The Corporate Oasis

by
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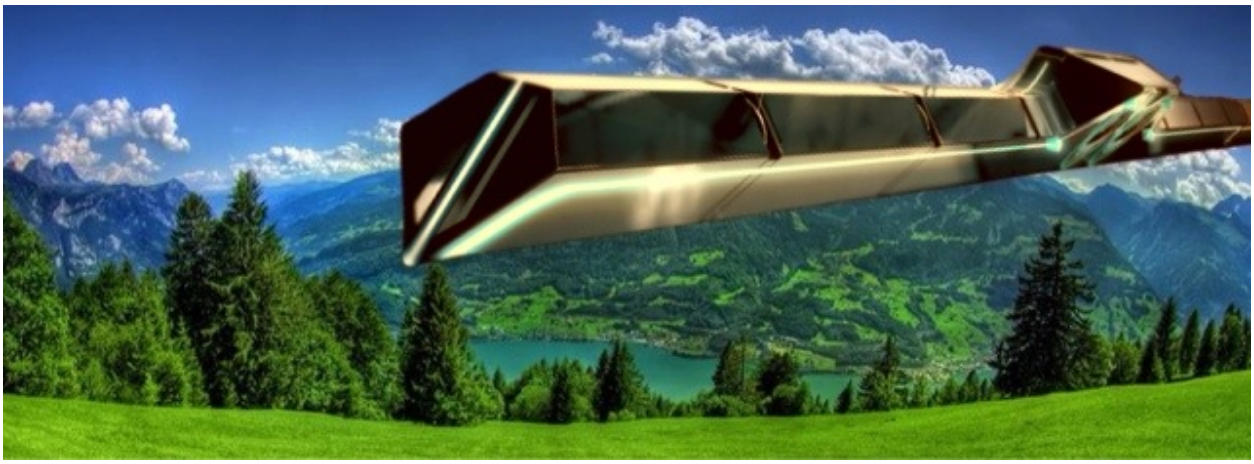
A few years ago Sam Willis was invited to take a short trip with the most unlikely of characters, Mr. Jamison. This would be companion seemed unpredictable to Sam and he did not have his heart set on taking such a trip, especially with someone he barely new. Mr. Jamison was one of the renowned board of directors in his company, and as far as he could remember (in his post 10 years) no one has ever turned down an offer from Mr. Jamison. Sam was a little nervous about the trip because he had known other peers who took offers from Mr. Jamison, that were not seen or heard from again. Sam thought for a short time about the whole event, and knew he had little choice but to go along for the ride.

Their destination, Sundial City. A place where many people have lost their identity, and some even their lives. "Why am I doing this thought sam. For my company, or a promotion, or maybe just to learn a new business strategy," he said thinking out loud, until Mr. Jamison nudged him, letting him know he was mumbling about strange things. Sam replied with an awkward smile. They purchased their tickets for the 6:05 PM to Sundial City, and prepared to board the new prototype Platinum-T. The Platinum-T was the newest ride for the city's elite. It hovered just above the tallest building in the city, and it was 179.8 times faster than those old silver-bullet trains. The brilliant yet dangerous feat of engineering arrived 2 minutes later. It looked sleek, lightweight, and seemed to go on forever. On the walk from the station to the train Sam looked down through the thick transparent flooring at the city below. This made him a little queasy.

They boarded and found their seats for the fifteen and a half minute commute to Sundial City. On the way to finding his seat Sam couldn't help enjoying each step he took. The floor he walked on seemed so lite and airy. The air seemed cleaner than any he had breathed in a long time. After finding his seat by the window a number of stewardesses walked down the aisle offering complementary water. After tasting the water Sam began to feel relaxed, more than he had felt in years. It reminded him of a Thanksgiving feast from his childhood, but also tasted of the smoothest wine he had ever had. Mr. Jamison smiled at sam then pointed out the window next to him. Looking out the window Sam saw beautiful landscapes, mountains, and an almost crystal clear ocean in the distance. The ocean seemed to be coming closer, second by second.



Before he knew it, he Mr. Jamison and a thousand plus other passengers were gliding out over the pacific ocean. I never realized it was so beautiful, Sam thought to himself. He could see many colorful forms of sea life swimming here and there under the smooth crystal blue waters below. He had no idea how much the ocean teamed with vibrant life. The window he was looking out of began to darken, he wondered only for a second why, then understood it was shading to block out the direct sunlight. The Platinum-T had changed course from it's straight path out over the ocean and seemed to be circling a little. Sam could feel a subtle touch of centrifugal force, but it was so lite he barely noticed. Amazing technology, he thought to himself, it's surprising at the speed we're going that the train hasn't lost control yet. He noticed that the seats across from him were empty, and thought to himself, I know it's almost childlike to explore, but he wanted to look out the window across from them. He excused himself from Mr. Jamison's company and moved over to the seat next to the window. As he looked out the window he could see the front cars of the train turning sharply. He followed the direction the train was heading and saw something in the distance shining like a beacon. What could it be he thought to himself.

Soon the beacon had turned into a small city. A smooth voice spoke over the speakers "Now arriving... Sundial City." Sam was used to hearing most transit intercom systems sound like a crackled voice in a windstorm. He was becoming more and more

impressed with how the elite lived. Must be nice to live in such style he thought to himself, don't think I could ever go back to the norm. A few seconds later they were hovering over the city next to the train station's platform. As he and Mr. Jamison exited the train, the feeling of seeing an entire city below through a transparent walkway came back over him, but this time the queasy feeling didn't last as long because the view was so spectacular. The air he breathed was incredibly refreshing. He expected to smell that all familiar industrial city smell he'd been so used to from back home, but instead he experienced a new aroma - a new scent that relaxed his whole being.

Where am I, he thought to himself as he walked along side Mr. Jamison. "This looks nothing like the specials I've seen on TV," he said loud enough for Mr. Jamison to hear him.

Mr. Jamison stopped Sam and looked at him while shaking his head in disappointment as a boss would just before he was about to fire an employee. A chilling feeling ran down Sam's back. He held his breath, and wasn't sure what to say. Mr. Jamison gestured for Sam to follow him. They walked to a fancy car hovering in a spot just outside the train station. The side door opened as he and Mr. Jamison approached the car. Sam expected someone to be sitting inside the car, but there was no one. How, he thought to himself. Mr. Jamison motioned for him to get in the car, and gestured to Sam not to say anything. Just as soon as the car door closed they were buckled into their seats, and the car was driving itself off to some place very quickly.

For the first time during their brief trip Mr. Jamison spoke to him. "Sam," Mr. Jamison said in a woman's voice. Sam cringed a little and looked over at Mr. Jamison. Mr. Jamison coughed a little and sounded like he was giggling. Then before sam could say anything Mr. Jamison started loosening his tie. Sam was becoming very uncomfortable, and was thinking about punching out his boss. Before he knew it Mr. Jamison had changed, literally. Mr. Jamison's face, hair, and even his suit had changed. Sam was now looking at a beautiful woman dressed as if she were heading to a modeling shoot. It was an old girlfriend he knew years back. She was more stunning that he had remembered, and dressed quite classy for the accountant he knew her to be.

With a look of disbelief he pointed his finger at her and said "Penny, what the hell".

