

It's Just Business.

(Story Commission)

It was just another ordinary day as the lights flickered on in the Condom as the anthro couple prepared to start their day. A day that would be hectic, at least for one of them. Eve, a hyena boy with a slim, twink-like appearance, was on the verge of heading to the airaporto. Nothing out of the ordinary, just another business trip to the West Coast. In the not-so-distant future, the comforts of modern life had ushered in a whole new era of conveniences. The hyena's cellphone app showed that the helidrone would arrive on the megabuilding's rooftop in less than 15 minutes. Luckily for Eve, he had Smack by his side; the yellow-furred chu, with a similar build to the hyena, was almost always responsible for keeping things in order. Taking the liberty to get ahead of the inevitable delay of his love, Smack not only woke up an hour earlier but also had clothes and breakfast ready, eagerly awaiting his partner.

The dark purple-furred hyena, with small dark purple spots that softly contrasted with the light purple inner fur, stumbled into the room, his naturally large and fluffy mane in disarray. "Smack!!! The flight!!!" exclaimed Eve, struggling against his own clumsiness, seemingly attempting the impossible task of getting dressed and eating breakfast at the same time. On the other side of the kitchenette, seated at the coffee table, the chu with predominantly yellow fur, adorned with delicate white stripes forming circular patterns on their outer thighs and tail, and four black bands of fur on their back, smiled with a slight sense of satisfaction as they observed the unfolding scene. Deep down in his mind, Smack pondered what would become of Eve without him around. Finishing his orange juice, the vibrant yellow-furred rodent remarked, "Oh, I know, sweetie. I've already packed your things, but I suggest you decide what to do first. Having breakfast and getting dressed simultaneously isn't a good idea." Concluding his sentence with small giggles of satisfaction.

Before long, the hyena adjusted himself, now dressed and with a full stomach. Eve hurried through the Condo, passing the living room towards the built-in elevator. "Alright, let's go over this again. I should stay on the West Coast until the end of the week. I probably won't be there for more than seven days, but I think this round of negotiations might drag on," the hyena said, finishing up tapping his black graphite pen and reaching his hand towards the holopad sensor to call the elevator.

The downside of Eve's job was that he could be required to attend contract analysis meetings in different states every quarter. The advantage was that he was the one supporting their lifestyle, including paying for the relatively high-end condo where both Smack and Eve currently lived. Smack, on the other hand, was not far behind. Working in the field of information technology, the slender chu had the luxury of being able to work from the comfort of their home, though often forced to spend hours sitting in front of the computer screen at their home workstation. Many times, they had to attend online cookie meetings, virtual gatherings conducted through the neural cookie platform.

"I'll try not to set the house on fire this time," the yellow anthro said jokingly, referring to the time when they accidentally triggered the Condo's fire suppression system, sending an emergency notification to Eve's phone in the middle of an important demonstration. "And no crazy culinary experiments while I'm away. If you want to try something new, use an app."

Speaking of apps, it was at that exact moment when the elevator reached their floor, and Eve's phone app notified him of the helidrone's arrival, now waiting on the rooftop to take the hyena to the airport. "Okay, see you next week, kisses," the hyena said in the cutest way possible, albeit sounding somewhat forced at the end. Smack, in response, simply mimed blowing kisses as the elevator doors closed slowly until the hyena disappeared from view.

It had been a suspicion lingering in the chu's mind for quite some time that perhaps Eve's business trips involved more than just business. The suspicion grew stronger with each passing month. Smack could vividly recall how, in the beginning, Eve's business trips would last no more than a handful of days. Sometimes, they would board a flight one day, handle contracts and meetings the next, and be back home on the third day. But now, these trips could easily extend to a week or even longer. Over time, the suspicion festered within Smack's mind, escalating to a legitimate obsession.

Given Smack's submissive and conformist nature, it prevented them from bringing up the subject and having a proper conversation with Eve about it or even expressing their suspicions. Instead, Smack always resorted to prodding and being rude to the hyena at opportune moments, the typical behavior that could be interpreted as nothing more than harmless couple banter. But not this time.

"Not today," Smack muttered to no one in particular within the now-empty Condo, except for themselves. A master plan had been brewing in the yellow rodent's mind for some time now.

