

LIFE//HACK
By Travis Olson

Connor Nix
Corridor 6, Lead Junior Executive
A Subsidiary of The Weyland Consortium

The elevator opened but Connor didn't make a move to leave. He was distracted by the throbbing in his eye. There was no pain, just a soft tissue tremor that wanted to signify to him where the new security cybernetics had been implanted.

He was slightly unnerved that there had been another successful Hack of his wrist security implant but more embarrassed when the hack had been routed and the fallout was the "Human-Gif" of his hand clenching a fist and extending his middle finger until the implant could be removed. He was certain that the other Junior Executives would reprogram their data-cursors from pointer-fingers to middles.

That was a concern for tomorrow, he thought as he finally stepped out of the elevator and walked the concrete carpet to his apartment door. As he looked at his door, he instinctively raised his arm to scan the wrist. He lowered his hand as he saw the new Cyber-EyE lock on his door and remembered he was the lead executive. He got to live on this floor in this building with this door and this lock. He was somebody and if all his co-workers, strike that, underlings. If all they had was middle finger cursors, then he should let them have that.

I'm benevolent that way, he thought as he leaned inward. The door opened with a beep.

Bobby Starks
Corridor 6, Junior Executive
A Subsidiary of The Weyland Consortium

Bobby stared blankly at the ground. He originally was wondering about the self-folding origami pattern of his kitchen bar floor but now his mind was trying to race against the judgement of the incoming guests. What had he forgotten to hide? What was going to get a question he couldn't answer? Why did he decide to host this party?

The door-tune began playing. “That was it!” Bobby smiled as he walked to the door and snapped his fingers. The holographic display screen lit up and he changed the setting from Bird Chirps to Gong 120bpm. “Squashed it!”

The speedy Gong played again to Bobby’s confusion, he nodded to the screen and it disappeared. As he turned from the door, he spun back around as he put 1 and 0 to binary. “Open.”

Bobby liked this guy. Kend’rik enveloped the room before entering. His hands were gripping the top of the doorframe with his elbows bracing the sides, his head cocked to one side and his clear blue eyes clearly insulting Bobby for his delay in answering. Bobby liked this guy.

“You ready? Should I come back in a couple?” Kend’rik hadn’t moved.

“Tap, Tappy, Tappity, Tap, Tap? I’m sorry, is that how you say “Hello” in Runner?” Bobby wanted this guy to like him. “I’ve never seen a, um, KEE-BORD?”

Kend’rik shook his head as he tried to stifle a laugh but ended up chuckling from his nose. “Where you upstals learn to civilize?”

Bobby stepped to the side as Kend’rik entered. Bobby didn’t notice this from their screen communications but Kend’rik was big. Bobby always took pride in his strict svelte conditioning but Kend’rik had an easy sixty pounds of muscle as well as eight inches over him. He smiled to himself thinking about what Ruth was going to say when she saw Kend’rik.

Kend’rik had been scanning the apartment and came to the kitchen bar tiles. “Hey Bobby?”

“Yeah?” Bobby smiled.

“Do you mind if I alter your Self-Folds?”

“What?” Bobby frowned.

Kend’rik pointed to the tiles, he had an innocent concern upon his face. “You don’t want your friends to see them. It’s cool, if you like’em, no judgement from me either. You’re my client and I’m here to host your party and make sure you impress. Do you mind if I make you impressive?”

“I trust you, Kend’rik...” Bobby was crestfallen, he did want to impress and thought that those retro-folds would do the trick. “Say? What’s wrong with...?”

Kend’rik wouldn’t even let Bobby finish. “Come on, Bobby! If you have to Search, you’ll never know.”

Bobby knew in that moment that Kend’rik was going to make this the greatest party ever.

The Gongs sounded, Kend’rik smiled from behind the bar at Bobby’s choice of tune. Confident, Bobby went to the door and opened it. Ruth, hands in pocket and unimpressed, stood behind nervous smiling Gene who brought along a canister of Tru-Air. Bobby knew he wasn’t going to have to compete with these two, it was the late running Steven that was the real threat.

“Is he here?” Gene whisper asked as Ruth rolled her eyes and walked passed him and into the apartment. Bobby nodded yes to Gene as he entered. Bobby stepped out and looked down the hallway expecting to see Steven but to no avail, he closed the door.

