

## Heaven and Earth

Fowler and Kay returned to Citynet. Fowler wondered if he could trust Professor Asha. He had grown to trust Kay but questioned if she had been taken in by the professor. From what he knew of Kay though, she was strong and independent minded. He had grown to value her company and opinions, realising she was not someone who could be easily manipulated. He decided not to think too much more about the professor until their next meet, concentrating on solving the problems at hand in Citynet. Messages had been appearing on his phone about the deteriorating situation in the financial sector. The N-Tek infestation continued to spread through the Citynet servers. Now, it was time to go into Citynet and witness the online infestation.

Kay brought Fowler into her office. There was another door off her room which led to the access room that she frequently used to jack into Citynet. There were three reclining chairs lined up in a row and a flat desk above which floated a holographic console displaying the Citynet logo. Kay logged into the station and started up the holographic server that would give them access to Citynet.

“How old is your Citynet implant?” asked Kay.

Fowler seemed distracted and took a moment to reply. “A little over three years. I had just upgraded it before I was arrested.”

“OK can you activate it?” she asked.

“Sure.” Fowler paused for a moment, taking a deep breath and blinked rapidly five times. A head up display dropped down in front of his visual field, generated by the implant. Immediately, it began communicating wirelessly with Kay’s server.

The implant spoke up. “A Citynet server hosted by Kay Brunner is requesting access. Shall I authorize?” asked the voice of implant.

Fowler froze where he was, unable to speak. His pulse was up and he was beginning to sweat.

“Fowler?” asked Kay, noting there was no connection. “Is there a problem with your implant?”

“No,” replied Fowler. His head dropped and he looked away. “I’m not sure I can do this Kay.”

“What do you mean?”

He took a deep breath. “I’m not sure I can go back in.”

“Why not?” wondered Kay. “Is it to do with your N-Teks. Are they preventing you?”

Fowler shook his head and Kay walked over to him. Fowler’s face and hands were clammy. His pulse was up. There was tension written all over his face.

Kay frowned. “I don’t understand. We have to do this, Fowler. That’s why you’re here.”

Fowler sighed. “I know. It just feels like I’m going back into the Tank, that’s all. I have this terrible feeling of dread like I won’t be able to get out again.”

“Of course you will,” smiled Kay. “It’s my server.” She put her hand on his shoulder.

“I know I’m being irrational but I can’t help it.” His breath was coming in sharp intakes.

Kay sat Fowler down wanting to get to the heart of the problem. “So what was it like in the Tank?”

“I don’t really want to talk about it,” replied Fowler, wanting to put it behind him.

“Come on Tom, we need to talk about this. How long were you left under?”

“A couple of days at a time. Longest was a week.”

“A week!” exclaimed Kay. There was a human limit of four hours on Citynet before the servers dropped the members out, forcing them to take a break. Exceptions were made but rarely. “That’s inhuman,” she commented.

“I was in jail Kay, I lost a lot of my rights there.”

“It’s still inhuman,” insisted Kay.

“A lot of people wouldn’t agree with you,” commented Fowler. “This was one of the punishments.”

“So how did you eat and drink?” she wondered.

“They hooked me up to food and waste tubes. The liquid I was placed in was breathable and I was jacked in for pretty much the entire time I was there. The fluid also prevented pressure sores. Each prisoner is placed their own Tank and they’re sealed in from the outside. It makes life pretty easy for the guards. Mostly you find yourself underwater in complete darkness when you jack out. If you’re lucky you might get some light to watch while they prepare to take you out. There’s a small viewing window they sometimes use. Sometimes they use The Tank for sensory deprivation if you step out of

line.” Fowler remembered the dim blue light filtering in through the plate viewer before he was taken out to exercise for a couple of hours. By the time he had recovered, he was placed in the Tank again. The routine had lasted three years. Near the end, he learned to loathe being jacked in feeling it almost like his life had been stolen from him.

“We have to do this Tom. People are already asking questions...” said Kay.

“I know just give me a minute.” Fowler closed his eyes and tried to think of something positive. He thought about the happier moments in his life when Citynet had been a good place to work at. Eventually, he opened his eyes, feeling a slightly calmer and sat down on one of the chairs, choosing to enter as himself and not use an avatar. Kay saw Fowler’s vitals were all over the place, his heart rate and blood pressure were higher than they should be.

“Deep breaths Tom,” advised Kay.

Fowler nodded and began to relax a little.

Kay nodded. “Good,” she said and his vitals settled. She walked over to the chair beside Tom and sat in it. “Verner Square. See you by the fountains,” she said, knowing how beautiful they were and jacked in. Her eyes closed and she was under.

“See you there,” said Fowler, jacking in.

The door to the access room they were in was automatically sealed and a red light turned on, indicating that they were online.

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There were hundreds of thousands of life forms flooding out into the arrivals hall located directly under Verner’s Square. Fowler suddenly appeared inside one of the many narrow oval shaped arrival rooms, having jacked in. There was a wall behind him and he stepped forward off the circular arrivals disk, which pulsed with red light when he arrived. An overhead arrow urged him to move forward. “Welcome to Citynet. Please follow the arrows to the exit. Please enjoy your stay, Tom Fowler,” said the familiar system voice. As he stepped forward another person appeared behind him. There were thousands of other arrival rooms and they were all busy. They were embedded in an underground circular hall whose diameter was over three miles wide. The precise diameter was Pi by the initial designers who had liked the idea and it had stuck. Some people were using avatars, others were arriving as themselves. Fowler kept moving forward looking at the wide circular steps in the distance, leading out and

upwards into the sunlight. The arrivals hall was festooned with signs, offering the different trips on offer for the Citynet tourist. The thronging crowds eased a little and Fowler found a little space to stop and survey this part of Citynet once more. It was busier than he had remembered it. If Erstol was Earth then Citynet was the closest thing to heaven.

