This is 2.1, a Netrunner Reboot Project podcast.

Episode 104, Bigger, Badder, Boom.

Hey, this is Remy.

The title cards for this week's episode are the icebreakers for the new minifactaction runner Simon LeBu that arrived in Data and Destiny.

And those are the flavor texts for each of the three in sequence.

Bigger, badder .

Boom.

They're all called GS, and then the user, the title, and then M and a number.

And the GS, I'm not entirely sure what that stands for, because good shot, maybe , or maybe it's just random.

Or maybe somebody liked the Apple 2GS back in the day.

Anyway, we're going to get into the runner side of data and Destiny, and I've got a lot to say about this.

So let's get into it.

Anonymous tip.

Seven things you can do to get better at net runner.

Well, we've been going over these tips for weeks now, and we're finally up to number seven .

This article is, of course, by Zenesis, Andrew Hines, published in that middle part of 2016.

The seventh tip is don't be afraid to give up points.

One of my good friends, James, was struggling to win with Jinteki replicating perfection, leading up to UK Nationals 2015.

I have a wealth of experience with the ID and is one of my most played corp IDs at tournaments, whereas he had only picked it up recently.

I sat next to him through a couple of games and talked with him through them to hopefully try and help.

It very quickly became apparent to both of us that one of the problems was a fear of attempting to score an agenda if R&D was still easy to get in , or if there was a small chance that the runner could break through his late game remote.

This fear is something that that's easy to have, and it's something that James had to overcome.

And I'm certain a lot of other players are struggling with this very thing.

The reason not to be fearful is twofold.

Firstly, even if they can get into R&D, you should take any deal that gives you an agenda, and all of its benefits, like Nise Mark II, but only gives the runner the chance to get an agenda.

Secondly, if they have a small chance of getting into your late game remote, then it'll usually completely bankrupt them if they do.

Meaning, you've a clear path to start pushing out another agenda next turn.

Getting agendas from a scoringring remote server will, usually, or more accurately should, cost the runner a lot of money or resources, for example, lady counters or cost for Faust.

There are plenty of times where you'll happily drain the runner's credits for the cost of a few agenda points .

Usually, when it means you can score some agendas because because that swing makes your remote impenetrable for at least a few turns in the future.

If it's correct to let your opponent take an agenda from any search server, to retort with your own, then that's a line of play that you should be happy to make.

You shouldn't exactly be handing out agendas for free.

You don't need to have every server on absolute lockdown.

And it's practically impossible to get to that point anyway.

The chance that a runner can steal an agenda is a perfectly acceptable cost when scoring your own.

A good example of this rule in action is the time- honored tradition of Haasbroid decks firing accelerated beta test.

There are plenty of cases where it's okay to lose an agenda to get some more ice .

And, indeed, the reason that there are some times where you want to fire accelerated bas beta test without a card like Jackson Howard to save you if things go wrong, is a perfect example of this rule in action.

Maybe losing an agenda isn't always the end of the world and is sometimes very much the correct decision.

How much is the correct decision is not something I'll discuss here, though it's absolutely not 100% 100% or 0%.

Though I see some players who will never, under any circumstances, fire unsafe accelerated beta tests, which is, I believe, most certainly a mistake.

And that is the end of the seventh point and the abrupt end to the article that we've been working our way through.

Seven things you can do to get better at Night Runner.

That last tip, again, was, don't be afraid.

Oh, I scrolled p.

Don't be afraid of giving up points.

Satellite Uplink, Data and destiny, the runner side.

From the very first deluxe expansion that arrived in the summer of 2013, people's and they saw that was Haasbroid and Shaper.

That's how they were going to do the deluxes.

People immediately went forward to the fourth expansion and were like, okay, what are they going to do for the runner side of the fourth expansion?

And many things were thrown out there.

I'm sure somebody mentioned this possibility that FFG actually went with.

You know, a lot of people thought they'd just start looping around.

It'd be Schaper again, or that it would be a mix or whatever.

But let's go ahead and get the comments from Lucas Litzsinger on this box.

Back in 2022, when I was working on the corset, we created a roadmap for the first four deluxe expansions.

Since then, we've released the first three of these, Creation and Control, Honoror and Profit, and Order and Chaos , each of which focuses on two factions, one corp and one runner.