Upon reentering the apartment, Bobby saw the expression on the Five-foot Ruth as she stood frozen in place finally catching sight of Kend’rik; Gene clutched his Tru-Air closer to his chest. Ruth looked to Bobby, her hand at her side pointed to Kend’rik mouthing the word “Runner” questioningly.

“Are you a Runner?” Gene blurted unexpectedly from behind Ruth.

Kend’rik rose up to full size and stared menacingly at Gene. “You NAPD!” Gene shrunk instantly but Kend’rik did also. “Sorry man, that was a joke... Bobby?”

Bobby stepped over to Gene and smiled reassuringly as he reached politely for the Tru-Air. “Let’s open this and let it breathe.”

As they stepped away, Ruth spoke under her breath. “We need him at the office.”

“Bobby, we still waiting for one more?” Kend’rik asked as he pulled a crystal ball from within his trench coat. Bobby nodded his response. Kend’rik went back to waiting to activate the ball and his eyes fell on Ruth who was still looking him up.

“You get this big from Street Food?” She asked.

“I got this big from...” Repetitive cymbals interrupted Kend’rik’s slang as Bobby walked to the door and opened it. Bobby stopped any follow up jargon from Ruth with his guffaws.

Steven stood in the doorway dressed in a flowy white tunic, brown synthetic leather chaps and a black eyepatch. He looked into the apartment with an emerging hostility as the others began to join in the laughter. Steven stomped into the apartment. “Is this some kind of Error Code!”

“What are you wearing?” Ruth’s version of laughter was sardonic questions.

“My invitation said this was jacked-out fantasy dress...” Steven’s self-doubt presented itself in his eyes. “...I knew that wasn’t a thing.”

“I can answer that...” Kend’rik stepped forward.

“You’d better...” Steven’s voice got nicer as he saw Kend’rik.

Kend’rik rolled with it. “Bobby, can I start?”

Bobby looked at Kend’rik with pride. Can I start indeed? This Runner was showing everyone that Bobby was the Alpha. He was certain that Kend’rik was like him, an Executive. The only difference was that Kend’rik was born in some backwater Root district, Bobby felt sorry for this one tragic flaw because he was already toying with the idea of checking his CV. “Tappity Tap.”

Kend’rik winked to Bobby while Ruth rolled her eyes; Gene smiled and Steven flipped his eyepatch up. Kend’rik held the crystal ball in both hands and slowly pushed it outward to his audience. “There is one law in this world. It is an old law, it was at the beginning, it created everything, those that didn’t, couldn’t learn, they are forgotten unless one of the law followers deemed them to be remembered. This law, allowed a single cell organism to transform a barren planet into the World we live in today...”

“Evolution!” Gene squeaked out excitedly.

“Evolution isn’t a law, it’s a process...” Steven began

“You two are both a process.” Ruth added to the interruption.

Bobby shook his head but Kend’rik smiled knowing that the hooks were in place. “Observe and Adapt.”

“That’s it?” Gene seemed disappointed.

“Well I had a speech prepared...” Kend’rik delivered gently as Gene’s cheeks reddened slightly. “Lady and Gentlemen, I am Kend’rik, the All-Seeing and this evening we shall utilize the mastery of our Human Intellect, the millions of years of adapting to become the top of the food chain, the travelers of the stars, the manipulators of bioengineering, the bringers of synthetic life, we shall take all that our mental facilities can capacitate and...”

The Crystal Ball illuminated and began to float away from Kend’rik’s hands. The room faded into white light and it became apparent that this was now a viewing screen for the Ball’s projection of a closed door. The door opened revealing the perfect Three-Dimensional holographic figure of Connor Nix entering. “...Embarrass the hell out of your boss.”

“No, no, no, no, no...” Gene began repeating under his breath.

“Bobby, you said we were just gambling tonight... Your comm said you had a Runner that was going to let us bet on Nihongai District Prisec Street Races...” Ruth’s fists were clenched but still at her side, a good sign Bobby thought.

“Mine said, we were going to watch vintage Bioroid mating test footage with real time coding,” Gene volunteered unabashed.

“This is a Life//Hack of our boss!” Ruth picked back up. “We are a subsidiary of Weyland! What is your malfunction?”