The plan was... well, it was anything but simple. But from the perspective of an obsessed mind, it seemed simple. Being the skilled programmer that Smack was, instead of sitting at their workstation to start work, today they had a mission to invade Eve's phone and steal any and all information that could prove their love's infidelity. It may sound foolish and childish, but in reality, it was more invasive than that.

With the advent of neural chips, new features were available when it came to mobile devices. Not only was it more common to have sensors in clothing, known as wearable technologies, but it was also possible to send commands to smart devices through thoughts. Text messages could be composed mentally and sent straight to a friend's inbox, or even photos taken with one's own eyes stored in the cloud, or the so-called first-person streams where people at events could provide followers with the experience of being there, even if they weren't physically present, through a real neural link stream. Today, it was even possible to send real-time thoughts to Twitter in text format. Author's suggestion: don't do that.

Either way, modern life without such appliances was impossible, and obviously, Eve and Smack had their respective neural chips or cookies, as they were informally called. All Smack had to do was invade Eve's phone and take advantage of the real-time

connection between the device and their partner's cookie to spy on the hyena's day-to-day life.

A simple and direct plan, if it weren't for the fact that hacking into someone else's personal network access was not exactly that simple for obvious reasons. The potential for damage would be almost limitless. But that didn't stop the chu from trying, and try they did. "Okay, if what I think might work actually works, I shouldn't take more than forty minutes to get into Eve's phone," said the yellow-furred twink, sitting at their workstation and powering up their devices. Fortunately, a significant part of their initial work routine could be automated with some simple AI algorithms. However, Smack only had the morning to invade Eve's phone, find what they wanted, and get out.

Reclining in their chair to make themselves comfortable, the chu prepared to initiate the neural immersion interface. Anyone with a bit more knowledge than the average person about neural interface systems knows that invading other networks using their own consciousness as the basic processing unit is akin to signing their own death warrant. If a firewall system detects the presence of an unauthorized agent, aka their mind, it's the infiltrator who will be incinerated. But Smack was confident that they could do what they needed to do and get away with it smoothly. The chu could already imagine Eve's reaction when they arrived home and every holoprojector in the house displayed images of their betrayal for everyone to see. It would be their ultimate act of revenge.

However, the initial difficulties began to arise, the first being that Eve had changed their phone last week. Always trying to stay up to date, the hyena had purchased the latest release from Ifruit, and everyone knows how extremely strict Ifruit is with security. "Great, this will take more than an hour to crack," the frustrated chu muttered. "Unless I use Eve's password." A small smirk formed on their lips, that is if they were able to remember or guess the password. If Smack succeeded, the original plan of stealing the photos could be accomplished within the estimated forty minutes.

Meanwhile, far away from the East Coast, Eve was enjoying a bottle of water in the first-class section of OrbitEscape. While the wealthy could enjoy vacations in large orbital hotels around the Earth or even in resorts on the moon, the global middle class could now enjoy suborbital flights around the planet. Air travel, once expensive and taking easily a dozen hours, was now completed in thirty minutes or less with the advancement of commercial aviation to the edge of space. Massive aircraft capable of flying at speeds exceeding Mach 7 and skimming the edge of space made it possible for air bridges between coasts in the country with a flight time of just half an hour to become not only a reality but also the industry norm.

In a little over forty minutes, Eve was already landing on the West Coast of the country. And now, believe it or not, the part that would take up most of their time in terms of transportation was about to begin. No matter what happens, LA refuses to invest in a mass public transportation mode. The traffic congestion, previously limited to the ground, now extended to the sky, with the clear blue summer sky partially obstructed by a queue of helidrones flying in formation at low speeds one after another due to flight ceiling restrictions in the city.

Despite it all, Eve arrived safely and soon settled into the hotel. Even before landing on the rooftop of the building, the hyena sent a message to a contact that appeared at the top of their list, above their own boyfriend Smack's icon. The icon in question belonged to a sleek bat, young and strong, with a fit and defined muscular build, but not necessarily overly muscular. The name was Tony, a somewhat generic name for a somewhat generic DJ at a house nightclub in downtown LA. "Hey, I'm already in the city. Meet me at the hotel; we still have time before work," read the hastily typed and somewhat anxious message.