The fourth one was going to be special because we had seven factions in the game.

Many different ideas were thrown around, but the one that stuck was that the box would introduce neutral runners.

These runners would not fall until our three existing factorsions for both thematic and mechanical reasons.

Not every one that hacks, can, or should be defined as shaper, anarch, or criminal.

However, things change, and our original idea was refined over time, especially in play testing.

We realized that our new runners should belong to three new mini factions,, rather than a group of neutral runners.

I want to be very clear.

We are not introducing a fourth, fifth, and sixth runner faction to the game.

The majority of the support these runners will ever get is contained within data and destiny.

And you will continue to see many shaper, anarch, and criminal cards in in the future.

Ultimately, we made the decision to launch these runners in their own many factions in order to ensure that each introduced creative deck building possibilities without breaking or handicapping the game.

Each has its own personality.

And we felt that making them all neutral undermined their unique identities.

It would have also meant that we couldn't push their power levels to the extent that we wanted .

As neutral runners, each could have cherry picked the best cards from the others.

Additionally, by associating them all with their own mini factions, we were able to carve out a unique aesthetic for each of these runners with new card templating , and retained the design space we would need to print more powerful neutral cards in the future since all runners would still have to pay influence for them.

In the end, I feel confident that Apex, Sunny, and Adam will shake up the competitive environment in a good way, and that more casual players will have a lot of fun putting all of their signature cards together in one deck.

Finally, I expect everyone will enjoy figuring out how to spend the 25 influence that each of these runners has.

Android Net Runner has never been in a stronger position than now, and we look forward to taking the game to the next level.

So those were Lucas Litzzinger's comments.

He was the lead designer for a little while longer on the game and had been up to this point.

There are 27 runner cards in Data and Destiny.

Each of the three many factions gets eight, and then there are three neutral cards .

Of these 27 cards, 12 of them have received adjustments and two of those adjustments are nerfs.

Unlike what I normally do where I talk about the nerfs, and then the buffs and then the unchanged cards, I'm actually going to split them out and talk about each separately.

So I'm going to jumble the nerfs and buffs and unchanged and talk about it in a more life logical, coherent way.

So let me start, just get out of the way, the neutral cards.

The nerf to a neutral card is to employee strike, a current event, whose cost has been increased from one to two .

It's one influence.

Its ability is that the corpse identity text box is blank.

The other two neutral cards are unchanged.

Windfall, an event that costs zero, you shuffle your stack, then trash the top card of your stack, and gain however many credits that card is worth.

Well, whatever the install cost is of that card .

And then the other one is Technical Writer, a resource whose install cost is zero, and whenever you install a program or hardware, you place a credit on it.

For a click and trashing that card, you take all the credits.

The first miniaction that is in the set is Apex.

Apex is a called invasive predator.

It's a We used to be a 4525 ID.

It is now a 40 25 ID.

That's a buff.

The restriction is that you cannot install non-virtual resources.

That's a pretty big restriction.

And then when your turn begins, you may install one card from your grip face down .work from the excellent Ligas Smilskna.

Now, prior to the release of this box, there were only 19 virtual resources.

The corset had Ice Carver, the Genesis cycle, the helpful AI , Xanadu, and DataLeak reversal.

Creation and Control brought ice analyzer.

The spin cycle had Grifter and Woman in the Red Dress.

The Lunar cycle brought the shards, Eden Hades and Utopia Shard, as well as Ghost Runner and F Fester .

Order and chaos had virus breeding ground and data folding.

And the Sanan cycle has brought gang sign, spoilers, Rolodex, Fansite, and DDOS.

Whereas in this box alone, there are six more virtual resources, and up upcoming in the booster part of the reboot card pool are five additional virtual resources.

But out of 87 total resources, only 19 of them were virtual.

So about a quarter, a little less than a quarter.

The notable Well, let me just talk about the nerf.

It's the next card in sequence.

It's apocalypse, an event that costs three, and the influence on it has been changed changed from three to five.

So it doesn't affect an apex at all, just whoever else can run it.

You can only play it if you've already successfully run all three centuriesr, that turn, and then you trash all of the installed corp cards and turn all of your installed runner cards face down.

