

Occupational Hazards: Crowdsourced

Eyes closed, Hunter sighed into his pillow. A thumping bass emanated from the alarm on his dresser, just out of arm's reach. As much as he liked the morning DJ's taste in music it did little to raise his spirits. Turning his head onto its side, the light from the soft green numbers floating on its screen flashed every other second, piercing through the back of his eyelids. Hesitantly, he forced his eyes open, his bleary vision slowly coming into focus. The screen proudly displayed five forty-seven. A feeling of dread always welled up in him as his next shift drew ever closer and closer. "It was nice while it lasted," he mumbled.

Sliding out of bed, the mouse ambled towards his alarm and flicked the switch on top of its plastic rectangular form. The radio switched off, taking its soothing sounds with it. The mouse emitted a groan with a bored cock of his head. Setting one paw in front of the other, the wooden floors in his apartment creaked loudly with every step as he navigated towards his bathroom. Relying on muscle memory more than anything else, he blindly bumped through the hallways with his eyes closed once more.

A stream of lukewarm water rolled over his gray furred form, Hunter's head thunking loudly against the tiled wall just beneath the shower head. Shoulders slumped, his gaze drifted towards a bottle of shampoo tucked away into a corner that was beginning to... yeah that was probably mold, at least if that hideous grey-blue spot was any indication. Regarding it with a yawn, his prehensile pink tail wrapped around the colorful plastic container and brought it up to his hand. The mouse flicked open the lid to squirt a generous glob of orange gel into his palms. Careful not to rub it in too deeply into the circuitry tattooed onto the back of each knuckle, Hunter lathered the citrusy—or was it outdoor freshness? He never bothered—scented gel into his arms and chest. He couldn't help but smirk at the layer of bubbles that tickled and clung to his body.

Six twenty. Rubbing a hand through the tufts of fur atop his head, Hunter did relish the fact that drying off took no time at all. Not like there was that much fuzz on him on the first place. His attention turned towards a crumpled pair of jeans sitting at the foot of his bed. He'd only worn these... two days in a row? They could make it a couple more. Maybe to the end of the week if he was careful not to spill anything on them.

After he slid into one of his few remaining clean undershirts, he sleepily scanned his dresser. "There we go, almost didn't recognize it." A flat and crumpled sheet of black plastic was spread out before him. Picking it up, he wrapped it around his forearm. With a thought, the circuits on his knuckles sparked briefly before the exterior of the plastic solidified. A bright glow radiated from his arm as his wearable computer booted up.

Flopping back onto his couch, Hunter nibbled away at a bowl of store brand cereal. With every spoonful brought up to his mouth he focused on his arm, flicking through his browser windows with a twitch of the eyes. "Scientists achieve nuclear fusion at room temperature." He glazed over the headline and switched to the next page. "Concept of absolute zero is shattered as researchers in Prague..." Next. "Common cold finally cured! Along with about every other disease." Tch, another slow news day.

Hopefully there was still a little more time left to laze around. An interactive calendar instantly appeared on his forearm, the date and time displayed prominently for the mouse. Six fifty-nine. "Dammit."

In response to his grumbling, a traffic density map generated. An instance of hot air gusted out his nostrils as he unwillingly pulled himself out of the couch's cushiony embrace. Trotting back into his bedroom, Hunter pulled a keycard tucked out of a pocket from last week's work pants and trudged out the door.

Eight o' clock on the dot was when the mouse strolled through the warehouse doors. Not fifteen minutes early. Not ten, nor five, and especially not so much as a minute early. There was no reason to stay here ANY amount of time above the required eight hours.

Tucked between a bank and a bookstore, Hunter's place of employment was situated smack in the middle of the downtown metropolis. Though a holdover from the late twentieth century, it had since been refurbished. Whereas once before it had just been a rusting eyesore, it now served the shipping needs and desires of the entire metropolitan area at a bargain.

"Morning, Hunter." Kneeling down besides his workstation, the coyote's ears perked up as she shot him a wave. Situated in an open portion of the warehouse, away from the rows of shelves and automated forklifts, was a lone desk. Beneath it were a pair of quantum hard drives, along the lower end of the spectrum truth be told. Atop it was a stack of paperwork and a single monitor.

Arching a brow, the mouse couldn't help but incredulously stare at the array of tools she already had splayed out on the floor. Four squares of flexible plastic sat at her side, each one projecting a digital screen into the air above it. "Just how long have you been here?" His tail flicking to and fro, he gingerly approached her. He cringed when he saw her ears flattened.

