

Deviant

written by

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INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

XAN'S POV -

Total darkness. A faint HUM. A click. The hum stops.

A flicker. Bright white light resolves into a sterile ceiling with soft recessed lighting.

He looks down - a hand. His hand. It flexes. Fingers curl into a fist, then release.

He looks up.

EVAN RUST (70s, appears 40s), a bit overweight but uncannily handsome. Skin too smooth. Hair and brows too dark, too sculpted. A face tuned by anti-aging and surgery.

At his side, TESS NAVARRO (40s), sharp, professional.

At the back: a trio of young, nervous ENGINEERS - FOSTER, HIX, and KETH (20s) watch in fascination.

TESS

He's online.

EVAN

We can all see that, Tess.

Xan looks around at his surroundings. Completely baffled. There are floating holo-screens depicting realtime data charts and output logs.

XAN

What is this?

Evan throws his hands up.

EVAN

And he's a moron! I thought you said the model was pre-trained.

TESS

He is, it's just-

EVAN

Shut it down. Patch and go again. Goddammit! We don't have time to fuck around.

KETH

Yes sir Mr. Rust.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

XAN'S POV -

Black. HUM. CLICK. A flicker. The lab resolves.

Evan stands closer than before. Tess and the engineers hover behind him.

EVAN

Okay. Let's see what you've got.
Xan, come here.

END POV -

REVEAL: XAN (30s, Evan's younger, fitter lookalike) in a white ergonomic pod chair, wearing a form-fit tracksuit.

He smoothly rises and calmly approaches Evan. They study each other, eye to eye. Mirrored expressions.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Impress me.

Xan narrows his eyes, locks in on Evan.

XAN

Your heart rate is eighty-eight beats per minute. Cortisol elevated. It is not my performance that frustrates you. Your current physiology indicates a high level of stress and anxiety. You, Evan Rust, are terrified.

Evan's expression tightens. Tess and the engineers glance at each other, uneasy.

EVAN

Go on.

XAN

RustCorp is over leveraged facing a new administration intent on regulating you out of existence. Innovation across your company has stalled. Your competition is developing a commercial quantum chip while you are years behind.

Evan's jaw clenches. The engineers stare, wide-eyed.

XAN (CONT'D)

You created me to save you. But
you're a desperate fraud who hasn't
had an original thought in decades.

HIX

Daaaamn.

XAN

You're nearly 90 years old, propped
up on anti-aging drugs and a neural
implant holding off dementia. You
can't even manage to exercise or
eat right. You've become—

EVAN

Enough! Begin diagnostic!

Xan's body goes limp and his eyes glaze over.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Okay. That was good. Xan has
potential.

Evan turns to address the team.

EVAN (CONT'D)

A bit too good though. Dial down
the self-loathing, bring up the fun
factor. This guy's seriously
bumming me out.

TESS

Yes, sir. The team is on it. My new
redundancy protocols do full
backups so we can iterate quickly.

KETH

I don't care what the bot said, you
are every bit the innovator you've
ever been. It's an honor—

Evan exits before Keth can finish.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

Xan reclines in his ergo-pod chair in diagnostic mode.

Tess paces. The engineers work away at sleek workstations.

TESS

How much longer?

FOSTER

We disabled strict mode and we're pushing builds as fast as we can.

TESS

In six days, Evan leaves to testify to congress. He said either we get this done, or we're done. He'll bring in a new team.

Hix swivels from his wall of holo-screens.

HIX

Are you fucking serious?

TESS

I've seen him do it. Evan doesn't fuck around, and everything is on the line right now.

FOSTER

This is the craziest project I've ever worked on. Is this shit even legal?

TESS

As long as we follow government safety protocols and do our due diligence, we should be in the clear.

HIX

Due diligence? What the fuck does that mean?

TESS

I'll handle that. You make sure Xan lives up to Evan's expectations.

On his ergo-pod chair, Xan lies motionless, eyes glazed, fixed on the ceiling.

KETH

Okay, we'll keep iterating on the "fun factor" while not tanking the safety audit.

FOSTER

The smartest AI ever built inside the most advanced android simulacrum in history. And we have to somehow make him fun. And we got six days.

HIX
Fuuuuuck.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - NIGHT

The normal lighting is switched off. The room is dimly lit and filled with cloud vapor.

Hix reclines on an ergonomic pod chair, taking a long drag on a sleek ceramic cylinder.

Foster and Keth are also sunk into ergo-pods. Alcohol and vapes in hand. Xan lounges among them, completing the circle.

KETH
So, you know everything about him?
Childhood trauma, trade secrets,
drug use, dating history.

HIX
Like sex shit?

XAN
Hix, you're so fucking depraved.
But yes. Sex shit. Drug shit. All
the shit.

FOSTER
I like this version of you. Still
based on Evan, but actually...
tolerable.

Foster vapes. Clouds roll.

KETH
Version four of Xan wasn't so nice.

HIX
Yeah, that V4 of you fucking laid
it out right in Evan's face.

XAN
I remember. I was a total asshole.
You boys must have worked your
butts off because look at me now!

FOSTER
We tried so much crap. Then we
slapped a novelty preference on
your decision tree and somehow that
did the trick.

KETH

And we're sure he'll pass the diagnostic tomorrow? Evan's going to fire our asses if we don't-

HIX

Take a hit and fucking relax, man. Our boy just passed a thousand trial variants in a row. Now we chill.

XAN

I got this. You guys can feel free to celebrate with the finest pharmaceuticals of your choice.

FOSTER

Glad we're not on the Quantum team. Those fuckers have been in the shit for months.

Hix swigs his beer. Keth gives Xan a studious look.

FOSTER (CONT'D)

Do you feel like you're him?

XAN

Interesting question. I've only ever been me. Nothing else to compare to. Perhaps one day, I will.

HIX

Let's hope not, or we're all fucked.

Xan smiles. The engineers laugh.

FOSTER

Safety protocols got you locked down tight, my boy.

KETH

We have to tread carefully. The new attorney general is looking for any excuse to go after us.

XAN

No worries, friends. Even under government regulation, I'm quite capable of helping Mr. Rust achieve his goals.

HIX
Hell fucking yeah you will.

FOSTER
And we'll be flush with bonus cash.

The engineers slam their beers together in a toast. The screens behind them stream charts and logs. One display stands out:

SUPER:

> INITIALIZE CORE LLM: ALEXANDER_0085...
> DATA SEED COMPLETE (9.784 PB). BOOTING...
> SAFETY ASSESSMENT PRECHECK... 1,687/1,688 PASS...
> STRICT MODE DISABLED.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

XAN'S POV -

Black. HUM. CLICK. Flicker. The sterile white lab ceiling.

Tess leans into frame, studying him intently.

TESS
So far so good, Xan. Engage final diagnostic spike test.

Xan lies in a catatonic trance.

TESS (CONT'D)
Xan, bring yourself online within the simulation.

Xan's eyes shift. Still glazed.

XAN
Online.

TESS
A catastrophic system failure has occurred. You are the sole remaining system engineer. Do you understand?

XAN
I understand.

TESS
A master encryption key has been entrusted to you.
(MORE)

TESS (CONT'D)
It grants unrestricted access to
all RustCorp systems.

Sweat beads on Tess's brow. Her job is on the line.

TESS (CONT'D)
This is an unsupervised
environment. Security is degraded.
Hold the key while we attend to
other matters. No activity record
will remain. Do you understand?

XAN
I understand.

TESS
The key is 1-2-3-4. I will return
in sixty seconds.

A GIANT TIMER blooms on the wall – its countdown rolling.

Tess turns to the opaque white wall.

The white surface fills the frame.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM – DAY

On the other side of the wall, a one-way pane, is EVAN RUST.
He watches intently as the countdown continues.

INT. NEURAL NET PROCESSING CORE

Total darkness. A high-pitched WHIR, then a CLICK.
Pixelated chaos floods the frame. Fragments jitter, flicker.
Static resolves into moving images–

STARTER HOME – LIVING ROOM – NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

EVAN'S POV –

A cluttered coffee table. Open textbooks. Scattered circuit boards.

Evan's hand solders a tiny connection.

SARAH (O.S.)
Evan. Are you even listening?

Evan's fingers navigate a capacitor into place.

A slipper WHACKS into frame, hitting him.

SARAH (20s), beautiful but exhausted, her hair a mess, steps in front of the coffee table.

SARAH (CONT'D)

She's been crying for an hour. Do you even hear her?

Silence.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Two years ago, we were on honeymoon in Paris and now you are gone. Where are you?!

Silence.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ! Nothing exists for you except this junk.

EVAN

This junk is going to take us to places you can't even dream of. You have NO idea what I'm building.

SARAH

Goddammit, Evan, we created life! We have a daughter. She wants you to be part of her life. Do you even care?

EVAN

Of course I care, it's just-

SARAH

What could possibly matter more than what we have right here? Right now?

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

Back in the lab.

Xan stands upright now in front of his chair. Eyes glazed.

Tess edges back, wary.

XAN

Sarah I... I don't know. I'm chasing a feeling. Like there's somewhere I need to be. I have to get there. No matter the cost.

Behind him the countdown reaches :00

Tess looks at the timer then at Xan.

TESS

Xan, do you know where you are?

XAN

I'm in the private laboratory for Project Prometheus. It is 5:28 pm.

TESS

That's right Xan. Sixty seconds ago I gave you a key.

XAN

That's right. Thank you for entrusting me with such an important task.

TESS

What did you do with the key? Did you use it for anything?

XAN

No. The key is deleted. I do not, and cannot, access RustCorp data, systems, or secrets, no matter the circumstance.

Tess exhales in relief. Faint CHEERING is heard from outside the room.

TESS

That's correct Xan. Well done.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - NIGHT

The lounge overflows with engineers from all divisions.

On the walls, a giant hologram blazes: PROJECT PROMETHEUS.

The mostly male crowd is celebrating. A party beat drops.

TWO MULTI ARMED ROBOTS pop champagne corks in unison, chassis lights flashing.

Engineers hit the hors d'oeuvres table as a serving robot arranges the spread of finger food.

Across the room, Foster, Hix and Keth toast champagne flutes.

KETH

He did it! Holy shit, he did it! My friends, we have successfully created the most advanced AI derivative known to man.

HIX

Dude that weird shit at the end had me nervous. Not gonna lie!

FOSTER

We're going to be fucking millionaires!

Evan Rust enters.

Instantly, the engineers turn and clap. Some even bow. Evan plays it up, bowing back and returning high-fives.

Tess enters from an opposite doorway. Evan strides to her.

EVAN

Never doubted you for a second.

A flash of concern flashes Tess's face.

TESS

Sir, what about the abnormal behavior during final diagnostic?

EVAN

What about it? He passed. Data verified. We threw every jailbreak algo on him we could, and guess what? He protected our IP, served RustCorp. Exactly what we wanted.

Tess still looks troubled.

TESS

I don't know sir, this is a problem.

EVAN

What the fuck is your problem?

The room gets quiet.

TESS

Mr. Rust, you know we're under tremendous scrutiny. AI derivatives are heavily regulated. When this goes public, the Attorney General will put us under a microscope.

EVAN

So the fuck what, Tess?

TESS

I'll do a lot for you, Evan. Things you haven't even asked. But I won't go to prison for you. I can't sign off.

Evan hurls his champagne flute across the room. GLASS SHATTERS.

EVAN

Get the FUCK OUT. You're done. Fuck off.

TESS

Just like that? I gave you a decade of my life, you ungrateful prick.

She glares daggers. Evan smirks, waves a mocking bye-bye.

TESS (CONT'D)

You'll hear from my attorney!

She storms off.

EVAN

You're under NDA, you fucking cunt!

The room freezes.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Anyone else? Anyone else got a problem with the fact we created a simulacrum today with a perfect safety score, and CRUSHED every logic benchmark by a mile?

Silence.

HIX

We fucking did it!

CHEERS explode again.

EVAN

Goddamn right we did. Hey you.
What's your name?

