A Surprise Upgrade

Vyrnen could already tell that the next nexus brother was already hot on his tail after leaving the realm of Kirdos as he made his way through the park. Though he was in the midst of a park he could see the shadows of winged creatures flying overhead as he quickly tried to obfuscate himself by the canopy. Yavini and Haleon were the only two that were left besides the two new brothers, and since he didn’t know how they operated he just had to assume they would be a surprise. All he could do was look out for the first two as he went down the park path to try and find a way out.

Just as he ducked out of sight from one particularly low-flying avian creature he felt something press up against his leg, the nanite dragon looking down to see that the root of a nearby bush had wrapped around his ankle. If the creatures above him were synths then it appeared both were trying to snag him at the same time as he pulled away and broke loose before returning back onto the pavement. With bushes and trees no longer an option to hide in he made a break for it to try and at least get out of the park and into the city, though as he made it to the end of the pavement he was on he saw that there was a large open field between him and the nearest concrete block with actual buildings on it. Completely open and nothing but grass and dirt, Vyrnen thought to himself as he looked back and saw more vines emerging, it was probably impossible but he made a try for it anyway as he started to run for the nearest structure off the park.

Before he could even get twenty feet though he suddenly felt something swoop down from the sky and scoop him up, feeling taloned legs wrap around his arms and underneath his armpits. “Gotchya,” the synth hawk said as he flapped his wings to get them back in the air, only for the nanite dragon to feel something pull against his feet strong enough to bring them back down to earth. “What the?!”

The synth hawk didn’t get a chance to finish as he crashed into the ground in front of Vyrnen, tumbling a few feet away from sheer momentum and letting him go. Before he could attempt to run however he felt more vines push out of the ground and grow around him, effectively pinning him to the ground as he saw the avian quickly scramble back up to his feet. Though it was hard to move around with his legs pinned together and his arms bound to his sides the nanite dragon managed to turn himself enough to see what his first captor was looking at, a gold-furred kitsune whose five tails were pushed into the ground behind him. The vulpine also was staring back at the synth and had it not been for his bindings Vyrnen suspected he could have possibly snuck out of there, which was potentially the reason he was restrained like that in the first place.

“That’s not fair,” the hawk complained. “I had him first!”

“Well I have him last,” the kitsune shot back. “And that’s all that really matters.”

“Wouldn’t be so sure of that,” the hawk replied as another set of shadows passed over them. “There are a couple of us in the sky right now, you think you can pull him back into your realm before we snag him for ourselves? Only reason you got him to the ground in the first place is because I didn’t think you’d be so underhanded.”

“Plant creatures fight dirty,” the kitsune said as Vyrnen felt the vines tense around his body. “Now am I going to have to yank this dragon all the way down into the ground or are you just going to let us go?”

The tension was getting palpable and it wouldn’t be long before either side escalated the situation, which prompted Vyrnen to speak up. “Um, I really don’t mind going to both realms,” Vyrnen said, the two looking down at the prone dragon as he tried to wiggle into a better position to talk. “Since technically the hawk guy did actually capture me first I think it would be only fair that I go with him first, but I promise once I’m done Lord Yavini can come and pick me up to go to his realm. Otherwise if you stir me up too much both of you are going to become my drones and your two masters can talk to me if they decide to bring you back.”

Though the avian was practically beaming at the kitsune the threat was enough to have the multi-tailed vulpine retracted the vines off of his body and allowed the nanite dragon to stand up once more. “Thanks for that,” the hawk said after the kitsune retreated back into the woods. “That’s one of Lord Yavini’s most skilled Collectors, had you not sided with me he probably would have gotten you back into the plant fox’s realm before I could even move.”

“I only spoke the truth,” Vyrnen replied as he brushed himself off. “Admittedly I’ve also been very curious about Haleon since I caught onto how this whole thing worked, though with us being so closely related since I’m made of nanites I doubted it would be long before my other self came out.”

“Heh, what you’re speaking of is way above my paygrade,” the hawk Collector stated. “I’m just the delivery boy, and you’re being expected. Just give me a second to circle around and I’ll pick you up.”

Vyrnen nodded and watched the hawk synth flap his wings and circle around once before he swooped in and grabbed the dragon once more. Even though he expected it Vyrnen found his feet kicking in the empty air as he was quickly flown away from the park and into the city proper. It didn’t take long before he saw what the Collector was angling towards as the bright electronic billboard filled the night sky with neon light. For a brief moment the advertisement showed some sort of burger place before it shifted suddenly to show another, more futuristic city that suddenly became real once the two were flown straight through it to the other side.

The feel of the air around Vyrnen was electric as he was brought down towards one of the largest buildings, a skyscraper that was stories above the other tall buildings in the megacity. It was a perfect nest for an avian overlord and as he was smoothly brought back to his feet on the metal floor he saw the chrome and black metal eagle himself standing there with a synth raven looking at several screens. “Ah, you have arrived,” Haleon stated as the hawk collector landed next to him. “You are almost a minute over the expected delivery date, run into some trouble?”

“Lord Yavini tried to cut in,” the hawk synth stated. “Thanks to Vyrnen though I was able to get him to you Master Haleon.”