Bobby was prepared for this excitement, but Steven was always going to be the wildcard and right now he was calm. Ruth noticed this too. “Tell him, Steven!”

Steven looked from Ruth to Kend’rik and then to Bobby. “I’m in.”

“What!” Gene and Ruth’s surprise were in unison to his response.

“I think I’m reading this right... All of our communications were engineered to guarantee that we would show up as well as to be our alibis, I’m guessing my costume add-on was a prank... Now, Kend’rik isn’t the Runner, right? He’s the MC and his neck is on the line cause he knows we’re a subsidiary of Weyland too, and since they’re already plugged in to his home security feed we are all accessories just by being in this room.

We're all sharing a cell if the NAPD show up... or a coffin if Weyland ever found out..." Steven laid it all out methodically. "This is Bobby's show now... I'm in."

The night could have ended for Bobby right here. All eyes on him. Waiting for his go ahead. "Mr. Kend'rik... Run program."

"Copy that." Kend'rik snapped his fingers and the Connor Nix image came back to life and entered the holographic apartment. "This is the situation, we have taken control of the security system of Connor Nix's apartment. We have visuals of every room and since he has the echo-visualization upgrade, we have every nook and cranny that can be translated by my associates to our holo-screen. Now, we are on a Relay-Delay fixed signal, we will be able to pause the feed but not rewind. We are not here to fixate, fixation will get you caught. We are here to commiserate. And the best way to commiserate is to poke fun at someone else's lifestyle without them knowing..."

A double flash of blue light appeared on Connor Nix's hand as it moved upward, the feed paused. Kend'rik continued. "...Perfect timing, now periodically those flashes are signals from my associates that we have an opportunity to place bets on the unsuspecting Mr. Nix. Now, this one is just for fun, the question is... Where is Connor's finger going to go?"

The room was shy.

Kend'rik chose his guinea pig. "Come on, Gene. Where is your boss going to put his finger?"

"Um, I mean..." Gene's face flushed red. "I think he's going to touch his temple."

Kend'rik's face went slack as he looked to Ruth to save the bet. Ruth stepped up. "Nose. I know that man and it is going up his nose."

"Such confidence from my girl... Pirate Guy?"

"Steven." Steven asserted.

"That's what I said."

Steven frowned slightly. "I'm going nose."

"Bobby, you chiming in on this one?"

“Ear... There’s only so many holes up there...”

Kend’rik smirked. “That is some gross side commentary but here we go...”

Connor Nix began moving again. His hand moved upward and his index finger became the only outward facing finger. It neared his face and came to a stop next to his eye, his temple. Kend’rik cocked his head slightly in surprise as he joined the others looking over to a beaming Gene.

Feeling uncomfortable, Gene gave his insight. “He was scheduled for a new security implant, I assumed it was an eye jack...”

“Watch that guy.” Kend’rik pointed reassuring finger guns at Gene. Gene liked them. “Any side bets you guys want to make as we follow Mr. Nix during his turn downs, call them out. Or if you’re just as comfortable judging his homestyle, call it out... Like, yeah, there it is. He’s got those played out Self Folds in his kitchen, I mean are those just standard for all you suited Executives? Bobby? What you got?”

Bobby actually had to look before he could answer. “I got... yeah, I got grass.”

“Yeah, you better rip on this guy, if only just for that paper creasing...” Kend’rik kept his eyes inside the footage purposely ignoring the awkward look-aways that Bobby was purposefully watching; he did take note that Kend’rik was a step ahead of him, probably them all. “What you got, Gene?”

“Um, yeah, I got the Chibi-Gami Self Folds...” Gene answered honestly. “...They fold into dancing animals. They’re also part of the cleaning system so when I drop food, they swarm to it and pretend to eat it. I like it...”

“Hey Gene, we’re here to embarrass Connor.” Ruth politely interrupted.

“What do you have then, Ruth?” Steven spoke up to catch her.

Ruth raised her eyebrows in annoyance at Steven. “Oh, I have the Origami Self Folds like Connor. I just don’t pretend it’s anything more.”

Kend’rik looked over to Bobby. “Damn Bobby, your friends...” Bobby smiled back, he crossed his arms before his chest feeling content at putting this night together.

