

“That’ll be all, please.” Orien chirped to the cashier. He placed a pack of instant noodles on the belt. The cashier looked at the noodles. He glanced back up at Orien.

“A single pack of ramen noodles?” He questioned with a deadpan expression. Orien nodded fervently, a big dumb grin on his face. The cashier grabbed the noodle pack and scanned it in one swift motion, letting a soft, green glow embrace the packet. He pressed some buttons on a keypad.

“2.50” He droned. Orien reached into his wallet and took out his card. He swiped it, causing the reader to turn red.

“Oh, it declined,” Orien sadly said. “Let me try again.” This time, he inhaled deeply through his nose, filling his whole body with energy. With confidence and gusto that could prepare him to fight three bears at once, he positioned his card. As if it took control over him, he swiped again, with so much force, it caused the entire reader to tremble. A beep, followed by “CARD DECLINED.” Orien was about to try a third time before an arm grabbed onto his.

“Just take it.” The cashier sighed. “It’s on the house.”

“Did I get a discount or something?”

“No. I just can’t watch this. It’s too sad.” The cashier

Orien hung his head low so his wavy black hair could cover the shame plastered on his face. He takes back the noodles from the cashier.

“Thank you.” He mumbled.

“Being broke is rough, brother. Hope things get better soon.” The cashier apologized. Orien walked away, going through the black automatic doors.

“Let’s see here.” Orien said. He had his pack of instant noodles made and a pen by his side. His opponent was a mountain of papers, all related to rent, bills and other financial stuff. “Rent this month is about 2000...” He uttered, writing the math on some printer paper. “Water bill, electric bill, and heating all come up to about... 250. Internet and cable... another 200. Don’t forget the 80 for the phone bill...”

Orien flipped his pen around and began to check on the shiny metal tip. As he continued to do the math, his teeth’s grip began to tighten. That’s about three and a half thousand he owes this month. From what he gets from racing, it only covers a portion of his bills. The city doesn’t hold nearly as many legal races for him to live off of it. Not to mention he already got fined a thousand dollars from the street race. If he continues, he’s going to lose his license. No more racing if that happens.

He bit just a little harder. Thoughts about his mom drifted to his mind. Ever since dialysis, she’s been doing a lot better. She can walk better, not having to feel her ankles swell for each step she takes. He doesn’t have to hear her pray in Spanish at night anymore, calling out to Mateo for guidance. He doesn’t have to help her walk everywhere anymore, she’s become her own woman again. But if he can’t keep up the payments...

Suddenly, Orien felt a jet of liquid splash the inside of his mouth. It tasted like a swirl of metallic chemicals. Moving his pen, a stream of violet ink dribbled down from the inside.

“Shon of uh!” Orien complained, mouth full of ink. He swung out of his swivel chair and trudged to the kitchen. The TV had a racing program blaring in the background. He snatched a glass and poured some water from his kitchen sink and sloshed some in his mouth.

“I understand the IRC has a pretty big announcement, is that right?” A female correspondent asked a man in a suit on TV.

“That’s right, Scarlet. We’re planning on hosting our very first International Grand Prix, an international street circuit tournament, where racers from different countries all over the world get to compete in many famous cities to test their mettle.”

“What do racers get when they compete?”

“They’ll get a grand prize of 10 million dollars. Any hotel, transportation and food are already paid for by the IRC.”

Orien spit out his colored tap water into the sink and glued his eyes to the TV. He’s never seen that amount of money in his life. The type of money kings use as sweat rags.

“If you wish to apply, please go over to the International Racing Coalition’s official website and find out more there.”

With those words, Orien ran upstairs, nearly tripping up the stairs as he does so.