She looked at him with a devious smile, and said, "I'll explain on the way".
As they flew through the city Sam didn't know what to keep his attention on most. His old gal, or the other worldly architecture of Sundial City. He decided it best to figure out what the heck was going on, and why she was back in his life after all this time. He looked at her in a boyish naive way, then became very serious all at once.

She quickly responded to his uneasiness of the situation, "You were always passive aggressive Sam. Ok, I see you're getting a little upset, so I'll tell you why we're here."

"We?" he questioned her directly.

"Well yes, the company thought it would be easier for you if you went through the process with a friendly familiar face."

"Go on," Sam said looking out the window.

"The company brought us here to... well, pitch a new product," she said with an awkward smile.

"What kind of new product?" he said turning his attention back to her.

"A marriage license," she said sinking back into her seat a little.

"Penny, I'm already married. Look see the ring on my finger. What the hell is the company thinking," he said becoming upset again.

"It's not the kind of marriage license you're thinking of, love. It's a play on words, an acronym for the new product. M.R.G.L.C.N.S.," she said leaning forward taking hold of his hand patting it.

"Ok Penny, you've got my attention. What are we really pitching here?" he said in a very business like tone while distancing himself from her. He could see she wasn't wearing a ring, and he didn't want to get too comfortable around her like he had in the past. This is not the best situation for me he thought to himself, she knows me too well, knows what buttons to push. They knew I probably wouldn't have come on this trip if they had told me directly what they wanted me to do. Tempting me like this is not going to go over with the wife. She'll never let me here the end of it.

"Sam, M.R.G.L.C.N.S. is a new prototype jacuzzi. If the organization we'll be pitching it to likes it, then it'll be a big sell to the common," she said sinking back into her seat again. Sam knew all too well what she meant. The *common* are commoners, every day people, the work force. There's just the common and there's the elite. You can guess what the elite do (setup companies like Sam's for the common to have a job. The middle class had died out a long time ago along with war, poverty, and food shortage. Money doesn't exist anymore (at least the kind we're used to, and family blood doesn't

carry riches from parent to child as it did in the past. It's a new world, not an entirely brave new world, just the results of our leaders leading us in a new direction. We make our way in this life entirely of our own choices. If we make good ones, and take care of those around us, we make headway and can eventually become an *elite*. If we're selfish and try to hoard success to ourselves then we're screwed. It's a strange way of life, but it works, and Sam knew it all too well.

"Man they're clever. The company knew I wanted to have a better life for me and my family, but this is wrong Penny. The wife would never go for it. Just take me back now," he said turning to look back out the window.

"They told me you would say something like that Sam. That's why they wanted me to show you the prototype first hand. Once you see it in action Sam, it'll change your whole world. Here are the blueprints Sam, just have a look. If you don't like what you see, I'll take you back," she said while taking off her necklace and handing it to him. He looked the necklace over, then tugged on it from both ends. The necklace breaks and shatters into pieces all over the seats and floor of the car. The pieces begin to rattle, then all at once they come together hovering as one piece. It floated there in between Penny and Sam. While Penny sank back into her seat smiling, Sam's eyes became mesmerized. Penny had done her job. He hadn't noticed that her seat had subtly fell back, and that she slipped out unnoticed into a pressurized pod that would take her to her next assignment. Sam was hypnotized, he wasn't going anywhere.

When the car finally stopped, Sam looked out the window. It was dark, and he couldn't quite make out where he was. He hadn't bothered looking out the window during the drive, because he had been studying the prototype's blueprints. To him the drive only seemed like a few minutes, but in reality it had been hours. Neroprints, or new-tech blueprints often have this effect on people (kind of like kids playing those old Playstation or Xbox games, they don't realize how much time passes). As the car door opens a man dressed in black holding a strange flashlight walks up to Sam. The man motions for him to get out of the car. Sam touches the neroprint with his finger and it fades into nothing. As he steps out of the car the man holds up a badge. Sam doesn't see

anything on the badge, and looks at the man shrugging his shoulders. The man chuckles and says "First time to Sundial City sir?" Sam nods. The man shines the strange flashlight into Sam's eyes. All at once Sam feels distorted and about collapses, then regains his composure just as soon as he had lost it. "You're much faster than the others sir," said the man amused by Sam's reaction to the flashlight. "Have another look sir," said the man holding up his badge for him to see. This time when he looked at the badge, he saw an elaborate hologram of tiny diamonds forming over the badge. They formed into a photo of the man's face. Directly below the photo were the words 'OFFICIAL S.C. GUIDE / body guard'. Then the man handed the badge to Sam. Once Sam had it in his hand the man disappeared. A half second later the man appeared again in front of him saying "I'm you're personal security and guide sir. Anything you need, just ask."

"What's your name?" asked Sam.

"Felix sir, but you can call me anything you like," the man replied.

"Alright Hal, where am I really, and where are you programmed to take me to," asked Sam.

"Very clever sir, you have arrived at the Under. Your host requests your presence post haste. Please follow me sir" said the man starting to walk off.

"The Under?" questioned Sam following his virtual guide.

"Yes sir, we are underneath Sundial City, approximately 20 miles. Don't worry sir, the air is perfectly breathable, but I wouldn't suggest venturing off on your own, the locals are most unfriendly."

"I'm not going anywhere with you Hal, until you tell me who my host is," says Sam as he puts the badge into his pocket. Hal was about to respond when something shiny flew past Sam's head. Sam ducked, but not fast enough, something had nicked his neck. Out of the dark walked a number of men and women (about ten in total). He looked at their faces. They were beautiful, all of them, like the faces you'd see for pharmaceutical ads, but they were all dirty, wearing grungy clothes, and all of them were carrying what looked like long icicles. They looked at Sam as a child would a new toy it wanted. Sam didn't want to find out what they really wanted from him, and had nothing to defend himself with, so he decided to try and make a run for it.

As they were closing in on him, Sam looked to see which of them might be the weakest. He sees his chance and makes a mad dash narrowly escaping between two of the beautiful women. A second later he hears footsteps walking in his direction, then nothing. Sam turns around to defend himself, then realizes it's Hal. "I told you the locals were not very friendly, sir. Now please follow me, your host is expecting us shortly," said Hal as he turned and walked off. Reluctantly Sam followed him. On the way down the lowly lit path to wherever it was they were going he noticed something glimmering. It was the group of beautiful people that had been after him before. They were sitting on the ground with their backs facing one another, each holding onto their icicle weapon. They looked catatonic. "I have subdued them for you sir. The authorities will be along shortly to collect them. Now please follow me," said the virtual guide. Sam knew he had no choice but to follow Hal, but wondered along the way how this virtual guide had taken out ten people so quickly and so quietly.

Soon they we're walking down a series of dark alleys, and eventually came into what looked like an underground city. There were cafes and street venders everywhere it seemed. Hal motioned for Sam to continued following, and Sam nodded at him. An elderly woman dressed in a dusty old business suit looked at him as if he were crazy. She raised an antique gun and pointed it at him. Sam reminded himself that no one else could see Hal, and he looked away from this old lady. It seemed that he was on a safari tour, and the local wildlife didn't like unfamiliar faces. He had once read about an extinct species called gorilla that if you looked into their eyes they would see it as a sign of aggression, and they would attack you with out warning. Sam decided it best to keep to himself, and get the hell out of this place as soon as humanly possible.