“Ah, already being useful and I haven’t even asked for anything yet,” Haleon replied with a small smirk on his beak as he gave a small nod to the hawk, who promptly bowed and left. “It’s something that I would expect from someone that comes from similar stock, I have to say that I’m still stunned that you decided to go with the rubber dragon instead of me. But such is life, one can not help but cater to the whim of the variables stored within, thankfully I can at least have you be my guest while you help me out with a little problem I’m having.”

“Since we’re of similar stock I’m sure you know that I’ve long since caught on to the ploy,” Vyrnen replied, Sare’s beak dropping in slight shock as Haleon just continued to grin. “The fact that Yavini was cutting in meant that there was a queue, which means you twelve were on to this from the very start. What is so important that you are all keeping everything so obfuscated?”

For a second there was silence as Vyrnen finally confronted one of the brothers directly before they could pawn him off on the second, which is no doubt what the eagle was about to do with the raven that was in the room. “Yavini is going to love it when you get to his realm,” Haleon said with a chuckle. “As you said I was pretty sure the ruse wouldn’t last by the time that you got to me, but didn’t want to give it up just in case. That being said I’m going to have to insist on keeping you in the dark for the moment, and though we can dispense with the formalities the show must stay on the script that it was given which means that I must be off and leave you in the capable hands of Sare.”

Vyrnen realized too late that the eagle had been stalling and watched as the nexus creature disappeared with a crackle of static. The nanite dragon looked at the empty space the nexus creature with a sour expression before he turned towards Sare, who jumped slightly at seeing the look being given to him. “It’s a pleasure to meet you Vyrnen,” Sare replied as cheerfully as he could as he went over to shake the dragon’s hand. “Normally I would say that I’ll be your liaison while you help me out, but I guess since you’re kind of in the know already I suppose that I’m just here to help out.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Vyrnen replied as he tried to reassure the raven with a smile on his muzzle as he gave a thumbs up. “So, I suppose you have somewhere to show me around? As I mentioned to the Collector that brought me here I’ve been interested in seeing the realm for a while.”

The mood lightened considerably and Sare quickly moved him towards the elevator so they could go down to the street level and see everything that the realm had to offer. Of those that he had seen so far Haleon seemed to have the most expansive setting, though he knew that looks were very deceiving when it came to the space controlled by the nexus creatures. As they went down the glass elevator gave the nanite dragon a snapshot of what was offered and he could see that there was a lot that had to do with digital entertainment and equipment. Everything from classic video games to VR and total immersion technology was on display and ready to either transform, drone, or otherwise mess with those that used it.

As they walked out onto the streets Vyrnen suddenly found himself surrounded by synths and Sare went on to explain that it was typically the body of choice when it came to minions of the realm. There were some that opted for more traditional robotic forms all the way to those who lived entirely in the digital realm, and everything in between. The latter of the two caught Vyrnen’s attention the most and when he relayed that to Sare he immediately started to guide him towards another part of the city. It was a bastion of technology, Vyrnen thought to himself as he saw all manner of robotic and synthetic creatures interfacing with one another, and could only imagine how many technophiles they drew in here with the promise of a taste of such advanced mechanization.

“Here we are,” Sare said as they got to an area that looked like a place where one could play VR games, except that as they walked inside they saw one of the synths that was strapped in suddenly dissolve away. “Most of the time minions don’t start off with an entirely digital avatar, as such when it happens we turn their entire body into data and move them over into a pure data state where they can then modify themselves as necessary. As a nanite creature yourself you won’t need nearly as much prep or recovery time, especially being a nexus beast.”

“Very cool,” Vyrnen commented as he was led over to a chair with one of the headsets attached to it. “So what’s it like going full digital?”

“It’s hard to explain without actually experiencing it,” Sare said as he motioned for the dragon to have a seat. “But think of it like a lucid dream; there isn’t going to really be anything that confines you, so really your imagination is the limit. I have a few scenarios that you can go through once you’re on the other side, but for now we need to get you downloaded.”

Vyrnen just nodded and sat down in the chair, feeling connections being made to his nanite body as he did. When he went to grab the headset Sare pushed it aside and said that it wouldn’t be necessary for him as a tingle began to cascade up and down his body. He was shocked to find that the process was already starting but as he looked down at his feet he could see that the blue lines were glowing brighter as his white scales started to shine with a light of their own. So this is what it was like being turned into pure data, Vyrnen mused as his hands began to glow the same way while the tingling sensation gave way to pleasure.

As the process continued to spread through his body Sare gave him a smile before the light became bright enough that it was becoming harder to see through it. Soon everything turned to white and Vyrnen felt the boundary between his physical body and the room around him completely dissolve away. The white light soon encompassed everything and it felt like he was floating in it, like he had just dipped himself into a bath that was the same temperature as him. After a few seconds though the light faded and when Vyrnen was able to see that he was still in his draconic form, but when the brightness didn’t fade from his surroundings he could sense he was inside a program.

“All scans report full data conversion,” the voice of Sare said, though as Vyrnen looked around he didn’t see the raven anywhere. “Vyrnen, how are you feeling?”

“I feel… strange,” Vyrnen replied as he looked at his feet to find himself standing, except that there was no floor beneath him which made him feel like he was floating. “Like, I know that I’m real, but it feels like I’m not. It reminds me of when I’ve possessed others after being turned into goo or something except that there’s no other consciousness here.”