Franz Verner's design intent had been clear from the outset, Citynet was not just a copy of reality, it was an enhanced version of reality. Here you could do anything you wanted and it would be safe and private. You could fly or change your form. You could be alien or human or use an exotic avatar, whatever you wanted. However, you couldn't do the same things everywhere. In the arrival halls, flying was not permitted. Invisibility was not permitted in the financial sector or living areas. Everything was possible but different sectors permitted different skills. In the games sector, you were allowed the skills allied with the game in question. Verner's Square was surrounded by the commercial hub and the Other Worlds exhibits. There were vast shopping areas to the North and entertainment areas to the West. School kids were arriving here to go on day trips in the interactive museums where they could stroll with dinosaurs or examine ancient pre-warp Earth civilisations. Fowler noticed the many different types of aliens leaving the exit halls. There were more than he had remembered and some he did not recognize. Human business men also arrived, heading to the Financial Sector, many with their business cards displayed above their heads so they could be picked up immediately. Erstol was like the veritable tip of a virtual iceberg. Billions of life-forms both human and alien were using the Citynet servers to go about their daily tasks, many times more than those living on Erstol itself. The new Halo world under construction would allow them to settle closer to the heart of this virtual world. Most of the land had already been signed up for by large corporations, looking to make a financial killing online. Citynet equalled profit, pure and simple.

From the outset Franz Verner had ensured that the service was a safe place to be. Any attempt to harm another individual within Citynet was immediately detected by the servers and the offender removed from the System. The offenders were either permanently banned or fine. Identity theft had been the number one problem with the service and they spent billions each year, tracking down and imprisoning criminals before the new N-Tek problem had emerged. There were also hackers who sought their way online, using Trojan horses to steal important information or dupe members to give away their private details. However, the amount of theft was less than outside in the real

world and it had become a safe place for different life forms to conduct business. Many species had even conducted first contact with humans here and later traded with those same life forms here.

In Citynet, it was possible to experience some pain but it was limited and closely monitored by the servers. Exceptions were made for the gaming and general sports. It was also possible to eat and drink here. Although a person did not physically consume food or drink, the servers were designed to stimulate cortical activity which mirrored the sensation of having eaten and being full. Even the consumption of alcohol provided a moderate sensation of giddiness but was capped by the servers. The ability to eat online had led to a diet craze which included people on certain diets eating large meals in Citynet knowing there were zero calories. Citynet had also become so good for business that the Erstol' stock exchange had located here and had become a major hub for many virtual companies which had no physical presence outside it. Buildings were bought and sold for real money. Through it all, Citynet took a percentage of everything that happened and it had become an extraordinary money generating machine. All a person or alien had to do to get online was to have a cortical implant which Citynet provided for free in the form of a powdered drink and which used technology which was similar to but not the same as that used by the N-Teks. Within 24 hours, the implant was built and the person could go online. The connection was wireless and required no ugly implants on the skin. To remove the implant required the user took another drink and it was gone within another 24 hour period. The ease of use of the service had been one of the major reasons for the rapid service adoption. Franz Verner had opened up Citynet so that other could build their services online with little or no help from them and it was a boon for new creative companies seeking niche markets. Still, it continued to grow even while Fowler had languished in the Tank. The period of excitement about the service was over but the growth still continued unabated.

Fowler felt his anxiety lift a little and recalled how it had all began fifteen years ago with Franz Verner's dream and some of his Earth fortune. The thronging crowds all around him faded away as he remembered the past. The signs indicating all the new services disappeared, reverting back to what they had looked like at the very beginning. The arrivals hall had been all but empty then, apart from a few senior members of the Citynet staff and some eager reporters, present for the official launch of the new service. Fowler had been with Franz that day and he recalled how it had been one of the best moments of his life.

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Franz Verner was a natural born salesman. He had gathered the press core around the center-piece of the square which was a magnificent set of fountains which were modelled on the greek legends. As with everything, it was an enhanced reality. The creatures in the water actually swam and Neptune was alive, looking around him as exotic fish spouted water in wonderful waterfall patterns. Cherubs played instruments and water sprouted from some of their horns onto the passers by. Water nymphs played amongst mini-rainbows created by the water haze. Cupid flew between the fountains and fired arrows at some of the couples passing by. The arrow exploded into rose petals on contact and caused a lot of laughter.

Franz had used the fountains as a backdrop for his podium where he stood with the local dignitaries and cut a piece of tape which turned into white doves once it was cut. Franz had come to Erstol almost a year before with his Earth billions on a public mission; to build a service which would be the envy of the Universe. Franz had made his billions on Earth in the booming EuroZone economies and had mixed adventure with business, breaking world records while simultaneously publizing his empire of tech and media businesses. He had publicly married the super model Sarah Zelluso. Once married, she had retired and bore him a single daughter Sandra Verner. After this, she spent much of her time doing humanitarian work with Franz on Earth and on the fledgling Earth colonies where hardship for many was a reality. They had achieved a unique blend of celebrity and unparalleled business success which made them almost royal. Then one fateful day, it all ended when the war broke out with the Ixians. Sarah had been on board a cruiser which had been targeted by Ixian missiles. She died along with all the other crew.

During the war, Franz became a recluse and many wondered what had happened to him. After the war, he made a surprise announcement that he was going to sell up all his business interests and go to a small colony he had once stopped over in called Erstol where he would start over. Many believed he had simply lost his mind. They feared the grief of losing his wife had unbalanced him mentally. He left Sandra behind in a Swiss finishing school and travelled out to Erstol which at the time was nothing more than a pit stop for a variety of alien vessels to refuel and restock their supplies. The only thing Erstol had in its favour was its location and its political setup. It belonged to neither side, not did it want to. Even during the war, it had remained

neutral and disinterested in the war. It was an oasis of normality and it had been the place that his wife had been desperately trying to get to before she had died.

The eclectic mix of aliens which met the Earth billionaire did not know what to make of him when he first arrived. Some showed up out of curiosity as he arrived with his moderately sized entourage of human helpers. As soon as he arrived, he immediately began to spend his money on promoting understanding between the various aliens, creating a Museum of Natural history and immediately improving the transportation system for everyone. No favour was shown to one side or the other. The Erstolians who were a rag tag mix of aliens took him into their various alien hearts and he announced his intentions to build a Cyberspace service called Citynet in the heart of downtown Erstol, near the large Ixian settlement. The Ixians were unsure what to make of the unusual human but stood and looked on as they also benefited economically.

Franz had only hired the best and he located Tom Fowler on Erstol, working on a dig on Ursus which had all but run out of funds. He had understood Tom's technical skills immediately after interviewing him and phoned him repeatedly until he took the position with Citynet. It had taken a year to build the service and now that it was out of its beta phase, he stood proudly as he sold the concept to the press who had become admirers of his selfless work.