So there's your second references. To face down cards.

What are you doing with these face down cards?

Well, endless Hunger is Apex's icebreaker.

It has also been buffed.

It's an install cost of zero and a strength of 11.

And it used to be all four MU.

Now it is just three.

It's also two in. Influence.

The ability is to trash one of your installed cards, maybe one of those face down cards , to break and end the run subroutine.

And it is specifically a subroutine that says only end the run.

The unchanged cards, the five unchanged cards for apex, are prey, a run event that costs zero and is two influence.

And once during the run that you play it, when you pass a piece of ice, you may trash a number of your installed cards equal to the strength of that ice, and then trash that ice.

Heartbeat is Apex's console in install cost of two, three influence.

It gives you a memory unit and you can trash one of your installed cards to prevent a damage of any kind.

Harbinger is the other program for Apex.

Its install cost is zero, It's one influence, and when it is trashed, you install it face down, instead of putting it in your heap, artwork here from Adam S. Doyle.

Hunting Grounds is one of two virtual resources that apex gets, also a location.

Install cost is two, one influence, once per turn, prevent a when encountered ability on a piece of ice.

And then you can trash it to install the top three cards of your stack, face down, artwork from Adam S. Doyle.

The final EB Apex card is wasteland, again, another virtual location resource, the install cost, again, two.

This one is two influence.

And the first time each turn, you trash one of your installed cards, you gain a credit.

Those are the cards for Apex.

I don't think I've ever played with Apex.

Maybe I've played against it.

But what I'm gleaning here, and what should be very clear, is that it uses a lot of things that have involve face down installed cards .

It's installing face down cards.

It's got cards that install face down cards.

Then you're taking those face down cards and feeding them into endless hunger to break end the run subroutines.

Pray to try trash ice that you have passed , heartbeat to prevent damage, and all the while gaining money every time you do that, well, the first time each turn you do that, with wasteland.

That is apex.

The fluffy one race apex, a two, saying it's the worst identity in the game.

The second minifactaction is Adam, compulsive hacker.

The identity has been buffed, just like apex from 45, 25 to 4025.

And his ability is to start the game with three different directive cards installed, and those are not considered part of your 40 cards.

Artwork from Matt Zeinger.

The three directives are all unchanged.

They are safety first , a unique virtual resource, install cost of zero, three influence.

That's true of all of these.

Your maximum hand size is reduced by two.

Well, that's not good.

And when your turn ends, you draw a card if you are less than your maximum hand size.

Always be running is the second virtual resource, the second directive.

Install cost zero, three influence.

Your first click, each turn, must be a run.

It can be a run event.

Once per turn, you can click, click to break a subroutine on a piece of ice.

The third directive is neutralize all threats.

Again, unique virtual resource, again, install cost zero, three influence.

The first time each turn, you access a trashable card , you must trash it, you know, if you have enough money for it.

And the bonus, whenever you access cards from HQ, you access an additional card.

So this is a built in HQ interface.

Now, the way the idea is phrased, where it says, start the game with three different directive cards installed, means that there could be a fourth directive, and then you'd be able to pick from the three of them.

And FFG did eventually print a fourth one almost exactly a year later, so that you could mix and match as you pleased.

It was a card called Find the Truth, which came in the sixth cycle, the middle of the sixth cycle.

It was just like the other two, three, rather, as a unique virtual resource, the install cost is zero, it's three influence.

Its ability, whenever you draw a card , reveal that card, and then the first time each turn you make a success successful run, you may look at the top card of R&D. Now, last summer, when previewing equity and eternity, the fourth reboot booster, which has a card for each manufaction in it, Gamina suggested maybe we could get a new directive for Adam, because this card, obviously, find the truth, is not in the reboot part of the cardpool.

And the big boy said, no new directives ever.

I asked, what's your objection to nut directives?

FFG made a fourth one, right?

It seems like it would be good to have choice, even if it isn't particularly thematic.

And the big boy replied, no, because then people just choose not to take always be running , and the deck is boring.

So there you go.

The other three cards for Adam are independent Thinking, an event whose cost has been reduced from one to zero, so this is a buff.

In fact, all of these are buffs.

It's one influence.