She was actually having to think about the question.

"Rolled in here little after six, I think?" Nonchalance notably present in her voice, she kept her attention focused on the task at hand.

"Jesus, you were already here when I was barely still waking up." Dropping to his knees, Hunter was admittedly curious as to what could have dragged her in this early.

"Ehh, it's the only time I could find to work on a little pet project of mine." Humming to herself, Maylene's tail swished against the concrete floor. Hunter's tail draped flat upon it in turn.

"You want to work outside of work? Why."

"It's not work if you enjoy—" A loud groan cut her off before she could even finish. "—Not everyone hates their job, Hunter. Mind boggling, I know." Maylene's expressive ears twitched. "Besides, I'd have thought you of all people would appreciate this."

"What all does 'this' entail?" Rising to his feet, he leaned towards one of the screens hovering over the coyote's shoulders.

"Been noticing you've had to file a lot more error reports lately. Shipments and pallets not reconstituting correctly on the first try for example. Figured I'd help fine tune the Creationeer and make your life a bit easier!"

"What? No!" Tilting his head back, the mouse let out a frustrated sigh.

"No?"

"Those error reports are the only freaking thing that break up the tedium down here! They give me a chance to sit down for like half an hour and just glaze over paperwork. Otherwise I'm just walking around on the floor, circling around cargo for hours on end."

Maylene's ears flattened against her skull. "You resent the fact I'm helping you do your job?"

Hunter breathed in for a somewhat anticlimactic, "Yes."

The coyote blinked a couple times as she prepared a response. "*Maintenance update completed,*" the computer on her own fuzzy forearm politely chimed. Hunter's lips curled down, a frown beginning to form on his face.

"You're welcome by the way," Maylene dryly commented. While she would've enjoyed antagonizing the mouse further, a chirp from her computer claimed a much higher priority. Grabbing up the set of thin and flexible machines at her feet, the coyote walked off and disappeared between one of the countless graphene shelves populating the warehouse. One of the self-driving forklifts must've futzed out again.

Once he was certain Maylene had passed out of sight, Hunter snuck a glance at his wrist. His computer obliged his mental request and displayed the time. Eight fifteen. "Alright that's..." The mouse placed a hand over his arm. He could figure this out for himself, didn't always have to rely on technology for every little thing. "So four blocks of fifteen minutes in an hour, eight hours in a day..." not counting lunch of course, "and that's thirty-two blocks in a day." Spreading apart his fingers, he was pleased to see the same fraction displayed. One over thirty-two. "...That's only three percent of my day done. Augh." Left with little other choice, he trudged over to his desk and flicked on the monitor. "Back to the grind we go."

Heh, it'd been how many months now since he started? Ah, the glory days of yester-earlier-this-year. Bright eyed and, well... hmm he really wasn't all that excited when he first started to be honest. A job's a job after all. That first day had felt exciting enough, though. Being sat down at his desk and introduced to the Creationeer really was something else. The very concept that you could scan an object, break it down into its constituent atoms, convert them into what was essentially pure data, and send them halfway across the planet to reconstruct them on a whim seemed mind boggling. Even more surprising was the simplicity of the execution.

Hunter leaned forward in his chair and stared vacantly at the computer monitor. It activated and loaded up the login page. With a blink he activated the cursor and clicked on the username field. Shifting his gaze down slightly brought him to the already filled out password field. In an instant the desktop loaded up.

First, there was the matter of scanning and digitizing an object. Living objects were a no-go, for fairly obvious reasons. That and even quantum computers had trouble tracking the objects in motion. Keeping tabs on all the moving parts in people and plants was dangerously taxing even on those monstrous machines. The Creationeer desktop icon highlighted and seconds later the program opened. On the right side of the screen were rows of prepopulated cells, the queue of digitized objects waiting to be reformed. Yawning, Hunter clicked on the first row, then with the clack of his teeth he committed the change and gave the machine the go ahead to do its thing.

"First item on the list is... a bed frame." Kicking off on the ground, the mouse rolled away from his desk and kept his eyes on the barren concrete before it. Wisps of dense and heavy gases pooled out from the quantum drivers and hung low to the ground around Hunter's desk, slowly making their way out towards the large open area. On the monitor, a series of commands were cycled through in mere nanoseconds.