“That’s a good way to put it,” Sare stated. “Now one of the first things we have our non-avian avatars do is try to make themselves look a little more bird-like; it’s usually an easy transition for them and they have a lot of source material. Go ahead and show me what bird Vyrnen looks like.”

Vyrnen nodded and thought about himself with a beak, and just as he did he felt his muzzle warp and reshape itself until he had a dazzling white beak instead of his usual draconic muzzle. The fact that the transformation happened as soon as he thought of it was amazing and when he looked at his wings he saw them sprout white feathers that replaced the membranes. While his body was somewhat mutable as a nanite creature he never had this kind of response time, especially when he made dramatic changes to himself. He let out a slight gasp as he tried to think of a tail for himself and watched his own split and reform into ribbon-like feathers that stretched out behind him. As he gave himself a crown of feathers, keeping his horns, and a pair of grabby avian feet like the kind the hawk used on him he wished he had a mirror only to have one suddenly materialize in front of him.

“Being a data creature doesn’t just mean affecting yourself,” Sare instructed as Vyrnen examined his new self as a white-feathered phoenix, puffing out his chest as a thick plume of feathers appeared there to help complete his avian look. “Since space you’re in is raw, unprocessed program space that you can basically use to create whatever you want. Now if you’re in an actual program or someone else’s space changing things can be much harder, but for the moment why don’t I load up one of the more popular programs into this space so you can see what I mean.”

Before Vyrnen could respond he suddenly found himself in the middle of a city populated by humans and anthros alike, all of them walking around him while carrying on their normal business. “We like to call this little simulation god mode,” Sare explained with a chuckle. “Go ahead and do whatever you want, everything in this program is a bare-bones construct using raw data so they’ll respond to your thoughts. Create, destroy, it’s basically like one of those sandbox video games on steroids.”

God mode… Vyrnen couldn’t help but grin slightly as he looked around and could feel the means to change anything at his fingertips. The best part was that since these were not real people there was no compulsion for his nexus beast side to come out, which means that he could do whatever he want and not suddenly go into a droning frenzy. As he tried to figure out what to do first one of the avatars suddenly bumped up into him and caused him to stumble slightly. Well that was rude, Vyrnen thought to himself as he watched the avatar continue on its way until it suddenly stopped and turned back towards him.

“Oh, I am very sorry,” the human man said as he went back up to him. “Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine…” Vyrnen replied as he realized the avatar had picked up on his displeasure and it subconsciously programmed him to come back to apologize. As he glanced at the road a smirk came to the digital dragon’s face as he thought of something very deliberate to do. “But I’m going to need you to cross the road… as a chicken.”

The avatar looked slightly confused as Vyrnen tapped him on the nose and watched as it and his lips immediately stretched out into a beak. Feathers cascaded over the man’s face and down every part of his exposed skin as a feathered avian tail burst out from his pants and caused them to fall down and reveal scaled yellow legs. The phoenix chuckled as the avatar’s new wings burst out from the back of his coat as he tipped his hat to him and immediately turned to cross the road. He could still hear the avatar he had changed clucking even while he moved on towards a park area.

Seeing the sudden transformation and no one reacting to it cemented into his head that this was his playground even though everything felt real. As he ran a hand along the water that was within a fountain it felt cool and wet to him, at least until he caused it to freeze into solid ice. He did jump slightly when some of those that passed by it seemed to look on in awe and he realized that it was because he wanted someone to notice it, which was picked up by the program around him. When he dismissed them mentally though they immediately began to walk on their way again without another word spoken, which provoked him to think of what he could do in a world without any real consequences.

His first thought was sex, but he shook his head at that as he reminded himself he had a stable of drones that he could summon at any time. He wanted something more… action-oriented, the thrill of something like being in a video game where he could do crazy stunts and blow stuff up without the consequences of death and property destruction. Though he was having a hard time thinking of what to do it appeared his subconscious already had an idea as a bunch of helicopters went overhead with one crashing into a nearby skyscraper before exploding. The crowd went from passive bystanders to panicked crowd as the sky went from blue to tinted orange.

Well this was definitely chaotic, Vyrnen thought to himself as more buildings exploded as several military vehicles rolled by. The nanite phoenix had to stifle a laugh as he saw the one he had turned into a chicken cawing loudly as he ran away along with a bunch of others from one of the major streets that fed into the plaza he was in. As he tried to see what everyone was running from he suddenly saw what was chasing them; a group of synth birds walked down the street with what appeared to be blaster cannons on their arms that they fired into the crowd. Instead of vaporizing them though when the energy shots hit someone it caused them to transform into an avian synth themselves, flesh turning to metal as they quickly got back up from their metamorphosis to continue to spread.

“There you are!” a voice behind Vyrnen said just as he wondered what to do next, looking behind him to see an arctic wolf in a black military uniform standing there. “Fall back in formation and start firing, we have to protect the president!”

The president? That’s a little over the top, Vyrnen mentally said even as he recognized that this was his brain setting up the scenario, or at least he thought it was as he was pulled back towards an area where several others in similar uniforms were firing on the synths. Though he didn’t have a uniform itself it seemed that he was part of his group as he was handed a very large and somewhat unwieldy gun. It quickly shrank down in order to fit him however and as he fired it the beam hit one of the synths and bathed him in light. At first he thought that the avian creature would explode but as the color of the light when from white to black he saw that the robot that had been converting other people turned into a synth version of his nexus beast side that immediately pounced the nearest creature next to him.