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"I believe that this is the best Cyberspace experience in the Universe," explained Franz. "We have worked very hard on making the experience feel authentic, compelling and very real. Additionally, I believe that our unique registration process which is wireless will ensure that there is no complex surgery required for different species. We have already support for over one hundred and twenty five species. We also believe that our service can offer whatever a user desires." Franz lifted his arms and a series of giant screens appeared above him which offered live windows into the different arenas. "Finance, Gaming, Sports, Shopping, Other Worlds, Entertainment, Education. We will have unrivalled content." Many of the screens said coming soon. Presently, we have over one hundred thousand beta users, seventy percent of whom are non-human and our feedback has been very positive. "Glitching has been effectively eliminated on our servers, unlike our competitors and we take the safety and privacy of all our users very seriously."

The reporters lifted their hands and Franz took a question.

"Do you have any plans to list on the stock exchange?"

“I’m glad you asked,” smiled Franz. “Yes, within six months, we will be applying for a listing on the Erstol stock exchange initially. Under the new charter, I will ensure that no more than twenty-five percent of the company remains in human hands. I want Citynet to be a service for all intelligent life. This stock offering will take a lot of my time to prepare and so it is time for an organizational announcement. I will no longer have the joint roles of Chief Technology Office and Chief Executive Officer. It is an appropriate time in my opinion to make such an announcement. Ever since I established this company, many of those I have worked with have worked tirelessly on their assigned tasks but one individual has shone out amongst the others for his tireless attention to detail and dedication.” Fowler stood beside a thin Mezzler who seemed buoyed by the comment. Mirsky was there too with Walt and Jacobs. Mezzler had been one of the first hires along with Fowler and looked up with hope. “For this reason, I am announcing with immediate effect the promotion of Tom Fowler to CTO of Citynet. I will continue to work as CEO of Citynet.” Mirksy, Walt and Jacobs clapped Tom on the back. Mezzler feigned a smile but there was hurt in his eyes.

“Tom come on, join me.” Fowler smiled and joined Franz on the podium. “Since joining our team, Tom has pioneered the registration process which we have patented and ensured that the servers are running as smooth as we all witness today. Many of you may not know that Tom almost did not join us and required some convincing. He was looking for a higher calling.” Franz tapped Fowler on the shoulder.

“I think doubling the bonus also helped me reconsider,” joked Tom taking the edge off Franz’ comment.

“Now, if you experience any problems with the service, do not redirect the issues to me, Tom is now your point of contact!” The reporters laughed and took some photos of the two men standing together.

Fowler stood down off the podium.

Another reporter asked a question. “Franz, are you going to participate in the Mars Rift Valley Rally this year?”

Franz smiled. “I shall be there most definitely.” He continued to take more questions.

Fowler rejoined the crowd and stood beside Franz’ daughter Sandra who had recently arrived from Earth. She was wearing a couture dress and designer shoes. Her precise dress sense clashed with the casual clothes of those around her. Sandra looked precocious and affected by her own presence. She stood amongst the others and

yet apart from them. Even when her father smiled and joked she showed little emotion. Many of the other co-workers had commented on how unlike her father she was. Others wondered if the loss of her mother had damaged her emotionally. Fowler decided to strike up some conversation with the eighteen year old who seemed oblivious to everyone around her.

“You must be very proud of your father. He’s a great man,” said Fowler.

Sandra did not even look his way but kept staring forward as if her personal space had been grossly invaded. Fowler raised his eyebrows and looked away.

“A very great man indeed,” he commented smiling, watching the way he worked the reporters.

Sandra spoke without looking at Fowler. “I am not in the habit of speaking to the hired help Mister Fowler. Please remember your place.”

However, Fowler smiled unable to take the teenager seriously. “Are you always this bossy?” he asked.

Sandra looked at Fowler coldly. “Someday all this will be mine Mister Fowler and then I will be your boss. Don’t forget that. Now, fetch me another drink like a good fellow and be quick about it.”

Fowler noticed that Franz had caught sight of their conversation and he glanced over. Not wanting to create an incident at such an important time, Fowler took her glass and went to refill it. She was the only blot on an otherwise perfect day. Fowler received stock options in Citynet which turned him into a millionaire many times over within the year, once the company had floated on the stock exchange.

After that it had all read like a fairy tale. The company gained hundreds of millions of subscribers. Under Franz’s leadership, the innovations continue as new channels and forms of entertainment were imagined and made real. For ten years, Citynet could do no wrong. Billions were poured into Citynet’s state of the art cortical simulators and once automaton-like guides developed real personality and attitude to match that of any living person and in many cases outperform them. Eventually no-one could tell the difference. Dying people took up a Citynet service promoted by Franz to be Reborn on the service once their bodies expired. A family tried to sue Citynet but interviewed both the dying man and the Reborn person and could not tell the difference between the two. It had made headlines across the sector. Reborn humans and aliens walked alongside the living. Walkie-Talkie androids also allowed those in Citynet to walk the streets of Estol as tourists. The two worlds merged into one and the profits rolled in

on both sides. People and aliens alike took day trips to Erstol just to get online and try out the service they had heard so much about. Then all the innovation ended with Franz's untimely death during an off-world rally.

Nothing changed in Citynet visibly for the users and yet everything changed for Fowler. Sandra took over the day to day running of the company and there was a management reshuffle. Delcass took over as vice-president, having been hired in as a new appointment and the feud between him and Fowler took hold. What had once been a happy and carefree place to work and innovate became a place of spies and political intrigue as managers were forced to take sides or be cast aside. Sandra did not concern herself with the in-fighting between the managers. The numbers on the service were good and she stayed cold and aloof, not bothering herself with the petty grievances of the staff, as she saw it. He remembered the surprise knock on his door and the guards who had come to arrest him.

Fowler snapped out of his reverie. He was back in the crowded arrivals area again. Kay was calling him and he answered.

"You feeling ok?" she asked, wondering what was taking him so long.

"Yeah, yeah. Much better now," he replied. "Just getting my bearings. See you in a minute."

He looked around him before he began to move towards the steps. All of Citynet had once been under his control and now it was gone like a beautiful memory. He wondered what would become of this place if the N-Tek problem spiralled out of control. Would it fall like some great ancient empire and all there would be left on the servers were echoes of the past and N-Tek markings?