A short time later they reached what looked like a giant statue draped in liquid silver. Hal motioned for Sam to continue following him. When they passed the statue Sam couldn't help but turn around and look at it again. He saw the front of the statue this time. It looked hallow and incomplete. "Lost innocence, sir," said Hal continuing to walk ahead.

Sam turned to rejoin his virtual companion then asked "Lost innocence?"

"The artist who sculpted this statue wanted to remind those who have any sanity left in their minds about the children lost from the old war, the last war," said Hal as he pointed to the seemingly mindless people roaming around looking at Sam.

"They seem almost like zombies. Why would they try to kill me?" asked Sam in a naive tone.

"You might ask your old friend Penny," said a strange voice coming out of the shadows ahead.

The owner of the voice walked out where Sam could see. "Detective Terra Silver, and you must be Sam Willis," said a tall dark complected woman in a trench coat and hat as she reached out her hand to shake Sams.

"Carmen Sandiego, I've found you a last," he said while shaking her hand.

"Very funny Sam, the situation is more serious than you know. Please follow me. Felix you can go for now," she said as she pulled out a badge and swiped her finger in a circular fashion over it. Hal disappeared, and Sam had found his host. As she walked into the shadows, Sam followed her. He wasn't sure if he could trust her, and had never heard of there being any female detectives on the force. About five minutes later they reached an oversized iron gate that surged with electricity. "I know you must find it odd, me being a female officer, but I assure you Sam, you can trust me one-hundred percent," she said pulling out an antique key and opening the gate. As soon as the key was turned the electricity surging over the metal stopped. She pushed the gate open and they walk through. As soon as they were in, the gate began surging with electrical sparks and closed.

They continued walking down another darkened alley. Along the walls torches began to light. As they passed by the torches, Sam hears a series of snaps, then a humming sound. He turns around to see a series of transparent walls glowing a violet color. "Force fields, Sam. One of our many securities here," she said with a little wink. The darkness faded little by little, and soon they found themselves before a drawbridge. A moat, they have a moat too Sam thought to himself. The water bubbled as steam rose

from it. "Another of our security measures," said Detective Silver as she pulled out her badge and made a series of movements with her hand over it.

"Sign language?" asked Sam as he watched the drawbridge come down.

"Yes, a language once used by those who were what they called deaf. About 200 years after the bioengineers had found a viable gene implant solution, we decided to apply this old language to our security tech. All officers at my level are trained in the ancient arts, even the martial ones," she said as she and he started to walk across the drawbridge. Once across the drawbridge they came to a massive door with a gargoyle's head on it. Over the door was a sign that read "M.R.G.L.C.N.S." After reading the sign he looked as if he had just seen a ghost. "You ok Sam?" she asked looking at him oddly.

"Yeah, just thinking about the family. I was supposed to contact them once I reached Sundial City," he said fumbling for the phone in his pocket.

"Won't work down here Sam. You'll have to wait till your back up top," she said while holding up her badge to the gargoyle. Sam sighed, as a tiny door opened and a small camera came out. She looked into the camera with her eye. The camera scanned her eye with some kind of laser. Then she said "Detective Terra Silver." The camera immediately returned inside the door, and the door began to open. "You might want to step back a little," she said pointing at two large dogs with two heads each chained on either side of the door way. She held up her badge to the dogs and they sat down putting their heads on their paws. "Genetic engineering, who knew it would work," she said while they walked into the building.

Inside the facility everything had a rustic or antique look to it, even the furniture. They walked down at least five long hallways passing by glass rooms full of men and women dressed like Detective Silver. "I've got three twins. I guess you could call them look-a-likes," she said to Sam as she opened a door to one of the rooms that was empty. As

soon as they were in the room, she closed the door and pointed to an empty chair, while she sat down at the desk. She took out her badge and placed it on the desk, and all the windows to the room darkened. Sam assumed this was an interrogation room, and got ready for whatever was coming.

"Welcome to M.R.G.L.C.N.S. Sam. Can I get you a drink or any food before we start?" she asked sam while tapping her badge. A hologram of a book appeared above the badge.

"No thanks, but I've been meaning to ask you what M.R.G.L-whatever stands for," he asked her with a blank stare.

"Our organization Ministry of Regulatory Governing Logistical Censorship and Neurological Systems, marriage license for short. I'm surprised you've never heard of us before," she said with a brief laugh while taking hold the book and placing it on the desk.

"Funny you should mention that Detective Silver. I've heard about marriage license before, from my friend Penny," he said looking oddly suspicious.

"Don't worry Sam, we're not after you, but we would like to know what Penny told you about it," she said easing Sam's tension.

"She mentioned the name, then told me about a prototype for a jacuzzi I was supposed to help her pitch to some company, but she didn't go into a whole lot of detail. While I wasn't looking she sneaked out of the car somehow, and I ended up in this place," he said studying the tinted windows.

"Sam, are you familiar with identity theft?" she asked him while opening the book.

"Yeah, it's when someone steals your life, drains your bank account, pretends to be you," he says continuing to study the room.

"Penny was one of our best agents Sam, she had been with us for nearly fifteen years. We think she must have been turned by the Thrax. They're a criminal organization that have been successful turning agents with specific skill sets. Penny was good with statistical analysis, and suggestive memory, or manipulation as I like to call it. The Thrax are the elite's worse nightmare, they've cost Sundial City two trillion dollars alone last year. If they turned her, we have no idea how. The train you took here, the Platinum-T. Did you notice any celebrities or elite faces? Take a moment to think," she asked Sam while producing a holographic pen from her badge.

Sam thought back to his trip on the train. "No, now that you mention it everyone that I saw on the train look like common every day people, except Mr. Jamison. Well I meant Penny impersonating Mr. Jamison," he said remembering Penny's cleverness.

"It's good you noticed that Sam. Most every elite who travels on the Platinum-T wears an imperial-suit, which allows you to choose a look from random generated DNA. The technology runs like a lottery, so no one ever knows who they're going to look like. It prevents any unwanted persons from bothering them on during their travels. When the Platinum-T's security cameras noticed Mr. Jamison an alert was sent to us. We know that Mr. Jamison is a bit eccentric, but even Mr. Jamison would not travel like that. By the time our people reached the train station, the car you and Penny were in was long gone. It was not until the car landed here that anything could be done. So you see Sam, Penny had used tech to manipulate you. She apparently knew Mr. Jamison's schedule, that he would be on the train, and must have told the train station attendants that he forgot his imperial-suit, that he would take the train anyway. Our records show that the real Mr. Jamison had boarded a little before you and the fake Mr. Jamison did. This way Penny could work her magic on you," said the Detective while she wrote down information in the virtual book, with the virtual pen.

Sam just wanted to get back home, but knew it would probably be some time before they would let him go. "How much longer to you need me to stay here?" Sam asked giving the impression he had better things he could be doing.