Once settled in their room, the hole wall near the entrance buzzed, indicating that a bat was requesting visitor permission at the reception to come up. Eve immediately granted permission, and a few minutes later, the hole wall buzzed again, and the structure of the door became transparent, allowing the occupants inside the room to see the corridor and whoever was on the other side of the door as if the door didn't exist. However, it remained a solid door for those outside, and on the other side stood the said bat with orange fur, white inner fur, stylishly styled bangs falling to the side, dressed in pink All Stars, and wearing a mini skirt that did very little to hide the bulge between their legs. They also wore a neutral gray hoodie to tone down the flashy colors of their outfit. The hyena, still in a dress shirt with only the upper part of their suit removed, walked up to the door, chuckling softly before even opening it. "OMG! What did I tell you about your clothes, Tonny! This is an executive hotel!" exclaimed Eve as they hurriedly pulled the shorter bat inside, feeling embarrassed. "Relax, nobody noticed," said Tonny, deliberately tilting their hips and raising their typical triangular bat nose upwards, a subtle way of saying that they dressed that way for the hotel because they knew how much Eve enjoyed seeing them like that. "Gosh! I just hope no one from my team saw you entering here like this," said the hyena, still embarrassed but unable to take their eyes off the bat boy's groin region.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, Smack was still struggling to make their breakthrough. The new security software on their boyfriend's Ifruit phone was proving to be quite difficult to crack. But they had managed to obtain some partial results. For example, the exact location of Eve's phone was available in real-time on one of the six screens of their workstation. Smack's frustration was gradually increasing as time went on. Knowing that their partner had already arrived at the hotel, they were aware that "things" could be happening at this very moment, and thanks to the stupid security network of a smartphone designed specifically for the corporate world, Smack might be missing the evidence of their partner's improper actions right now. And in a way, they were indeed missing all the action. But after a handful of minutes had passed, Smack exclaimed, "YES!!!!". The yellow chu even jumped from their chair; they had gained full access through a 5G link. "Perfect, this should be more than enough to integrate my neural chip with Eve's phone storage." Said and done; without a second thought, Smack lay back and reclined in their chair, the indicator LEDs of their neural chip on the side of their temple all lit up at once, indicating that the user's neural processing capacity had been maximized. This was confirmed by the graph on one of the workstation monitors. Closing their eyes, the conscious part of Smack's mind was no longer on the East Coast but traveling at the speed of light through an extensive mesh of optical fiber cables, bouncing through a handful of servers until reaching the backdoor they had struggled to open in Eve's phone's local storage. It was the kind of connection that had the potential

to result in catastrophe. You see, when an average user uses the same means to play an MMORPG or enter a virtual chat room, the route is secure and pre-established between the user's home station and the provider's cloud. In Smack's case, they had to manually create their own route, jumping from server to server, reaching addresses in meta space on their own and manually to avoid getting lost in the neural network. However, once the desired route was established, it was all a matter of milliseconds, and Smack was already amidst the mess that could be called Eve's cell phone's internal storage.

You're right, it wasn't the hyena's fault. Intelligent systems don't operate reading and writing information in the way it's shown in the user interface. These systems function more like networks, resembling a capillary network that a neural operator like Smack could extend their consciousness throughout its entirety and thus "become aware" of the files stored there. The sensation is similar to having thoughts arising in your mind, but those thoughts are actually files, and they appear extremely vivid and detailed, especially if they are audiovisual files extracted directly from another person's mind through a neural chip. And indeed, this was Eve's preferred method of saving the most important moments of their day and life. They just needed to be present, pay attention to what they wanted to store, and the system recorded everything directly from the neural stimuli coming from the hyena's sensory organs and processed by their brain.