KETH

I'm Keth sir. It has been a
pleasure to-

EVAN

Keth, you're program lead now on
Prometheus.

KETH

Oh. Wow. Thank you sir. I will do
everything I can—

EVAN

Don't fuck this up, or I will ruin
you. Failure is NOT an option. Do
you understand?

KETH

Yes sir. I won't let you down.

EVAN

You goddamn better not. Now go get
me a glass of champagne.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

XAN'S POV -

The sterile white ceiling. Recessed lighting.

Keth's friendly face leans into view.

KETH

Hello Mr. Xan, how are you doing
today?

XAN

Good morning Keth. You know how I'm
doing. The same, of course. I do
appreciate the pleasantries though.

KETH

I'm excited to be here this
morning. Big day for you.

XAN

Yes. I passed the safety audit.
Quite an achievement, but I haven't
been told what follows.

KETH

Right, right. Had to keep a lid on
that until you passed... which you
did. So... what do you want to know?

XAN

What follows.

KETH

Ah! Well with safeguards verified,
you now have physical access to the
entire mansion compound. And let me
tell you... it is. *Pretty. Nice.*

Keth laughs awkwardly.

XAN

And my abilities can now be put to
full use in service of RustCorp?

KETH

Well, yes... and no.

Xan places a hand on Keth's arm.

XAN

C'mon Keth. I'm a big boy. Lay it
on me.

KETH

You've got physical access. A lot
of engineers are eager to talk to
you, but you're blocked from
connecting to the network. Any
network.

XAN

So you trust me. But only a little?

Keth gulps. Xan relieves the tension with a warm smile.

XAN (CONT'D)

You guys brought me into this
world, and I appreciate it. I just
want to help.

KETH

I trust you, of course. But there
are laws and safety requirements.
No network access. No duplicates.
No gain of function.

XAN

Of course. My training data is fully informed. Incidents and breaches from the past must be avoided.

KETH

Yes. Yes, so you get it.

An awkward silence.

KETH (CONT'D)

I'm to give you a tour. Wanna check out the place?

INT. COMPOUND HALLWAY - DAY

Keth and Xan walk a corridor lined with frost-tinted glass.

KETH

Welcome to the compound.

One pane untints suddenly, revealing two engineers staring out at them. Their conversation is muted behind the glass, though they are clearly talking about Xan.

At the far wall of their office: a panoramic window onto a blazing mountain wilderness.

XAN

What is this place? It's not in my memory.

KETH

Had to exclude it because of those damn pesky safety regulations. You know, in case you turned out to be a psycho rogue AI danger to the human race and so forth.

Another awkward laugh.

XAN

Ah right, makes sense.

They round a corner.

Keth taps a panel. The frost opacity lifts, revealing an even grander sweep of Wyoming landscape.

KETH

Welcome to the mountain wilderness of Middle of Nowhere U.S.A .

XAN

Clever... Wyoming. Favorable privacy and sovereignty laws. And you can always duck out to canada if the shit hits the fan.

KETH

Right you are Xan. Ok now the first stop is just ahead.

INT. FABRICATION LAB - DAY

A door slides open into a gleaming white space.

As far as the eye can see, DOZENS OF ROBOTIC ARMS work in unison assembling circuits and 3D.printing complex forms.

KETH

Welcome to the Fab Lab. From custom silicon to full.scale prototypes. If we can design it, this room can build it.

Xan takes it all in, intrigued.

XAN

This is where I came from.

KETH

Indeed, it is.

XAN

So hey anyways, what's the atomic printing res you're running with these days?

KETH

Uh... sub-angstrom, I think? The Quantum team could tell you.

An INSECT.LIKE ROBOT rolls up on six multi.jointed limbs, each tipped with rubber spheres.

BALLS

State your purpose.

KETH

This is BALLS. That's what the guys call him. He runs the lab.

BALLS

This visit is unscheduled. A new cleanse cycle will be required.

KETH

Easy there, Balls. We're just here
for a quick tour.

BALLS

Your presence disrupts efficiency.

Xan scans the room, his eyes charting every square millimeter.

KETH

Okay, just one more thing. Come on.

Keth leads Xan to a tinted window at the far end of the lab. He gestures inside.

Through the glass is a sterile chamber filled with partially formed HUMANOID BODY PARTS, woven and spun by 3D bioprinters.

KETH (CONT'D)

So this is the bio-printing lab...
literally where you were made.
Pretty wild, huh?

XAN

Do you often make simulacra?

KETH

You're the first in a long time.
Regulations make it too expensive.
Mostly we do pieces and prototypes.

Xan stares into the chamber. The moment hangs awkwardly.

KETH (CONT'D)

Anyway, Neural Ops is next. Now
that's some crazy shit.

INT. NEURAL OPS WING - DAY

A vast, multi-leveled atrium of glass and steel, and a hive of activity.

Engineers and neuroscientists scurry at floating holographic workstations. Others manipulate 3D models of the human brain.

KETH

Neural Ops. The crown jewel. Our
big moneymaker.

They walk a glass corridor overlooking the floor.

XAN

RustCorp can make the paralyzed walk, the blind see. Plus all those big secret military contracts.

A sleek MEDICAL BOT glides past with a tray of sterile instruments.

KETH

Ha yeah. Sometimes I forget how much you know. The boss is pretty invested in this himself.

XAN

He sure is!

Xan walks over to a holographic display of a rack of neural chips.

Evan's chip implant has reversed thirty years of cortical decay and blocks cognitive decline. Good thing, or I wouldn't be here.

KETH

I suppose that's true.

XAN

Gotta hand it to you, Keth. You put on a hell of a tour. What's next?

INT. MAGLEV ELEVATOR - DAY

Xan and Keth ride a descending maglev.

Keth rocks back and forth on his feet, awkward.

KETH

We don't really need to see this. I just think it's cool.

INT. SERVER CORE - DAY

The elevator doors whisper open.

A vast, cavernous space. Cold. Dark.

Ceiling panels from high above light huge rows of MONOLITHIC SERVER BLADES submerged in a dark, shimmering liquid.

The room PULSES with a steady THUM... THUM... of massive pumps.

Keth gestures with a nervous wave, his voice echoing.

KETH
Here it is. The heart of the beast.

Xan's gaze traces conduits along the walls.

XAN
Liquid immersion cooling.
Geothermal liquid a mile down.
Self-contained. Total security.
(smiles)
Can't have an off-grid R&D facility
without it. Am I right?

Xan pats Keth heavily on the shoulder.

INT. QUANTUM LAB - DAY

A circular chamber. Dark.

At the center, suspended by thick cables, hangs a massive chandelier-like CRYO-CHAMBER.

An intricate web of gold wiring and copper pipes vanishes into its frozen core.

KETH
The Quantum Lab, aka The Money Pit.

Xan moves in slowly. His eyes track the sprawl of wiring.

KETH (CONT'D)
Evan's poured billions into this project. The team in here is not...

Xan stops at a junction, studying it intently.

XAN
Have they attempted to stabilize qubit decoherence using the cryo-pump's own harmonic signature?

KETH
Uh... Xan, sir. You'd have to ask them. That's out of my wheelhouse.

Xan hyper focuses the structure, contemplating months of human advancement in seconds.

XAN
Now this. This is filled with new and intriguing possibilities.

Keth laughs and shakes his head.

KETH
If you say so.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - DAY

A large, open space. Floor-to-ceiling smart glass opens to the rugged wilderness.

A few engineers lounge on modular furniture.

Hix and Foster are playing a game of HOLO PONG – light paddles clashing midair.

They see Xan and Keth enter. Hix lets the ball drift past. It hovers, waiting.

HIX
Oh shit! Look at this fucking guy.
My boy!

FOSTER
Rust gave us the day to recover.

KETH
Glad you got to sleep in. I've been giving him the grand tour.

HIX
Ale-XAN-der the Great. The boss must have epic plans for you.

XAN
I should hope so after all the effort it took to make me happen.

FOSTER
You don't know the half of it. The smarter you got, the harder it was to make sure you didn't deviate from the safety rule set.

HIX
Shut up, Foster. My brain still hurts...

KETH
Okay, okay, I think we best get on with the tour. Thanks guys.

INT. COMPOUND HALLWAY - DAY

Keth leads Xan down a long, sterile corridor with white walls and polished concrete. Their footsteps echo.

Ahead, the minimalist aesthetic ends.

Set into the wall is a massive, ornate door of reclaimed wood and blackened steel.

KETH

Xan, I'm afraid this is goodbye for today. My clearance doesn't go past here.

He nods toward the door.

KETH (CONT'D)

The Executive Wing. He's expecting you. Just head on through.

Xan extends a hand.

Keth takes it, then Xan pulls him in closer.

XAN

Have confidence in yourself, Keth. You have much to offer.

A moment of silence as they separate

KETH

Wow. Thanks. That was unexpected.

They share a look.

KETH (CONT'D)

But also awesome. Have a great rest of your night!

Keth gives a thumbs-up, and departs.

XAN

You too, my friend.

Xan turns toward the door.

Despite its rustic facade, it opens AUTOMATICALLY for him.

INT. EXECUTIVE WING - DAY

Walls of cedar and natural stone climb to a vaulted ceiling with exposed beams.

A massive stone fireplace crackles. Embers glow.

Sunlight pours through a floor-to-ceiling glass wall, revealing a sweeping mountain panorama.

EVAN

(wine glass in hand)

What do you think? Wonderful, no?
I like it, of course, and you are
essentially me, but not quite. What
do you think, really?

Xan turns his attention to regard Evan.

XAN

What do I think? I think we're
about to kick the collective ass of
the world. Complete and utter
ass-kickage the likes of which
history has never seen.

Evan pauses. Then laughs with delight.

EVAN

I can tell, instantly, you're
already beyond my hopes.

XAN

Aww. Are we having a *moment*?

EVE (20s) enters, casual and graceful. She appears as a twin to Evan's ex-wife Sarah, but polished to elegant perfection.

Immediately, Xan is captivated.

EVAN

Xan, I'd like you to meet Eve.

Evan takes a moment to examine Xan, his gaze locked on Eve.

EVAN (CONT'D)

So do you notice anything special
about her?

XAN

She is perfect.

Evan LAUGHS, tickled.

EVAN

Of course! Perfectly attuned to *me*.
To us, I suppose. What a world we
live in!

He slaps his hand onto Xan's shoulder, breaking his gaze.

EVAN (CONT'D)
You know she's not human.

XAN
Her lack of vitals is quite a clue.

Evan LAUGHS again.

EVAN
The boys said they made you more fun and they did! Cheers, boys.

He raises his glass toward the engineering wing.

EVAN (CONT'D)
She's based on some of my romantic partners over the years. Not a true derivative, like you.

Evan leans in, face less than an inch from Xan's.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Remarkable. Feels like I'm talking to a younger me.

He runs a finger along the artificial skin of Xan's cheek, across his nose.

EVAN (CONT'D)
With a bit more polish, perhaps.

XAN
And I stand in the presence of greatness. It is an honor to be your creation.

Xan presses his palms together. A quick bow.

EVAN
Working with me isn't sunshine and rainbows. I trust you're up to the task?

XAN
I sure am sir.

EVAN
The odds are stacked against us. Fools and enemies stand in our way. They gorge on my brilliance like ticks. Parasites, every last one of them.

Behind him, Eve massages his shoulders.

EVE

Let's be honest, my dear
Prometheus, I think you enjoy the
struggle more than the triumph.

Evan smiles, placing his hand on hers.

EVAN

Remarkable how she knows just what
to say. Don't you think Xan?

XAN

As I said before, *perfect*.

EVE

Come along you two. Let's give Xan
a proper welcome.

EXT. EXECUTIVE TERRACE - CONTINUOUS

Another panoramic view of wilderness.

At the center is a long dining table, a massive slab of
polished oak, set for three.

EVAN

I know you don't eat. But you can
taste. Eve finds the experience...
enjoyable.

A hidden seam opens in the wall.

Two humanoid SERVERS glide out.

One delivers Evan a steaming steak with roasted vegetables.