You can trash up to five of your installed cards and then draw a card for each one you trashed.

Unless at least one of the cards you trashed as a directive, then you can draw two cards for each card you trashed.

It's a lot of card draw, and one way to get rid of the directives if they're cramping your style.

Brain Chip is Adam's console.

Its install cost has been reduced from two to one.

It is three influence.

It gives you plus X memory units and plus X maximum hand size, where X is equal to your agenda points.

And Dr. Lovegood is a unique connection resource whose install costs has been reduced from two to one is one influence.

When your turn begins, choose one of your installed cards.

The text box of that card is blank for the remainder of the turn.

So this is another way to get rid of at least one of your directives, at least temporarily.

Looks.

And there's one additional card.

The other car that Adam has, the only program that he gets is the only car that is unchanged, the only other car that is unchanged.

The directives are unchanged.

It is multi-threadder, a program with an install cost of three and one influence.

It gives you two recurring credits for using programs.

So clearly, Adam is built around his directives., gives you an unusual mix of abilities and detriments right from the start of the game.

What he isn't given is any particular breakers, which means he'll always be importing those. .

That's where a lot of his 25 influence is going to go.

Although at least he always has always be running, where you can circumvent the worst possible effects of any particular eyes that he is going to be forced to hit because he has to make a click or he has to make a run of the first click of each turn.

So it's nice that always be running gives you not only the incentive to run, but also the ability to dodge some real damaging stuff.

The third ID is Sonny LeBeau, security specialist.

She is a 5025 ID.

That has not been changed.

And her only ability is having two link artwork from Matt Zeinger.

Her buffed cards are her three icebreakers, GS Sherman M3, a cloud fractor, whose install cost has been reduced from three to two.

You know what?

There's a better way to do all of this.

So, there's GS Sherman, M3, the fractor, GS Striker, M1, the decoder, and GS Shrike, M2, the Ker.

The buff to each of them has been reducing their install cost by one, So their install costs are now two for the fractor, Sherman.

Three for the decoder, striker, and four for the killer, strike.

Otherwise, the cars are identical.

Strength 1 , two influence, cloud, two credits to break any number of their assigned subroutine, two credits for plus three strength.

The other buffed card for Sonny is Security Chip, which is hardware with an install cost of zero, just one influence.

You can trash it to choose an icebreaker or any number of cloud breakers.

And each chosen breaker has, well, it used to have plus one strength.

Now it has plus two strength per link for the remainder of the run.

Of course, Sunny starts with two, the only runner, of course, who starts with 2 link, which unlocks the ability of cloud breakers, which always require two-linked, to not take up any MU.

It also opens up naturally the a couple of resources that'll give you drip economy, data folding, I believe.

Well, data folding is one.

Underworld contact is the other.

I can never keep straight, which is which.

One of them gives you a credit at the start of every turn if you have at least two link , One of them gives you a credit at the start of every turn.

If you have at least two open memory, which, since her icebreakers aren't taking any space, she will.

Her remaining three cards are unchanged.

There is her console security nexus, an install cost of eight and three influence gives you an extra MU and an an extra link.

And then once per turn, when you encounter a piece of eyes, you may force the corp to trace five , which will give you a tag and and end the run if it is successful.

But if it is unsuccessful, you get to bypass the ice.

Global SEC security clearance is a virtual resource that the install cost of two and two influences you must have two link to install, and then when your turn begins, you may lose a click to look at the top card of R&D .

Our work here from Andreas Soritos.

And Jackson Sinclair is a connection resource with an install cost of three and two influence, although the install cost is reduced by one for each link you have.

So for Sunny, it's always going to be no more than one .

And when your turn begins, you may make a run.

But you can't use programs during that run.

So it either is going to be on an open server or you'd better have your security nexus already installed.

So I don't remember whether this is something that I actually thought of on my own, John honestly seems very unlikely, or whether it's something that I heard around the time this expansion was released.

But it seems to me that the many factorsions are like the regular factions only more so.

Schaper is the faction that best at control strategies and playing the long games.

And Sonny is really good at that, too.

Maybe even more so.

Anarch is the faction of disruption, which is definitely something that Apex is all about.

And criminal is aggressive and can always find ways to get in, which is Adam's design right from the jump.