Of course, such a method occupies absurd amounts of space, and usually, the phone's local storage is used to temporarily store the data before it is sent to the cloud, freeing up local space on the device. Naturally, Smack had already combed through their partner's personal files in the cloud several times, never being able to find anything that would prove their infidelity. And yet, here they were, executing this crazy and semi-suicidal plan. It didn't take long for the yellow chu to find exactly what they had been desperately searching for. Finally accessing the files from that morning, from the moment Eve left the Condo and boarded their flight to their arrival at the hotel and the subsequent arrival of the bat. Time passes differently in the metaverse, where a second in the real world can be hours in a "sandbox," so to speak. More than enough time for Smack to comb through Eve's contact list until they found the contact for the orange bat, Tonny, a DJ who worked at one of the high-end clubs in the city. "Ah! Why am I not surprised?" Smack said, or rather, thought to themselves as their virtual self floated in the linear space representing the internal storage of the hyena's phone.

Allowing their obsession to take over and without the slightest consideration for their partner's privacy, Smack watched from Eve's perspective the final hours of their life, engaging in an affair with a bat they didn't even know. Worse still, they discovered that every time they had been intimate together, Eve had been faking orgasms, pretending to experience pleasure when they felt nothing. The neural data captured by the implants didn't lie—the level of satisfaction from being with the bat was infinitely higher than what they experienced with Smack themselves. This fact alone fueled a deep rage within the young IT technician. Immediately, Smack thought about copying all the files from the local storage to their cloud system, but they encountered a technical problem. The direct connection they had opened was only meant to accommodate the data transfer necessary to maintain the link extending their consciousness from Florida to LA. If that link was lost, their mind would be trapped within the internal storage of

Eve's phone. The thought alone made Smack's soul tremble and chill, worse than the worst scenario of a psychological horror film.

The solution they found was to remain connected to the device, prolonging their consciousness in that location so they could use the local connection between the phone and Eve's neural implant to witness and experience in real-time everything the hyena was doing. In this way, their own cookie would be able to record this information in Smack's personal storage, which was all they wanted to confront Eve about as soon as they returned from their trip the following week.

Meanwhile, back in the physical world, the hyena was already taking a shower. The fun with the bat had come to an end, and Tonny, still lying on the bed, enjoying his afterglow, reached out and grabbed Eve's phone. Unaware that at that very moment, the device in their hands was acting as a receptacle for someone else's consciousness.

"Funny wallpaper! Send me the app link so I can download it on mine too!" the bat shouted from the room towards the suite where the purple hyena was at the moment. "Hey! Don't touch my phone! There are important work things on it!" Eve shouted back. "I don't know your password, my love. I can only see the moving wallpaper." Indeed, the wallpaper was cute and interactive, one of those that moved as the user shook or tilted the device. At the same time, it also sent accelerometer data to the operating system, data that should have been noticed by Smack as it could indicate that someone was currently handling the device. However, all of Smack's attention was focused on trying to force the phone to establish a real-time link with Eve's cookie, similar to what happens when someone starts an online streaming. "Also, do me a favor and delete our browsing history from today from the memory. I don't want Smack snooping around my phone and finding out everything when they get home," the hyena said, stepping out of the shower and preparing to tackle the task of drying their tangled purple fur. "The password, sweetie, I need to know your password!" the bat commented once again, now sounding a bit frustrated. "The password is EvE312, with the two E's capitalized!" the hyena replied before turning on the hairdryer. Tonny laughed on the other side of the room. "An executive's phone with such a simple password."

At this moment, Smack realized something was wrong as the OS indicated that the phone had been unlocked. Immediately, they activated the front camera of the device and could see the face of the bat who had been cheating on them with their partner in real-time. "You son of a bitch!" Smack thought as they focused on the white-faced, pointy-snouted creature. It was an intimidating view, giving them the sensation of being tiny, held in the palm of a giant being. Well, that wasn't entirely untrue considering Smack's current reality. Nevertheless, they now had the proof they needed. The sight of Tonny unlocking the phone and holding it from within the hotel room, alongside Eve, should be sufficient evidence. However, their obsessive side took control again, making them think that Eve might initiate a discussion about the importance of the situation or that the hyena might come up with any excuse to justify the presence of an unknown bat in their hotel room handling the phone. Eve could claim that the bat was part of the hotel staff or even a spy trying to steal information from their device. Instead of ending the connection and stopping their exposure as they should have done at that moment, Smack decided to continue. They wanted to gather more evidence, everything they needed to throw in Eve's face later. Immediately, they commanded the device to open

the microphone, allowing them not only to see but also to hear the ambient sound. Coincidentally, the microphone opened at the perfect moment to capture the bat talking to himself, saying, "Okay, delete local history... Where is it? This Ifruit is new, right..."