Double flash: How many items of clothing does Connor wear in his apartment when he's alone?

"He's a nudist." Hoped Gene.

"Half naked." Steven priced right.

"Which half?" Kend'rik tried to keep it fair.

"Top." Steven chose.

"Well, I'll take the bottom just in case." Bobby joked.

"Is that the over/under?" Ruth swooped in to make the joke before Gene could. "He's gonna loosen his tie cause he thinks it looks cool, even when no one is around. Fricken Poser."

Ruth won.

Double flash: Where is Connor's Finger going to go this time?

"We're doing this one again?" Steven asked.

"Temple." Gene's eyes were resolved.

"I'll stick with Ear." Bobby chewed on his inner cheek.

"I know this man. It is going in his nose." Ruth eyed Connor daringly.

"I'm going to ride with Gene this time." Steven decided fruitlessly.

Ruth won.

"Oh my... I was not expecting that." Ruth spoke up. Connor was in his bathroom. He had been standing before his mirror steadfastly discussing with his mirror the right Zoom In ratio to verify if he was going to get surgery acne from the procedure.

"What? What is it?" Bobby asked as Ruth began giggling wildly to herself.

"Steven?" Gene asked stepping closer to get a better view.

"I don't see anything either." Steven confirmed.

"Yeah, you wouldn't..." Ruth wiped a tear from her eye. "You see it? By the toilet."

The three men stepped closer but couldn't figure it out. Kend'rik stood in the background giving a wink to Ruth in understanding.

"I give up, I don't see it." Steven turned to face Ruth.

"His toilet has a Nozzler upgrade!" Ruth chuckled to herself some more.

"What's a Nozzler..." Steven began innocently.

Ruth's chuckle turned to frustration. "You men have no idea what a Nozzler is, of course you don't know what a Noz..." Ruth took a breath to remember who she was dealing with. "A Nozzler is a hygienic device that helps a woman with the sanitary replacement and dignity rejuvenation during the menstrual cycle."

Steven looked to Bobby, Bobby looked to Gene, Gene looked to Ruth, Ruth looked to the ceiling. Gene, unfortunately felt compelled to confess. "I didn't know it was called a Nozzler... I thought it was just part of the toilet."

Ruth lowered her gaze to Gene as Steven began to giggle wildly. Bobby side glanced to Kend'rik for confirmation, Kend'rik gave Bobby a thumbs up and a nod to confirm that he had hid his.

Double flash: Does Connor use a Nozzler?

"We'll skip this one." Kend'rik called out.

"Why?" Ruth piped up.

"Obviously cause you already called it." Steven canaried.

"I just saw that he had one, I don't know he uses it... Or how he uses it." Ruth smiled like the cat.

"I'm going to step out for this one, Gene is too." Bobby grabbed Gene before he could offer more expertise in the matter.

"What do you say Steven?"

Ruth won.

“Hey Kend’rik? What’s that?” Ruth had stepped away from the men to get hydrated when she had discovered a patch of black in the hologram. Kend’rik glanced over to Ruth’s position and was beside her in an instant. His eyes were searching around the void as Ruth sipped loudly from her flute vacantly staring.

“Something with the feed?” She asked as she looked to him. She felt like she was back at work as he ignored her question and continued processing the blot. She walked back over to where Steven and Bobby were seated, they were watching Gene as he had pulled out his digital tape measure and was measuring the height of freeze-framed Connor.

“Yep. The scale is accurate even with the Echo-Fill. I might have to subscribe to his security package.” Gene concluded.

“You’re talking about the security package that we are watching right now?” Ruth pointed out.

“Yeah.”

“Okay.” Ruth was done with Gene now. She turned to Bobby. “Bobby, your Runner looks worried about that black patch over...”

Ruth’s words trailed off as the footage began playing. Connor seemed to hear something and was turning to look to the sound as the black patch became a black silhouette that swiftly approached and then pierced Connor’s chest with a pointed object. As it removed the obstructed object, the holographic blood spewed across Gene’s person. Steven stood up in shock as Bobby remained seated sharing the same sensation.

“Pause. Pause!” Kend’rik was screaming to the room but the silhouette stood over the gasping for life Connor as he had collapsed to his knees.

