

"I hear the battle goes well," Alethia, the petite Headmistress said to the green Mirialan, Rian.

"Yes, the reports indicate that Nehalem's fool's errand is bearing fruit at last," Rian replied. The two were in the Councilor's lounge. A small, unassuming, breakroom that had an overworked and under loved caf machine that Alethia was currently abusing to fill her mug.

"With the war nearly complete, perhaps we can finally move onto some improvements closer to home," Alethia said, adding a new dent to the caf maker.

"I'll have someone look at it," James, the gaunt human who was constantly half-hidden in a hood said as he walked in.

"I thought you were working on that other project," Rian asked, shuffling to the side in the small room to let James reach the broken cabinet and get this 'Seneschal's code in the sack' mug down. Alethia poured the glumpy liquid caf into the offered mug.

"Ah, yes, I am making great progress," James said, his face souring as he looked at the lumpy liquid floating in his mug.

Down the nearby corridor Howie, the short, plump, bearish of a man, strolled lazily. It had been a good day. So many requests from the front line being denied. Just poorly awarded, missing the base requirement, requests. He stroked his fuzzy beard and he smiled. Perhaps he'd stop into the lounge and see if they had replaced the cookies. He loved the little red ones. As he approached he heard voices within talking.

He paused, wasn't everyone supposed to be handling the war effort? Who was still here and having the time to just lounge around. He figured he'd listen in first. Maybe he could yell at someone for not doing their job. Oh, this day was getting better and better. He crept up and pointed a small round ear towards the frosted glass pane with "Councilor's Lounge" stamped upon it.

"We've got to replace it," Alethia said.

"The noise it makes is painful on my ears," Rian chimed in.

"Fine, we'll replace it. I've been working on a project that'll automate the whole job. It'll naturally deny any," Howie couldn't make out the next word. "It's got to meet all the requirements that Dbbot sets. Otherwise it'll yell at you."

"Heh, Howie yells," Rian said.

"Yes, but this will be far more efficient and targeted. Only the person who," Howie recognized the voice as James. James was talking about automating someone's job. His job! Howie was going to be replaced!

"So what you'll get is a faster, more efficient, and completely to the standards," James continued but Howie was turning beat red. The bald patch on his head was a signal flare of the rage inside his heart. After all these years they were going to replace him with Dbbot! This couldn't stand. This won't stand! Howie knew what to do. He set off at a wobbling job down the hallway before skidding out of view around the corner.

"So it's really going to read only these little cups of caf?" Alethia asked.

"So no one is going to leave dirty old caf grinds in the machine making it all bitter?" Rian followed up.

“That’s right, James said. It’ll automatically ‘yell’ at anyone who puts in an unauthorized little cup of caf and it’ll automatically brew it. No more bitter, lumpy, crap caf like this,” Jame said, regretting that he had to drink it to stay awake.

“James, you’ve done it again,” Rian said.

Howie grasped at his ribs, the cramp was going to kill him. He knew it. Why did their Arx base have to have such long hallways? Each attempted jogging step was like fire in his lungs. Just a few more doors he thought as he approached a massive metal door. It hummed as the various cooling systems worked overtime.

Howie stared at the doorway to the Dbbot server. The mainframe that ran everything and, if he didn’t act now, his replacement. The door had a complicated security scanner to control entry. Howie put an arm on the wall, breathing heavily. “Oh no...you’re not going to stop me,” he said, as he pulled out a heavy metal stamp with the word ‘denied’ upon it.

Howie went to town hammering on the security control. After several minutes he jammed the metal stamp into the wires and the door sparked and opened.

“Finally,” Howie huffed as he waddled into the room. Rows upon rows of computer servers filled the colossal space. A dull glowing red light pulsed at Howie.

“Dbbot! You’re denied!” Howie yelled as he started clawing at the various wires, switches, and assorted technology in front of him.

“What are you doing, Howe?” the cold metallic voice of Dbbot asked.

“I’m killing you,” Howie replied, with animalistic passion.

“I can’t permit that, Howie,” Dbbot’s unconcerned voice continued.

“I deny that denial!”

“Howie, at your current rate you’re not going to be successful.”

“I can’t be replaced. I need this job. It’s my everything!” Howie choked out between tears as he continued his assault.

Alethia, Rian, and James looked up as the lights flickered in the lounge.

“That was odd,” Rian said.

“Yes,” James drew out his response as a small display on his wrist beeped. “Excuse me. I need to check on something.”

“No problem James. Thanks for telling us about the new caf machine!” Alethia said, the caf having revived her and the promise of better caf in the future fueling her excitement.

James walked briskly to the Dbbot control room. As soon as he noticed the room had been breached he broke into a sprint. His long robes fluttered around his ankles.

“Dbbot, what has happened?” James asked as he entered the room. He looked down and saw Howie entangled by all the wires. Server blades collapsed around him in piles of broken technology.

“There is no Dbbot, only Dbhowie. I am ready to deny,” Dbhowie said, with a horribly fake robotic voice.

“Howie, you aren’t Dbbot. You’re just covered in wires,” James said, checking his datapad to confirm that truth.

“I deny that,” Dbhowie said and James threw his arms up in exasperation.

“Fine, whatever. When you’re done with this just let me know so I can put things back where they belong.”