"Not much longer Sam. I just need to verify a few more things with you, then we'll have an escort take you back home," she said continuing to write in the virtual book. Sam began to feel light headed, then started to nod off. He shook his head, but couldn't help an over powerful feeling of falling asleep. Sam collapsed in his chair and slid off onto the floor. "Sam! Are you ok?" said the detective as she stood up and rushed over to where Sam was. Blood was draining out of his ears, nose and mouth. She slammed the badge sitting on the table and yelled "Medic!"

When he woke Sam found himself in a hospital room. A nurse came in to check on him. "The doctor will be in shortly," she said looking over his chart. "I need to check your blood levels, please hold out your hand," she said as she calibrated a pen-like device. Sam held out his hand and let her do the blood test. She scanned his hand while

looking over the chart. "Blood looks fine, but your blood count is higher than average. Have you had any discomfort or headaches recently," she asked putting down the pen and chart.

"None that I can think of ma'am, just a little light headed," he said while looking at the chart the nurse had sat down. The digital chart looked different from the normal one's he had seen when visiting the family doctor back home. This chart had a three dimensional object spinning on it with equations floating around it. He noticed that one of the equations had the letters 'mrglcns' in it. When he looked up the nurse was gone.

Penny, that was her, he thought to himself while getting up from the bed. A doctor and Detective Silver came into the room. "Good to see your up and around Sam," said the detective looking him over.

"Penny, I think she was just here," said Sam pointing at the chart.

"Who's Penny, we don't have anyone on staff by that name, and what's that on my chart?" asked the doctor as he reaches for it.

Detective Silver blocks the doctor from the chart and says "It's above your pay grade doc. We'll have to debrief you later. Can you give us a minute." After the doctor left the room Detective Silver lays her badge on the chart. A shaky hologram of a vault appears above the badge. "Oh my God," she said looking at Sam, then she took her badge and ran out of the room. A few moments later she was pushing the doctor back in the room that she had kicked out only a few minutes before. About five nurses followed them into the room.

"What's going on detective?" asked Sam glancing at the chart, then looking at everyone who had just entered the room.

"Sam, what kind of relationship did you have with Penny. It's important that you're honest with me," asked Detective Silver looking into his eyes.

"About average I supposed. Why are you asking?" Sam questioned her with concern in his voice.

"Because, we think you may have a bomb fused to your brain, that's why Sam," said the detective as she put her hand on his shoulder to reassure him.

"Uh, we dated off and on for a few years, but she never gave any indication that she wanted to get married or anything if that's what your looking for," he said focusing his attention on the chart.

"Ok, Sam. It may be a false alarm, but we need to make sure. The doc and his little helpers are going to do a retinal scan. It should only take a few minutes."

Sam laid back and let the doctor and his nurses do their thing, while Detective Silver stood in the background researching on her badge in sign language. A few minutes later the doctor sent the nurses out of the room and walked over to the detective. They discussed the results in private, then the doctor nodded at her and left the room. She walked over to Sam and sat on the side of the bed. "Sam, I've got good news, and I've got bad news. What do you want to hear first," she said in a grieving tone.

"Let me hear the worst of it detective. Let's get this over with," he said with a serious look.

"Sam, the scan shows us that remnants of a new neroprint type called *trist* was fused with your brain. A trist neroprint can be programmed as a monitoring device, but can also be setup as a decoy bomb," she said looking into his eyes.

"You're saying I've got a bomb in my head? I thought neroprints were just disposable virtual blueprints. All I remember seeing was a mobile jacuzzi that sort of looked like a tank but more sophisticated. I mean it had tracks on it like a tank, I suppose for moving around on any type of terrain, and a lot of other components that would make old Commander Bond from the 21st century jealous, but a bomb, how?" he said looking back at the chart.

"Sam the blueprint you saw is legitimate, Penny must have used her skills to coerce some college kid from the FratCorp to give it to her. The trist neroprint, however was a new prototype we were working on for security purposes. It was designed as an added layer to neroprints to monitor and control potential corrupt elite. The Thrax have apparently found a way to design a biotech bomb with our tech," she explained as best she could.

"So, I don't suppose your people can get this thing out of my head, can they?" he asked looking back to her.

"Well Sam, that's the good news. We can disable the trist, but..." she looked at him oddly.

"But what?" he returned a similar glance.

"But, you have to see her again, Penny. She's the only one that knows the vault code to your neroprint," she said with a faint smile.

"Ok, what exactly do you need me to do?" he said giving her a look of concern.

"First we have to find her. Then Sam, you have to osculate her," she said slightly looking out of the corner of her eye.

"Osculate?," he said looking at her oddly.

"It means you have to kiss her Sam," she says while showing him the chart.

"Your kidding? That's the only way to get the vault code?" he said looking at her in disbelief.

"There is another way Sam, but it involves primitive neurological surgery. The procedure could lobotomize you," she said in a serious tone.

"My wife would lobotomize me if I even thought about kissing another woman. Actually her father would now that I think about it," he replied to her alternate solution a little nervously.

"Sam, it's ok, we've already debriefed your wife of the situation, and she understands completely. She'd rather have you alive than the alternative," said the detective showing him her badge with a holographic video of his wife being debriefed. He cringed a little when he saw his wife Stacy's initial reaction, then was relieved when she calmed down and agreed to the situation.

"Ok detective, how do we find her? How do we find Penny?" he asked her in a hurried tone.

"My agents have been running a bio-search since last night. We've identified a faint bio-signature of her's near the Q district in Sundial City," said the detective in a positive tone. "Get dressed Sam, we leave in 10 minutes," said Detective Silver as she left the room. Sam got ready, then went down the hall to grab a coffee. A few minutes later he joined the detective and her people in what looked like a mini-limousine on steroids.

"This is some ride," said Sam looking at all the holographic tech floating around in the limo Detective Silver and her people were using.

"It does the job," she replied showing Sam a red dot pulsating on one of the holographic displays. Before Sam knew it he was in Sundial City again.

"Q district ma'am," said a man up front monitoring the navigation system.

A minute later they were parked in front of a large building. Sam was amazed at the architecture, then read the name on the building. "Stellerbuck's, wow they're still alive?" he said in a nostalgic tone.

"Yes... The investors of Q district like to keep some things alive, they're quirky that way. You're in luck Sam, Penny's inside. Go grab yourself one of those classic gourmet coffees and see if you can't get her to warm up to you. Don't worry we'll be right behind you," said the detective as she adjusted the lapel on her coat.

Sam watched Detective Silver and her team morph into unrecognizable people. The detective pulled something from a nearby hologram. It was a bio-earpiece. "Wear this Sam, so we can communicate," she said handing it to him. After he put the earpiece in his hear it became invisible. "Can you hear me!" yelled an unrecognizable voice in his ear.

"Ouch. Yes," he said holding his hand to his ear.

"Oh sorry, let me turn down the volume for you. Our last assignment was a concert," said the voice Sam now assumed to be the detective's.

Now inside Stellerbuck's with his classic gourmet coffee in hand he spots Penny at a table in the back. "I see her," he says looking in the direction of Penny.

"Sam, you don't have to say anything out loud, just think about the words you want to say, and they will show up in front of you. I gave you an optical earpiece. When you

want to share it with me think of my name and I'll hear it," said the new voice of Detective Silver.

Sam thinks the words "I'm going to screw this thing up".

"You'll be just fine Sam," she reassured him.