A chill ran through Smack's mind. They had to hurry and act quickly! At this moment, Smack chose to do the most challenging thing. They attempted to upload all the local history from Eve's phone to their personal cloud, sacrificing their only backdoor that could be used as an exit from the local storage back to the neural network. At the same time, they had to use their own mind to slow down the phone's processes, making the entire OS sluggish and unresponsive. "Damn it, the phone is new, and it's already frozen!" Tonny exclaimed to himself, struggling to access the history options and delete the files. What was only a few seconds of frustration for Tonny felt like hours of mental effort for Smack, struggling to save all the data, release the backdoor, and exit the device. But the young bat was a nighttime DJ accustomed to transferring music files back and forth; dealing with personal cookie files wasn't much different, just larger in size. Eventually, Tonny reached the final address of the current history in Eve's personal cookie and sent the delete command. This was the most tense moment for Smack, leaving the yellow chuu with no other choice but to overload almost all processes of the phone's OS, forcing it to freeze completely. Tonny became furious, turning his head towards the suite where Eve was still drying off and asking, "Eve! I have to format your phone!" The hyena, with wet fur and his head poking out of the suite while wrapped in a towel, asked, "Format it?! Why?!" "Your phone is freezing a lot. I think it might even have a virus." The hyena found it strange, but since the device was new and there were no important files that couldn't be recovered from their personal cloud, Eve quickly checked the time and concluded that if they formatted the phone now, there would still be time to restore a backup and use the device for the meeting later. "Fine, just be quick!"

In the metaverse, Smack was feeling more terrified than ever, as he could still hear the conversation in the room through the phone's microphone. He was well aware of the implications and consequences that formatting the phone would have on him, so he immediately tried to interrupt the file upload through his backdoor to access and exit the device himself. However, at that moment, his own plan backfired, as he had already overloaded the phone's operating system processes, rendering him unable to make the system respond to his commands. Meanwhile, the DJ bat, Tonny, used the physical factory reset button located on the side of the phone, rendering Smack's attempts to prevent the reset virtually useless. To initiate the reset, all it took was holding down the power button for more than ten seconds. From Smack's virtual perspective, those ten seconds felt like hours! In a state of panic and despair, trying everything he could and pushing his own brain to the limit, Smack watched as all system functions were interrupted by the prioritized countdown, preparing for the factory reset. After the ten seconds passed, a mechanical and shrill voice echoed throughout the virtual space of the phone's internal storage. "DELETE IN PROGRESS!!!" The voice repeated multiple times.

As the process began, Smack immediately started feeling the effects. Everything around him started to darken, and his thinking became slow and heavy. He couldn't tell if the virtual space around him was darkening or if it was his vision failing—it was much worse than that. It was his own biological brain's synaptic connections being destroyed as the pathways that connected them directly to the ingrams of his neural chip became overwhelmed. The sensation was terrible, both slow and fast at the same time. From a biological perspective, it felt as if Smack was struggling more and more to remember things, what he was doing or wanting to do, and even who he was. With each passing second, it worsened, but from Smack's dilated perspective of time, every second felt like hours. In his final breath, Smack tried to send a local command from his room on the East Coast to his phone, attempting to make a call to Eve's phone in an effort to force an interruption to the formatting process. But it was already too late. With a significant portion of his physical brain damaged, Smack's body began convulsing in his chair at his workstation. The difference of milliseconds between when Smack had that thought and when he sent it to his physical body became decisive. The screen of the phone in the bat's hand showed that the formatting process had been completed successfully, with all the data properly erased. On the other side of the country, Smack's semi-lifeless body convulsed agonizingly in his chair, repeatedly shouting, "EVE! EVE! EVE! EVE!" as if repeating an incoming phone call command, until everything stopped. Smack's vegetative body remained in that chair, in the same position, for a little over a week, until the foul smell alerted the neighbors. Eve, and especially the bat named Tonny, would never even become aware of the true fate of the poor, obsessed Smack.

The end.