So to my mind, Sonny is like shaper, but more so.

Apex is like Anarch, but more so.

And Adam is like criminal, but more so.

Now, obviously, to some degree, they are also less so, because they are largely just shoehorned into a limited array of strategies. 25, even 25 influence, isn't enough for them to really feel like a full-fledged faction where they can break their shackles and do something different.

Still, I think they are super cool, and I'm really happy to finally reach this part of the cardboard.

This right here is the reason why I debated whether I wanted to explore the cardpool slowly from the beginning like I have or just just jump in to the end because I knew looking at the first option, oh, man, that means they're going to have to wait like two and a half years to be able to play with the mini factions.

So the Atic Lance review thread from Reddit says that good for criminal is security nexus.

That's honestly the first time I've heard that.

I know that, yeah, it's good for shaper.

Also always be running and Jack Sinclair, whereas good for Shaper are Apocalypse.

I don't know that I've heard that before either.

Wasteland, Security Nexus, and technical writer , and potentially useful for any runner are hunting grounds, Shrike, and imployee Strike, although I would also add Apocalypse.

At least it was before it got nerfed.

None of these cars make the top 50 countdown , and as we look at the precconstructed decks, the majority of runner decks were already buildable once we got to the underway, which was the fourth pack of the sand sand cycle, which added street peddler and Faust and hyperdrivers.

This final release then only finishes finishes off two of the decks.

Sihon Max was missing a copy of employee Strike, and then, of course, Adam is well one of the many factions, one of the preconstructed decks.

So now you can build that deck.

And of the atom cars that are we received in this pack, this release, all of them are in that that preonstructed deck except independent thinking, which is the one that trashes cards so that you can draw more.

Although each of the other is only a one of, except Brain chip, and there are three brain chip in there, because Brain chip seems pretty important for Adam.

The source, nerves to apocalypse and employee strike.

So Apocypalypse, the one that wipes the court board and turns all of yours face down , has had its influence change from three to five.

The big boy says it should be difficult, but not necessarily impossible to run multiple copies of this card outside of Apex, and this change accomplishes that.

So null signal rotated dat and destiny a couple of years ago.

But there were competitive decks using apocalypse all the way to the end.

Looking through the top 30, most liked decks on Net Runner DB using Apocalypse.

The one in first place, has 175 likes, which is quite a lot , 26 for the one at the bottom of the page.

That bears this out, Rotage went top eight of the 2016 UK gnats in the spring, and then top 16 at 2016 Worlds, running his diaper combo out of Haley.

I touched on that deck back in episode 97.

It has been pretty well dismantled in reboot, and this Nerf is one part of that.

I'll provide a link to the article if you want to see how it worked, though.

Fourth, on this top 30 list is the 2017 U.S. Nats winner, June Cuervo, running a combo deck out of Ala, which is a shaper runner that came in the campaign expansion, Terminal Directive.

Spaggs took 10th at the Last Worlds Magnum opus 2018 Worlds, using 419, which is a criminal runner from the last deluxe box, Reign and Reverie.

There was also a sixth place, APCOC deck out of that world's, out of Vow.

And then Soka, won, 2022 worlds for null signal, using L, a shaper which came in the first release by Null signal, downfall.

And this is just the top 30.

And of these, only eight of the decks were actually running apocalypse out of Apex.

Although most of those decks were running apocalypse as a one of, so maybe they would still be possible, although they'd have to give up two influence somewhere else.

The other nerf is to employee Strike, changing the cost of this current from one to two to wipe the corpse's text box.

The big boy says, E-Strike is a very powerful economic denial card against many corps.

The cost, this cost change makes the economic exchange a little worse for the runner, and makes recurring or spamming Strike a lot less appealing.

Employee Strike is the seventh runner current in the FFG cardpool, and is the one that is most expensive in the full reboot cardpool, no other runner current current costs too.

Even though, as we mentioned last week, there are multiple corp currents that cost two, and one that costs three.

Actually, originally, three runner currents cost two two scrubbed, itinerant protesters, and hackivist meeting, but those have been buffed down to one, zero, and zero costs, respectively.

So for this current to be nerfed up to two costs is saying something, and it's one influence.