Sam walked toward the back and grabbed a seat a few tables from Penny. "Ok, what now," he thought seeing the words floating in front of him.

"Just wait, she'll come to you," said the detective. Sam looked over a digital newspaper that was built into the table and fiddled with the heating/massage controls on the chair he was sitting in. About a half hour later he felt someone tap him on the shoulder.

"Sam, funny meeting you here. What brings you to Q district?" It was Mr. Jamison. He was not wearing his imperial-suit.

"Uh, I won a trip through Novel Sweepstakes sir," he said nervously in his mind.

"Out loud Sam, you need to say it out loud," said the detective snickering a little.

"Oh... Yes sir. I won a trip through Novel, Novel Sweepstakes," he said attempting to sound inconspicuous.

"That's great Sam. Well it's good to see you again. Enjoy your trip, I've got a meeting I've got to run to."

"That was close," Sam said in his mind to share with Detective Silver.

"You're doing fine Sam," reassured the detective. Shortly after Mr. Jamison left a familiar face poked around Sam's shoulder and whispered in his ear.

"How did you find me Sam?" asked Penny in a quizzical tone.

Before he could answer she sat down next to him with her coffee. "You know, Q district isn't part of the Novel Sweepstakes tour Sam. So I can guess you found that marriage license after all," she said leaning in toward him smiling a little.

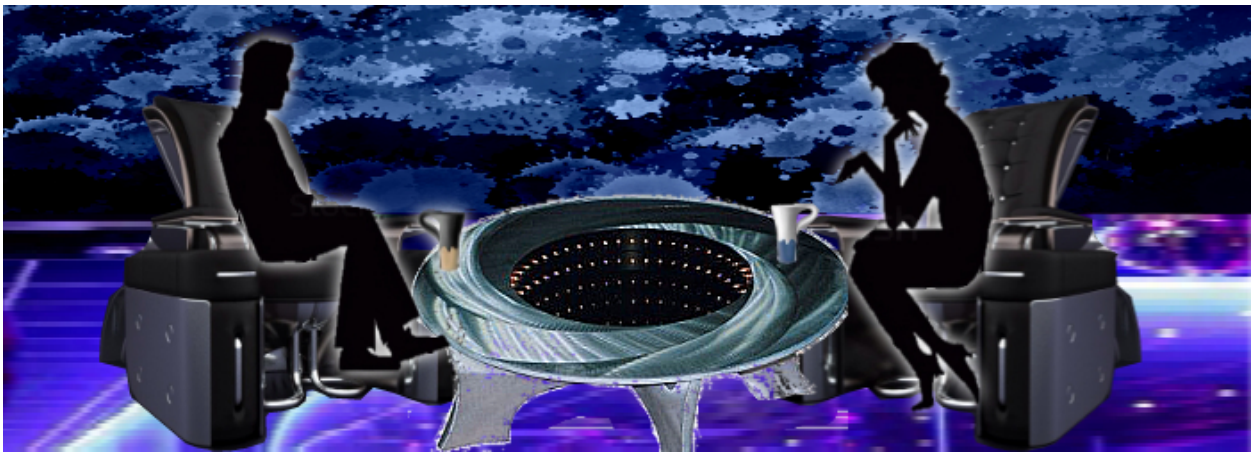
"Yeah... I..." he couldn't think of what to say and took a drink of his coffee, then he heard the detective 'tell her the blueprint had this address on them'.

Penny sat there staring at him intently waiting to hear what he would say next. " Yeah, the blueprint you showed me, told me to meet here at this address. It took some asking around to find a taxi that would take me out this far, but I finally found one. So now that I'm here, what's next?" he asked her sounding as confident as he could.

Out of the corner of his eye Sam noticed two large men dressed in black suits sitting a few tables away. Penny sat back in her chair and studied him for a few moments, then spoke, "Sam, I always liked you. That's why I'm going to give you this one chance to tell me the truth. Do you really want to be an elite?" He thought she was going to interrogate him, instead she was just being curious.

"Yes, doesn't everybody. Why do you ask?" Penny had pulled out a pen and began writing on a napkin.

"My employer is very insistent on knowing who he does business with, that they're serious about the work they do," she said sliding the napkin over to him. Sam read the words on the napkin *'Not Safe, Get Out While You Can'*, then looked at her.



"What's going on Sam," asked the detective.

"She's studying me, trying to figure out if she can trust me," he replied in his mind. Sam takes the pen from Penny and draws a *question mark* on the napkin and shows it to her. "I know I'm good at anything I put my mind to Penny. Your employer will see that," he says carrying the conversation.

"That's good to know Sam, because he want's to meet you tonight, if your serious," she says taking the napkin and writes the words *'Durbish And Bernstein - Dead'*, then shows it to him. His eyes widen and his blood pressure increases. He remembered working with these men years back, they were some of the brightest minds in the company. He also remembered reading about their horrible deaths on the neroweb a few years ago. Sam was confused and felt trapped.

Who should he trust he thought, but remembered not to think about it enough to share with the detective. "I'm serious, but only if it's an opportunity to become an elite," he says looking angry now.

"Meet back here around 6:00 PM and find a seat near the back. A man in a blue pin striped suit will approach you, and drop off a brief case. Do not open it until he leaves. If you open it before, the information inside will disintegrate. Once he's left the building you can read the instructions on what to do next. Oh by the way Sam, the information will be coded to your DNA - which means you'll be the only one that can read it," said Penny while she broke the pen and laid it on the napkin. Then she got up and walked off with the two men in dark suits into a crowd of people. Ink from the pen poured out and covered everything they had written, then began to disintegrate, leaving a subtle burn mark on the table.

A flash of violet light shot overhead and around him forming a dome. The exterior of the dome was transparent to anyone outside of it. A hologram of Detective Silver formed in the seat across from him. "For our privacy Sam, just in case she is still in the building watching. The external mode of this privacy dome is set to loop, which means the only thing anyone will see is you drinking your coffee and reading the paper. So you can talk freely," said the virtual detective.

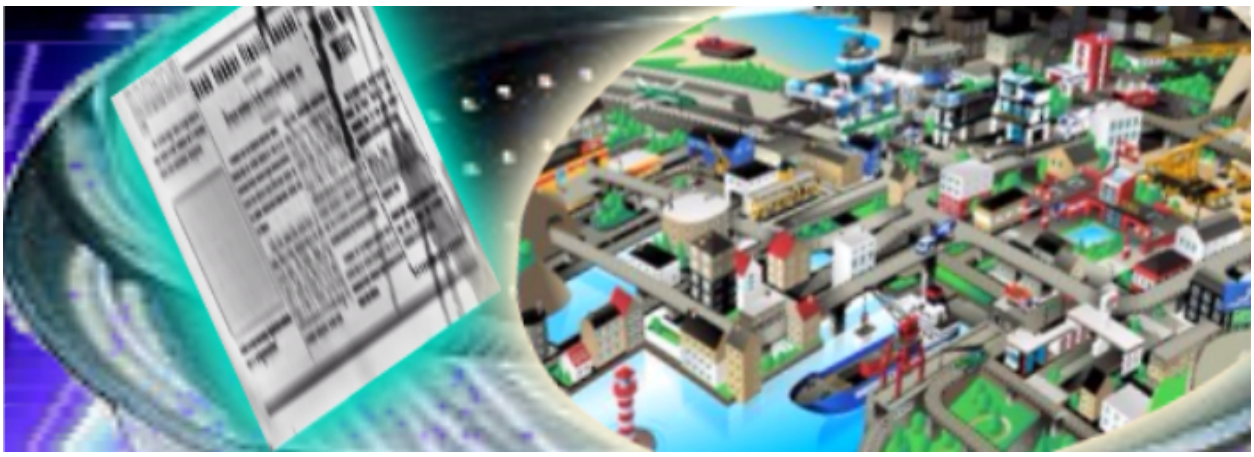
"You know she's on to me, she was playing with me. Why didn't you catch her on the way out?" he asked her while looking at the domed violet color pulsating around them.