Not sure if that makes things much better, Vyrnen thought to himself as he fired a few more times and created more avian clones of himself that started to convert other synths as well. “There’s too many of them!” The arctic wolf said as the line of creatures quickly came up to them. “We have to escape by any means necessary, get a vehicle to get us out of here!”

A vehicle… most of the street looked to be too blocked-in order to actually drive anything out, but as he looked to the street that was behind them he suddenly noticed a very auspicious sports car that happened to be parked right on the road with a clear path in front of them. It certainly made sense to the data dragon from a wish-fulfillment fantasy as he told the arctic wolf what he found and that seemed to be just the thing to get them out of there. By this point the non-corrupted synths had taken most of the people in the plaza, people turning to synths right before their eyes, and as they made their way to the car several of the ones in military garb were zapped as well. As they got into the car, Vyrnen making sure that he got to drive, the rest piled in and as they drove off one of the humans began to quiver as his face pushed out into a beak and metal feathers spread out from his arms.

Vyrnen still had the gun given to him from before and as he put the petal down the arctic wolf through the changing man out of the car before he was shot with the weapon, turning him into a nexus version of the robots invading the city. As he started to drive down the street he swore he could see the creature wink at him and it made him wonder if his other side was having a little fantasy of his own. Even as they began to drive down the street he could see that those he had converted were not just set on assimilating the others, at least not merely with beam weapons like the original synths were, and though he hadn’t anticipated on it he could sense that he was more focused on sex than his original intention.

That was his nexus beast self though, Vyrnen thought to himself as he drove through the cars that were just wide enough for him to get a decent head of steam going, he was going to get to drive a sports car through a city with no worries about any damage he might do to it. Even though he was just data he could feel his adrenaline pumping as buildings and cars exploded around him, hearing the others in the vehicle firing back on those that were trying to assimilate them. “They’re driving in armored cars!” the arctic wolf suddenly shouted, Vyrnen looking at the rear-view mirrors to see a number of synths in vehicles including the armored ones. “We have to lose them or we’ll never get out of here!”

“But… that doesn’t make any sense,” Vyrnen said as he looked back at the synths again. “They have wings, they could just fly-“

“We’re going to need all hands firing back,” the arctic wolf interrupted as a box was slid on the seat next to Vyrnen. “Do you want to start lobbing grenades or not?”

The data dragon picked up one of the grenades and looked at it as a grin formed on his muzzle. “Hell. Yes.” Vyrnen said as he pulled the pin and let one fly. He watched the device bounce a few feet before it rolled under a parked car, and though it didn’t hit the one he wanted he did get to see it fly up through the air behind their pursuers. That prompted him to try out other things as well, and though he did aim at the creatures that were trying to follow them he also tossed them into buildings and watched as they very realistically exploded with one smaller skyscraper even collapsing into the street behind them.

After a few minutes of lobbing explosives and taking hairpin turns through the streets, sometimes being successful and sometimes not, Vyrnen felt a tap on his shoulder and saw the arctic wolf pointing ahead of him. “The evacuation zone is just on the other side of this building!” the lupine said. “You’re going to have to go through!”

Vyrnen was about to respond that there was no way that he could take this car through the rather large skyscraper in front of them until he saw that a car trailer and semi had parked in a way that if they hit it would launch them right into the side of it. Eh, what the hell, the data dragon said as he put the petal to the metal and aimed himself at the ramp. Meanwhile behind them the synths they hadn’t managed to explode fired rocket launchers at them that caused the parked cars nearby to explode and burst into flame as they continued to drive towards their destination. Even though he knew this was just a simulation Vyrnen could feel the heat of the flames around him and couldn’t help but brace himself as he went up the ramp and heard the engine rev hard as the tires lifted off of the ground.

Everything seemed to go into slow motion and Vyrnen swore he could hear music playing as they flew through their towards the windows, feeling the wind rush past his face as he saw the reflection of the car and their shocked faces getting bigger the closer they got. At this point the data dragon realized he hadn’t been aiming anywhere in particular but as the front bumper of the car made contact with the window it caused it and all the surrounding panes to explode in a cloud of glass as their vehicle hit the floor of the building and started to crash through several pieces of office furniture. The arctic wolf shouted to keep driving as he dropped something out of the back of the car and as they approached the window on the opposite side Vyrnen could see that synths had started to get into the building as well… unaware of the large bomb that the lupine had dropped.

Once more the sports car busted through the glass on the other side, but this time as the car sailed through the air it was pushed by a massive explosion that caused the entire floor and the ones above and below it to be engulfed in a huge fireball. The blast caused the car to rocket forward and Vyrnen bounced hard in his seat as they landed on a grassy hill before they skidded to a stop in front of a helicopter pad that had several flares lit up around it. “Well, we did it,” the arctic wolf said as the data dragon flopped over the busted door and landed on the grass. “Congratulations Vyrnen, you’re a hero that will go down-“

“Skip,” Vyrnen said as he waved his head, resting in the grass as he recovered from what he had just done.