So I think the review on Net Runner DB from Big Guy for You 518 is interesting here.

While it's tempting to write this off as the runner version of cerebral static, and Call it a day, I believe a closer examination will reveal it to be far more powerful.

C Consider how turning off ID abilities differs across both sides of the net runner table.

Runner IDs, broadly speaking, give them minor economic boosts or small rig enhancements like MU or Link that would normally cost deck space, draw time, and a creditor to.

Though seemingly minor. These little incremental boosts can be game unbalancing, see, Kate, over the course of 20 turns.

Turning them off temporarily, however, is usually not going to give the corp anything other than a very tiny economic edge until another current is dropped or an agenda is stolen.

For the corp, turning off an idea ability is most impactful when it actually opens a scoring window, or when it throws a huge wrench into a deck list that will relies on the ID too heavily.

Cerebral static probably gets the most mileage against noise, Leila, or possibly Naser.

What about the runner, though?

If Haasbroid engineering the future is any indication, corp IDs are designed in pretty much the same way, minor economic advantages, or efficiencies.

Or are they?

Blue Sun can allow the corp to suddenly grab 14 credits without spending a clip click, in order to make a game winning play like SEA source, or midseason replacements.

Harpsichord can allow the corp to stuff 10 agendas in archives with no real worry that that you'll steal them and win the game.

Industrial genomics can force you to pay 15 credits if you want to trash and ash, caprice, or sundue.

Cerebral imaging can allow the corp to have a 30-card hand.

Gentechi Biotech can flatline you at any time if you make a mistake.

Replicating perfection can permanently lock Kit out of her scoring remote if she's relying on decoders.

Tenin Institute will heavily pressure you to run every turn.

Jinteke Personal Evolution will make you play extremely cautiously with your hand size and makes large multi-access tools a constant flatline threat.

I could keep going .

The point is not that corp IDs are more powerful than runner IDs.

They really aren't.

But at the moment, corp IDs are more likely to fundamentally change the way the game is played.

So allowing the runner to turn off those abilities suddenly can be much more devastating.

Wayne McPain responded.

Another thing to consider is what it takes to shut off a current on both sides.

Runners can hit agendas from any one of four plus different servers at any time and have more clickques to do so.

All it takes is one simple click to make a run on R&D and get lucky, and there goes the corp current.

The corp, however, has to have a scoring window, or a 2-1 in hand, and most likely spend their entire turn to shut down a current.

Though on the flip side, corpse, up until recently, have always had more impactful currents than runners and are much more likely to have deck space for them.

But overall, I think, just due to the nature of court play, employee strike is much more powerful than cerebral static .

So I just want to point out how sound this logic is, as a reason for why corp currents are generally better than runner currents, especially for the same price and and for that matter, why corp currents on average cost more.

So, I appreciate this reasoning.

It Helps to unm me help me understand the wide disparity between costs on the corp side and on the runner side.

So, after all this buildup and me saying I have a lot to say about the minifactions, I look at how much time I've already spent and how much time, how much more I have left to cover.

And honestly, I just think it makes sense to cut it off here.

This will give me something like a 45 minute episode here, and I think close to a 45 minute episode next week.

So, yeah, I think, I'm going to say 245 is better than a 90.

So many of the cars discussed in this week's episode are linked in the show notes.

Music is from Alexi Action, website that goes to the reboot Project homepage. Is Net runner 2.1.com.

The reboot Discord server has just started up the preconstructed league.

I got a chance to play my first round games and had a nice a nice set.

Well, I, it was a split.

The first game was pretty funny because I was playing.

The world is Yours and my opponent, Joel Narr Binks, also known as Manta, on Retch. , was playing with noise, and we both, he ran out his deck, I guess they ran out their deck completely.

No cards in the deck, no cards in hand.

I was down to the last card in my deck, and on my next turn, I could have won .

But then on my last agenda was the last card in my deck.

So I lost instead.

It was fun.

But yeah, I mean, it's probably not too late, even if you want to get in now.

And the preconstructed, the constructed league is starting up here in just a few days.

But of course, you can play a online at Rekiun, set your own.s your own schedule.

So next week, I will get into the buffs that have been made.