“Kend’rik? What? What is happening?” Steven called out hypnotized as the silhouette raised his foot and pushed Connor to fall onto his back. Kend’rik didn’t answer. He had activated his eye-screen and gave the impression he was having a stroke with the multiple micromovements his head was making as he worked through several files and programs.

The initial shock had worn off and Bobby was back to voyeuristic intrigue as he lunged from his chair to kneel beside a traumatized Gene and a digitized Connor. “Bobby?” Ruth called out at his sudden behavior.

Bobby was inches from the silhouette as it’s apparent dark blob of a hand covered Connor’s face.

“I think it’s going for his new implant.” Bobby called out. “Kend’rik, why would it go for...” Bobby looked to Kend’rik and saw the giant of a man who entered, huddled into himself seated on a chair. His eye-screen was still active but he was staring beyond it now. “Kend’rik?”

The silhouette removed the blob from Connor’s face and the eyes had been removed. Gene’s hands raised to his mouth as though they were going to hold back what was coming, his feet began moving without his knowledge and he lurched toward the hall which finally prompted Kend’rik. “No! Gene! No!”

Gene stopped and turned back in confusion that turned to fear as he saw Kend’rik on his feet demanding the room’s attention once more. The torment of physical exertion of his lips and the mental anguish of the indecision of movement proved to be too much for Gene and Ruth bore the reward down the front of her shoulder. Her eyelids seemed to flutter and she gave one dry heave in response.

“Sorry.” Gene’s breath circumnavigated her face until it blew strands of her hair back.

Ruth was as gracious as she could be. “The apology made it so, so much worse.”

“What is happening!” Steven erupted, actually stepping toward Kend’rik while Bobby stayed at Connor’s side.

“No one leaves the room. No one tries to do anything... We are witnessing a Corporate Assassination.” Kend’rik spoke plainly but there was something else going on.

Bobby could sense it. Kend’rik always presented himself as all-knowing, in control, there was no confidence now. “What do we do?”

“There’s nothing to do. This has already happened.”

“What about the fact that we’re still watching a Corporate Assassination take place?” Steven blurted and pointed to the silhouette.

Gene looked to Connor. “Oh, it’s done.”

“No, Gene. It’s not done. There’s still Five witnesses here that need to be dealt with. Right, Kend’rik?” Steven’s hands whirled about for emphasis. “What are your Runner’s telling you to do?”

Bobby looked to Kend’rik for signs of betrayal but looked away for feeling so weak. Bobby liked Kend’rik and knew that Kend’rik was good people. Bobby hated Steven, he knew more now than ever that he hated Steven. “Shut up, Steven!”

“You just killed us, Bobby.” Steven discarded Bobby with the statement and he felt it. Bobby looked to Gene who was crestfallen and Ruth who was side eyeing her new stain. “So what are they telling you to do?”

Kend’rik stepped toward Steven. “They’re not telling me anything.”

“Wait.” Gene called out and pointed. The Silhouette had stepped toward the door but stopped. It was looking at something. A very pregnant pause and then both of the silhouette’s blob hands began to work in unison. The orb’s projection shrunk in on itself and Bobby’s apartment came back.

“What was that?” Ruth’s attention was back to the room.

Bobby looked at Kend’rik as it came to him. “Did they find your Runners?”

“They’re not talking to me.” Kend’rik looked away from Bobby’s concerned gaze. “And they wouldn’t have broadcasted the murder.”

“Cause we become liabilities.” Steven answered the unasked.

“Cause it’s not professional.” Kend’rik corrected.

Bobby finally got to his feet and looked to the orb. “We’re waiting, aren’t we?”

Kend’rik could only nod. Ruth looked to all the solemn faces and then raised her hand. “This might be trivial but could someone get me a clean shirt, you know, if this is the end, I’d prefer the comfort...”

Gene piggybacked by raising his hand. “If a breath mint was available...?”

“I can’t have anybody doing anything stupid. I need you all in line of sight...”

“And if we don’t?” Steven prodded.

“I’m with y’all in this, unless y’all aren’t with me.” Kend’rik poked back.

“We’re with you, Kend’rik.” Bobby reassured, he looked to Ruth and Gene to nod and they did. He looked to Steven, who crossed his arms and then nodded. “What do we do?”