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: Bed Frame

Converting from metric to imperial units of measurement...

Size: American Standard - Queen

A soft glow radiated from the super-cooled gas as it shaped itself into a simple rectangle. Then at each corner, a small brown circle appeared on the floor that gradually rose up into a column. Layers of matter, each as thick as a single atom, piled atop one another. Paper-thin pillars of wood extended from one column to the next, gradually increasing in width and thickness. "Now, the first time you witness something being created from nothing it's worthy of shock and awe," Hunter muttered to nobody. He leaned back into his chair, the spine squeaking loudly. "But as the days and months wear on, it loses all of its appeal." Exhaling loudly, he started counting how many different ways the ceiling's rafters intersected with one another. "Eventually, you just start to get tired of all the theatrics and wish things would hurry the hell up."

Generation complete

Please package product before moving on to next item in queue

Finally finally *finally*, the magic of science killed the razzle and dazzle and presented to the impatient mouse a wooden bed frame. Quietly scooting against the smooth concrete floor, Hunter remained in his chair. He circled round the object, methodically scanning it for any flaws or

imperfections. Miraculous it might have been, but the Creationeer wasn't perfect. "Legs are all the same thickness, so are the supports..." It all checked out. No anomalies to reverse—at which he found himself the slightest disappointed.

Back at his desk, the mouse clicked on the 'Package' button in the Creationeer window. Another belch of cooled gas spilled out from under him and snaked towards the bed frame. A wooden crate began to form around it. Both elbows resting on the desk, the mouse cupped his chin with his hands and tallied off the minutes it took to finish generating.

Two and a half to three minutes would seem quite fast, breakneck even compared to an outside observer. Yet they dragged on for poor Hunter. It somehow found a way to hit that dreaded sweet spot between instantaneous and delayed. In a ten to fifteen minute window, that was ample time to relax and goof off. If it was instantaneous, he could just inspect the crate immediately after the bed. But no. He had to settle for the aggravating in-between comprised entirely of stopgaps. Wasn't even enough time to check in on how his latest round of Assimilated City was going. Could hardly pull himself away from the game when he settled in back home after work.

Two minutes and seventeen seconds. "About time," the rodent grumbled. Rising from his chair, he padded towards the crate. He ran his fingers along its surface, knocking on the walls and frame per his required auditory and visual checklist. Nothing amiss here as well. Once more he returned to his desk and brought up a new window. A list of the automated forklifts appeared, those available to receive orders marked in green at the top. Shooting off a command, he summoned forth one of Maylene's toys.

From a business perspective, this Creationeer thing was golden. It removed almost all of the transportation costs traditionally associated with shipping which proved to be a massive draw for customers. It was the reason why this old warehouse had been brought back to life, after all. From Hunter's perspective however, it had sidled him with day after day of drudgery. "Can't deny that it's easy," he reluctantly admitted while watching the packaged bed frame be carried away. "Boring? Mind-numbing?" His eyes followed the orange automaton, reflective yellow warning tape plastered on its sides. Closing his eyes, he rested his chin against a cupped palm and scratched at his whiskered muzzle. The machines whirled once more as they prepped the next item in the queue.

"Dammit, why does Maylene have to be so... proactive?" Plucking at a whisker, Hunter winced at the pinching sensation stinging above his lips. His eyes glazed over at the leather mound coming into being before him that suspiciously resembled the lower half of a couch. "I mean," the mouse pressed his hands against his cheeks, furred flesh pressing against and squinting his eyes. "Shouldn't be mad she's going out of her way to check up on me." That coyote was about the only one here who could tolerate him for any amount of time. Then again she was the only other employee down on the floor so she kinda had to, but still. "Why does her job have to be making sure I do my own?" Layers of leather continued packing upon one another, the couch becoming decidedly more couch like. "Argh but if that wasn't the case then she wouldn't even have to stop by in the first place." Hunter continued wrestling with his ambivalence over the coyote's responsibilities.

He enjoyed her company. Just not the additional work that her very presence tended to pile on along with it.

Generation complete

Please package product before moving onto next item in the queue

Leaning over the side of the chair, the metal armrest dug into his ribs. Hunter's lips curled up into a smirk at the glorious sight of imperfection. Looked like Maylene's upkeep wasn't quite up to snuff. "Not that I'd ever tell her that," he mumbled. That'd just encourage her to work all the harder and make the Creationeer flawless, which would be much to the mouse's chagrin.