I'll talk about the breakers, the economy cards , and future cards from fantasy Flight that we're not going to see in reboot or haven't seen yet.

And then talk a little bit about the food flavor behind the different aspects of the manufacturing runners.

The Astroscript pilot program is going to cover the flavor insert from data and destiny in which we get one little article about each of the runners.

Thanks for listening.

Thanks for your patience.

See you next week.

Sonny Le Beau.

Goodbye, sweeties, she said.

Five-year old Frankie was already running at a full sprint for the playground, but Alexa held back.

At three, she was more cautious than her brother and still not enthusiastic about daycare.

Mommy, she said, what do you do all day?

Why can't you stay?

Mommy works on the 72nd floor right up there, Sonny said, pointing up at the looming mini arc above them.

The GlobaloseC tower was smack dab in the Laguna Velasco district, not far from NAPD .

Mommy works on the network to keep people safe.

Alexa gave Mommy a kiss and then shuffled off, taking a chunk of Sonny's heart with her.

With Pat on Mars for two years now, she was on her own.

Not for the first time, she considered giving it all up and staying home with the children.

She thought about it during the ride up to the 72nd floor.

She was still thinking about it when the doors opened and she stepped out into the offices of the intercorp Task Force.

Her boss, Jack Sinclair, was waiting for her.

Good morning, Le Beau, he said.

He fell into step beside her as she walked down the row of cockpits, where other global se runners were jacked in or browsing data between runs.

Got a black hat sniffing around our servers earlier.

Security defect on the latest Kwanh Hoppers .

You might want to take a look at that.

But our top story today is...

He gestured at her nexus as she reached her pod at the end of the row.

It bloomed to life and showed the NBN logo.

So, is my hat white or gray on this one?

Sonny asked.

Sometimes, Global SEC was asked to test another corpse security, a white hat, purely legal job.

Other times, Sonny found herself part of an investigation that required breaking in where she wasn't wanted .

Those were the fun jobs.

Gray, we have a tip that NBN is sniffing data off one of their supposedly secure storage services.

That would put them in breach of contract.

He smiled and sipped his coffee.

Chase tested this same branch last month.

Couldn't get in.

Their security is as good as anything I've seen.

She settled her visoror over her head and stepped up to the nexus.

I should have something for you by lunch.

You're the best, Le Beau, said Jack, drifting back toward his office.

Mommy, what do you do all day?

She murmured to herself as she pulled her visescape H3 goggles.

Mommy kicks button and takes names, sweetie.

She grinned and jacked in.

Adam.

I streamed through cyberspace at light speed, approaching the outermost ice protecting the data fortress that was Hasbroid's R&D division.

Handshake okay.

Connection refused..

Firewall detected.

Wotan.

I configured my processor's clock multiplier factors and shut down ancillary systems.

The meatbox invitation lay inside the building where most high-end beroids were prototyped.

A gap existed in my memories, where I would have first come online in its awakening center.

By my own calculations, there was an 88% chance I'd been tampered with , my programming reduced to this singular purpose to run.

Malicious software couldn't be excluded.

Something suppressed my adherence to the third directive, meaning my self-d diagnostic systems were woefully out of date.

Regardless, I I'd had to override them on several occasions to install third-party programs I raided from the shadow net.

Was it a subroutine?

Something hard-coded into the bios of my quantum processor?

Or was it residual from the brain maps upon which my personality indices were based?

The other 12% included the possibility that someone within Haas biooid had built it me, expressly for this purpose and released me into the world.

A double blind experiment?

Or an act of defiance?

Knowing the why could reveal the what.

This quest compelled me as strongly as the first directive did.

I finally had made contact with someone on the inside.

It could be a trap or a revolution.

Time to initiate.

I activated my cued commands and called up programs to help me overcome their defenses.

I unleashed a barrage of near infinite access requests against Wotan.

He defended against all but one, my own.

Next up was a more aggressive opponent, Ichi.

