

The instructor wasn't happy with how the trainee was standing. "You're too bladed, 'Grey'. You need to square yourself to the target."

The Latrans Chimera placed his hand on Seven's shoulder and forced it forwards to that his upper body was facing forwards and not at a forty five degree angle to his target.

"You also need to have your legs closer together, about shoulder width apart. You need to be mobile, so that you can get behind cover or concealment. Mobility is a lifesaver on the battlefield."

The young Vulpes Chimera nervously apologized. "S-sorry 'Red'"

He wasn't used to abandoned warehouses in derelict industrial areas. Much less homemade firing ranges made by "Die Oper", The Opera, which was one of the more prominent armed resistance groups fighting the Architects who had created their species. The interrogation he had been subjected to earlier to make sure he wasn't an enemy agent hadn't helped. Nor had the 'guarantees' that he had been offered before the interrogation. And he was sure there were other Chimeras here. He felt like he was being watched from the shadows, but he couldn't hear or smell anyone other than himself and the instructor he had been told to meet a few blocks from here.

Seven tried to make light of the situation. "I guess all the years in the Silver Flower cult-"

The older Chimera cut him off mid-sentence. "Loose lips sink ships. Never tell anyone, even a fellow volunteer, more than they need to know. Now, back to training."

The young closed his eyes and relaxed his muscles. When his eyes opened, he raided the illegally printed firearm and squeezed the trigger. The round splattered on the human silhouette target, next to where the heart was.

"What are you waiting for? Keep firing!"

Seven's ears flattened and his tail flicked behind him. He raised the gun and fired until the magazine was empty. He even removed the empty magazine from the gun, and had his finger off of the trigger and outside of the trigger guard. When he was given a couple of fresh magazines, he patiently waited for instructions before doing anything. Eventually 'Red' told him to load. After he had loaded, a light illuminated a target off to the side of the range. The Vulpes quickly aimed and fired at the target. His shots were not in a tight group like before, but they would have killed the target had it been a real threat. A second target was light up on another area of the range. He took that one out as well. A third target appeared, and he aimed again – but didn't fire. The target was of a woman with a baby. He lowered his gun and scanned the range.

'Red' was impressed. Vulpes Chimeras didn't normally have the natural 'knack' for this sort of thing that Latrans and Marder Chimeras did. The kid's sub-species may have been designed for pleasure and entertainment, and he may have been trained by the Cult of the Silver Flower to be an entertainer, but he

had some real potential. A little skittish at times, but that was something they would work on at the training camp they had planned. Assuming that he passed the 'screening test'.

'Red' smirked and nodded. "I think you have potential, 'Grey'. Place the handgun down on the bench, and follow me".

Seven hesitated. "Leave the gun here?"

'Red' smiled. His long, pearl white sabre canine teeth glimmered in the light. "Don't worry kid; it will be secured by others."

Seven placed the gun down and nervously followed the instructor. 'I was right. There are others here' he thought as he was led towards a structure that was hidden among old crates and pallets. It looked like it was made out of wooden crates and a few shipping containers. He was led inside by the Latrans instructor into a very rustic lecture room. There were no desks, and a couple of seats. An interactive white board was on one of the walls, next to a pulpit. There was a second door opposite the one they came in through, and a long, low door below the white board. The instructor gave him a mask and gestured for him to sit down in front of the white board.

*'Strange... why bother with a mask if it doesn't filter out scents?' thought Seven as he put it on and sat down. 'It can't be to stop me recognising the others. I can still do that by scent if I wanted to. Perhaps it's psychological? It does seem intimidating.'* Seven looked around the room a few times. Nothing seemed to be amiss. As he sat waiting for the others to make their appearance, he couldn't help but wonder *'Why am I unnerved by the idea of others wearing masks? I wonder what percentage of the Chimera genome is... Human?'*

He didn't get a chance to think about the issue. He was soon joined by six other Chimeras in the small room. Seven assumed that two of the masked Chimeras were instructors as they had their own weapons. One had a submachine gun that was modelled on an ancient Sterling gun, a type of weapon he had used as a re-enactor back when he was an adept. It brought back happy memories for him looking at the weapon, and he stared for a while, which seemed to annoy the weapons owner. He averted his eyes when the large, stocky Chimera frowned and glared at him.

Four of the Chimeras had no weapons and sat down in front of the white board with Seven. Some glanced around, one stared straight at the board, but no one said anything. After what seemed like an eternity, the door at the far end of the room opened and a tall Latrans woman in a military inspired outfit walked in and stood behind the pulpit.

The woman had a husky voice that Seven found alluring. "I am a representative of the General Headquarter Staff of Die Oper, the Opera. I am a conductor, the commander of the local cell. I would like to congratulate you, Silver, Orange, Blue, Gold, and Grey, on having successfully passed the first test. Die Oper, The Opera, has selected you as candidates for an arduous and dangerous task, to fight the Architects, to avenge our fellow Chimeras, and to fight for the restoration of the legal rights that have been stripped away from our people over the last eight decades. As you will have been told before, we will try to provide for you and your families, but we can offer no guarantees in this regard. The only guarantee I can offer, is an early grave, or a lengthy stay in prison."

A chill went down Seven's spine at the thought of prison. He had heard many tales about what happens in the places that Chimeras go to do 'hard time' in.

“Despite these guarantees, and despite the dangers you know you will face, you all rose to the challenge and have joined the cause. Now I would like to give you a lecture on and secrecy...”

The lecture was short, but interesting and informative. The conductor explained the importance of secrecy, how secrecy was used by the movement, and the many ‘rules of secrecy’ that Die Oper had learned through bitter experience.

The conductor concluded the lecture. “You will receive further training in the future. Your instructors, or concertmasters, will give you details when necessary. For now, be content that you have succeeded where many others have failed. Go back to your every-day lives and lay low for a while. Don’t engage in any kind of resistance activities until we say otherwise. You are dismissed.”

The tall Latrans woman left the room through the same door she had entered. Seven and the other recruits waited for a moment before one of the instructors spoke.

“You all have to go now. We can’t stay in one place for too long for security reasons. Go back to your normal lives. And use different routes to the ones you used to get here. Remove your masks somewhere quiet when you are alone.”

The recruits got up and left without saying a word. Seven went back towards the makeshift firing range, but left through a side door he had noticed when he arrived, rather than going back to the range. He walked through the abandoned industrial area, and stopped to listen and sniff the air from time to time to make sure he wasn’t being followed. When he was satisfied that he was truly alone he removed the mask he had been given, and threw it into a rusted metal drum that was half filled with some kind of liquid. Once he was outside the industrial area, he went through the nearby town that once housed the workers who worked in the now dilapidated factories and warehouses. After a long and tiring walk, he finally came to civilization. Although Seven was glad to be in an area with lights once more, he hadn’t missed the stench of the car exhausts, or the Architects themselves.

On his way back to the Chimera colony where he was made he was stopped twice by private security officers for a ‘random’ ID check. Seven was terrified that they knew about where he had been, and what he had been up to. But he walked away from the ID checks with only some minor bruises. *‘Perhaps they are trying to scare me?’* he thought as he made his way back to his tiny apartment. While one of the officers had been a little rough, one seemed very friendly and approachable. During the evening Seven found doubts entering his mind.

*‘Did I make the right decision?’* he wondered.

*‘Are all Architects bad?’*