Kend’rik looked to Bobby for what seemed an eternity. Bobby felt the moment that Kend’rik trusted him as the faintest of tugs gripped the edge of his lip. “Alright Bobby... My guys are running quiet. Usually, it’s some retooling issue but sometimes it means they’re evading. We don’t know what your boy Connor had access to, and we don’t know who wanted it... I can tell you that my people are good, we don’t leave trails and we don’t ego-out with a signature that someone could see...”

“But someone did see...” Steven piped up.

Kend’rik raised a hand for him to ease up. “However, as it has been pointed out, there is the possibility that someone could have technology that is greater than ours and could see our tap. Now, we know this operative used some sort of stealth tech to bypass Connor’s security and so, it masked the operative on our feed. It’s good for us. They know, we don’t know who they are...”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Kend’rik. Gene, we’re trading.” Ruth downed the zipper along her side and strategically peeled herself out of her shirt. Gene wasn’t sure what was happening as Ruth handed her shirt to him. “Gene? Give me your shirt!”

Gene held the shirt. “What?” Ruth crossed her arms and gave Gene an aggressive stare. Gene sheepishly removed his shirt, then awkwardly, as he tried to do it while holding the toxic shirt by which time Bobby stepped in to help and held it for him.

Ruth put on Gene’s shirt and her eyelids fluttered again as it laid against her skin. “That’s a lot of wet back there, Gene.”

“It’s been an eventful evening, Ruth.” Gene sassed back as Bobby handed him the vomit shirt. He looked at her shirt and then dropped it to the floor. Bobby sighed aloud and Gene shrugged as he gave up any sense of composure. “Oh wow.” Gene understated the new situation as Kend’rik was holding a pistol that looked big even in his hand on Steven.

“It’s cool, Gene.” Steven raised his hands, revealing his unlocked pad.

Kend'rik reached out and took it. "Your friend is an asshole, Bobby."

"I know. He steals credits from the petty cash." Bobby added.

"It's not stealing if it's from petty cash." Steven retorted, remnant of a previous but ongoing conversation.

Kend'rik lowered the pistol and looked to the pad for any sign of usage as he spoke. "I'm going to try and *define* this, so that you can fully *measure* and *analyze* the severity of the situation and you can *improve* the chances of getting out of here alive and *control* the fear that makes you act against your better interest."

"I'm with you."

"I knew you would be, Gene." Kend'rik spoke throwing Steven's pad across the room. "You're all corporate, so you know variations happen. We don't know how we factored into their desired outcome and they're calculating the exposure versus expenditure. We are also..."

"Sorry." Ruth raised her hand. "Which input are we?"

Kend'rik forgave Ruth's interruption. "...Expenditure."

"Cause it costs money to assassinate people." Bobby helped.

Ruth didn't forgive Bobby. "Thank the network you were here to explain it."

"Time is our factor," Kend'rik tried to keep it moving. "The longer my people stay dark means the relay to us is closed. We have time so long as no one tries to send a communication from Bobby's network."

Eight eyes looked to Steven who relented his uppity posture and sat down with his arms crossed. Gene broke the silence. "If Bobby's network is the bad place to be, shouldn't we just..." Gene hitchhiked his thumb toward the door.

Bobby got it. "Still leaves me on the hook, right? Which ties us all to this..." Kend'rik nodded.

"Mr. Kend'rik? Since we've established that Steven is the traitor of our group, and I'm very cooperative to the situation, could I please get a fresh shirt from Bobby's closet?" Ruth was leaned forward as though trying to separate the fabric from her back through sheer determination. "Gene's a very thorough sweater."

Gene nodded to Kend'rik to further secure Ruth's point. Kend'rik looked to Bobby for his assurance.

"Bobby?"

"She can be trusted." Bobby had never lived on the ground floor but knew the stories of what it took to live day-to-day in the squalor. He felt a new kind of pride for being considered by Kend'rik.

"Fast as you can, Ruth."

Ruth nodded and rushed to the hallway. Once she had disappeared from sight, Bobby sensed a new tension in the room as he stared at the hallway opening not knowing why he was so focused on its shape. He looked away to Gene but saw that he, too, kept the vigil. Steven's sigh could be heard across the room as the time going by was now palpable. Ruth returned to the room with a new shirt and a smile on her face, but it disappeared as she was under the spotlight of so many eyes.