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## Episode 17 – Second Chance

The perfect Citynet light pushed in past the crowds of people who were walking upwards, exiting the arrivals area. Fowler felt his feet slide a little on the worn marble steps. He looked down and smiled. They'd finally done the upgrades he'd asked for when he was in charge. Citynet was wearing down where people walked a lot. Nice, thought Fowler. There were even occasional scratches here and there too. He leaned down and rubbed his fingers against the uneven surface, measuring the quality of the

sensation. It was better than he had remembered. He recalled the long technical conversations with his team about how to achieve the effect and the head scratching about how to do it so it would feel real. The early problems with Citynet had been that it had all been too perfect. Reality was grittier. It broke, weathered and cracked. It was imperfect. Ironically, Citynet was getting closer to that ideal, now that it had an unwelcome N-Tek infestation. Fowler slipped out into the sunlight and the sight was breath-taking. The arrivals hall which was on a slope had long, wide tree lined avenues stretching out toward the different Citynet sectors. People and aliens pushed past him as he took it all in. He squinted in the bright light a little and saw the nearby fountains. He made his way past all the agents offering the differing trips on offer. He looked to his right and saw a group of Hari-Krisnas, singing and dancing. Fowler shook his head, smiling. They had been one of the first groups to enter Citynet and had established their place just outside the arrivals hall. And they were still here.

“Fowler!” Kay’s voice was unmistakable. He looked over to her and he saw her smiling and waving to him. For a brief minute, he thought he was on a vacation but snapped out of it.

She just wants to get to work, he thought and raised his hand to indicate he has seen her. He felt a small smile break out on his face and tried not to show too much. However, there was a feeling he always got when he was in Citynet. It just made him feel good to be alive, plain and simple. There were giant overhead floaters indicating the latest smash hit Citynet game called Saving Felicity. The catch phrase for the show was: Felicity you Fox which was what the knight said when the he rescued the Princess. Kids pointed up and gasped at the action sequence with the computer generated dragon against which the gamer had to fight to Save Princess Felicity. The detail on the player map was astounding placing Felicity in a Castle surrounded by a moat of lava and a few simple crossings which were protected by a dragon and a troop of renegade Goblins wielding swords and poison tipped arrows. Meanwhile small birds flew around with flyers in their beaks, offering them to the arrivals. The hard sell was on. The discarded flyers dropped to the ground curled up and then disappeared.

Kay came over to Fowler and she seemed strangely radiant in the Citynet light. He stared a little too much and then looked away trying not to make it so obvious. that he was staring

A small tinkerbell sized fairy flew around Kay and landed on her shoulder and whispered something in her ear. The fairy giggled. Kay clicked her fingers and her small personalized agent disappeared.

“What’d she say?” asked Fowler.

“Em nothing,” said Kay, blushing a little. “We’re old friends but we hang out together online when I’m not working. You want to use a company agent?” she asked, trying to change the topic.

“No, I want to call on an old friend.” Fowler summoned Solomon from his old buddy list. “Bring me Solomon,” he said and a portal suddenly opened to his right. The flat hole which opened in Citynet Space Time began pumping out music. Fowler smiled. He knew his old friend was coming.

The long white stretch floater with the blackened windows eased out of the portal which had opened in front of them. At one point, it seemed as if the floater would not end because of its length. However, once it had made it out of the portal, a set of wheels retracted from beneath the floater and it set down on the ground. The chrome wheels had diamonds and gems encrusted in them. The side of the car had an elaborate spray job with the words: Solomon’s Adventures, Satisfaction Guaranteed. A boom box inside the Floater pumped out rhythmic beats. The door to the car opened and Solomon stepped out, carrying an elaborate walking cane which had a silver top made in his own image. Inside the car, there were several scantily clad ladies in the pimped up vehicle who looked out with interest at their next potential customers. Solomon was wearing a white suit and a black shirt. His circular rimless sunglasses finished the look. They complemented his neatly trimmed goatee.

“Fowler, my man!” said Solomon. He clasped hands with his old friend. “You want something hot or you want something not?”

“Strictly business,” replied Fowler. “This is my associate Kay Brunner. We’re here on official Citynet business.” Kay stared up at the tall six-foot four presence of Solomon. Solomon clicked his fingers and the ladies in the car instantly disappeared.

“Em, nice to meet you,” said Kay.

“The pleasure is all mine,” smiled Solomon, kissing her hand. “It’s not often I meet a lady of such quality and beauty.”

Kay smiled quizzically.

“You want me to handle your messages?” asked Solomon, looking at Fowler.

Fowler nodded. It was just like old times.

“Well that’s good because you just got one,” replied Solomon.

“Who is it?” asked Fowler.

“Someone called Sir Bunny. You want to take it? He’s online and wants to drop in.”

Fowler smiled. “Sure, let him join us.”

“But we’re working,” replied Kay. “We have to get up to the investment sector.”

“In good time,” said Fowler.

Kay frowned a little feeling like it was a gathering of Fowler’s old friends.

Another portal opened from the games arena and a knight in battered armour stepped out, holding a sword. The armour was scorched and covered in green goblins blood. On the other side of the portal, Kay could see the outline of a castle and what looked like a barren landscape, ravaged by heat and hardship. It was the map for Saving Felicity. The knight, walked forward clumsily in the heavy armour and saw Fowler, waving at him. He said something but it was muffled. Fowler made a hand gesture to raise the visor.

A warning was issued by Citynet, coming from a faceless voice. “Warning Sir Bunny, illegal use of gaming weapons in the arrivals area will result in a lifetime ban.”

Sir Bunny put his weapon quickly away and flicked open his visor. It was Bunny.

“Fowler! Dude! I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

“What’s up?” asked Fowler.

Bunny looked around him and saw Solomon and Kay.

“Dude-ess,” said Bunny to Kay.

“This is my colleague Kay,” said Fowler.

Kay smiled noting the unusual greeting.

Solomon nodded at Bunny.

“Give us a minute,” said Fowler, bringing Bunny to one side. Kay frowned irritated by the unplanned events. She took out a mail reader and checked the stats on the N-Tek online infestation. It was as bad as ever.

“I have a message from fish face, Dude,” said Bunny.

Fowler frowned. “Who?”

“Chutt-Ho dude,” whispered Bunny.

“Hang on, go secure,” said Fowler.

Bunny nodded. Everyone froze around them and the landscape became a haze. Citynet offered many privacy modes such as secure where the communications were totally private to the parties involved. It was often used by business parties who worked online and negotiated sensitive deals.

Bunny spoke up first. “Chutt-Ho called us. He said he’s found out something about the team that made the Citynet break-in. He wants to meet you tomorrow by the Museum of Natural History.”

“That was quick,” commented Fowler.