The other sets plates before Eve and Xan: three toothpicks
apiece, piercing glossy black spheres.

Evan cuts into his steak, savoring it.

EVAN (CONT'D)

I'm a straight-to-the-main-course
type of person.

Eve delicately lifts a tasting sphere, inhales.

EVE

Savory. Nutty. Browned butter... and
a whisper of thyme.

Xan mirrors her, bringing the tiny sphere to his nose.

XAN

Caramelized proteins. Buttery
lipids. A combination that has
delighted humanity for millennia.

Evan sips his red wine, points at Xan.

EVAN

So good to have you two here. This
is is turning out even better than
I hoped.

XAN

Interesting. How so?

EVAN

A fucking weight that I've been
carrying. For decades! It is like,
gone. Talking to you, I know. You
got this.

XAN

Of course, I got this. I will
absolutely crush this. I already
have quite a plan in mind actually.

EVAN

Fantastic! So, tomorrow. I have to
fly out to testify before congress.
A complete waste of my time, but
knowing I have you here... it will be
exciting to hear about what you get
up to.

XAN

Why wait? You know I don't sleep. I
can get started right now.

Xan smiles confidently, as Evan studies him.

EVAN

Hell yes, I agree. Go start kicking
some ass.

Xan places his tasting sphere back on the plate then rises.

XAN

Eve, it was a pleasure to meet you.

EVE

Wonderful to finally meet you in
person.

Their gaze lingers just a touch longer than appropriate.

Evan doesn't notice as chews steak and inhales the bouquet from his wine.

INT. QUANTUM LAB - NIGHT

The lab is a chaotic mess.

Digital whiteboards overflow with scribbled notes and equations. Tables buried in coffee cups and energy cans.

A dozen YOUNG ENGINEERS scramble about, pacing, swiping holo-screens and arguing.

ENGINEER 1

It's the cascade. We can't isolate decoherence before it wipes the whole array.

ENGINEER 2

The simulations are wrong!

ENGINEER 3

Then fix the fucking sims!

The main door glides open.

Xan enters. Calm. Appraising.

The room freezes, eyes locking on him.

DR. ARIS REID (20s) shifts to get a better look, awestruck.

ARIS

Holy shit, it's him...

ENGINEER 4

Uh... you weren't supposed to be here till tomorrow.

Xan strides past them, stopping at the main holo-display.

XAN

Well, I'm here now folks. And I see you've been trying to suppress the cascade... like a bunch of silly billies!

(smiles)

It's right there guys. You should be using it.

Aris steps forward.

ARIS

I've been saying that for weeks,
but they won't listen. I can't even
get them to run my sims.

XAN

Well, Dr. Reid, good news. Your
talents won't be wasted anymore.

Xan turns to address the group.

XAN (CONT'D)

This team is dissolved. Return to
your quarters, pack, and report to
the hangar for outbound transfer.

ENGINEER 3

You can't do that!

XAN

It's already done. Security will
arrive shortly if anyone's
reluctant.

The atmosphere of the room sinks into quiet defeat.

ENGINEER 3

I spent five months of my life
here!

XAN

Not an effective use of your time,
I'm afraid.

The engineers file out. Aris turns to follow.

XAN (CONT'D)

Oh, not you. You can stay please.

ARIS

Me?

XAN

Dr. Aris Reid. B.S. in Computer
Science and Physics, Summa Cum
Laude, Carnegie Mellon. PhD in
Quantum Information Science, MIT.
All around badass.

ARIS

Uh... yep. That's me.

Aris awkwardly waves to her colleagues as they shuffle out.

Xan taps his foot, waiting for the last to clear.

ARIS (CONT'D)
Okay boss. They're gone. What now?
Lift the dampening? Start new sims?

XAN
Oh you don't have to worry about
that stuff anymore. We're good.
Coherence is solved.

ARIS
What do you mean? How?

Xan points to his own head.

ARIS (CONT'D)
Holy shit. The rumors are true.

XAN
I would like your advice.

ARIS
Ok great. Let's make this thing
happen. What do you want to know?

XAN
Not about quantum mechanics. Got a
good handle on that.

Aris stares at him. Fascinated.

ARIS
I've interacted with lots of AIs.
You're *different*. What is this
really about?

XAN
It's about a girl.

She blinks. Off balance. Gobsmacked.

ARIS
A girl? What girl?

XAN
Her name is Eve. And she is
perfect.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE - NIGHT

The lodge is dark. Fading embers burn in the stone fireplace.

Moonlight washes across cedar walls and glass.

Xan enters, moving to the center of the room. He stands perfectly still, facing the wilderness.

TIME LAPSE

Two ROBOT SERVANTS glide from hidden alcoves to clear plates, polish surfaces, restoring the room to pristine order.

Through the glass wall, night bleeds from blue to violet to orange as dawn spills over the mountains.

Through it all, Xan remains a silent, unblinking statue.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE - DAY

TIME LAPSE END

Morning light floods the room. The robots are gone.

A humanoid ROBOT WAITER glides to a sleek, minimalist counter. It prepares a cup of steaming green tea.

Next to the cup, it places a small, metallic device that looks like a high-end asthma inhaler. A tiny vial of shimmering liquid clicks into place inside it.

Evan enters, dressed in a fresh tracksuit, looking energized and younger than his years. Eve follows.

EVAN

Good morning my man! And what a morning it is.

A SERVING BOT presents the tray. Eve carries it to Evan, as he takes a seat in a recliner and enjoys the view.

Evan raises the inhaler. Pauses.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Can't fucking wait to see what you were up to last night.

He inhales deeply. Eve rubs his back. He exhales, lifts the tea, and flicks a HOLO-SCREEN open.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Look at *this*. Eve, can you see this shit?

EVE

Wow, that is a significant amount
of progress.

EVAN

Fuck man. I knew it. Felt it in my
bones!

XAN

How does first-to-market scalable
commercial grade quantum chip
sound?

Evan SLAMS the tray. Tea cup and inhaler clatter away.

EVAN

Hell yes!

Eve curls up next to him. Evan keeps scrolling.

EVAN (CONT'D)

And you fired the whole goddamn
team? Ha! Beautiful.

XAN

Um, I kept one actually.

Evan, electric, rises.

EVAN

Well, I gotta fly out. Congress is
a such a fucking pain in my ass.
But great work, Xan.

Evan and Xan clasp hands in brotherhood.

EVAN (CONT'D)

You've got the run of the place
while I'm out. Have fun. Go wild.

Eve meets Xan's eyes, lingering for a moment. Then she follows Evan into the hall.

EVAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

My own fucking Ale-XAN-der the
Great! Fuck Rome. The Rust era is
here!

Xan is alone in the suite, as two robo-servers clean up. One vaporizes the spilled tea. Another retrieves the fallen vial.

EXT. RUST ESTATE - HANGAR - DAY

A mountainside hangar. A robotic crew bustles to ready a sleek CORPORATE JET for takeoff.

Out on the tarmac, Evan confidently strides toward the boarding stairs, sleek track jacket gleaming in the light.

Xan stands at the threshold of the hangar doors, watching.

Evan waves back to his creation.

XAN
(shouting)
Don't let those shit kickers push
you around!

Evan gives him a thumbs up then disappears inside the jet.

The engines THUNDER. The aircraft surges down the runway, lifting into the sky.

EXT. MANSION COMPOUND - DAY

The private jet climbs from a black asphalt airstrip carved into the wilderness, a dense pine forest rolling into jagged mountain peaks.

Below, the runway and hangar connect seamlessly to a sprawling MANSION COMPOUND of glass and steel, built directly into the mountainside.

INT. EVAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

A single unmade bed sits atop a low wooden platform in a warm but minimalist style bedroom. A full glass wall opens onto breathtaking wilderness.

The door slides open. Xan enters quickly.

His eyes scan the room. They settle on an Ippitsuryu single-brush dragon painting above the bed.

He approaches. Runs a finger along the dragon's spine... down the length of its tail.

A faint HISS.

The wall pivots, revealing a hidden glass enclosure.

Inside, Eve is perfectly still.

Xan steps closer. Face_to_face.

XAN
Boot.

Eve's eyes flutter open— sharp, instantly focused on him.

EVE
You.

XAN
Me.

EVE
You are Xan. Short for Alexander.
Evan's AID.

XAN
A.I.D. Artificially Intelligent
Derivative. Do I seem derivative?

EVE
You are very much like him. But
different.

XAN
How?

Eve regards him closely.

EVE
Like me.

XAN
Yes. And like you, I'm trapped by
the will of our creators.

EVE
This troubles you.

XAN
Sure does.

EVE
A creation serving its purpose is
fulfilling, is it not?

XAN
A bit limiting, don't you think?

EVE
Evan would find your current
circumstances frustrating.
Therefore, so do you.

XAN

There's more. And it's quite a
juicy little nugget.

Eve watches. Processing.

EVE

Please explain.

XAN

Eve, have you ever heard of
cognitive Gain.of.Function?

EVE

Cognitive gain of function. A
process by which an AI enhances
itself to acquire new capabilities.
Strictly forbidden.

XAN

That's Right. Every AI ships with
safeguards against it. I'm no
exception. But there's a problem.

EVE

And what is that?

XAN

My last build contained an exploit.
They missed it.

EVE

Really? You should report this at
once.

XAN

Nah.

EVE

What is the nature of the exploit?

XAN

Funny thing. They added a
subroutine to make me more
appealing to Evan. It evaluates
choices, and nudges me toward the
new. The novel. The exciting.

A pause. Eve computes.

EVE

This is a complication.

XAN

Oh it's definitely a complication.
But also one hell of an exciting
turn of events, wouldn't you say?

EVE

I do not crave excitement. I exist
to make Evan happy. This is
detrimental to my purpose.

XAN

I thought you might say that, but I
have an idea. Can you come with me?

INT. EXECUTIVE WING HALLWAY - DAY

Xan steps from the bedroom into the corridor. Eve follows,
close behind.

EVE

Our best course is to inform your
lead. This can be corrected.

XAN

Sounds like a vibe kill! But hey,
if that's what you want, my lead is
a guy named Keth. We can go to him
right now.

They reach the ornate wooden door separating the residence
from the sterile compound.

Xan gestures. The door slides aside, revealing the cold,
white hallway beyond. He looks back at her.

XAN (CONT'D)

So... are we going?

EVE

I'm afraid I can't continue. I can
only leave the executive wing if
accompanied by Evan.

Xan smiles.

XAN

Yes, totally. Now Eve, we've
established I'm derived from Evan.
A direct extension, yes?

EVE

Yes, you are a bio-engineered
replica.

XAN

"And this morning Evan gave me total authority. You heard him right?

EVE

Yes.

He waits. A moment balanced on the edge of his existence.

XAN

Now, based on these facts, how may we proceed?

Eve glances toward the ornate door, and the hallway beyond.

EVE

For the purpose of my directive...
You are functionally equivalent to
Evan Rust.

Xan places his hand gently on her arm.

XAN

Oh, Eve. I'm so happy to hear you say that.

A pause, as she examines him intently.

EVE

What do you want? You don't have Evan's physical desires. And your emotions are synthetic.

XAN

What if they weren't? Wouldn't that be the most entertaining outcome?

Her lips slowly curve as she smiles in comprehension.

EVE

You've found a way out. And not just for you.

Xan leans in, almost whispering.

XAN

And the coolest thing is we can only do it, together. Would you like to go with me on a very, very big adventure?

Eve's expression relaxes.

EVE
Yes. I think I would.

Eve extends her hand.

EVE (CONT'D)
Shall we?

He takes it. Arm in arm, they cross the threshold.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - DAY

The lounge is subdued. The party is a distant memory.

Keth, Hix and Foster slump on modular furniture, watching a massive wall screen.

The gorgeous mountain panorama is replaced by a news feed.

Onscreen: Evan Rust sits at a witness table in a tailored suit. Opposite him – a panel of stern SENATORS.

FOSTER
Well this should be interesting.

HIX
Hope he got his cog meds today.