"What!" Ruth never needed to scream as her scathing tone spoke volumes.

"Felt like a long time, Ruth?" Steven answered with arms crossed.

"Yeah? And?" Ruth's hands landed at her hips, her elbows protruded out creating the hooded cobra of body language.

"Why were you smiling?" Gene joined.

"Cause Bobby keeps his Nozzler in his closet."

Bobby looked over to Kend'rik who could only offer a shrug, Steven guffawed. The room was suddenly illuminated in white digitalized. "No!" Kend'rik exclaimed as he moved to the orb that was broadcasting in idle. He pulled a piece from the orb and the room returned to normal. His crestfallen eyes looked to Bobby. "Sorry, Bobby."

Bobby nodded absentmindedly but his mind was racing with countless scenarios about what was coming for them and what they could do to escape their fate. He blinked away the thoughts and looked to Kend'rik.

"What do we do now?"

The only response came from a gong operating at 120bpm. Kend'rik's pistol was in his hand instantly as he stepped to Bobby and leaned in to his ear to whisper. "They rung the bell, so they want to negotiate. Beg

for your life...” He leaned back for the eye contact exclamation point, then leaned back in. “I’ll be down the hall if they don’t actually want to talk... The rest of your life starts in the next ten seconds.”

Kend’rik stepped past Bobby and disappeared into the hallway. Bobby took a breath, he felt more of the new pride and it helped him as he made his first step toward the front door. Gene reached over to Ruth for sympathy but she swatted his hands away, Steven began moving toward the kitchen where his pad was discarded. Bobby got to the front door and placed his hand on the panel just as a square metal brick burst through the door. Bobby stared at the brick as it removed itself from the door revealing the hallway, then the helmet with a visor and angry eyes.

Bobby and the angry eyes made contact, the eyes commanded him to open the door and he did so. Bobby was tackled to the ground by the angry eyes man so that the Four NAPD Officers behind him could advance safely. He could feel the blood pumping in his ears as his face was held to the ground with force, this also meant that he couldn’t hear was being shouted at the others.

Bobby saw that Ruth and Gene surrendered before they got tussled and were saved from feeling floor burn on their temple. Steven was pulled from his hiding spot behind the kitchen counter and received a gut punch for the extra effort the Officers had to exert. Bobby was scared for the Officers that went down the hallway. For an eternity, Bobby waited pinned to the floor waiting to hear the gunshots. Eternity would continue for no shots were fired. Bobby was pulled to his feet and marched out of his apartment.

The room had a smell that Bobby couldn’t place. Having been in there for hours, the unidentifiable odor was the only thing keeping his mind off the urgent desire to urinate. As he shifted his posture once again to trick his body into holding on longer, he chanced a glance at the trenchcoated Bioroid stationed at the door. Those unblinking eyes still gathering data made him almost as anxious as his bladder.

“Coming in.” The intercom buzzed. The door opened and a suited man with armor under his jacket entered. He sat down across the table from Bobby and began pushing buttons on the tabletop screen. Bobby watched intently.

“I’m Detective Ra. Timestamp this interview.” Ra spoke outward to the table and a small screen appeared before him, but not obstructing his view of Bobby. “How you doing, Bobby?”

“I have to pee.” Bobby chose honesty hoping for decency to follow.

“Okay.” Ra wasn’t interested. “Tell me the name of the Runner.”

“I don’t know any Runners.”

Ra held his blank expression on Bobby’s response for a long beat before he looked back to the Bioroid. The Bioroid turned to the door and exited the room. Ra returned his gaze to Bobby. “I’m going to bore you for a second, cause when a person talks about themselves, it gets boring. I do this job. I do it well, cause otherwise what is the point. I don’t have many friends, this job makes you question loyalty too often. I live in a squat house but it has strong reception. I have my mini-escapes every night when I go home and plug in. That is what I have. I don’t lie to myself. I don’t lie to others. I tell you this because we are nearing the end of my shift. I didn’t come in here not knowing what happened tonight. I came in here so that you could tell me the name of the Runner.”

“I don’t know any Runners.” Bobby tried not to stutter, he wanted to be strong.