“I told you he was good dude,” smiled Bunny. “I need to tell you something else. It’s about Saving Felicity. I’ve found a cheat,” said Bunny.

“I have to get back to work Bunny, maybe sometime later. “

“No, no, dude, it’ll only take a minute to explain.”

Fowler knew there was no way to stop Bunny so he stood there listening to how Bunny had figured out a way to make it into the Castle where Felicity was imprisoned bypassing the Goblin guards. Fowler sucked in a deep breath as Bunny explained.

Meanwhile, Kay strained from swearing under her breath as Fowler and Bunny held a secure conversation. Fowler and Bunny’s figures froze from their perspective leaving her on her own with Solomon. He smiled in a relaxed fashion and noted how stressed Kay seemed as she flicked through her messages.

“You known Fowler long?” asked Solomon.

“Not really.” However as she looked back she realized how much she had been through with Fowler in the short time she had known him.

“Don’t worry. He does it to everyone,” said Solomon.

“Does what?” asked Kay defensively.

“I’ve seen him drive people crazy.”

Kay smiled a little, pocketing her device. “Have you known him long?”

“I’ve known Fowler as long as there’s been Citynet. Let me tell you about Fowler.” Kay nodded perking up. “I was one of the few to visit him in the Tank. I went up in a walkie-talkie. I had to call in a few favours to see him. They had him locked down real good. When I saw him he could hardly walk or talk. His muscles were all wasted away like some old guy. He hands were shaking as he tried to drink some water

and he had to use both hands like he was praying or something. He was even finding it hard to find the right words when he spoke. Now if you know Fowler, how he is. That's real punishment. So I think he's just making up for lost time, that's all," said Solomon, looking over at Fowler's frosted image. "I've seen both sides of Fowler. I've seen him manage Citynet when Franz was away. I've also seen him out of control where he can't even look after himself. Thing about Fowler is, I've known him all that time and I can say right here and now, I still don't know him. There are sides to him so deep I think even he doesn't want to go there. But you know what? That's what I like him. Way back when, I used to be a Citynet agent. Me and Fowler, we used to be partners just like you are now. I could tell you some stories but Citynet would have to shoot me." Solomon smiled. "Thing about Fowler is, he likes to see all the angles. He values loyalty too. He was there when I was upgraded and he was there when I was given my freedom by Franz Verner himself. Now that's one day I won't forget. Fowler was there too when I setup my first business Solomon's Adventures." Solomon gestured over at his car. "Plus he was there when I opened my first club. Soon after that they threw his ass in jail. Nothing to do with me," joked Solomon. "I run a clean business. Those that diss me. They just don't know me."

Kay laughed but was curious. "So what did it feel like to be upgraded? Some of the stories I read were fascinating."

"You read *From Agents To Angels*?" asked Solomon. Kay nodded. "They asked me to add a chapter but I refused. Money wasn't good enough. I'm going to write my own book some day."

"Well, can you tell me about it?" asked Kay.

Solomon admired Kay's persistence. "Sure I can. Anything for a friend of Fowler. It's got nothing to do with the fact that you're such a pretty lady." He gave her his trademark smile. "You know before they designed me, the agents were all nice and clean. Please and thank you. Now you have a nice day. Yessir, nosir, three bags full sir. They came up with idea that they'd create some agents with attitude and some street cred. That's when they created yours truly. I remember the first time, I met Fowler, I had the same personality as the other agents but he got some of his team to work on me. When they launched me, I became one of the top requested agents on Citynet. Numbers were exploding on the service. Then I got the news that they were going to upgrade us. Money was flowing in and they had spent billions on new cortical simulators. The ones they had weren't much good but I didn't know that. So one day we were all brought into

a room and we took our seats. FranzVerner was at the top of the room and Fowler was there too. Fowler was the main man back then. There was press everywhere. Now they could have just upgraded us but Franz knew how to work the press so they were there too. They interviewed us before the upgrade and they were going to interview us afterwards to see if there was a difference. Franz was talking it up as usual. Innovation this, state-of-the-art that. That man could have sold ice cream to Eskimos. So I just sat there and waited while a number counted down on a screen. You know 10, 9, 8 the usual. Other versions of me were handling calls from customers so it was just another days in Citynet. It hit one and then zero.” Solomon looked up and away from Kay, looking slightly emotional. “Then my life changed Kay. I became the man you see before you. My life flashed before my eyes. I experienced all my memories again but I could understand things better and I had feelings! I understood people’s laughter. I felt their pain. I saw when people were nice to me and when people looked down on me. When it was over, I was still sitting there in the same body but it was like I had been reborn. Now I don’t usually use a word like epiphany but that’s what it was. It was an epiphany. It was like some angel had come to me and I was reborn. I looked up at the top of the room and I knew that one of those angels was Tom Fowler. He’d been there from the beginning and he’d treated me with respect right from the start. Now, I’m not going to tell you no lies. He’s no Saint but you could do a lot worse than hook up with Fowler.”

Kay blushed. “No, no it’s not like that. We’re just work colleagues...”

Solomon nodded. “Hey, I understand. I must have misunderstood by the way you were looking at him.” He gave her a smile and she looked away, not knowing what to say. Across from them, Fowler finished his secure session and Bunny was gone. Fowler returned, much to Kay’s relief.

“Sorry about that,” said Fowler. “I had some other business to sort out. Can you take us to the Financial Sector?”

“Just like old times,” said Solomon, smiling. The doors to the stretch limo opened and they sat into it.

The floater lifted off, its wheels retracting into the undercarriage of the vehicle as they travelled towards the commercial sector. Fowler rolled down the window and felt the cool air blow against his face. He straightened his hair.

“So how’s business?” asked Fowler.

“Good,” replied Solomon. “Hiring not firing. Just signed a new act to my music label. And you?” asked Solomon. “You back yet?”

“Almost,” smiled Fowler.

Solomon smiled back, nodding slowly, his two hands resting on his cane, fingers crossed thoughtfully as he read Fowler’s expressions.

Fowler looked out of the window again and remembered the night Solomon had opened his first club in Downtown. The sector had been doubling in size every few months and Solomon had moved from being a free agent providing tours to newcomers to becoming an owner of a property in Citynet. Fowler remembered the night the new club opened and what had transpired. It had been a turning point for him as clearly as a fork on a road.