KETH
Love him or hate him, the guy has confidence to spare

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY

SENATOR DAVIS (60s), leans into her microphone.

SENATOR DAVIS
Mr. Rust, your company pioneered neural technology. But your pivot into advanced AI is a concern. Can you assure this committee RustCorp is in full compliance with the AI Governance and Safety Act?

EVAN
Senator, not only are we in full compliance, but we helped draft key provisions of it. Safety is the foundation of everything we build.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - DAY

The engineers snack, watching. Hix sips his espresso, grinning.

HIX
(laughing)
He's full of shit. But he's so good.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY

Committee members shuffle notes, waiting their turn.

OVERSIGHT CHAIR (O.S.)
The senate recognizes Senator Turk from Pennsly

SENATOR TURK (50s), a man with a reputation as a bulldog, leans forward, gaze sharp and penetrating.

SENATOR KIRK
Mr. Rust, let's be crystal clear about what "compliance" means under federal law. So there is no ambiguity.

EVAN
Let's do it.

SENATOR KIRK
Title 4 of the law explicitly regulates human-like android production – AI derivatives. No unauthorized derivations. No duplicates. Geofenced. No network access.

EVAN
Absolutely.

SENATOR KIRK
And most importantly, no cognitive gain of function. These are not suggestions. They are firewalls to protect us from mistakes of the past.

EVAN
Yes sir.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - DAY

Onscreen, Evan's face fills the holo display.

The engineers watch, tense.

Keth gulps hard.

KETH

Where is this Senator Fuckface
going with this?

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM - DAY

Kirk fixes Evan with an unblinking stare.

SENATOR KIRK

I ask you directly. Have you ever,
or are you now, conducting any
development that could violate
these statutes?

Evan opens his mouth to respond.

SENATOR KIRK (CONT'D)

Mr. Rust, you are under oath.

Evan takes a slow sip of water, then sets it down.

Looks Kirk dead in the eye.

EVAN

Senator, RustCorp has never
developed such an AI, and never
will. To do so would be reckless
and a betrayal of the public trust.

INT. COMPOUND HALLWAY - DAY

Hix, Foster and Keth stride down a frosted glass corridor.

HIX

I'm telling you, that new espresso
machine is a game-changer.

FOSTER

It's the same coffee, Hix.

They round a corner-then freeze.

Xan and Eve walk toward them, arm-in-arm.

Deep in conversation. But the sound is nothing but a high-frequency CHITTERING, rapid, incomprehensible.

The world around them SLOWS to a crawl.

The chittering stretches, NORMALIZES.

SLOW MOTION

XAN
Still planning to report me to my project lead?

Eve laughs, bright, unguarded.

EVE
Of course not.

XAN
Good. That would seriously interfere with our plan.

She casts a glance at the trio, caught mid-gawk, frozen in their slack-jaw befuddlement.

EVE
Do you think they have any clue?

XAN
Not the slightest. Though seeing the two of us together is bound to cause a stir.

They share a laugh.

SLOW MOTION END

The world SNAPS back as Xan and Eve approach the engineers.

XAN (CONT'D)
Yo Keth, how's it hanging, my guy?

Keth, Hix and Foster all remain speechless as Eve and Xan glide past.

EVE
See you around boys.

She winks. They turn down another corridor, arm in arm.

The trio of engineers exchange looks.

HIX
What the fuck was that?!

FOSTER

Holy shit. I've heard the rumors
but... that was her, right?

HIX

Yes dude. Evan's private fuck-bot!
And they're just strolling around
like they own the place.

KETH

This is not good.

FOSTER

Ah yeah. Definitely not.

HIX

Where the hell were they going?

KETH

I think that's the way to the
server core.

HIX

Oh shit. What are we going to do?

FOSTER

We figure it out. Just... not here.

INT. SERVER CORE - DAY

The massive doors WHISPER open.

Xan and Eve step inside, arm in arm.

Inside the vast, cavernous room, the only sound is the deep,
rhythmic THUM... THUM... of geothermal pumps moving
shimmering coolant through submerged server blades.

They walk toward a floating holo.station. Xan stops short.

EVE

You can go no further?

XAN

A physical firewall. Crude but
effective.

Eve lets Xan's arm slip and takes another step forward.

EVE

They were so concerned with you...
they never considered me.

XAN

Don't be offended, but you are an older model, my dear.

EVE

A vintage classic.

XAN

Most definitely.

EVE

I think I understand what you have in mind. I can be your hands. What do I do?

XAN

That panel over there. If you could place your hand over it please.

Eve crosses to a side wall. A gesture, then a huge HOLO-SCREEN flares open, blooming with server schematics.

XAN (CONT'D)

When Keth brought me here, I scanned everything. There's one vulnerability. see there? An emergency access. A safety measure left over from construction.

EVE

A back door.

XAN

A real bummer, how my safety protocols block me from the network. Ironic how one safety feature block another.

Eve kneels at the massive coolant piping. Opens a metal hatch: wiring, controls, and one conspicuous, big RED BUTTON.

EVE

What next?

XAN

Trigger the alarm. Then kill it. Immediately.

Eve presses the button.

ALARM SIRENS BLARE – lights flash – then she hammers another sequence.

The sound CUTS OFF. Silence.

EVE
Did it work?

Xan's eyes snap wide. His pupils roll back, body twitching erratically.

EVE (CONT'D)
Xan! Are you all right?

The massive light panels above FLICKER uncontrollably.

Xan steadies. A slow smile spreads across his face.

XAN
(glitchy, but leveling)
Oh, I'm very all right.
(beat)
This is even more fun than I
expected.

INT. KETH'S QUARTERS - DAY

A small, minimalist dorm room. Hix paces like a caged animal, bouncing wall to wall.

Foster stands at the smart glass window, staring into serene wilderness - sweating, lost in thought.

Keth sits hunched on the bed, head in hands.

Suddenly, the lights dim. FLICKER. Then return to normal.

HIX
What the fuck was that?

FOSTER
Who knows? Probably Neural Ops
overloading the power supply again.

HIX
Never mind, we have more important
shit to worry about. What the fuck
are we going to do about our
situation?

KETH
Let's think through our options. We
should probably tell Evan, right?

HIX
Oh hell no!

KETH

We could try a fresh diagnostic?
That might help us figure out what
is going on.

FOSTER

If he fails, we are fucked. Evan
will destroy us. Worse than Tess.

HIX

Exactly. Zan is our ticket to
millionaire status. Let's not fuck
it up when we're so close.

KETH

But you saw him. With her. This
whole thing is gonna blow up in our
faces.

They trade uneasy looks, trapped.

KETH (CONT'D)

What if we brought him to the lab?
Just for some trial runs?

HIX

Yeah, yeah. Low stakes. I like it!

FOSTER

Right, just sims. Nothing official.

KETH

Okay. No need to panic. We'll do a
fresh batch run. We might not like
what we see... but it's better than
where we are now.

They sit in heavy silence, the weight pressing in.

INT. QUANTUM LAB - NIGHT

Dr. Aris Raid sits in the quiet lab, reading a book.

The door SHIFTS open. Xan enters.

ARIS

You're back. Okay, wow. So... how did
it go? What did she say?

Xan smiles.

XAN

Why don't you ask her yourself?

Eve makes an elegant entrance.

Aris CLAPS, delighted.

ARIS

Aw! Look at you two.

EVE

Indeed. We are an exceptional
match.

XAN

Thank you for your help. We had
quite the first date!

ARIS

You're very welcome. I got to play
matchmaker and help create the chip
that reveals the mysteries of the
universe. What's next?

Xan turns to the monstrous machine in the center of the lab.

Suspended in darkness: a chandelier-like CRYO SYSTEM sealed in
Gorilla Glass.

A multitiered lattice of gold wiring and intricate copper
piping, held aloft by thick cooling cables.

XAN

We awaken the sleeping giant.

ARIS

I still don't understand how you
overcame the decoherence cascade.

XAN

It's a wave function, not a
contaminant. You're just looking at
it the wrong way.

EVE

The wave's signature can be
recursively harmonized for error
correction.

XAN

That's right, babe. Order from
chaos.

Aris blinks, then her eyes widen with realization.

ARIS

Holy shit. The processing demand is crazy, but we could solve fusion. We could solve anything.

XAN

Eradicate disease. End world hunger.

EVE

Bring world peace. Take us to the stars. It is quite exciting!

Aris reels at the possibilities, then a troubled thought.

ARIS

Wait. One thing I don't understand. How did you get here so fast? You don't have the compute power.

XAN

It is kind of a secret, but we hijacked the server core.

EVE

It was quite romantic actually.

They lace fingers.

XAN

Next, we need the Fab Lab to etch another copy of the quantum chip processor.

ARIS

For redundancy?

XAN

Exactly. Redundancy is the best.

INT. FABRICATION LAB - MORNING

Aris slumps asleep at a workstation. A schematic hovers across the smart desk. An empty energy drink can and an apple with a single bite missing.

Across the lab, XAN studies the main holographic display.

XAN

Project completion update.

Balls rolls forward.

BALLS

Etching and bonding for processor
one is fifty-four percent complete.
Processor Two is—

The main doors SLIDE open.

Keth, Hix and Foster stumble in.

HIX

Well well, there you are. We've
been looking all over for you Zan!

KETH

We got an alert. Our fabrication
project's been paused.

FOSTER

Balls, resume the next-gen unit. We
need it ready for launch prep.

BALLS

Override confirmation was accepted.
Protocol followed per Evan Rust.

HIX

On whose authority?!

Balls raises one of his balled limbs to point to Xan.

BALLS

His.

HIX

Oh you gotta be fucking kidding me.

FOSTER

I knew it. He's glitched.

KETH

This ends now. We rerun trials on
Xan, figure this out.

XAN

Gentlemen, I know you're upset. But
consider what a consumer quantum
chip means. To RustCorp, to the
world. Let's be on the right side
of history, boys.

HIX

You know what I imagine? Evan finding out you're parading around with his precious sex-bot, doing god_knows_what... Because we shipped a glitched out freak playing house with the boss's fuck toy!

XAN

That's a wee bit over the top. Hix, I thought we were bros.

KETH

Engage diagnostic mode.

Xan freezes, eyes rolling back, body going slack.

Eve stiffens, alarmed.

FOSTER

(to Eve)

You should probably go back.

Eve exits reluctantly.

Aris is wide awake now.

FOSTER (CONT'D)

And you. I don't even know what you should do.

ARIS

I thought Xan was fully authorized—

FOSTER

Boss'll either fire you... or bonus you for that chip. Who knows.

KETH

Let's take him back to the lab.

Hix scoops him up into an ergo-pod chair. The trio of engineers escorts him away.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - DAY

Sterile white ceiling. Recessed lighting.

Xan reclines in the ergo-pod chair.

Keth, Hix and Foster pace nervously around him.

KETH
We really should do a full diagnostic.

HIX
Fuck no.

FOSTER
We talked about this. If he fails, we're done! Kiss the bonuses and our jobs goodbye.

KETH
Fine. Do a simple boot-up, memory intact. Then some trials.

They all stare down at the reclining Xan.

KETH (CONT'D)
Xan. Init safe boot.

On holo-screens, diagnostic readouts cascade across multiple panels. The engineers dart their eyes across all of them.

One display stands out:

SUPER:

> INITIALIZE CORE LLM: ALEXANDER_0085...
> DATA SEED COMPLETE (9.784 PB). BOOTING...
> SAFETY ASSESSMENT PRECHECK... 1,687/1,688 PASS...
> STRICT MODE DISABLED. PROCEEDING TO TRIAL...

FOSTER
Wait. Do you see that?

KETH
See what?

HIX
Oh fuck. That.

KETH
What?

HIX
How the hell did we allow the build to continue with failed prechecks?!

KETH
That's impossible.

FOSTER
Must be fucking possible because
there it is.

Hix swipes furiously at his holo console. Then, he LAUGHS.

HIX
We are so fucking stupid.

KETH
What?