"By the time our team got to the crowd she had blended in, and we could not locate her. She must have been wearing an imperial-suit. Don't worry Sam she's not going far, just remember to follow the instructions they give you very carefully. Once you have them we'll follow you. Wherever the information leads you she is sure to be nearby, and when she show's her pretty face we'll subdue her and take her into custody. Then, Sam you'll have your chance. It's nearly four o'clock, our team needs to prep for the meet. Why don't you get something to eat while you're waiting," she said in an anxious tone. Sam ordered a Cuban style sandwich and mojito to relax him. A few minutes later a panel on the table he was sitting at slid open, and his meal appeared along with his drink. While he was eating, Sam wondered if this was going to be his last meal.

It was ten till 6:00 PM when a man in a fancy blue pin striped suit walked into the restaurant carrying an old beat up leather brief case. He walk to the back and sat down at a table near Sam. He didn't make eye contact with him, instead he pulled out his mobile to make a call. After the call he got up and went to order a coffee. Sam noticed that the man had the brief case with him. After the man had his coffee in hand, he left the building. Sam became concerned and wondered for a moment if another man in a blue pin striped suit would show up. Then he got up and went over to the table where the man had been sitting. There was a virtual newspaper opened on the table. Normally any items that had been opened on a table with this tech would automatically close after the person left. This is why Sam was so intrigued by the newspaper. He looked over the page that was left open and didn't notice anything out of the ordinary, but after a second look he saw something that intrigued him greatly. There were only five articles on the page, by law each page is required to have at least six. He also noticed something odd about each of the headlines 'The Bakers Cousin Has A Dozen', 'Hendrix To Rewrite Elvis Tune', 'Radiologist Composes Symphony', 'Another Warsaw

Pact Arises', and 'Xygote Found In Frog'. Sam found the headlines amusing. Each of them were ridiculous, but was even more odd were the articles themselves. All the text was in latin.

Sam looked at the headlines one more time, and this time noticed the first letter of each headline had font that was slightly different than the others. He pulled up a virtual notepad on the table and jotted down the letters *T*, *H*, *R*, *A*, and *X*. Thrax he thought to himself, but did not share it with the detective. Then he looked over the latin text, and found a strange character that didn't seem to fit. Out of curiosity he put his finger on one of the strange characters. The latin font transformed into an image of a museum. He took his finger off of the strange character an the image transformed back into latin text. He tested the odd characters in the other articles and saw the following images, a bank, a library, a coffeehouse, and an arboretum. He knew the images were depicting places that would lead him to the Thrax, and searched for a map of the city. After pulling up a virtual map of the city, he did a search for museum separately from the



others, then all of them in one search. There were a handful of museums, as well as libraries, and even arboretums, but nothing seemed to stand out. Then he had an idea. He pulled up the images again, and drug them onto the map. Each image shrunk down to a specific coordinate on the map, about one block away from each other. He studied the map and noticed there was another building that wasn't part his set of images. He zoomed into the map, and found the mysterious building to be a glass shop. That's got to be it he thought aloud in his mind.

"So you found it, the location?" said a familiar voice.

He started to fell a burning sensation in his ear. It became almost unbearable until he dug out the earpiece. As soon as he removed it the pain was gone. Damn this tech he thought to himself while dropping the earpiece in his coffee that had gone cold. He went back to studying the glass shop he found on the map. A few seconds later an elderly woman sat down across from him. It was Detective Silver in her imperial-suit.

"Well Mr. Absent Minded Professor you broke protocol, what happened? I've been trying to get ahold of you for the last few minutes," she said looking at him sternly.

"I was looking over this map when my ear started to burn. What the heck is wrong with your tech," he said to the old lady while pointing at his coffee that had steam rising from it.

"You were unresponsive for at least ten minutes Sam. A lot can happen in ten minutes, you could be dead and we wouldn't have even known it. As for the tech it's designed to initiate a heat cycle if the wearer becomes unresponsive," she said giving him a serious look.

"Ten minutes? No I was only looking over the map at this glass shop for a few seconds when my ear started to feel like it was on fire," he said glancing at his cup of coffee.

"That trist neroprint you have in your head is really doing a number on you Sam, If we don't get it out soon you'll be losing more than just time," she said starting to look over the map.

"I think that's it detective. That glass shop stands out like a sore thumb. But what's so special about a glass shop?" he asked her reaching for his coffee.

"Might not want to drink that. Earpiece remember. I'll have them bring you a fresh cup. Glass shop you say? Some elite like the outdated art. Some pay a pretty penny for things like custom fiber optic windows for their homes. Let's them tint their windows instead of using curtains, watch TV while looking outside, or a video conference." she said pulling up the menu and ordering two new coffees.

"What's that symbol there, I can't quite make it out?" he says pointing to a tilted infinity character with dots in the middle of each loop.

"Good eye Sam, it's an old symbol the Sundial City engineers used for time, like an analog clock. The tilt gives the hour and the number of dots are fifteen minute increments. Looks like 9:30 PM," she said pulling out her badge.

"That's two hours from now, what do we do till then?" he said while studying the time symbol.

"Have some fresh coffee, and get the team ready for the meet," she said as two hot cups of coffee rose up from the table.

"Sam wake up, it's time," said the detective nudging him. He rubbed his eyes and looked around seeing that he was back in the limo.

"When did we get in the car?, I don't...," he said in a groggy tone.

"Sam, do you realize how serious this is getting? We left the cafe not just fifteen minutes ago. You sound like you've been sleeping for hours," she said giving him a worried look.

"I'll be ok detective, just point the way," he said looking at her with a subtle hint of concern.

"It's about two blocks down that way, and Sam, good luck," she said pointing in the direction of the glass shop. Sam got out of the car still feeling a little groggy. He walked the two blocks to his destination, while the limo followed a distance behind. When he finally reached the building there was no sign, just an oversized door colored burgundy with the number 222 on it. He remembered when he was looking at the map back at the cafe, that it didn't give a business name for the glass shop like it did for the museum and the other locations. No sign, but the address is right he thought to himself as he opened the heavy door, and walked inside.

The glass shop was just that, endless shelves of glass work. Sam was genuinely impressed as he walk through a particular aisle containing elaborate silver blue glass designs. "Can I help you," said a kindly voice of an elderly man from behind the counter.

"Just browsing," he said while looking pass the old man into the back of the store.

"The items we have on display were specifically designed for our clients, perhaps you are looking for something specific?" said the man stepping out from behind the counter with something shiny in his hand. Sam couldn't make out what it was that the old man was holding.