The legs on one side of the couch were significantly thicker than the other. Tree trunks held up one end while toothpicks scraped against the floor on the other. Miraculous as it was, what with being able to transfer mass digitally and all, the reformation process wasn't always perfect. The couch contained the exact same mass and amount of atoms as it did prior to being broken down. Those atoms just might not have been reassembled exactly where they ought to have been was all.

A new window flicked to life on the monitor, the Creationeer having been minimized. "Next. Next. Next." Hunter lazily vocalized his commands, the Discombobulator software flicking through screen after screen. Counter to Creationeer's ability to build something from nothing, Discombob was able to break down something to nothing. Well, okay, that wasn't entirely true. It broke down objects to their individual atoms, which from a passing glance sure looked like nothing.

Object identified

Initiating scan

Another belch of gaseous air poured from the sides of the quantum beasts that hummed loudly at his feet. Snaking towards the couch, the cloud of nitrogen sparkled with bits and flashes of green. Lattices of green rows generated throughout its smoky white surface. Higher and higher the gas rose, bathing the entirety of the snazzy furniture in its digital glow.

Caching template...

Molecular makeup identified

Sorting atoms

Swirling softly the cloud of nitrogen lowered to the ground, peeling away layers of leather, wood, and cotton with it. Hunter wiped a finger along the desk, traces of dust clinging to his padded fingertips. He flicked the accumulated mass of mites and shedded fur at couch currently teetering between two states of matter. The cloud buzzed with energy in response.

Contaminants detected

Identifying and expelling

Seconds passed, the cloud arcing with activity in its agitated state. Straining his eyes, Hunter peered forward. At the edges of the cloud, ripples could be seen travelling towards the center. Overlapping with one another, the union of five different waves sent a tiny little speck up and flying back at the mouse. That same speck of dust bounced upon one of his furred knuckles. "Heh, okay, that's probably the one thing I won't ever get tired of." What wasn't there to love about that nifty little failsafe? It was always fun seeing how close it could get to sending invading particles back to their source; hell, it even mimicked its trajectory. That and it was always a good way to tack time onto the clock.

"Computer: Load Trouble Tracker," Hunter commanded. Twiddling his fingers against the desk, Hunter pointed his free hand at the screen and tossed the Discombobulator window to the side. Plucking his thumb and index finger together over the Creationeer window, he then spread them apart to maximize it. A flash of white light gave him reason to turn his gaze towards his wrist. While every application and program utilized by employees on the job was expected to be run solely on the computers the warehouse provided, neither he nor the coyote paid much heed. Eyes drifting between one line and the next, his very thoughts were translated to text and populated every field. "Can't believe this is the part of the job I hate least," Hunter mouthed aloud. Tapping at his forearm, the completed error report appeared on his workstation's monitor, attached to a row of data signifying the couch that had reappeared back at the top of the Creationeer queue.

"Alright..." Hunter's head jerked to the left. Nothing. To the right. Still no sign of Maylene. "So far so good." Buck teeth digging into the bottom of his lips, Hunter committed the change and gave Creationeer the command to retry.

"Did you just file another error report?" A disappointed coyote's cute face replaced the mouse's right forearm. Ears drooped to the side, Maylene let out a sigh. "Geez, fix one bug and you create about a dozen others."

"Knock it off, May. It works plenty fine as is." Wait. That couch was supposed to have three cushions, not seven.

"It could be so much better though!" Bushy tail wagging, she was already looking forward to digging back into it. Argh. Ambition bad.

"...Don't you have your own work to attend to?" Arm tucked against his chest, he tapped his left hand against the screen, quickly cycling through the Discombobulator's commands.

"Making sure you're able to do your job is what mine is all about, remember?" The coyote's mug circled round his arm, curiously eyeing his workstation's computer screen. "I'll stop by in a couple minutes."

Brows flattened, Hunter let out a sigh and shot off his next error report. "See you then." Darnit, he was afraid this would happen. Maylene always scrambled down whenever she got pinged with a

handful of error reports in short succession. "Shoulda played it safe," he mumbled before bringing up Creationeer on his own computer. The circuitry layered across the back of his hand warmed to the touch and took on a soft blue glow. Tapping at the flexible screen wrapped around his arm, he lined up the queue yet again and gave the couch another go. His localized instances of Discombobulator didn't require him to shoot off an error report after each use. Combined with Creationeer, he could build up and destroy an object as many times as he liked until he got it right.