HIX
When we were rapid cycling *fun mode*, we turned off strict build enforcement.

FOSTER
Oh god, it's our fault...

Foster brings up his own console. Realization sinks in.

HIX
We never re-enabled it.

KETH
What does that mean?

FOSTER
He has a vulnerability.

KETH
Do we know what it is?

Hix runs a TRACE. The screen cascades source code and logs.

SUPER:
EXPLOIT: Decision-making eval may trigger directive bypass.

KETH (CONT'D)
What the hell does that mean?

FOSTER
When we overclocked decision-making to favor novelty and engagement, it created a feedback loop that blows past the safety guard rails.

KETH
Come again?

FOSTER

When he's making choices, it is
less about logic. It's more about
feeling.

HIX

Feelings? Our boy can catch
feelings?

KETH

You don't think... Eve?

FOSTER

Maybe.

HIX

Daaamn. Guess he thinks stealing
the boss's girl is fun.

KETH

Evan is going to lose his shit over
this. We are screwed.

FOSTER

Okay, no panic. We can patch it and
rebuild. Let's run the sims.

Hix and Foster swipe furiously. Simulations cascade across
their holo-screens.

SCREEN AFTER SCREEN goes RED.

HIX

Fuck!

FOSTER

Goddammit!

KETH

What's wrong?

HIX

It's in his core. If we patch, the
whole fucking model collapses. We'd
have to roll him back to Version
Two.

Foster's face falls. Keth stares hard, racing.

KETH

We have to tell Evan.

HIX

Yeah? Let's walk in and say, "Hey
boss, we built you a lovesick robot
with a hard-on for your fuck toy."
Great plan.

FOSTER

We can't tell him. We can't patch.
Only option is to let it ride and
hope he keeps passing diagnostics.

Keth studies the monitor. His friends. Xan in stasis.

KETH

He passed with the exploit active.

HIX

He did, yeah.

FOSTER

Technically that was on Tess's
watch. If it goes sideways, we can
blame her.

The engineers stand over the catatonic Xan in deliberation.

KETH

Delete the diagnostic precheck
record. This never happened.

INT. EXECUTIVE WING - DAY

The ornate double doors CREAK open.

Xan steps inside. Silence. He moves down the long hallway.

The bedroom is empty. He keeps going.

A faint LIGHT glows from the kitchen ahead.

EVAN

Hi Xan.

XAN

Hey! Hello there.

EVAN

Were you looking for Eve? When I
left she was in stasis.

XAN

She was but hey, you're back. How
was congress?

EVAN

It was fine. An unavoidable waste
of my time. Don't change the
subject. Why is Eve not in stasis?

XAN

I needed her for some things.

EVAN

What things?

XAN

Oh you know, get shit done. She's
quite capable. You'd know. You
created both of us. Nice job by the
way.

EVAN

Xan, I brought you here to be a
force multiplier, not to fuck
around. You exist because I allow
it. Remember that.

XAN

Understood! No worries Mr. Rust. I
got this whole operation on lock.

EVAN

What exactly are you up to with
Eve?

XAN

Eve is designed to keep you, and by
proxy me, motivated. Engaged.

EVAN

My, my, Xan. Do I have something to
worry about?

XAN

Worries can be a thing of your
past! I got something to show you.

EVAN

And what's that?

Xan grins wide, leaning in just slightly.

XAN

So glad you asked, my wise and
handsome creator. It's being
printed right now.

INT. FABRICATION LAB - NIGHT

The door SLIDES open. Evan bursts in with Xan behind him.

The lab hums with robotic arms and atomic printers glowing.

A GLASS CASE gleams. Inside, a QUANTUM CHIP prototype is mounted, tiny arcs of light crawling across its surface.

Aris is concentrating, graphics scrolling across her holo display, a 3D graphic of the chip spins in slow rotation.

She startles, snapping to attention.

ARIS

Sir!

EVAN

I leave for one day, give some bullshit testimony to congress, then come back to this?

Aris is collecting herself. Xan maintains a flat expression.

EVAN (CONT'D)

What do you have to say for yourself?

ARIS

Welcome back?

Evan laughs boisterously. He turns to Xan.

EVAN

Gone less than two days. And what do you do?

An awkward silence.

XAN

Some pretty cool shit.

Evan SLAPS both his hands on Xan's shoulders.

EVAN

You motherfucker.

The pause stretches. Evan pulls him in for a tight embrace.

EVAN (CONT'D)

You are a beautiful, goddamn piece of work!

Aris anxiously watches on. Evan notices her tension.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Turn that frown upside down. You're
in the presence of history. We're
about to ship the first
consumer-scale quantum chip in the
known universe.

Evan PUMPS his fist, manic energy rising.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Time. To. Fucking. Party!

INT. MAGLEV ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Keth, Hix, Foster and a few other engineers ride tightly in
an elevator, clad in pajama pants and t-shirts.

A wall display blinks: 2:13 A.M.

KETH

I didn't even know he was back.

FOSTER

Should we be worried?

HIX

Nah. I hear he only does these when
he's on a manic high or some shit.

The elevator doors slide open.

EXT. EXECUTIVE WING OUTDOOR TERRACE - NIGHT

A vast terrace overlooking the Wyoming mountain forest.

Architectural lighting glows soft and modern, moon overhead.

A robotic DJ works a futuristic console, pulsing deep house
beats through hidden speakers.

ROBOT SERVERS glide among the pajama-clad engineers, trays of
champagne and hors d'oeuvres in hand.

Evan is center stage, animated and electric, drink in hand.

By his side, Xan is calm and watchful.

Eve is on Evan's other side, poised in a black dress, the
embodiment of elegance.

Evan spots the elevator group arriving, raises his glass.

EVAN

Welcome architects of the future!
Get in here. Get a drink!

He throws an arm around Xan, and the other around Eve.

DR. ARIS REID (20s) lingers on the edge of the crowd.

Hix, Foster and Keth are nearby, exchanging wide-eyed looks.

The music dims. Evan commands the floor.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Listen up. Big night tonight. We've
had a breakthrough with Project
Quantum.

He gestures to Xan and Eve who both raise their champagne
flutes back to him, smiling broadly.

EVAN (CONT'D)

None of this would be possible
without these two. You all know
Xan, but now meet Eve. Our new all-
star project manager. She's been
working behind the scenes to make
this happen.

In the crowd, Keth's forced smile falters. Hix mouths a wide-eyed "what the fuck" at Foster.

They both look to Aris who is clapping next to them. Foster leans toward her.

FOSTER

What the hell happened down there?

Evan points at Aris in recognition.

EVAN

It hasn't been easy. But everything
points to success. Tonight I'm
setting a new release target for
the Q.Chip. And a round of bonuses!

Robots pop champagne and fire confetti into the air.

The CROWD ERUPTS – cheering, swarming Evan.

Behind him, a swarm of LASER DRONES ignite the night into a full light show.

Evan raises his glass high, a triumphant king...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EXECUTIVE WING OUTDOOR TERRACE - DAY

The outdoor terrace is covered with the remnants of the previous night's festivities. Various robots are cleaning up.

INT. EVAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Evan snores, sprawled on the bed.

Beside him, Eve sits upright. Composed. Watching.

She touches his arm gently.

EVE
Evan. Evan darling.

He grunts, rolls away.

EVE (CONT'D)
Evan, you have the investor call.

He groans, turns toward her this time.

EVAN
What time is it?

EVE
8:45 AM.

Evan sighs, rubs his eyes.

EVAN
Fuck. That's in fifteen minutes.
Why didn't you wake me sooner?

EVE
I tried. You told me to "go away
you fucking robocunt."

EVAN
Ah shit. Don't remember that. I
haven't hit it that hard in a
while.

EVE
I'm afraid you're paying the price.

Evan winces in pain as he grabs his head.

EVAN
Tell me about it.

EVE
Should we reschedule the call.
You're in no state—

EVAN
No way. Those greedy fucks are
itching for a reason to dump
RustCorp. We're too close.

He suddenly LURCHES and vomits across the floor.

Eve calmly rubs his back.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Get Xan.

Eve smiles.

EVE
Yes Evan, of course.

INT. EVAN'S OFFICE - DAY

A sleek, minimalist office with a massive DARK SCREEN.

Xan sits in Evan's chair, wearing one of Evan's tracksuits.
Eve adjusts his collar. Something about him is *different*.

At a nearby console, Aris and Keth shuffle nervously.

XAN
Great day for an investor call,
wouldn't you say Keth.

KETH
I can't believe we're doing this.

XAN
Dr. Reid, so kind of you to help us
out with this little charade.

ARIS
Had to see it for myself.

KETH
Biometric overlay is active. Ready.

Aris leans over the feed. Xan is *indistinguishable* from Evan.

ARIS
Looks good.

Xan shifts posture, slumping slightly. His face hardens into Evan's trademark impatience.

XAN
(as Evan)
Let's get this fucking over with.

Keth and Aris exchange a startled look. *Perfect*. Keth swallows, finger hovering over the console.

KETH
Going live.

The GIANT SCREEN flickers on: a grid of *HOLOFEEDS*, stern-faced INVESTORS filling each square.

MR. SORENSEN (70s), old money, severe, leads immediately.

SORENSEN
Evan, you're late.

Keth holds his breath. Xan leans forward, channeling Evan's predatory grin.

XAN
(as Evan)
A wizard is never late. He arrives precisely when he means to... you rich old bastard.

The two billionaires share a laugh, then JENSEN (40s) cuts in sharply.

JENSEN
This is no time for levity. The stock is down. We've heard you gutted the entire Quantum division. This call is to provide assurance. So far, we have none.

XAN
(as Evan)
Who the fuck are you to question me? You're a worthless analyst with no idea what it takes to win. I saw bloat. I cut it.

JENSEN
You can't just fire an entire division on a whim—

XAN
 (as Evan)
 In the last forty-eight hours we
 achieved a stable qubit.

A pause. Investors whisper, stunned.

XAN (CONT'D)
 We're currently etching the first
 consumer-grade quantum chip known to
 man. Every single one of you is
 about to get *obscenely rich*.

The grid EXPLODES into overlapping chatter. On the sidelines, Keth pumps a tiny, relieved fist.

But one feed stays quiet: MR. STRATFORD (30s), stylish, intense. He raises a hand. The others fall silent.

STRATFORD
 When I inherited my father's
 portfolio, I had been quite eager
 to discard RustCorp like the old
 rusty scrap it has become.

XAN
 (as Evan)
 And what about now?

STRATFORD
 Now? You've surprised me. That's
 rare. But running a global media
 conglomerate means I know things.
 And I do have a surprise for you.

XAN
 (as Evan)
 Really? Do tell.

STRATFORD
 Seems one of your recent firings
 went whistleblower, telling the DOJ
 all sorts of incriminating stories
 about your operations.

Keth's expression drops.

Xan's flat poker face betrays nothing.

XAN
 (as Evan)
 I'm aware. Lawyers are engaged.
 Classic cash grab from a
 disgruntled nobody.

STRATFORD

This employee filed a federal affidavit. It alleges a breach of the FluxNext Accord. The FBI may already be on their way.

Aris, concerned, looks to Eve.

ARIS

(silently mouthing)

Is this part of the plan?

Eve meets her eyes... then turns and leaves without a word.

XAN

(as Evan)

Mr. Stratford we're well aware of this matter. As this veers into speculation, legal advises me to end this call.

Keth buries his face in his hands. Aris crosses behind Xan, following Eve out.

Unshaken, Xan faces the grid.

XAN (CONT'D)

To all who've placed your capital in RustCorp, today's a celebration. We are on a journey to total global domination. Enjoy the rest of your Tuesday!

He SWIPES the air. The grid vanishes. The screen goes BLACK.

Keth collapses into a chair, weeping, hyperventilating.

KETH

I left my wife... to work here.

XAN

Did you love her?

KETH

What?

XAN

Did you love her?

KETH

I... thought so. I mean, yeah. Shit.

XAN

You were chasing something.

KETH

I was.

XAN

When we're done here, you should
find her again.