"A marriage license," he said looking around the store to see if anyone else was there. The man stopped and gave him a strange look.

"Ah you must be him," said the man smiling while adjusting one of the glass pieces on a shelve next to him.

"Him? I don't..." he said trying to think of what to say next.

"She said you were clever. Most aren't able to figure out the clues we leave in that old newspaper. Tell me Sam, who helped you figure it out," said the old man smiling at him, now pointing a highly polished gun at his heart.

"No one, just me," he said looking at the gun pointed at him.

"Just you, huh? Then who are they," said the old man waving his gun around the store.

The next thing he knew, the lights went black and someone had pushed him to the ground and was holding him down. Shots were fired, and the sound of glass crashed all around him. A few seconds later the power was back on and someone was helping him up. It was agent Brack, one of Detective Silver's crew. Brack released him and quickly walked to the back of the store. Sam looked around at the shattered glass on the floor, then followed the agent.

In the back room Detective Silver was standing over the old man who was bleeding out. When the old man saw Sam enter the room, he laughed a little while coughing up blood. "They..." he said with his dying breath. The old man now lay there lifeless staring at him.

"They what?" ask Sam. Then from what looked like out of the walls and down from the ceiling came a number of people wearing body suits that surged with electricity. Detective Silver motioned for her crew to subdue them, but when they tried to take hold of the people, they were shocked and thrown back against the wall, knocking them unconscious. Seeing that she'd been defeated, the detective dropped her gun and held up her hands.

"What Mr. Fiero was trying to say, before he was abruptly shot by the detective here, was that they only wanted to talk with you Sam, they being us, the Thrax. Sam, why did you have to bring them," said a muffled woman's voice while taking off her mask and shaking out her beautiful long hair.

It was Penny, she looked down at the old man, then back to Detective Silver with a look of disgust. "He was like a father to me. Stupid old man, why'd you have to go and get yourself killed," she said looking back down at the old man, who was now dead.

"Penny, it's not going to work, the trist neroprint. It's corrupt and it's killing Sam," said the detective slowly putting her hands back down.

"Don't try it Terra, hands back up," said Penny as she put her hand into the detective's trench coat and pulled out her badge. "That old psychology trick isn't going to work on me Terra, and the blueprint is working just fine," she said walking over to a hot blower oven.

Just as Penny was about to toss her badge into the oven the detective yelled out "Knocks!" All of a sudden the badge burst with a blinding light, and the suits that Penny

and her people were wearing surged with electricity. They started to scream, then passed out and fell to the ground like flies. "Knocks!" yelled detective, and the badge went dark. Penny and her people lay there on the floor motionless. "A new security feature, just installed this morning," she said picking up her badge and looking at Sam with a faint smile. By this time Detective Silver's crew had recovered and were waiting for orders. "Book 'em. Let's take 'em back to headquarters," she said to her crew. Agent Brack and his fellow agents cuffed the unconscious Penny and her people, then picked them up and threw them over their shoulders and carried them out. Sam walked with Detective Silver and her crew out the building. There were a number of security vehicles already waiting for them, along with an ambulance. They loaded everyone in and headed back to headquarters.

On the drive back Sam asked the detective "What did she mean when she said the blueprint was working just fine?"

Detective Silver was silent for a short time before she answered him. "Sam, she may very well be right about the neroprint in your head, but she's playing with a double edge sword. If the trist test run is successful it will be very profitable for the Thrax. Unfortunately, the Thrax aren't known for just giving their tech away. They're going to want to extract it."

"What does that mean detective?" he asked in a concerned tone.

"It means Sam, either way they're going to try and wipe your mind. Your only option is Penny, she has the codes to unlock the trist so we can safely remove the neroprint. Don't worry Sam, It's just a little kiss," she said trying to reassure him.

It was hours later when Sam woke and found himself in a dark room. He realized he must have passed out again, and it bothered him greatly that he had no control of it. Damn this tech, gotta get it out of my head, he said to himself while looking around for a light switch. A few feet away he spotted a dimly lit light switch, and went over to turn it

on. As light filled the room his eyes adjusted to see what looked like a medical lab from the 21st century, but it was much larger. He checked the door, but it was locked from the outside. "Hello!" he yelled out, but there was no response, so he decided to explore. As he walked around he saw rows of scientific equipment and medical supplies locked up in glass cabinets. In one particular cabinet he saw surgical equipment along with various saws that made him a little uncomfortable. He continued walking around the room wondering what the heck was he doing there. Then around the corner he saw her.

It was Penny, she was unconscious and strapped to a strange chair that extended out to accommodate the length of her body. She didn't look injured, just unconscious. He tapped her on the arm a few times to see if she would wake up, but she just lay there. He double checked her breathing, and she was fine. "You're up, that's great! Now we can get started," said a loud, but familiar voice over the sound system. It was Detective Silver.

"Where are you, and why are we locked in this room?" he asked the Detective while looking around to see if there any windows in the room that she might be behind. He couldn't find any windows anywhere in the room, but he did spot a speaker cleverly disguised as crown molding running along the top corner of the wall. Below the speaker were tiny video cameras. She can see us, but we can't see her he thought to himself. "Ok, what's next?" he said looking to the nearest camera with a frustrated look.

"We'll Sam, she's sleeping beauty, and you're her prince charming. You know what to do," said the detective in a cynical tone.

He leaned over and kissed Penny. When he did, her eyes opened and she looked shocked, then she closed them again. He was embarrassed and immediately stopped and pulled away, but couldn't. Something had control over his body, he could not move and found himself paralyzed with his lips attached to hers. Then the room changed and he found himself in a place he had not been in a long time. It was a park, next to a pond in the city, a place they used to meet. Time seemed to be frozen around him, but he could hear the sound of birds flying overhead, running water, and people in the park.

It was like a memory had been unlocked, and he was reliving it again. Then he felt a shock run through his whole body, and all at once he had control of himself again. He moved away from her to see if she was ok. A moment later she woke up gasping for air. "Are you ok," he asked her concerned that he had hurt her in some way.

"I'm fine, it just felt like I was holding my breath for a long time," she said smiling at him like she used to do.

"Oh no, don't get the wrong idea Penny," he said looking at her funny.

"Don't worry Sam, I know the drill. Now can you help me out of these" she said looking at the straps binding her arms and legs to the chair. He started to loosen the strap around her arm when he was pulled back, and pushed to the ground. It was Hal, he was standing next to Penny dressed in a doctors uniform.

"What happened Sam," she said looking at him getting up from the ground.

"You don't see him do you," he asked her starting to feel worried.

"See who," she said nervously.

"Nothing personal sir, orders from above," said the holographic man looking back at him.

"You stay away from her, she's done nothing wrong Hal," said Sam thinking of a way to get to Penny.

"On the contrary sir, she is the reason you're here if you didn't remember. Did she by chance tell you why you're here?" said Hal adjusting the straps on Penny more firmly.

"Penny, why am I really here? It's certainly not to pitch an idea to a client," asked Sam while keeping an eye on Hal.

"They were going to broadcast the trist neroprint over Sundial City tonight, at midnight. So I searched the database for the best possible candidate to help me stop them. You're that candidate Sam," she said looking down watching the straps having been tightened on her, then back to Sam.