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: Designer Couch

Converting from imperial units of measurement back to metric...

"Was wondering why your numbers have been down lately." Teeth gently nipping at his ears, Maylene shot her coworker a toothy grin.

"ACK!" Swatting at the coyote, Hunter stumbled out of his chair, his chest smacking loudly into the table.

"You know," clawed fingers gripped at his neck and pulled him back into his chair, "it amazes me how much effort you'll put into making sure you're as INEFFICIENT as possible."

Slinking back into his chair, Hunter let out a defeated huff.

"I know you're not stupid. Selectively lazy." Her fingers wrapped around his wrist and tapped at his wearable computer. "But not stupid. Takes a lot of work to force something as beefy as Creationeer to run on something as primitive as this."

Hunter's rounded ears reddened and twitched. "I did have to trim some features to get it to run on here..." It did futz out on him every now and then, but nothing too serious.

Dropping to her knees, she poked her muzzle towards the quantum hard drives. "Relax, I'm not going to rat you out." Her tail whapped softly against the floor, waiting for the pool of gas to cease seeping forth from beneath his desk. "I like our setup after all."

Generation complete

Please package product before moving onto next item in the queue
Moving on to next object in queue

"All you do is wander around the warehouse running checks and maintenance. What's there to like?" Grunting, the mouse scratched at his knuckles. The circuitry always shot out arcs of static whenever he forced his more taxing programs to run.

Reaching forward, Maylene's clawed fingers depressed the power buttons on both hard drives, forcing them to restart. "Heh, you've never had someone micromanaging you before have you? Not having someone constantly breathing over your shoulder is a delightful change of pace." Her tail whapped against Hunter's leg softly, prompting the embarrassed mouse to scootch back. "That and it's always nice working with someone who isn't constantly telling me shit is broken." The coyote laughed to herself as the hard drives booted back up. "Practically have to pull on those buck teeth of yours most days to find work." The precision to which these machines were able to follow the templates handed to them always dipped by a couple percentage points over time. Resetting them every now and then tended to improve their accuracy.

*Creationeer connection lost
Syncing to warehouse systems
Syncing Creationeer to local user*

"Yeah, yeah." He couldn't decide whether it was annoying or... cute, just how much she'd pestered him during his time here. Not like he asked her to constantly check up on him. Not like he minded though, either. Endearingly annoying—yeah, that'd work. "You done yet?"

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: Folding chair

WARNING

Template already exists at target designation

Commencing transfer of mass...

Fingers curled around the tops of the quantum computers, Maylene watched on excitedly as the latest item slipped forth from the company's local intranet. Bytes of bits of data rendered into something palpable and real, how could one not be awed by the fact! "That's odd." The pooling super cooled gas dissipated as quickly as it came, leaving nothing in its wake.

“Hey!” The coyote’s fingers wrapped around his arm; Hunter was wheeled along the floor, towards her, the mouse cringing when the rollers crunched his tail underneath them. “Careful!”

“Sorry, sorry.” Her clawed fingers dragged along his computer’s screen, pulling up folders nested deep into the local Creationeer instance’s install path. “Urf. Did you not enable Trace logging?”

“Already told you I had to trim some features to get it up and running,” Hunter grunted, what little pride he took in his work to not work having been poked apart.

“Creationeer is succeeding at... something.” Maylene’s ears drooped down and brushed against her cheeks. “Bluh, these log files are so freaking vague.”

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: Shelf

WARNING

Template already exists at target designation

Commencing transfer of mass...

Wrapping around the mouse and coyote’s toes, the atom laden clouds summoned forth from the quantum computers hovered at their ankles before disappearing once more. “That doesn’t seem...”

CREEAUNCH

Transfer of mass completed

Crushed beneath Hunter’s burgeoning and significantly more massive behind, his chair had been brutally cut down in its prime, simply confronted with too much mouse to manage. Rubbing at his back Hunter groaned, none too pleased at his abrupt meeting with the ground beneath him.

A blast of air puffed at Maylene’s face, causing her to nip at the offending computer that assailed her. The signal for the next iteration of Creationeer cast, a familiar cloud of gas slipped washed over the coyote, snaking directly towards the mouse. Annihilated upon contact with his form, Hunter squeaked softly as his feet shifted forward and pushed the desk back.

