. He had just moments ago thrown a fit like a spoiled child and now he was leaving. How was that progress? He was an emotional mess. He'd seriously considered that he was not only unstable but actually going insane. *Maybe that's why they're going to do the Reboot,* he thought. *It's a process. I'm improving.* His mood slowly began to shift.

"I'm gonna be leaving?" Dylan said, in disbelief.

"You sure are, Dylan. Let's get your room back in order and then I'll take you down to the Meta Room. Then we'll prepare you for the Reboot."

CHAPTER TWO: PULLING STRINGS

Earlier that day Holo337 had called Chin911, the head of the corrections division at Lorquinianus Fields Mental Rehabilitation Center and friend of Holo337.

"Hey, Chin911, who's the head of admissions over there?"

"So, you want another favor?" Chin911 responded with disgust.

"What makes you say that?

Well, you didn't call me fathead, you're not giving me orders, and you called me on my private line."

"Well, other than that. This line is private right?"

"Yes. What is it? Why do you need to talk to Shen837?"

"It's about that Phil767 project. He's getting out."

"We just got him in not that long ago. He isn't even ready?"

"Oh, he's ready."

"He got the upgrade. But the procedure was quite extensive with that upgrade you wanted, and the optical implant. I'm not so sure that he's mentally ready to—"

Holo337 interrupted. "What about the auditory device? Was that also installed?"

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"Yes, yes, it's all done, and so is this conversation; it's too soon; he's not ready to leave. There's a healing process. He's being erased, then, Rebooted.

Right now, he probably doesn't know who he's or what to believe. I'm not the expert, but I know more about it than you. We've never let anyone go this soon after admission. Especially when it's a procedure of the level of mental cleansing."

"Okay, listen, fathead. I'll decide when he's ready."

"Now I know it's you," Chin911 said, disgusted.

"This new chip will take care of the rest of his mental healing. He'll be fine."

"It's experimental. You don't know that. We don't know that. Typically, they're here at least a month to be newly identified. It's a complex process of mental rehabilitation."

"You don't know this programming like I do. I want you to Reboot and release him. Today!"

"Where would he even go?"

"I have that all taken care of. Let me speak with Shen837."

"You don't need my permission. Call her yourself. Let her shut you down."

"I need you to back me up on this," Holo337 asserted.

"I'm not going to do it... He's not ready."

"Since when do you give a shit? Are you getting soft? You're not showing me the characteristics I'd be looking for in the CEO of this place." "Ha, you can't promote me. You think you're so powerful. It's laughable. You're a fool."

"I'm tight with Caedo the Great; you know that. He gave me the authority to oversee this patient. Remember, fathead?"

"You love throwing names around don't you, AssHolo?"

"Under the advisement of Holo337,' I believe that's how it's worded."

"You don't run this place."

"Not yet, fathead..." Holo337 paused. "Give Shen837 a call and let her know how you feel about the release of Phil767. You can mention that the power of advisement and administrative authority has been granted to Holo337 by the Great Caedo himself."

"You think you can just push me around?"

"You're too big to push around. I'll just contact Shen837 myself and let her know how much I appreciated your cooperation in this process."

"Wait..." There was a moment of silence. "I'll call her in an hour. He'll be ready in the morning.

"Fathead, I see the makings of a fine executive in you."

Chin911 responded by ending the call.

CHAPTER THREE: THE COCOON

Nurse Glri834 pushed Dylan, in his wheel chair, through the doors of The Meta Room. "Here he is, ladies. This lucky guy is all yours."

"Hi, Dylan," the younger assistant said. "We've been expecting you. Can you walk over to the changing room and remove your clothes please. You can cover with this robe until you get in the Metapod."

"Okay, see you later, Dylan," Nurse Glri834 said, leaving the room.

Dylan came out of the changing room wearing the robe.

"Climb up in here and I'll remove your robe just before I shut the lid."

Dylan stepped up into the Metapod and lay down.

"How are you, Dylan? Comfortable?" the assistant asked once Dylan was settled in the Metapod.

"I'm a little scared," Dylan said.

"We'll give you something to help you relax." The assistant gave him an injection in the arm.

The assistant leaned over and said, "Try to relax, Dylan. When you wake up, the world will be a different, wonderful place."

Dylan reached out, grabbed her hand, and held on. "Will I remember anything?" he asked.

The attending assistant looked at the operator performing the Reboot. The operator shook her head discreetly.

The assistant placed her other hand over his. "Only the good things. You'll only remember the good things, Dylan."

"Like what, this place? Like you? What's your name?"

"Everything will be fine, Dylan."

"Will that be my name? Will I still be me?"

"It's time, Dylan."

She let go of his hand and placed it gently on the reformatting bed. She slid off his robe. The bed automatically fitted to the exact shape of Dylan's body.

Another formfitting cover was lowered down over him, adapting to every contour of his body. He was encapsulated in the bed to undergo the Reboot.

Dylan's eyes darted around anxiously as the inhalator engaged his mouth. He was drifting off, when he recalled a conversation he'd once had with his mother.

She had said, "Always remember, Dylan, your mind is your own. No one can take that away from you."

The lid sealed tightly. Gradually, the fear faded from Dylan's eyes. Slowly, his eyes closed. The cocoon like Animamutatis sealed Dylan like a mother's womb. Now he was oblivious to any stimulus beyond the airtight walls of the device. It felt like falling asleep, but something was happening. His head felt like it was spinning with ideas and images, induced by the machine. *Always remember, Dylan, your mind is your own* was Dylan's last remembered thought. Everything else was new, added, and solidified by the Animamutatis.

The operator monitored the startup of the Reboot program. "It's working fine. He'll become someone within the hour."

"Or something else," the assistant said. She looked concerned. "What was wrong with who he was?"

The operator ignored her question. "Notify Shen837 when the procedure is complete. Let her know that he'll be ready to leave in the morning."

Will he be okay?"

"Tell her that I would highly recommend that we keep him in a holding room and monitor him for at least twelve hours. We don't want to be responsible for a total mental breakdown."

"What could happen?"

"Any number of things could happen. He could go insane or not know who he is. He might not even recognize himself in the mirror."

"He seems like a nice guy."

"I don't know what he did, but between you and me, he wasn't ready for a Reboot. He's only been here 11 days," the operator said. "I'll make a note on here. She was typing on the computer. "Since he's leaving that soon, the transporter will have to reorient him when he reaches his destination. Otherwise, he'll be confused. He won't know where or who he is." She finished up a report and handed a copy, in the form of an electronic tag, to the assistant. "Put this on his wrist when he's complete."

"How long will it take."

"Oh, about another forty-five minutes. Just wait for the program to finalize. The Animamutatis will open automatically." She looked briefly at the monitor. "Then help him out, get him

dressed. A nurse will be down to take him to a holding room to be observed until he leaves in the morning."



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