Ra’s nostrils sighed with annoyance. “Bobby. Look at me.”

Bobby did.

“I am the law. I need you to adapt a different attitude, right now.”

Bobby heard it. He knew this must be a message as he leaned forward. “Are you asking me to observe and adapt?”

Ra’s eyes narrowed as he nodded. “It is important to me, while my Bioroid partner is in the hall for you to tell me the name of the Runner?”

Bobby nodded back. “Kend’rik.”

Nothing happened for five seconds, then the smirk formed. Ra hoisted both of his arms up into the air in triumph, four fingers extended on each hand. He brought his arms down, one normally but the other clenched into a fist as he shook it in front of himself. “That’s Four for Four!”

“Dammit!” A voice carried from the screen.

Ra looked into the screen. "I'll take your credits everyday, Son!"

"Whatever."

"Whatever." Ra taunted back. Bobby felt as though he had turned invisible. "You knew they were corporate, why'd you make the bet? One was dressed as a..." The word escaped Ra and he snapped his fingers at Bobby for help.

"Pirate." Bobby answered hollowly.

"Pirate! You are dumb. I am talking to you now, Bobby." Ra clicked the table and the screen disappeared. He stood up and walked to the door. He stopped and looked back to Bobby still smirking. "You're free to go."

"What?" Bobby still felt invisible.

"Corridor Six paid your fine for the "improper network patching"." Ra seemed to enjoy knowing more than Bobby. "You'll probably have to visit HR on Monday." Ra chuckled his way out the door.

"Bobby! Over here!" Gene waved his hands in the air. The people on the street weren't used to the spectacle and looked to Bobby as he exited the Police Holding Station. Bobby walked to Gene who stood in front of a shivering Ruth.

"You guys okay?" Bobby asked now feeling the chill affecting Ruth.

"Yeah." Gene answered insecurely.

Bobby looked to Ruth as she stared at the ground. "Ruth?"

"I'm not okay, Bobby. I'm really far from okay." Ruth looked Bobby in the eyes, then stopped herself from talking further. Bobby looked away.

"Where's Steven?"

"Squealer got let out first. Didn't even wait for us." Ruth seethed.

"I squealed too. Sorry, Bobby." Gene confessed.

“We all squealed, Gene. That’s why they let us out.” Ruth stopped shivering. Gene looked to Bobby for confirmation, Bobby averted his eyes in confession.

“Work paid our fine, that’s why we’re out.” Bobby revealed.

“Corridor already knows.” Ruth’s shoulders shrank. “That’s it. We’re dead.”

“What about Kend’rik?” Gene wondered aloud.

“He’s dead, too.” Ruth piled on.

“No, I mean, could he help us?” Gene was sincere.

“I’m going to die with morons.” Ruth was sincere.

Bobby looked at a hopeful Gene and hopeless Ruth, friends he put at risk for a stupid night of fun and a scheme to be on top. The idea hit him. He’d been wrong so many times tonight because he thought he had the only scheme. Kend’rik wasn’t caught. He had control of the entire evening and all information coming in.

“Beanstalk to Bobby. Come back to us.” Ruth was hugging herself, the chill had returned.

“Gene’s right.” Bobby knew his scheme wasn’t done. Get Gene first with affirmation.

“What?” Ruth inquired, her tone was returning. Gene was curious as well.

“Kend’rik is our only option now. If we go home, maybe Corridor gets us or they wait until Monday...”

Get Ruth with fear. “...Kend’rik has the footage of the night, might be our only chance to negotiate.”

“How? What? You’re...” Ruth was waffling.

“I’m in.” Gene exhaled shakily but mightily.

“You’re both insane.” Ruth directed outright feeling her options were dissipating. “I don’t like any of this.”

“We can do this, Ruth. We have to do this.” Bobby was closing this deal.

Ruth looked down at Bobby’s shirt. “We really can’t go home first?”

Bobby smiled away her request as he stepped before the two of them, stood over them to make the proclamation. “We have two days to save the rest of our lives.”

Gene and Ruth both took this statement in. Gene was ready and chimed, “How’d you find Kend’rik the first time?”

Bobby realized the answer as he said it. “He reached out to me...”

“Oh, we are so dead.”