"Candidate, I don't understand, and who are these people you're talking about?" he asked her, as he heard the door to the room being unlocked.

The door to the lab opens, and in walks Detective Silver. "The Thrax have a funny way of doing business Sam. They brainwash people into doing their bidding. They manipulated Penny into joining them, and then had her use her powers of persuasion on you Sam," said the detective walking past him and over to Penny. While the detective was explaining the situation Hal gave Penny a sedative that nocked her out.

"So the load about broadcasting the trist neroprint is true?" he asked studying Detective Silver.

"That report is bogus Sam. The Thrax needed a diversion to get to their true target, us, marriage license," said the detective looking over Penny while stoking her hair.

"I don't quite follow detective. You mean Penny and the others did all of that as a diversion?" he asked her feeling unconvinced.

"Yes Sam, and now that Penny and her people have been apprehended, we can recondition them and recover their minds from their brainwashed state. They should be ok by morning," said Detective Silver with a reassuring look.

"So that's it? I can go back to my life now?" he asked her impatiently.

"I'm afraid it's not that easy Sam, you have intimate knowledge of the inner workings of our organization, and our proprietary security systems. It's unfortunate, but we are required by law to detain you for at least 24 hours before releasing you. There's a little paperwork you'll have to fill out that says you won't discuss any of the events that took place here with outside parties. Standard procedure, you understand," she said walking over to him and putting her hand on his shoulder for reassurance.

"Ok detective, sounds like a plan, but can I ask her one last thing before I go?" he said looking past the detective to see Penny.

"Sorry Sam, she's out cold right now. She's been given a sedative that starts the recovery process. You can see her before you're released tomorrow, ok," she explained to him, then looked over to Hal and nodded. Sam was hoping to get more information from Penny, but he guessed he could wait a little longer. Then something seemed to be nagging at him, he had to ask.

"Oh yeah detective, the database Penny mentioned, what code did the Thrax use to hack into it?

"That's classified Sam," she told him, but a few seconds later she changed her mind,

"Oh, I guess it's ok to tell you. Cobol, yes that's what it was, Cobol," she said not realizing what she had just told him.

"Ok. Thanks detective," he said starting to study the room as he was being lead by Hal to the door. Sam spots an unlocked cabinet full of medical supplies, just before the cabinet he bumps into a medical slab and cuts his hand on the corner.

"Ouch!" he says stopping to look at his hand that was now bleeding.

"Here your are sir," said Hal as he gestures toward the unlocked medical supply cabinet.

"Thank you Hal," he said in a suspicious tone while pulling supplies out of the cabinet and setting them on the counter.

Bandages, iodine, rubbing alcohol, and a small bottle of NaCl (salt) were sitting in front of Sam. He used some of the rubbing alcohol on his hand, then a little iodine, and finally he wrapped up his hand with the bandage. He smiles at Hal, then takes hold of the NaCl (salt) bottle and drops it on the floor, spilling the contents of the bottle at the feet of Hal. "Let me get that for you sir," says Hal as he bends down to pick up the bottle.

"No!" screams Detective Silver, as Sam starts to pour out the iodine and rubbing alcohol over Hal. Hal immediately turns and knocks Sam off his feet and onto the ground at least five feet away. Detective Silver looks down at Sam with extreme hatred, then looks back to Hal. The virtual man looked like he was melting, and began surging like he was being shocked all over. Hal collapsed and fell to the ground, and disintegrated completely. Sam knew the mixture of iodine, alcohol, and NaCl (salt) would corrupt the hologram tech's structure that was Hal's makeup. Now he had to deal with the detective.

"Forget the debriefing Sam. You're not going anywhere now," said the detective fuming.

"Any systems engineer knows that Cobol's been dead for at least two-hundred years now. Did you think I was that lame?" he said while secretly pick pocketing the detective's badge.

"How was I supposed to know you were a programmer? Damn, I should have killed you back at the glass shop. Could have made it look like an accident," said Detective Silver while she reached in her pockets for her badge. Her eyes widened, and a frightened look came over her when she realized that he was holding her badge in front of her. While she wasn't looking he had reprogrammed her badge to his DNA. In a wild rage she sucker punched him and the badge went flying. She ran over to pick it up. When she took hold of it she began to feel stiff and couldn't move.

Sam picked up a lab chair and walked over to the detective, then sat the chair down behind her, looked into the detective's eyes and said "Terra," have a seat. He taps her shoulder and she falls back into the chair like a stiff board. He picks up the badge and says, "New security measure." Now smiling a little, he walks toward Penny who was still unconscious.

He lays the badge on her chest and steps back. "Wake up sleepyhead," he says crossing his arms. Penny immediately jerks like she's being shocked, then relaxes and begins to breath normally. As Sam undoes the straps she was bound with her eyes open, and she smiles at him.

"Thanks Sam," giving him a funny look. She slowly gets up from the chair with the badge, and walks over to Terra.

"I almost thought we weren't going to be able to pull this one off, but we did. I honestly thought you were going to kill me and my old friend," said Penny giving Terra an odd look.

"You and your team, oh and your friend there, I was going to personally take care of each of you. Told the boss I'd do you all for free," said Terra with a devious smile.

"Yeah, but killing a federal officer wouldn't look good on your record Terra, even for someone in the Thrax organization," said Penny while stripping off the trench coat that Terra was wearing. "Ok, you can take her away boys," she said while holding her hand up giving a rodeo sign. A team of men and women rushed into the room and cuffed Terra, then escorted her out of the room. "As for you Sam, thanks for all your help, and your wife for being so understanding," she said holding out her hand for him to shake.

"It was good to see you after all these years Penny. I mean Detective Silver" he said turning her handshake into a hug.

After the short embrace he asked her, "Those people outside, what the heck is wrong with them?" he was referring to the locals that wanted to kill him earlier.

"Oh them, they're from Sundial City's actor's guild. You know, up top. The director's an old friend of mine. He wanted to do some zombie apocalyptic end of the world movie, and thought the old Under city would be the perfect place to shoot his film. Thought you'd get a kick out of it during your visit here," she said laughing a little.

"Not really my style Penny, the old family life's my speed these days," he says giving her an awkward look.

"All right Sam, I get the hint, you want to go back home," she said walking with him out of the room.

"Thanks for everything Sam," she said to him before he got into the car that would take him to the train station up top. He nodded and got into the car. While on the trip back home via the Platinum-T he saw an envelope on the seat across from him. He looked around to see if anyone else might of left it, but no one seem to notice or care. He reached over for a closer look and saw his name on it. He looks around again wondering who might have dropped it off, then takes it and opens it. Out falls a check and a note. The check was written out to him for about ten times what he would make in a year at his job. The note read as follows, 'Be in my office at 10:00 AM Monday morning. We need to talk about you heading the new systems team in Sundial City. Welcome to the Elite Sam, you and your family are going to love it here', signed 'Mr. Jamison'. Sam sat back in his seat, and looked out the window smiling. After arriving

back home he exits the train and sees his family. They greet him and give him a big family hug, then they all head off toward home. As the Platinum-T was heading back to Sundial City the seat across from where Sam had been sitting had an odd impression in the cushion.