“Aw, I’m sure that would have been quite the speech you were about to give yourself,” a familiar voice said, Vyrnen looking up to see Sare standing there. “Quite the impressive simulation, I hope you don’t mind but I made a recording of it myself.”

“Go for it,” Vyrnen replied as he sat up. “I take it though my fun is at an end?”

“This kind is,” Sare explained as he snapped his fingers, the world dissolving away to the blank white expanse that he was in before. “But if you care to stay in this form we have a bit of infiltration we would like you to do on a group of hackers that are attempting to access the database of this realm and having moderate success in it. We figured that we might send a spike, but if you and your nexus beast side are willing to continue the rampage a bit we thought that perhaps it would be better if we gave them something a bit… nastier instead.”

Part 2:

For anyone that would have passed by the green metal building they would have assumed that it was a closed subway terminal for a defunct station, and for the most part they would be right. As a lizardman in a hoodie went by it though he knew that what might appear to most to be random graffiti on the doors and walls was actually an intricate code that told him how to get inside. With his laptop bag strapped to his shoulder he looked around to make sure no one was watching him as he punched in the secret numbers into the keypad and it opened with a click to allow him access. As quickly as he could he got to the other side and then went down the cracked stairs towards the station itself, feeling the charge of electricity in the air as he did.

With the station and the adjoining tunnels completely closed due to the rerouting of a main subway line the hacker group that the lizardman was a part of had taken up shop there, using the old ports and power supplies that were still connected to the main grid and disguising it through the rest of the rail system to keep their activities secret. The result had been so productive that they moved most of their equipment down there in order to keep off the radar while tapping into the main trunk line to access the internet and subsequent dark web. As he walked through the maze of wires and servers that had been set up he saw a husky sitting at one of the terminals leaning back in his chair while picking through a box of Chinese food.

“So how did your field trip go?” the husky asked as the lizardman sat down next to him and pulled out his laptop. “Did you manage to get the remote access links that you wanted.”

“Yeah, found someone dumb enough to use their cell phone next to their work terminal,” the lizardman replied, flipping open the screen and letting the program on it run automatically. “We should be able to access their main server anytime now with the trojan I injected into it. Where is Payton and Elric?”

“They’re off trying to get the server that was fried after our last attempt,” the husky explained while he watched the lizardman work. “That’s some good stuff there Sid, want me to integrate it into the rest of the data so that we can get started soon?”

“I haven’t done a through check of the data yet,” Sid replied as he got up after making sure there were no processing errors. “There were a few huge packets that got sent back and forth that I want to investigate first, might be something in the program itself that they use to track their access. First I’m going to see if the other two need any help before I check the fridge for any of that Chinese left that you said you were ordering everyone, unless you already ate it all.”

The husky just gave the lizardman a sheepish smile and Sid rolled his eyes before he got up and left. After about a minute the other hacker looked back at the door before glancing forward at the laptop that had left on the desk to continue processing. He put the nearly empty Chinese food box on the desk and put on a pair of specialized glasses that had a heads-up augmented reality display on it, then took the other end from his computer and plugged it into the lizardman’s. While he wasn’t going to directly interface the compiling code into their system he wanted to at least see what the ports were so that he didn’t have to spend as much time working on it as he made the final connection of the glasses into a small metal plug that was just behind his ear that accessed a cerebral implant.

“Huh, all looks normal to me,” the husky said as he used the neural interface to scan through things at the speed of his thoughts. “Not sure where he was talking about this large data packet, doesn’t look like he picked up anything. Perhaps if we just do a little modification here and there to the main system I can get out of here at a recent time…”

“I think not,” a digitized voice said that caused the canine to sit up straight as the glasses read out an error message. “Don’t worry though Artecus, I’ll be making sure that I get all the work necessary done, which includes punishing your little group for trying to sniff around where they don’t belong. If it makes you feel any better you’ll probably not even remember this little error of yours.”

“What the hell is this?!” Artecus practically shouted as he saw the image of a black metal bird appear in his vision, smirking at him before disappearing as lines of code began to mutate before his eyes. It looked like his vision centers were becoming corrupted but as he heard the voice laugh in his head he went from angry to fearful. “How is this possible… what is this, a virus?”

“Mmmm… I suppose I would be considered that,” Nexus Vyrnen replied as his data continued to assimilate what was stored inside the cerebral implant before using it to branch out into the actual neural pathway.

“No way a virus could get past my firewall,” Artecus replied, but as he tried to reach up with his hand in order to unplug the system from his implant he found he couldn’t lift either of his arms. “Stop it, this is impossible! Code can’t take someone over like this!”

The avatar of the synth phoenix just reappeared in his vision again as the flashing lines of strange code turned a bright red. “It can if you’re special,” Nexus Vyrnen replied with a smirk. “Now relax and enjoy yourself while I make a few adjustments.”

Artecus attempted to stand up and shout out to the others that were a few rooms away, but he found himself unable to speak or move his legs anymore. He could almost feel the rogue data moving around in his head and as he looked down at his muzzle he was shocked to see that it had started to morph right before his eyes. His canine nose lost its shape as he felt his snout stretch and swell slightly, the fur melting together and turning a deep, shiny black that was definitely not natural skin. It was impossible, Artecus reason even as he began to lose bits and pieces of his thought process, there was nothing that could turn do what he was seeing yet as he sat there he groaned slightly while his canine muzzle turned into a shiny metal beak.