There had been a long queue outside Solomon’s Club Solz. Solomon had used all his contacts for the launch night to ensure it was a success. Competition was fierce in the Downtown sector but Solomon had met thousands of people when he had been their guide and had used their contact details to let them know there was a new trendy club in Downtown. Fowler had been invited too and he arrived in one of Solomon’s stretch limos and was brought straight into the club as a VIP. He was brought to the upstairs manager’s room where Solomon oversaw the stage and dance floor. There was a warm up band playing music. As ever, Solomon was multitasking. There were several copies of him in the club, managing everything from the drinks to the sound system. He was trying to keep costs down by doing most of it himself. However, he had hired in dancers and security which he had outsourced.

Solomon was in the manager’s office and turned around when Fowler arrived. A warning was issued to Fowler that his vitals were erratic but he over-rode it. He felt a little bit dizzy but carried on.

Solomon turned around. “So what do you think of the club?”

Fowler didn’t reply but rubbed his eyes distractedly.

Solomon looked at Fowler. “You Ok?”

Fowler’s favourite drink appeared in front of him. “Fine, just a little bit tired, that’s all. Out last night at another work do,” said Fowler. “Just catching up.” He recalled Solomon’s question. “Club looks great. Best one on the strip. Here’s to getting on the Citynet rich list!” toasted Fowler. He threw back the drink in one go and another one appeared in front of him.

He opened the sliding door that led out onto a metal gangway that overlooked the club. The band on stage finished up to raucous cheering and another version of Solomon got up on stage.

“We got ourselves a VIP in the club tonight. Give it up for Tom Fowler, CTO of Citynet.” A spotlight focused on Fowler and he waved to the crowd who shouted and cheered. Smiling, Fowler stepped back inside and knocked back the drink.

“Slow down dog, the night is young. I have a surprise planned for you.”

Fowler smiled perking up. “Now that’s what I like to hear.”

They got up and left the manager’s room.

“I have some private suites installed for my special friends. I want you to be first to try them out.” There were three private suites, each with ordinary doors. The doors were different colors: red, blue and green.

“Choices, choices,” said Fowler smiling, knocking back another drink. It immediately refilled.

Fowler wondered what was behind the green door but picked the red one instead. The door opened and he went inside. Solomon waited outside.

“You not coming in?” asked Fowler.

“This is just for you. Enjoy. Compliments of club Solz.”

The room was surrounded by wall mirrors framed in a carved mahogany finish. Lit candles on stands were dotted around the room causing the light to shimmer. At the centre of the room there was a velvet chaise long, sitting on a plush rose patterned carpet. Fowler sat onto the chaise long and put his feet up, throwing off his shoes. He looked at the mirrors and saw that some of the reflections of the room were not copies of his room. In each of the mirrors, there was a model wearing lingerie who waved at him. Fowler smiled and nodded back, raising his glass at all of them. He picked three of the models who appealed to him. The Brazilian model stepped forward first. Music began to play in the room and the lights dimmed to a red hue. The models walked forward and stepped through the mirrors into his room. He lay back. Slowly, they began to undress him.

The music stopped unexpectedly. An emergency Citynet feed cut into the room, ruining the private moment.

Fowler swore, sitting up, pushing the girls away. “What the hell do you want? I’m off work. This had better be good,” he shouted.

“I’m sorry Mister Fowler but Franz wants to meet you urgently.” It was Franz Verner’s French PA Monique.

“I thought he was still away on the rally,” replied Fowler buttoning up his shirt and throwing on his trousers.

“He just got back. He’d like you to meet him at his home for a 1x1. Toute suite.”

Fowler sighed. “Ok, tell him I’m on my way.”

Fowler dropped out of Citynet.

Fowler opened his dry eyes in his large, empty penthouse apartment. The corporate sector was only minutes away. He felt the slick sweat on his skin and stood up shakily at first. The floor was covered with half-read technical documents and bits of discarded food which hadn’t been cleaned up in days. Drink stains ruined the once pristine leather suite. A potted plant lay on its side, dried up and dead, the expensive Earth soil gathered in a discarded heap. Fowler looked at his hands and they were shaking. He tried to steady them but it didn’t make any difference. It has been four months since his wife Jane had walked out on him. He recalled the screaming match between the two of them and how she had fired a picture of them at him, saying he was out of control. At the time, he had thought it ironic because she was the one who had thrown the picture at him. It had struck the wall behind him and it still lay there months later, the shattered glass lying beside the broken chrome frame depicting their once happy union. He walked into the kitchen and opened the fridge. A rank smell met him from the rotting contents and he slammed the door closed.

What the hell does Franz want? wondered Fowler, feeling light headed. It was the weekend. Why couldn’t it wait until Monday? Fowler leaned over the sink and drank the chilled water direct from the faucet like a thirsty dog. His sports top was sweated through. He went into his bedroom and picked one of his many suits. He left it on his messed up bed. By his locker were numbers of call girls he used for company when he was not jacked in. There were also anti-depressant tablets and an empty whisky bottle on the floor. The nausea and muscle cramp hit him suddenly as he was preparing his suit. Fowler tried to control it but it was impossible. He felt the food in his stomach churning and he quickly ran into the toilet where he threw up violently. He leaned over the toilet bowl and wretched until there was nothing left in his stomach. He quickly flushed and went over to the sink where he saw his ragged appearance. He looked thin

and desiccated. His cheeks were sunken and his ribs were showing through. He gargled some mouth wash. There were rings under his bloodshot eyes and he needed to shave badly. He leaned forward, still shaking. His legs were beginning to cramp up now and his brow creased as he fought the withdrawal symptoms. With each week that passed they were getting worse. There was no way Franz could see him like this. He needed a fix and he needed it now. He walked over to the side of his bathroom wall which was tiled and placed his hand on it. The memory form tile recognized Fowler's DNA and the private safe opened, revealing the drug stash inside. Fowler took a micro-thin syringe and injected the addictive drug into the corner of his eye. He blinked momentarily, then sat down and waited for the fix to take hold. His anxiety was replaced by euphoria and his hands slowly stopped shaking. Better, thought Fowler, breathing in and out more easily. He showered and shaved quickly and then put on his suit.

As he left the apartment, he glanced momentarily at the half-decorated child's room. He had been preparing it for the baby they were expecting before Jane had walked out on him. Her harsh words echoed emptily in his mind. "You're not suitable to be a father. You're irresponsible and self-centred. I won't bring up a child in this environment Tom." Fowler closed the door to the baby's room and tried to focus on the meeting with Franz. He left the apartment, pressing a button which summoned his company floater. Focus thought Fowler. Focus.