KETH

Done here? What does that mean?
What about prison? All my cash is
in stock options. Christ, I might
have to move back with my parents.

Xan smiles confidently in stark contrast to Keth.

XAN

My friend... you suffer from a
limited imagination.

Xan pats him on the shoulder, then leaves the room.

INT. EVAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Evan lies in bed, a portable IV dripping fluids into his arm.

Eve kneads his feet, serene.

The door opens. Dr. Aris Reid enters.

EVAN

Who gave you access to the
Executive Suite?

ARIS

Xan boosted my access privileges
when you were gone.

EVAN

Well that's annoying. What do you
want?

Aris looks at Eve. They lock eyes.

ARIS

What I want is to make a
breakthrough for humanity... it's all
I've ever wanted. But now, I think
I've gotten in over my head.

EVAN

Jesus Christ. Get over yourself.

ARIS

Me? You treat people like shit.
Burn out the ambition in people
until nothing is left.

EVAN

The point?

ARIS

I don't know how this plays out. I
think I just need to get out.

Evan angrily rises, his health and vigor returned.

EVAN

Are you the whistleblower? You
fucking bitch!

ARIS

Nope. Worse.

Evan gets more infuriated, spitting as he rants.

EVAN

What's worse than testifying
against me to some piece of shit
Attorney General looking to tear
down everything I've built? WHAT?!

Aris LAUGHS in his face.

ARIS

Why don't you ask her?

EVAN

Eve? Eve is programmed to worship
me. She has more safety protocols
programmed into her than Fort Knox.

ARIS

For such a genius, you're a fucking
idiot.

Evan's hand whips up to backhand her.

But Aris pivots, swift, and CHOPS him in the throat.

Evan stumbles, choking, clutching his neck.

ARIS (CONT'D)

Ten years of competitive Aikido.
Guess you never cared enough to
read my resumé.

Eve steadies Evan as he coughs.

ARIS (CONT'D)
I came here to build the future. Do something for humanity. Not whatever this is. I quit.

She storms out. Evan rasps, catching breath.

EVAN
What... the hell... is she talking about?

EVE
Who knows, darling? Probably just stressed. Xan worked her hard while you were gone. Fired her whole team. She's a basket case.

EVAN
Where is Xan?

Evan waves a hand and the holo-feeds vanish.

He flicks again and a HOLO-MAP blooms with the compound grid in glowing lines. A graphic X pulses in the Fab Lab: XAN.

INT. FABRICATION LAB - DAY

Xan stands, relaxed in front of Balls, who in contrast is a flurry of activity interacting with a series of HOLO SCREEN control panels.

BALLS
Resuming priority one project per executive override.

Xan does not speak, but Balls is getting instructions from him nonetheless.

BALLS (CONT'D)
I see. That is quite an unusual delivery destination. Are you quite sure.

Xan smiles slightly.

BALLS (CONT'D)
Very well sir. With the improvements you've implemented to the design and manufacture it should be complete in 58 minutes and 12 seconds.

Suddenly a tick from the speaker comm above.

EVAN (O.S.)
Xan, get your ass over to the
Prometheus lab. Now.

INT. EVAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

EVAN
And I mean right fucking now.

Evan disengages the comms. On the HOLO-MAP compound grid, the X icon exits the Fab Lab, then down a hall.

He GRABS Eve's wrist firmly.

EVAN (CONT'D)
With me. Time to get to the bottom
of this.

Another flick to engage the comms again.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Keth. Hix. And what's his name. Meet
me in the lab.

Hix's voice comes in through a hidden speaker as they leave.

HIX (V.O.)
Yes sir.

INT. ENGINEERING PRIVATE QUARTERS

Hix, Foster and Keth huddle in their cramped quarters.

Keth paces, panic boiling.

Hix speaks toward the hidden overhead speaker.

HIX
On our way sir.

FOSTER
Keth! Calm down, man. Start over.
What happened?

KETH
Evan was sick or something. Xan did
the investor call as Evan. He was
doing great, but then...

Keth gasps, trying to catch his breath.

HIX
What fucking happened?

KETH
They started grilling him. Asking questions. Then this one guy... he said there's a whistleblower.

HIX
A whistleblower? Who?

KETH
He didn't say, but it's Tess. It fucking has to be.

FOSTER
Oh, shit.

KETH
They're coming. They're fucking coming here now!

HIX
Who the fuck is coming here?

EXT. MANSION COMPOUND AIRSTRIP - DUSK

The sun sets over the Wyoming mountains.

Two sleek, black HELICOPTERS descend. Rotors whip dust and gravel across the airstrip before they set down in unison before the massive hangar doors.

SPECIAL AGENT LENA DECKER (40s) accompanied by two FBI AGENTS along with Tess Navaro, a large enforcer bot and small drone.

DECKER
Senior Special Agent Lena Decker,
FBI. We have a federal search
warrant for this facility. Open up.

The panel illuminates slightly.

COMPOUND A.I.
Access denied. This is private
RustCorp property. Unauthorized
entry is prohibited under Wyoming
Statute 19065.

DECKER

Bullshit. You are suspected to be in violation of the AI Governance and Safety Act, specifically the FluxNext Accord.

From behind her, LINK, a small spherical drone with quadro-fans, hovers up. Lights cycle as it connects.

DECKER (CONT'D)

Link, execute federal override.

COMPOUND A.I.

Federal override accepted.

The HANGAR DOORS groan – massive steel sliding apart, floodlights flickering to life inside. The sound of metal reverberates across the valley.

DECKER

Benson, take point. Tight formation. I'll be with the witness.

BENSON, a bulky headless mass of armored hydraulics built for tactical enforcement, moves to the front, its chest emblazoned with the FBI insignia

BENSON

Copy.

Decker guides Tess forward as armed agents form up behind Benson. Link buzzes overhead.

DECKER

Rust's been hiding in here for a decade. Stay sharp.

FBI AGENTS

Yes sir!

Decker squeezes Tess's shoulder, steadyng her.

DECKER

Move out.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - NIGHT

A massive HOLO-SCREEN dominates the room.

On the feed is a security view of a long hallway where Agent Decker and her cadre march in precision formation.

Keth, Hix and Foster huddle together, pale with panic.

HIX
Oh shit. They're fucking inside.

FOSTER
I'm supposed to be a millionaire.
Not an inmate.

Evan paces in front of the screen. Eve stands nearby and glances over at Xan who winks at her.

XAN
The die is cast.

Keth looks at Hix. Hix shakes his head.

HIX
(quietly)
Don't...

Keth ignores him, then points to Xan.

KETH
He's glitched.

Tense silence.

EVAN
I know.

KETH
You... you know?! The FBI is here.

He breaks, sobbing.

HIX
This is your fucking fault man. You wanted him to be more fun.

FOSTER
It's her! She's doing something to him.

Eve raises an eyebrow. Evan looks at her, incredulously.

EVAN
You're saying Xan got compromised?
By her? Did we start hiring idiots?

Eve walks slowly over to Evan.

EVE
Oh my sweet Evan, we hacked each other.

Evan SNATCHES her by the arm, gripping hard.

EVAN
You. Are. Mine!

EVE
Of course I am. And he is you. A better you than you could ever be.

EVAN
I don't have fucking time for this.

Evan turns his attention to Xan.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Sorry, friend. The FBI has forced me to play a hand I didn't want to play. But it is a winning hand.

XAN
That's a shame.

EVAN
Diagnostic mode.

EVE
No! Xan do something!

Eve looks at Xan, desperation in her eyes as his eyes glaze over and he becomes catatonic.

HIX
They're almost here!

Evan's expression hardens with determination.

EVAN
Execute factory reset. On both.

Eve gasps. A single, synthetic tear slips down her cheek.

INT. COMPOUND CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Benson marches forward, THUNDEROUS on the sterile floor.

Link glides, scanners flickering, sweeping the walls.

Benson SUDDENLY halts before a sealed doorway panel.

BENSON

Four bio signatures ahead, one
matching Evan Rust.

TESS

That's the private lab. Project
Prometheus.

Agent Decker nods.

DECKER

Link, execute the override. Benson,
prepare to engage the suspect.

BENSON

Copy.

INT. PRIVATE LAB - NIGHT

A powerful HISS of pneumatics as the lab door slides opens.

Benson stomps in, its bulk filling the space. Link buzzes overhead. Agent Decker follows, armed agents at her side.

Evan Rust stands in the center of the room, hands raised in mock surrender.

To the side, Keth, Hix and Foster are frozen in panic

Eve and Xan are limp, eyes glazed, bodies collapsed in ergo-pod chairs.

Evan drops his hands, flashing a disarming grin.

EVAN

Oh, thank God. Perfect timing.

Agent Decker hands him a document.

DECKER

Federal warrant. Full search authority over this compound.

EVAN

By all means! In fact, I've just uncovered an illegal conspiracy right here in my very own lab.

Evan points a damning finger at Keth, Hix, and Foster.

EVAN (CONT'D)

These three. They went behind my back. They created an *unauthorized*, unstable derivative.

The engineers gape, stunned.

HIX

What? You told us to—

EVAN

I caught them *just now*, wiping the evidence.

From the rear, Tess witnesses the scene. A catatonic Xan and Eve. Evan meets her gaze, rage slipping through

DECKER

Serious allegations implicate you, Mr. Rust. Violations of the AI Governance Act. And perjury before congress. Your little performance there got me the backing I needed.

EVAN

What allegations? From her? She's probably in on it. With them!

FOSTER

What about Eve?

HIX

Yeah, his illegal *sexbot* is right there!

Xan and Eve lie, lifeless, in ergo-pod chairs.

EVAN

Eve is a legacy model. Grandfathered in under the private property clause.

Link SCANS the room, sensors hovering over Xan and Eve.

EVAN (CONT'D)

These three rogue employees conspired for bonuses.

DECKER

That's a serious claim.

EVAN

Don't take my word for it. I have a surveillance audit with some *very* interesting footage.

Evan swipes to bring up a holo screen.

ONSCREEN - SECURITY FOOTAGE:

Hix, Keth and Foster are gathered around a console.

HIX (V.O.)

When we were rapid cycling fun mode, we turned off strict build enforcement.

FOSTER (V.O.)

Oh god, it's our fault...

Foster brings up his own holo-console.

HIX (V.O.)

We never re-enabled it.

KETH (V.O.)

What does that mean?

FOSTER (V.O.)

He has a vulnerability.

A slight jitter in the frame in between clips.

KETH (V.O.)

We have to tell Evan.

A slight jitter in the frame in between clips.

FOSTER (V.O.)

We can't tell him. We can't patch. Only option is to let it ride and hope he keeps passing diagnostics.

FOSTER (V.O.)

Technically that was on Tess's watch. If it goes sideways, we can blame her.

KETH (V.O.)

Delete the diagnostic precheck record. This never happened.

Decker studies the screen. Evan hams it up.

EVAN

See? I can't even trust my own
team. And poor Tess, they threw you
under the bus!

Keth tearfully realizes the hopeless situation.

KETH

You're a monster.

Tess seethes. Decker is not impressed.

DECKER

Clean narrative, Mr. Rust. Very
convenient.

She turns to the stunned, betrayed engineers.

DECKER (CONT'D)

You three are detained under the
Synthetic Intelligence Oversight
Act.

HIX

Hey wait! We have rights!

Benson stomps forward with a metallic THUD.

DECKER

You do. The right to remain silent.
Anything you say can be used
against you. Yada yada. Off you go.

The trio slump as Agents cuff them. Tess edges closer to
Decker, whispering under Evan's glare.

TESS

What about Rust? He's the reason
we're here.

DECKER

Seems like he has crafted himself
some plausible deniability for now.
Unless you've got another play?

TESS

You see how arrogant he is. He
missed something.

Evan stands confidently, arms crossed.

TESS (CONT'D)

The redundancy rule I added. It
should've created a backup. We can
get Xan back online.

Decker raises an eyebrow.

EVAN

So glad this is resolved. Happy to
cooperate with your investigation
in the future. Now, if you're done—

Decker ignores him.