It almost felt heavy on his head and he started to lean forward, though he was abruptly stopped as he felt himself able to move a bit again. When his hands went up to his face to feel it he gasped as he saw that his hands were also a metallic black, red circuitry spreading over his fingers that quickly began to trace its way up towards his forearms. As the thought of going to get help was erased from his mind it was replaced with an intense need to see what was happening to him, which meant pulling the shirt he wore over his head in order to look down just in time to see the black metal corruption spreading over his pectorals.

In reality though the husky was just looking down at his furry chest in shock as Nexus Vyrnen messed with his senses, using the neural implant to overlay the transformation of his body to that of an avian synth while he did the real work. Without even knowing it the virus that spread through the mind of the canine had already partitioned most of his knowledge and memory so that Artecus couldn’t access it, even his own name being forgotten as he began to work off his pants as well. As the nexus beast corrupted more of the neural pathways and had more access to the sensory nodes of the husky’s body, all of which had been augmented through some sort of bioware, the nexus beast virus decided to take his distraction to the next level.

As Artecus watched his now naked body get covered in black metal and grow more muscular in nature he suddenly felt himself get bent over the desk. Though the reflection in the mirror he saw the larger synth phoenix that he had only seen in his visor was suddenly behind him, and also that there was something pushing up inside of his tailhole. Among other things the virus had found the rather impressive stash of holoporn that the husky had and reasoned that was the likely reason why he had things like haptic feedback on his body, though that proved to be his undoing as Nexus Vyrnen manipulated that feeling to make it feel like he was pushing his thick metallic cock up inside of him. Artecus started to stroke himself off as he was suddenly swept up in the lust of the moment and with his mind so focused on the pleasure he didn’t even realize that his visor was lit up with warnings that the virus infection was close to finished.

The progress bar meant nothing to the husky though as his hips swayed back and forth; anyone that would have come in at that point would have seen him fingering himself with one hand while the other stroked his cock while he propped his naked body up on the desk. Eventually the virus in his brain would turn him to an obedient, loyal drone whose only thoughts were how to best serve and pleasure his master, but for now the nexus beast needed something that required him to be more than just a passenger. In the mind of the husky he suddenly felt himself start to get pulled back, wires slithering over his partially transformed body as he felt his body get absorbed into the creature that was ramming into him.

With the intense pleasure all Artecus could do was squirm as he watched the chest and arms shift and reform over his own, causing even more of a feedback loop that caused him to moan in his mind. All he could fixate on was needing to orgasm, but with his hand taken away from him and his body disappearing inside the synth phoenix all he could do was let out a moan as his head was pushed up into the one behind him. Nexus Vyrnen watched through the reflection as the last of the husky’s muzzle continued to move in an attempt to gasp and moan as every aspect of him was enveloped by the avian creature behind him, his paws disappearing soon after. Soon the only one standing there was the virus that had taken over the body in the first place, the nexus beast looking at the mirror at himself with a grin before his vision shifted and showed the husky standing there.

“Eh, not a bad start,” Nexus Vyrnen said through the husky as he looked over himself, smoothing out the fur of his chest and stomach before teasing the still erect cock of the male. As he looked up at the mirror once more he saw that one change had taken place, a smirk appearing on his canine muzzle as he saw a pair of red and green glowing eyes looking back at him. “Let’s see, who to go after first…”

Meanwhile Elric had gone into their primary server room, breaking away as Payton and Sid talked about the mission that the lizardman had gone on. While the lion was curious himself that wasn’t really his field of expertise, instead his main focus was keeping the hardware that they used to carry out their tasks was always ready to go. A frown crossed his face as he looked at the empty spot where one of his precious servers used to be before he had taken it into his workshop to be repaired. He still couldn’t believe that their initial insertion into the matrix grid had caused it to overheat to the point of setting on fire, and had it not been for the quick thinking of Sid the entire array might have gone up in flames.

As he went around one of the corners his thoughts were suddenly interrupted as he jumped in shock when he saw the familiar face of the husky standing there. “Damn Artecus,” Elric said as he held his chest. “Gave me a heart attack. What are you even doing back here anyway?”

“I was just prepping the gateway transfer for Sid’s new access port,” Artecus replied as he unplugged his implant from one of the upload bays.

“Already?” Elric replied in slight confusion. “I thought he had just come back with that.”

“Nothing wrong with making sure everything is prepped and ready,” Artecus stated with a wide smile that caused the lion to roll his eyes slightly, knowing that the husky tended to try and take shortcuts on his work when it came to time before the weekend. “As I was looking for storage space however I noticed an anomaly that was in one of the crystalline circuits and wanted to check it out myself. Did a scan and didn’t see anything, but I do notice that it has an usual change of… color.”

Elric’s frown grew even deeper as he went to the server that the husky been tampering with and nearly pushed aside the canine in the process, failing to notice his usual sheepish grin had turned into a smirk as he opened the cabinet. He had never liked it when the others fiddled with his work, especially his custom-made circuits, and to hear that one of them might have a problem after dealing with one melted down server made his blood start to boil. After tying back his mane to make sure that nothing got caught he pushed his head in to try and see what was happening, only to immediately notice that one of the translucent circuit boards glowed with an eerie red light instead of the usual green. His curiosity quickly became concern as he watched it spread to another, and another, until soon the entire row he looked at had not only started to pulsate with the same red light but also appeared to be melting.