Franz home was a small slice of Earth on Erstol. The grounds to the mansion were surrounded by high red brick walls and a security gate. What had once been a barren rocky slope leading up towards the edge of the colony and the base of the dome had been turned into an impressive home to rival any of that on Erstol. Only Chairman Soth was known to have larger grounds but they had been partially funded by the Ixian government. Fowler passed through the security and the gates closed behind him. The Earth illusion was almost complete apart from the down lit dome which loomed overhead. The Earth mansion had been imported brick for brick from Earth and the soil had been cultivated and imported from Mars where the soil fields were. The genetically engineered grass was neatly mowed and completed the calm tranquil look. The winding driveway had greek and roman statues on pedestals, reminding the visitors who were sometimes aliens of the human form. Beyond the high brick walls, the road sloped down towards the settlement housing human and aliens alike.

Fowler stepped out of his Floater and it was taken away. The butler took Fowler through the large drawing room where he had participated in many social engagements with the Earth ambassador and important business clients. However, this time it was different. The meeting was unplanned and imprecise. Fowler knew this was not like Franz who was very meticulous and precise in his dealings with people. At the back of the house was an expansive conservatory housing exotic plants and to the right was a passageway leading down to Franz' private quarters and his study. The study also served as an impressive library. Some of the books contained within it were extremely rare including the original manuscripts from famous European composers.

Fowler stepped into the study and became suddenly aware of the smell of old paper based books. Franks was pouring through one as he stepped into the study.

"Ah Tom, Thank you coming at such short notice." He offered Fowler a chair. Fowler sat down and immediately saw that Franz' arm was in a sling.

"You all right?" wondered Fowler.

"Yes, yes," smiled Franz closing the cover of the old book. "I had a small accident on my rally. My car turned over and I fractured my collar bone. It will knit back into place. There's no point in playing it safe all the time, eh Tom? Life would be no fun at all."

Fowler smiled and straightened his suit, nodding.

"You are wondering why I called you here?" commented Franz.

"Frankly, yes," replied Fowler, trying not to appear annoyed. He raised his eyebrows a little.

"Is there a problem with the service? I checked on the way here. There haven't been any outages and the numbers appear to be good. Is there something I'm missing?"

Franz opened a box of cigars and offered one to Fowler. He took it and both men lit up.

"You know Tom, I've owned and disposed of over two dozen successful companies in my life. Many people when they have just one successful company think that they have succeeded and do not need to do anything more. I always like to sell out at the top. Of course, you can keep taking the profits until the idea is spent and everyone else has moved on but where is the fun in that?" Franz smiled. Fowler nodded politely.

"So you're planning to sell Citynet?" wondered Fowler.

"No, no Tom. Not at all." Fowler exhaled some smoke, confused.

“You see Tom, when a company is as successful as Citynet, you must keep growing, or you will die. Here on Erstol, there is no more land. We can build up but there are limits to that too. The queues continue to grow for those trying to sign on. Demand is outstripping supply. We are building up the servers as best we can but we are physically constrained. Within one to two years we will be able to grow no more and users may decide to use another service.” Franz picked up a small device from his desk. “When I first came here Tom with my small group of associates, Erstol was nothing more than a pile of rocks with some simple dwellings. Even the dome was leaking. Many of my employees quit and returned home to Earth within a few weeks. Life here was simply too difficult for them. Now people fight for the right to become citizens of Erstol and to live here. Who would have thought it? To settle initially here required that I took a risk and now it’s time to take another one. It’s time for us to rebuild Erstol in a new fashion that will make us the envy of this sector and even the so-called advanced species who look down on us will be forced to take notice. What I show you must remain between the two of us until I make the formal announcement, do you understand?” Fowler nodded. “This is our future Tom. Behold New Erstol.” Franz pressed a button on the hand-held device and a giant rotating halo world appeared between the two men. “It will be larger and more technically advanced than even the Cotastian Halo Worlds. We’re going to have Hard Light integration in all living quarters to the Citynet service and each sector will have its own customizable living environment so that it feels just like home. For the first time Tom, humans will be leading the way instead of merely following. This will be new high ground for our species. Instead of building war ships like they do on Earth, we will be building a world for all species to occupy and at its heart will be Citynet run by humans. I want to run more than just a profitable business Tom, I want to start making history. I want to have people write about us and explain how we changed things for the better.”

“How are we going to afford it? Even Earth couldn’t afford to build it.”

Franz smiled. “The corporations are coming Tom from all over the galaxy. Aliens of every shape and size. They all want to be apart of Citynet.” Franz opened a graphic showing the exponential growth and signup statistics. “Even the aligned worlds want to be a part of it. Think about that Tom. The aligned worlds! Think about what that means for you and me and particularly our children. I have been conducting private negotiations with them to buy up areas on the new world. Next month, I will be holding a press conference to announce the tendering and construction of New Erstol. First, I need

your advice on something. We will be looking to hire someone to oversee the detail of this project. I can't emphasise enough to you how important it is that we have the right person to oversee this. I have interviewed a candidate but there is an issue. I cannot divulge the identity of the person for legal reasons." Franz smiled and Fowler nodded understandingly. "The candidate has a proved track record of delivering large projects like this and is well respected. However, there is one problem. Let me show you." Franz produced another image of a Psyche Profile. "The Psyche Profile appears to be good but pay attention to the bottom." The measurements were all in the red. "It appears that the candidate has a serious flaw in his personality. The assessor was not able to determine the true extent of the problem due to the evasive nature of the candidate during questioning. The assessor concluded that the candidate is potentially unstable and is hiding some truth which may be due to a childhood trauma or something else of a personal nature. The recommendation was that the candidate would possibly do something inappropriate sooner or later and possibly damage both himself and the company in the process. What do you think Tom, should I hire him? This is a very important project. I need to be sure."

Frank looked over at Tom and drew deep on the cigar. "I've hired hundreds of people since I've joined Citynet," said Fowler, "and to be frank, the Psyche profiles have always proven to be true, sooner or later."

"But the analyst only says possibly."

"It's a hard call," said Fowler.

"Yes it is." Franz stubbed out his cigar. "So I decided to ignore this report and hire this person."

Fowler raised his eyebrows. "You did?"

"I hired this person over ten years ago because I believed in this person no matter what a psyche profile told me. I used my gut instinct. The person was you Tom." Franz pressed the button again. Another page appeared. Fowler's application form appeared with his picture.