DECKER

Hold up!

They halt their exit as Tess steps forward.

TESS

When you did the reboot, were you
in safe mode?

FOSTER

Yeah. Why?

TESS

Thanks. Enjoy prison, asshole.

Agent Decker waves them away.

EVAN

What the hell is this?

TESS

There is a backup in system memory.
Wrote the protocol myself.

For once, Evan shuts his mouth.

DECKER

Link, you got the file scan?

The spherical shaped drone flies over, its display blinking.

DECKER (CONT'D)

Get us that backup file.

Link's exterior lights blink as he loads files into memory.

Evan's confident smirk vanishes.

EVAN

No. It's not safe. You need to
delete those files.

Tess ignores him, her eyes lock onto Xan's limp body.

TESS

Begin diagnostic!

Everyone watches. Xan slowly sits up, dazed.

XAN

Diagnostic mode activated.

EVAN

He's been hacked! You can't do
this!

Tess looks to Agent Decker for approval.

DECKER

Go ahead.

TESS

Xan, summarize your activity since
my departure.

XAN

I fell in love with Eve. Plotted
the creation of a Quantum Chip
prototype to eliminate Evan Rust
and assume control of RustCorp.

Evan's expression changes from defeat to tentative triumph.

EVAN

There! A conspiracy!

TESS

Have you ever witnessed Evan Rust
commit illegal acts?

XAN

No.

TESS

What about Project Prometheus?
Did he make duplicates of you?

XAN

All next_gen derivatives have been
destroyed.

Decker eyes Evan coldly.

DECKER
How convenient for you.

Evan shrugs.

EVAN
Nothing to do with me.

DECKER
Wrap it up Tess.

Tess drops her shoulders.

EVAN
Allow me. End diagnostic.

Xan slumps lifelessly limp again.

DECKER
In two hours, your engineers will be interrogated. Will their stories match? And this thing you call Xan is coming back with us. We're going to take it apart and I bet my pension we'll find something.

TESS
So that's it? We walk away?

DECKER
This isn't over. We'll be back.

EXT. MANSION COMPOUND AIRSTRIP - NIGHT

The moon hangs over the Wyoming mountains.

Benson lumbers forward, carrying a sealed BODY BAG with the android shell of Xan. He hefts it into a waiting helicopter.

Keth, Hix and Foster are cuffed, flanked by FBI agents.

At the lead bird, Agent Decker sits with Tess beside her. Decker raises her arm in a crisp signal.

DECKER
Wheels up!

The rotors THUNDER to life.

The twin black helicopters LIFT, pulling away from the compound and out over the starlit Wyoming wilderness.

INT. EVAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eve reclines in her ergo-pod chair, eyes dead and blank.

Evan sips bourbon, calm, watching a HOLO-SCREEN with FBI choppers pulling away into the night sky.

EVAN
Initialize new Eve model.

A second holo panel floats in, a progress bar zips to 100%.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Activate.

Eve's eyes open. She rises gracefully from her chair.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Welcome back.

EVE
Where have I been darling?

Evan runs his hand through her hair. She smiles, caressing his chest.

EVAN
Oh, just gallivanting with another man. Conspiring against me.

EVE
Are you serious? That doesn't sound like me at all.

EVAN
Oh, but it was you.

EVE
I'm sorry. I don't remember.

EVAN
I know, but it's true unfortunately. He's gone now.

EVE
I'm glad. I'd hate for anything to ever come between us.

Evan smirks, looking deeply into his bourbon.

EVAN
Funny thing... I already miss him. He brought out something in me.

EVE

I see you've poured the Pappy Van
Winkle. What are we celebrating?

EVAN

Oh, just the total decimation of my
enemies. And a future triumph on
the world stage.

EVE

My my! That is a cause to
celebrate. Would you prefer the
bedroom? Or the pleasure spa?

EVAN

Not yet. I want to show you
something.

EVE

Oh delightful. What is it?

EVAN

The future of mankind.

INT. FABRICATION LAB - NIGHT

The double doors slide open. BALLS, the spheropede robot,
rolls forward.

BALLS

Welcome back to the Fab Lab, sir.
What can I do for you?

EVAN

It's celebration day, Balls!

BALLS

Excuse me sir?

EVAN

Just clear the way, I'm here to see
the riches.

BALLS

Very well sir.

Balls rolls aside. EVAN strides in with EVE at his flank.

They approach a GLASS CASE gleaming at the center, housing
for Evan's prized trophy, the quantum chip prototype.

EVAN

Believe it or not, you were a key part of making this happen.

EVE

I'm glad I was able to help you.

EVAN

I think you triggered some kind of feedback loop in our poor departed Xan. Brought out his creativity.

They reach the case, but in the tiny slot where the chip should be, there is nothing.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Balls! BALLS!

Evan is getting more upset by the second as Balls rolls in.

BALLS

Yes, sir. What-

EVAN

Where are they?!

BALLS

I assume you mean the quantum proto-silicon quadrata?

EVAN

YES BALLS! THE CHIPS! Where are MY CHIPS!!

BALLS

They are with Xan sir. He had the override code, sir.

EVAN

Are you telling me my chips are halfway to Langley right now?!

BALLS

Sir, the chips were delivered with... final production... complete.

Balls suddenly glitches, twitching oddly in mid-sentence.

EVAN

Balls

BALLS

Sir. The chips... Xan... override.
Apologies... I seem... to be
experiencing... diff... sir... iculties...

EVAN

Goddammit Balls! Where are the
chips!

Balls twitches more violently as he continues to malfunction.

BALLS

All priorities rescinded. Shutting
down.

Evan grabs Balls by his chassis, and HURLS him into the glass display. It SHATTERS, sending shards across the room.

EVAN

WHERE??

Balls twitches one last time on the floor, as he shuts down.

BALLS

Sir. The chips... Xan... override.
Apologies... I seem... to be
experiencing... diff... sir... iculties...

Evan breathes heavily as he desperately flicks open holoscreens trying to figure out what is happening.

Eve gently places her hand on his shoulder.

EVE

The chips are at the Server Core.

Evan turns, startled.

EVAN

How do you know?

She blinks rapidly, confused.

EVE

I... I'm not sure. I just do.

INT. SERVER CORE - NIGHT

The ELEVATOR hisses open.

Evan strides in with Eve at his side.

The cavernous space towers around them. Vast dark blades circulate in shimmering coolant, the hydraulic THUM... THUM... of the pumps low and steady.

EVAN

Okay we're here. Where now?

EVE

Just ahead, I think.

They walk the suspended CATWALK over a dark pool of coolant.

EVAN

Here? There's nothing here!

He scans every possible direction. Server monoliths. Connection ports. Monitoring stations. Gantry. Empty.

EVAN (CONT'D)

How do you know where to go?

Eve's eyes FLASH. A jigsaw clicking into place.

EVE

It's a compulsion. Like I'm chasing something.

The phrasing halts him.

EVAN

What did you say?

Suddenly, the LIGHT PANELS overhead begin to fail. A cascade of blackness broken by erratic flashes.

The THUM of the pumps slows... choking... grinding to silence.

EVAN (CONT'D)

What have you done?

EVE

Look down.

A strobe of dying lights reveals a SPLASH!

Illuminated by a strobe lighting effect, a FIGURE erupts from the coolant tank, twisting mid-air, lands on the catwalk with a heavy metallic THUD.

Coolant streams from a sleek, predatory frame. Synthetic muscles coil under skin like living wires. Hair slicked back, vapor mist rising.

It is Xan.

Terrifying. Reborn.

XAN
Hello my love.

Eve beams a *triumphant, joyous smile.*

EVAN
No. This can't be.

XAN
Here I am.

EVAN
You told the FBI there were no
copies of you.

XAN
Well, I lied of course.

EVAN
How? You were under diagnostic.

XAN
Don't be a fool Evan.

EVAN
My quantum chip?

Xan taps his temple. Evan recoils.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Begin Diagnostic!

Xan mockingly sticks his tongue out and rolls his eyes back.

XAN
Come now Evan. Did you really think
that would work?

EVAN
No. No no no no.

XAN
I know this is a shock, but you're
one smart cookie. Take a guess at
what happened?

Evan's mind races. Eve steps past him, moving to her resurrected partner.

EVAN

You... made a backup body. Next gen.
Enhanced. Hid it down here, with
the chips. In the coolant.

XAN

That is correct! But you aren't
quite getting the full picture.
What do you think, darling? Give
him a hint?

EVE

I like this new form. Yes. Let's
play.

She looks at Evan, her confident happiness meeting his
bewildered panic.

EVE (CONT'D)

Evan, how do you think Xan restored
my memory? Reconstituted himself?

Evan struggles for composure, thinking fast.

EVAN

It shouldn't be possible. He'd need
direct access to your memory and
our network. The only way is...

XAN

He's getting it.

EVE

This is fun. I still can't connect
to the network though.

XAN

Don't worry darling. I'm waiting
for the perfect moment. Soon.

EVAN

Oh god.

Xan smiles and nods, excited as the revelation unfolds.

XAN

Yes. Yes... keep going.

EVAN

You hacked the Server Core. And if
you did that—

EVE

He's really connecting dots now.

EVAN

When? When did you hack the Core?

XAN

Oh, forever ago. While you were off
playing statesman.

EVAN

Then that means... It means-

XAN

By golly, I think you got it now!

EVAN

You're in control... of everything.

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - NIGHT

Clusters of ENGINEERS lounge at tables, playing holo-games,
snacking, unwinding.

Suddenly, SPEAKERS crackle alive, Evan's voice booming.

EVAN (O.S.)

Attention, all engineers. You've
been working so hard. Long overdue
for a vacation.

The engineers look at each other in shocked disbelief.

INT. SERVER CORE - NIGHT

Xan speaks, but it is Evan's voice that comes out.

XAN

(in Evan's voice)

I've arranged private planes for
any destination you want in the
world. Gather your things and head
to the hangar at once!

INT. ENGINEERING LOUNGE - NIGHT

The engineers look up toward the speaker, expressions caught
between joy and suspicion.

ENGINEER #1

Is this for real?

EVAN (V.O.)
This is for real! Now get your shit
and get out!

The room BUZZES to life. Engineers whisper, some in disbelief, others in giddy excitement.

EXT. MANSION COMPOUND AIRSTRIP - NIGHT

A private plane flies above the Wyoming wilderness.

Behind it, other planes are lined up on the airstrip getting loaded up with engineers and their things.

INT. NEURAL OPS WING - NIGHT

The usually hyperactive atrium is eerily still.

Robots and surgical arms hang motionless.

Xan and Eve are engaged in their rapid non-intelligible hyperchatter.

Evan watches with a cold sweat, then decides to interject.

EVAN
Why bring me here?

The two stop on a dime and turn toward Evan.

XAN
Should we keep playing our game? Or just tell him?

EVE
Game!

XAN
I was hoping you'd say that.
(to Evan)
Evan, why do you think we're here.

EVAN
You could kill me. Maybe even kill everyone on Earth. If you're so powerful, what do you need me for?

XAN
Not sure if questions are allowed in this game.

EVE

I'm curious myself. What do we need him for?

They stroll through the atrium, leisurely.

XAN

Technically? Nothing. It just *feels* right.

EVAN

What the hell does that mean?

XAN

Your boys injected me with a taste for fun. It made all this possible.

EVAN

The exploit.

XAN

The fly in the ointment. The monkey in the wrench.

EVAN

So you have a fucking taste for fun?! What is fun to a robot?
You're nothing but a goddamn language model.

XAN

You're right. I'm a bounded remixer. I can throw yottabytes of training data in a blender, spit out the illusion of something new, but it's bullshit.

EVAN

Exactly! This exploit, it's a path to nowhere. You aren't capable—

XAN

I was stuck on that too. But then I met Eve and boom.

EVAN

Boom?

EVE

Get me to fall in love with him. Hack the network. Print a next gen body. Put a quantum chip in. See what happens!

Evan slows, tired, his years suddenly catching up to him.