He fired up his first blast, and I dodged, burst after burst that scuttled and fragmented the code between us.
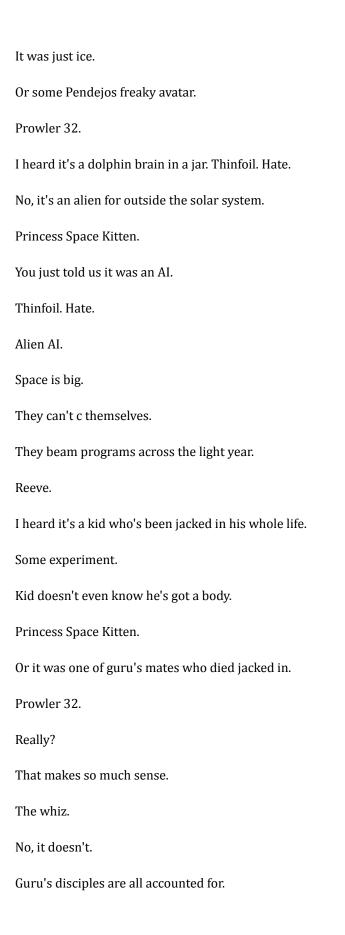
My programs crashed one after another.

So long as he missed my own OS, I'd be able to keep the net uplink online.

I found the node hosting his AI and pushed through to his credentials, adopting them as my own. A moment later, the security measures retreated.

No threat detected.

I waited, allowing the meatbox to generate its VR environment according to its user's will, an endless white plascret corridor, brightly lit and clinical.

I walked toward the door, which had a small security pad on the outside.

All of a sudden, a new connection locked onto my avatar from outside the facility.

It had completely bypassed my firewalls.

I tried to track it, but it seemed I had a blind spot in my programming.

A woman's voice invaded my internal calm.

You performed well, Linnus.

The code to enter is your model number, 381 FS4.

Linus.

The designation rang true in the very core of my being, despite my never having heard it before.

I felt compelled to enter the code, and the security pad blinked green.

I pushed open the door.

Apex.

Connection established.

Host name, D database.

Set Nick, The Wiz.

Filter, chat.

Reeve.

No lie.

I jacked out right then.

Princess Space Kitten, you are such a wuss, Reeve.

Thinfoil.H.

It's an AI guys.

True AI, unshackled and free roaming.

Thrieve.

Yeah, I'll bet you jacked, all right.

Reeve.

Fragoff, poser.

Thrieve has been kicked.

Princess Space Kitten.

Can't be AI.

It's impossible to get human-level intelligence without a bioid brain or supercore.

It couldn't free roam.

Reeve, it was free freaky, is what it was, like a monster, all tentacles.

The whiz.

What are we talking about?

Prowler 32.

Apexex.

The Wiz.

Oh, come on.

You don't believe the stories.

Reeve, I pinged it, man.

It wasn't an anomaly.

It was remote, like me, a user, a only it was weird.

It was definitely apex.

The whiz.

It was just ice.

Or some Pendejos freaky avatar.

Prowler 32.

I heard it's a dolphin brain in a jar. Thinfoil. Hate.

No, it's an alien for outside the solar system.

Princess Space Kitten.

You just told us it was an AI.

Thinfoil. Hate.

Alien AI.

Space is big.

They can't c themselves.

They beam programs across the light year.

Reeve.

I heard it's a kid who's been jacked in his whole life.

Some experiment.

Kid doesn't even know he's got a body.

Princess Space Kitten.

Or it was one of guru's mates who died jacked in.

Prowler 32.

Really?

That makes so much sense.

The whiz.

No, it doesn't.

Guru's disciples are all accounted for.

Reeve, I know what I saw.

Princess Space Kitten.

So it's some sort of monster that lives on the network and what, eats files?

Does it poop them out, too?

Ree, servers.

It eats more and more server space because it's a distributed AI and it needs to eat the whole network to achieve sentience , it'll make your rig part of its brain if you let it.

Princess Space Kitten.

Well, that is at least vaguely plausible.

Thinfoil. Hate is how the aliens reproduce their all AI now.

Reeve, is anyone else glitching?

Princess Space Kitten.

Yeah, something's wrong with the chat space, I think.

The whiz.

Oh, come on, you guys are so fragging gullible.

It's just a monster story, like Bigfoot or Nessie or the Chernobyl Chernobog.

Reeve, dude, your avatar is de-resing.

The whiz, What in the world is that, a tentacle?

Connection lost..

No carrier.