As Elric attempted to extract himself from the cabinet however he found himself unable too, suddenly feeling like wires were wrapped around his neck that kept him tied in place. “Uh… Artecus…” Elric said as he tried several times to force himself out only to remain stuck as the melting circuitry began to ooze towards him. “Not sure what’s going on, but could use a little help.”

When there was no response the lion began to panic and tried to use his hands to pull the wires away from the cabinet opening, only to find them getting tied up as well as he attempted to wiggle out. The only thing his movements served to do was to have a thick glob of the thick goo his circuits had become to drop right down on his muzzle, and with no ability to wipe it off all he could do was try to shake it from him. It stuck to his fur like glue however and though the material was surprisingly cool it came with a tingling sensation as another large droplet hit him square in the face. Soon the liquified circuits had drizzled down and completely coated the lion’s head, and though he tried to keep his muzzle closed eventually he opened it to breathe and suddenly felt the material push not only in his mouth but his nostrils and even ears as his goo-covered face began to become warped and distorted.

As the head of the lion transformed within the server Nexus Vyrnen dropped the act and as soon as he felt Elric become infected with his corrupted data he stripped the other man of his clothes. Once he had downloaded himself to one of the servers he had found everything he needed to continue with his plan and watched as bright red goo began to ooze through the wires on the lion’s neck. It wouldn’t be long before the infected circuits would integrate themselves with Elric’s head and download the viral programming into it, rendering him into an actual drone as he sped the process along by licking along his stiffening shaft. The entire body of the lion, which had already started to thicken from its scrawny form as the living crystal suffused through it, quivered from the pleasure, transformation, and corruption as the husky began to bob up and down on the thickening maleness of the other guy.

When Nexus Vyrnen knew that the lion had become his newest drone he pulled the wiring away to allow Elric to escape, though as he continued to fondle and stroke the cock of the creature in his hands the head that came out was no longer feline in nature. The lights overhead shined right through the translucent red crystalline circuitry that was shaped in the form of an eagle with a pair of horns on its head, and as the virus pressed against it he could feel the data flowing effortlessly through it. A living circuit board… it was something he wasn’t quite expecting when he infected the server but as the red goo that assimilated flesh to crystal circuitry continued to spread down his body he liked it.

Another thing Nexus Vyrnen was fond of was the feline form of the lion as it swelled with muscle. At first he was just going to make just another avian creature, but as he pressed his hand against the thickening chest of the other man he decided to keep most of the body with a few slight adjustments. Elric let out a silent gasp as he hunched forward while a pair of wings grew out from his back, his hands holding onto the husky as they went from furry to crystalline with a scaly texture like that of a bird. As the corruptive circuitry continued to cascade down the body of the new creature the smirk on the husky’s face grew wider when he felt the shaft he had been stroking thicken as the nexus beast’s new drone stood at attention.

“Looks like I have the materials to infect the rest of you after all,” Nexus Vyrnen said as he let go before the red circuitry reached his hand, keeping the husky from any outward changes while the other man continued to morph and mutate into a muscular beast of a drone. “While I adore the red it’s not quite my color scheme yet, fortunately from what I’m getting in your memory storage that shouldn’t be too much of a problem once we meet your other friends.”

Back in the main workshop the lizardman sat on the chair and watched as the rhino man continued to work on the damaged frame of the server, pulling out one of the damaged pieces before using his metal palm to grind out the imperfections. “I’m just wondering if we really want to go through with all this,” Sid said as he watched Payton work. “We aren’t even being paid for this, Artecus just wanted a challenge and thought that this mark would have a big payout for us at the end of it.”

“I will admit that what he initially found was intriguing,” Payton replied with a grunt as he tossed the straightened beam aside before going to the next one. “But maybe you’re right; we’re just a small group and this is way beyond our paygrade. Of course you’re going to be the one that will have to tell Artecus that.”

“Tell me what?” Artecus replied as he suddenly popped up from the lower level.

“Oh, hey, uh…” Sid said as the husky walked up the stairs towards the work platform they were on, Payton just giving him a smirk before going back to work. “We were just thinking that maybe this new target of ours isn’t worth the hassle. I know that you were interested and so were we, but perhaps this is one fish that might be too big to real in.”

“Well, I can certainly understand that,” Artecus replied with his usual grin. “Actually I have something that you might want to look at in the server room, both you and Payton.”

The rhino and lizardman looked at one another and Payton just shrugged in response before getting up, but just as Sid was about to get up as well he felt his phone vibrate. “One sec,” Sid said as he pulled out the device, his jaw dropping at shock at the flashing red screen. “Two of our servers just went down… wait, a third one too! They’re all being infected with some sort of virus program, we have to shut them down now!”

Payton nodded and moved over to a large red button marked Do Not Touch, which would sever every connection in the servers including one another, but before he could press it a translucent red clawed hand grabbed onto the mechanical arm and stopped it. Sid looked on in shock as a creature unlike anything he had ever seen before suddenly appeared from the darkness and pushed the rhino back, which was quite the feet considering the bio-metal plates just under Payton’s skin. Sid and Artecus stood back as the rhino got ready to charge, but only managed to make it a few feet before he suddenly fell to one knee and gripped his arm. The lizardman ran over to help but he was quickly told to stay back as the arm that motioned for him to keep away looked like it had red crystal growing underneath it.