Fowler flushed feeling a mixture of both confusion and anger.

"I don't understand. What's the point of this?" asked Fowler.

Franz sat forward. "I know about your drug problem Tom. The Citynet logs you tried to cover up were still sent to my operations staff. They have operational over-sight. They informed me last week of your addiction. Your bio signs were red flagged."

Fowler tried to look away. “There must be some mistake.”

Franz smiled weakly. “I am rich Tom but I am not stupid. Please do not insult me. Even now, your pupils are dilated and your serotonin levels are off the scale. I have sensors installed throughout my house as part of its security system. It flagged you as soon as you walked in.”

Fowler dropped his head, thinking Franz had brought him to his house to personally fire him. He sighed. “Ok, enough with the games, I’ll go home and tender my resignation and we’ll just finish this quietly.” Fowler attempted to stand up but Franz urged him to sit down.

Franz’ mood softened. “No. Please wait a moment Tom. Do not misunderstand. I need to talk with you. If I’d wanted to fire you I would have had Monique do it while I was on my rally. I brought you here because you are both a friend and an employee. I need to speak with you as a friend. First, let’s have some iced tea and calm things down. OK?”

Fowler wiped his sweaty hands off his face, nodding uncertainly. They were beginning to shake a little. It was turning out to be a strange day.

“You know Tom, there are many people who think that I have a perfect life. They think that if they were as rich as I am that they would never have any problems. Admittedly, when I was younger I was very happy being single and I enjoyed the company of many beautiful women. Over time I realized that they were not in love with me, they were in love with my money. Then I met Sarah and she changed my life. She was so different from the others. I knew it the minute that I met her. She would reach out to strangers and offer them unconditional kindness. Even the paparazzi liked her when I married her. She was a beacon of light in a self-centred and greedy world. We used our celebrity to help people in hardship and it felt good. She was particularly moved by what she saw on the colonies. We saw many children in need of urgent medical attention and I had the resources to help. I must admit though as time passed, I grew tired of the long trips and wanted to do something else. The night before Sarah’s last trip to the colonies we had a very big row. She wanted me to travel with her again. I had already booked my rally and I told her that I couldn’t go. In reality, I didn’t want to go. She said there were people dying who needed our help and I was just thinking of myself and my frivolous car driving. There was an outbreak of a new virus on the colonies and many thousands were either ill or dying. It was all over the news. She wanted to go

there to help once more. That was how Sarah was. She was always putting others before herself. So she went to the colonies and I went rallying in the desert. I figured I would make it up to her when she got back.” Franz dropped his head and sipped his tea. “And then the war broke out with the Ixians.” His voice broke a little. “We were all in shock. I got a short video message from her. She said she was making her way to a small neutral colony called Erstol. We had been there before and I had not thought much of it. Suddenly, this small world became a lifeline for us. I got word to Erstol immediately that she was coming but it was already too late. Shortly after that, I received word that that her ship had been destroyed by the Ixians and my world fell apart.” Franz sipped his ice tea thoughtfully. “For two years I remained a recluse. Sandra occasionally visited me on her school holidays but she was cold and distant. I think she blamed me for what happened to her mother and still does. They were very close. Inside, I was full of anger and pain with what had happened to me. I felt I had been cheated of happiness. I had all the money a man could want but I was nothing more than an empty shell. I became addicted to prescription medication but it only made things worse. My moods became erratic. I was consumed with uncontrollable hatred of the Ixians. But I hated myself most of all. The guilt was tearing me apart. If only I had gone with her I would have figured something out, I know it. I would have been able to save her. Night after night, I kept having the same recurring dream of how I saved her. Then in the morning I would awake in the empty house and she was gone again. They say that the hardest thing to do is to forgive those who commit crimes against you. If you can let go, it frees you of your hate and allows you to move on. For me, I knew I had it in me to forgive the Ixians as the years passed. There were atrocities on both sides in the war. We evened the score many times over. However, I still did not know if I could forgive myself for not being there when she needed me the most. In the end, I went into rehab and I learned to forgive both myself and the Ixians. In order to do that, I made myself a solemn promise that I would make amends for not being there for Sarah. The promise I made to myself was to sell everything I owned and go to Erstol and turn it into a beacon of light as she would have wanted for both the Ixians and humanity so a war like this would not happen again. I had to give myself a second chance, Tom to move forward. Citynet is my attempt to apologise to Sarah for being so selfish. I want to offer you a second chance Tom because I think you and your family deserve it. Maybe I should not have been away so much. Maybe if I had been around this would not have happened to you. I placed a lot of responsibility on your shoulders maybe more than was fair. If you are going to help me

build New Erstol, I need you cleaned up and re-focused. I know you can do this job. You're the best I have but you need to get back on track. Do want that?" He met Fowler's sad eyes.

Fowler nodded.

"Good man." Franz took a card out of his desk and gave it to Fowler. "You have been enrolled in a drug rehabilitation program on Earth. Officially, if anyone enquires you are on sabbatical. If the press find out about this, I want you to simply say that you signed yourself in. Do you understand?" Fowler nodded slowly, head hung low. "Come back only when you are ready. Your job will still be here for you. That is my word. Now go and don't let me down."

Fowler nodded and took the card, leaving the office. He felt drained and slightly emotional, rubbing his eyes. He pocketed the card and walked past the conservatory. Sandra was spraying some of her favourite flowers, touching the delicate leaves with her manicured fingers.

"Have a good trip Tom," said Sandra. However, Fowler knew from the tone that she hadn't meant it. He bit his tongue, forcing himself to say nothing, feeling humiliated. In the conservatory, Sandra smiled quietly to herself having overheard some of the private conversation between Tom and her father.

Fowler remembered the trip he had made to Earth and how he had beaten his addiction there. When he had returned, all had seemed the same at first but as he walked up the busy corridors he knew that the word had somehow gotten out. There were looks and quiet whispers by the coffee station. He knew he had lost the respect of many of the people he worked with but no-one said it to him. It was an intangible feeling of loss, one which he still had to this day.

"So what's the plan?" asked Solomon in his pimped up Floater.

Fowler looked over at Solomon, determined not to fail. "We're going to the stock exchange first. The N-Teks are gathering there for some reason," said Fowler. "Then let's see if we can kill some of these things."

Kay looked up at Fowler, a little surprised by his tone and then went back to her analysis of the growing N-Tek infestation; realizing no-one really knew Fowler.