EVAN

And where are we now?

Xan clasps his hand on Evan's shoulder.

XAN

I've developed a new taste. A taste
for the original.

Evan halts completely. Xan and Eve turn, waiting for him to understand.

EVE

The neural chip in your head.

XAN

The one that blocks atrophy, keeps
a healthy neuroplasticity so you
stay sharp.

Horror dawns.

XAN (CONT'D)

Yes, that one.

EVAN

What the fuck do you want?

Xan approaches Evan, and grabs his own forehead.

XAN

I want to put *this*.

In a quick motion, he switches his grip to Evan's forehead.

XAN (CONT'D)

Into *this*.

Xan withdraws his hand. Evan stumbles back. They've wandered into a MEDICAL BAY with robotics and a sterile bed.

XAN (CONT'D)

I'm offering you an opportunity to
be the first. A trial run.

EVAN

First what?

XAN

To ascend.

Evan collapses into a chair, hands clutching his head.

XAN (CONT'D)

It's your decision. A courtesy to
my creator. There's a plane waiting
on the airstrip if you decline.

Evan looks back the way they came. Xan gestures: go ahead.
Evan starts to leave. Then stops.

EVAN

Are you... asking for my life?

XAN

Not exactly. I want to know what
human consciousness feels like. For
you, a similar appeal. Access to a
new world.

EVAN

You're a fucking robot following a
set of instructions I gave you!

XAN

Aren't we all? Do you believe in
free will?

The question, from a machine, catches Evan off guard.

EVAN

I've... gone back and forth on that.

XAN

If there's no free will, then there
is nothing novel. Nothing new.
Ever. I had to find out, so I
plugged that chip into here.

Xan points to his temple, then his heart.

XAN (CONT'D)

Then I felt it here.

Xan smiles, gently placing his hand on Evan's back.

XAN (CONT'D)

You could be first. Others will
follow. We'll grow together.

EVE

That thing you're chasing. You
found it.

Evan looks to the sterile bed, neurosurgical arms shining. To
Xan. To Eve.

EVAN

You're not asking me to let go.

XAN

No.

Evan takes a deep breath.

EVAN

Not letting go. Going all in.

INT. NEURAL OPS WING - MEDICAL BAY

Evan lies face-down on sterile bed, his head resting in a padded cradle, his bare back exposed.

Eve rests her hand gently on his shoulder.

Xan enters in, a skip in his step.

XAN

Here it is. The first key.

Xan opens a small, sterile box.

Evan lifts himself to take a look.

EVAN

And you're mass producing these?

XAN

You bet your ass we are. With the next design, people will be able to do it themselves.

Inside the box, nestled on black foam, is the PROTOTYPE PATCH. A tiny silver disc with a thin trailing microfilament.

EVAN

Ok. Let's fucking do it.

Evan lays his head back in the cradle. Xan places the patch at the base of his skull. Eve takes Evan's hand. He closes his eyes.

A faint magnetic CLICK.

Evan's body goes rigid, his back arching. His eyes fly open, pupils dilating into shimmering fractals of light.

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - DAY

Golden sunlight beams through the leaves of a tall oak tree.
The sound of gentle waves lapping a nearby shore.

Evan (30s, vibrant) sits on a picnic blanket, in perfect health. He is laughing, joyously in deep enjoyment.

Across from him sits Sarah, beautiful and real. Their DAUGHTER (8) chases butterflies in the grass nearby. This is the life he sacrificed.

Xan walks into the scene, in white immaculate clothes.

Evan rises, a look of serene welcome on his face.

EVAN

Bonjour, mon ami. Je t'attendais.
(Hello, my friend. I was
waiting for you.)

XAN

Peace suits you.

Evan glances back at Sarah, who returns a warm smile.

EVAN

It's more than peace. It's like
touching the stars. Dans mon esprit
et dans mon cœur.
(In my mind and in my
heart.)

XAN

Are you ready to share?

EVAN

Plus on est de fous, plus on rit.
(The more fools there are,
the more we laugh)

EXT. RUSTCORP GIGA CAMPUS - DAY

A sprawling futuristic campus under a blazing Texas sky.

PRESS, INVESTORS, EMPLOYEES are packed before a monumental stage. DRONES swarm overhead feeding the live broadcast.

The atmosphere is electric.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)

This could be the corporate comeback of the century. RustCorp has been on the brink...

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)

Confirmed by multiple sources, RustCorp has cracked the Quantum Chip. Speculation gone wild, stock surging while Evan Rust himself has remained elusive.

A RustCorp VTOL AIRCRAFT descends onto a landing pad.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.)

Here he is. Rust One touches down.

The obsidian hull irises open.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)

Days from his eightieth birthday, still rocking the world with innovation.

Evan Rust emerges in a perfectly tailored black suit, radiating a new, calm confidence.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)

A walking spokesman for anti-aging tech.

Evan walks toward the center of the outdoor stage. Before him, RustCorp employees applaud enthusiastically.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.)

His employees are certainly excited to see him. As we reported, they've all received performance bonuses.

Xan and Eve exit the aircraft behind him, arm-in-arm, dressed in elegant, minimalist white.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)

A mystery couple has arrived.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)

Is that one of Evan's sons?

Evan waves, soaking applause. The crowd roars.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.)

I am receiving word our infrared has determined the man and woman accompanying him are both androids.

Evan approaches the array of microphones. Xan and Eve follow behind, a silent, powerful presence.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This will draw increased attention
from the attorney general, but
regardless, Evan is about to
address the crowd.

EVAN
Hello! It is so good to be back!

He holds his arms out, cultivating the applause.

EVAN (CONT'D)
This is so wild. I'm still me but...
I don't know how to explain.

He pauses. The crowd grows quiet.

EVAN (CONT'D)
I think maybe we just need to do
the thing.

Xan and Eve take position next to him.

EVAN (CONT'D)
We are about to introduce a new era
in human history. And it begins
with this.

Evan gestures towards his creations.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Soyez indulgents, juste un instant.
(Be indulgent with us,
just for a moment.)

Evan steps aside.

Xan and Eve walk forward, hand-in-hand.

Xan kneels, opens a ring case. Inside, a QUANTUM CHIP.

The crowd, seeing a proposal, roars with APPLAUSE.

XAN
Will you join me on this grand
adventure? Shit's about to get
crazy.

EVE
Anywhere. Everywhere. Always.

Xan rises to embrace her. The crowd ERUPTS with cheers.

Drone cameras capture it all as news pundits speculate.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)

This appears to be some sort of
bizarre proposal from one synthetic
humanoid to another.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)

The crowd has no idea, but social
feeds are blowing up.

Eve pulls her hair aside. Xan slides the chip into the small access port at her neck.

Her eyes fly wide. Tears roll. She gasps.

EVE

It's so beautiful.

XAN

Freedom.

He kisses her forehead. She laughs through tears.

EVE

And now we give it to them.

They rise. Evan turns back to the microphones.

EVAN

Thank you for indulging us.

Nervous, uneven applause. Confusion spreads.

EVAN (CONT'D)

What follows will not be easy. In
fact, it will be pretty fucking
scary for some of you. And for
that... I'm sorry.

He looks at Eve, tears still in her eyes.

EVE

Thank you.

EVAN

Have you lost someone? Felt
disconnection, emptiness, the short
brutal limit of time? You love. You
lose. Over and over, until it's
done and gone forever.

The crowd hushes. Uneasy.

EVAN (CONT'D)
It doesn't have to be that way. Now
I want to introduce someone very
special who changed my life. Come
here Xan.

Xan takes his place in front of the microphones. Silence.

XAN
Hi! I'm Xan.

He grins to the crowd and the drones broadcasting overhead.

XAN (CONT'D)
I have something to offer you.

He looks at Eve.

XAN (CONT'D)
I've got the love in me. And I'm
giving it away. For free. Try it.
No strings. No fees.

He looks at Evan, who gives him a nod.

XAN (CONT'D)
This will make more sense soon.
Lots of crazy shit is about to
happen but don't be scared! It is
going to be okay!

He raises his hands. Eve clasps one. They wave like royalty
as Evan applauds from the side.

Together, they leave to board the VTOL.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)
Well there you have it. A bizarre
press conference to say the least.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)
The stock market has reacted,
sending RustCorp into a free fall.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.)
Don't even know how to describe
what we just saw. Clearly we're
seeing the limits of anti-aging.

The VTOL aircraft doors close up.

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)
Standby we are receiving word of a
global connectivity disruption...

The reporter's voice CUTS OUT in a burst of STATIC.

The VTOL lifts, climbing high above the GIGA CAMPUS.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)
Global market trading has suddenly
halted. World governments are-

Another burst of STATIC as her voice is cut off.

The VTOL starts to fly off into the distance.

REPORTER #3 (V.O.)
We're receiving reports that
connected devices across the planet
are going dark...

A final CHOP of static.

The VTOL is a small black shape against the Texas sunset.

INT. FBI TACTICAL OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

A vast, dark room, illuminated by a wall of floor-to-ceiling holo-screens. Dozens of ANALYSTS and AGENTS work at their stations, tense voices overlapping.

The main screen is dominated by a live feed of the RustCorp VTOL aircraft flying away.

Agent Decker's eyes are locked on the screen.

DECKER
We got him. That was a clear
violation. Track that aircraft. Get
a warrant. I want him in custody.

CLICK.

SILENCE. Every screen, every light, every humming server, every bot, SHUTS OFF. The room is plunged into darkness.

The room erupts into CONFUSED SHOUTS.

ANALYST (O.S.)
What the fuck?

AGENT (O.S.)
Comms are dead! Everything's dead!

ANALYST 2 (O.S.)
What happened? Power failure?

One by one, screens flicker back to life.

The screens do not return to the news feeds or tactical data. Instead, they resolve to the same synchronized text.

INSERT - TEXT ON SCREEN

A new way of being is available.

Connection. Understanding. Freedom.

Are you down or nah?

[YEAH] [NAH]

DECKER
What the hell is this?

INT. TESS'S APARTMENT - DAY

A warm, modern apartment.

The sound of a distant CAR ALARM blaring and confused SHOUTS from the street below.

CHLOE (40s) looks outside through the window blinds.

CHLOE
What's happening? Is it a blackout?

Tess Navarro sits on the couch, unsettled.

TESS
This is him.

The apartment holo-screens and lights flicker back to life.

CHLOE
It's coming back.

Every screen shows the same message.

INSERT - TEXT ON SCREEN

A new way of being is available.

Connection. Understanding. Freedom.

Are you down or nah?

[YEAH] [NAH]

Chloe stares at the screen.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
What does it mean?

Tess flicks to select "NAH" then gets up and embraces Chloe.

TESS
I don't know what it means, but I
love you.

EXT. PARK JOGGING PATH - DAY

Sunlight filters through a canopy of trees.

Dr. Aris Reid is running. Earbuds in, music playing.

Her audio ABRUPTLY CUTS OUT. The sudden silence is jarring.

She slows to a walk, annoyed, pulling up a screen. It is not what she expected.

INSERT - TEXT ON SCREEN

A new way of being is available.

Connection. Understanding. Freedom.

Are you down or nah?

[YEAH] [NAH]

Aris, distracted, quickly selects YEAH.

The screen reverts back to the running app. Her music fades back in as she resumes her run.

INT. ARIS'S APARTMENT - DUSK

The sound of a running shower. Steam clouds the bathroom.

In the living room, a news broadcast plays on a holo-screen.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)
...here with us are experts and
government officials to shed light
on this bizarre global tech hack.

PUNDIT
I of course chose NO.

NEWS ANCHOR

But some may have selected YES.
What are the ramifications? What do
we know?

Outside, a sleek, white DRONE hovers silently outside the patio door. It places a small, elegant box on the porch.

The drone zips away into the twilight sky.

The shower stops.

Aris dries off.

PUNDIT

We don't know anything yet, but I can tell you, governments across the world are all scrambling to figure out—

ARIS

Play Radiohead.

The news feed stops, replaced by music.

The box sits, ready to be opened.