“I suppose that’s what happens when you link up your muscular and skeletal systems to software,” Artecus said, Sid turning back just in time to see the husky take a handful of wires and wrap them around the lizardman as the other creature moved over towards the rhino. “Your friends Payton and Elric are the keys to making the idea in my head complete, but I figure they’re going to need somewhere to… mix. Luckily I have just the place for them to do that.”

As Sid turned to try and reason with the deranged husky he saw that fanged grin on the canine’s face and the glowing red and green eyes and instinctively knew that it wasn’t Artecus that he was talking to. Nexus Vyrnen could see the look of shock and fear in his face as he realized the virus was in control now, especially as the rhino’s grunts and groans lessened and the look of determination and anger on his face ebbed away. The nexus beast had already taken control of the rhino’s systems and kept him from doing anything, and with those programmed hooked directly into his brain it didn’t take much for the virus to wiggle his processes into them and start changing things. Even before he had completely taken over the mind of the man there were already some aspects that were manifesting such as the huge bulge in his leather pants before he unzipped them to let out his thick cock.

Though the living circuit gryphon and rhino started to lick their lips as they continued to stare at one another their gaze was suddenly directed to the tied-up lizardman. Sid swallowed hard as he saw both men immediately approach them, their virus-addled minds undeterred as the hacker attempted to try and persuade them not to do whatever they were going to do. Nexus Vyrnen just watched from his husky body while remaining connected to the two as they unceremoniously ripped off his hoodie and sweats, leaving his scaled body open to the air as the lizardman found himself pressed against the chest of two creatures. Already Payton was starting to change as they groped and fondled the skinny man between them, his rhino hide becoming shiny and black as the bio-metal started to manifest.

With the beefy arms of the two muscular men keeping him in place there was nothing Sid could do but look down, swallowing hard as he felt their cocks throbbing against his thighs. Despite being potentially ripped in half by the two his own erection was pressed against his stomach while he was reminded of the times they had messed around with one another before. The difference was that a virus hadn’t infected two of them and turned one into a crystal gryphon as he felt the head of Elric’s cock start to push up underneath him. All the computer skills he had were useless at the moment as he felt the head of the cock push up into his tailhole, his legs twitching as the stretching caused a spasm of his entire body until the next second where it was replaced with pure pleasure.

The living circuit gryphon had already been leaking virus-laden pre and as the red goo was introduced into the lizardman it immediately began the process of assimilation. Sid looked down in shock as his groin suddenly became a similar substance as a warmth spread up through his body, which was quickly accompanied by the large cock that continued to impale him. As Elric continued to push up into the lizardman Sid swore he could feel it bump up against his lungs, but he wasn’t done yet as Payton suddenly got close. When he looked back most of the rhino had become subsumed with the biometal, the black material giving him the appearance of a cyborg.

Soon that wasn’t what Sid became concerned with as his eyes practically bugged out of his skull when the thick cock of the rhino joined the gryphon one inside of him. He didn’t even think he could handle one, much less two, but as he arched his back while the transforming rhino thrusted up into him he suddenly saw his already stretched stomach grow even bigger with the second dick inside of him. In the back of his mind he knew that this should be impossible, but by this point Nexus Vyrnen had already infiltrated his mind and made everything turn to pure pleasure as the transformation spread like wildfire. With the infected biometal and crystal circuit both inside the lizardman it was time for the virus to provide all three creatures with an upgrade, starting with Sid as the nexus beast used his knowledge of programming to expedite the process.

The husky stared blankly ahead as the rhino and gryphon continued to pump inside of the lizardman, flooding his insides with more materials as Sid’s swollen abdomen cascaded outwards. The scales of his body merged together and turned to black metal just like Payton, but as he was double penetrated the newly transformed skin began to modulate itself. As the changing creature’s frame stretched so dramatically that he could put his new leonine feet down on the ground while still getting both cocks sliding inside of him the outside of his body continued to morph, forming into red living circuitry underneath while the black metal remained on top and formed into an outer casing. The glowing red inside of Sid began to pulsate faster as the changes quickly reached up to his head, his reptilian snout becoming a beak even before it hardened into metal as thick red goo gushed up from his modified maw that transformed his insides.

Nexus Vyrnen couldn’t help but be impressed at the new gryphon synth that was created as he finished not only infecting the last creature but also the rest of the station as well. Since they hadn’t managed to disconnect themselves from the main line he could easily infect the rest of the city, and though he couldn’t transform all the citizens like he had with the three living circuit gryphons he could still use the technology to make even more drones. As he directed Sid and Elric to change the husky to become another gryphon as the last of the crystal infiltrated the rhino however the nexus beast suddenly found himself back in the café where Sare looked at the confused nanite dragon with a grin on his face.

“Enjoy yourself?” Sare asked, Vyrnen nodding his head as he could still feel his creations turning three synth circuit gryphons into four. “Good, now unfortunately we have to let you go at this time, we’ll make sure that all your drones get collected and brought back to the realm. Right now however we have to get you to Yavini’s realm, wouldn’t want to break our promise to him, now would we?”