Wiggling his toes, Hunter cast a worried glance at the now relatively smaller coyote still kneeling besides him. Even plopped down on his ass, sitting up he was now as tall as she was. “Maylene. What do.”

“I...” The coyote slowly rose to her feet. “Huh.” She was familiar with and knew how to deal with him shirking on the job. Growing, not so much.

Creationeer kicked off the next item in the queue. "Maylene?" Hunter dragged himself back away from the desk, the remains of his chair scraping loudly against the floor beneath him. A cloud of atoms eagerly snaked towards him. "Anytime now, May." Even though he was actively distancing himself from his workstation, the mouse's legs continued to stretch out towards it. When he absentmindedly wished for the monotony of his routine to be broken up, this wasn't exactly what he had in mind.

"What do you expect me to do?" Maylene barked dumbstruck, sidling to the side to avoid being knocked over by her coworker's swelling leg.

"Isn't your job to fix things?!" Hunter bit at his lips, suspiciously eyeing the probable source of his growing problem. Bunching his legs up against his chest, he glared at the encroaching gas. Twiddling at his toes, a pallet of computer monitors were soaked up into his paws. And the rest of him. "Oh for fuck's sakes!" He pointed an accusatory finger at the quantum computers innocently parked beside her. "Every time those things belch out another order I grow." Wisps of smoke trailed out the top of the hard drives towards his outstretched hand. "Ack, stop that!" Recoiling, Hunter yanked his hand out of reach, the smoky trails dropping down to ground in disappointment. "Start there."

Maylene couldn't help but snigger.

"What?"

"Look at you. Attentive and observant as can be." Her finger sank into the power button once more, halting the further conversion of niceties into more and more mousey.

"So?" Pulling himself off the floor, Hunter tepidly approached. The coyote barely came up to his waist.

"So, I'm saying you're perfect for the job you have. Whether you care to admit it or not." Weak tremors rocked the coyote gal off her feet, her nails scrabbling against the floor as she steadied herself.

Sulking, Hunter tapped a foot against the ground in irritation. "Tch, this is only encouraging her," he mulled as she continued laughing. He was starting to reconsider pestering for help. Maybe surging in size wasn't all that bad? It was that much less time spent working after all. "Any idea how long it'll take to troubleshoot this?" Please be most of the day. Well up until shortly before lunch at the very least.

"If the logs were actually you know, useful, it'd take all of ten minutes." Trotting over towards the swollen slacker, she pointed up at his arm. Dropping to his knees, he complied with her request and permitted her access to his wearable compy. "I'm sure I'll be able to nail something down by the end of the day."

Nice. "Unexpected downtime until then?" The transfer of runtimes and logs complete, Hunter returned to standing position. Stretching his arms up above his head, the thought of spending the rest of the day being paid to do sweet nothing was certainly an appealing one. Maybe grab some lunch or...

"Pretty much," Maylene shot back. Setting her fuzzy rump down on his desk, she poured back over the Creationeer's log files. "Not like you'll be able to leave the premises though."

"What. Why?"

"You are walking around with a couple thousand dollars worth of merchandise on you. I mean in you. Huh. Think that counts as stealing if you walk out like that." The Creationeer was certainly succeeding, at least in one sense. Maybe not at recreating things, but it certainly seemed to have the mass transfer part down.

"Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhh." Even worse. He was trapped at work until then. Hunter fell back onto his ass with a resounding thud, a blast of air whooshing towards and blowing back Maylene's facial fur. "...Well?"

"Hmmm?" The coyote gal didn't even bother to make eye contact. A soft white glow illuminated her face, Maylene's muzzle shoved against a computer screen.

"You're taking this whole turn of events, I don't know," his tail whirled about in circles, "awfully well. Does someone more than doubling in height just not register to you or something?"

"Creationeer has been on the market for years yet you go and break it in a way that's just... impressive. Like it's nothing." She kicked her legs back and forth, her fuzzy tan calfs bouncing against the table's edge, and smiled up at him. "I should be thanking you! Can't wait to dig into this and figure out how you managed it." Her quota of daily social interaction met, she turned her attention back towards her own computer. "Makes my day that much more exciting."

"You're welcome," he wryly remarked, tone dripping with sarcasm.

A loud, and oddly convenient, sputtering caught both furs' attention. Unsurprisingly, another self-driving forklift had crapped out. No amount of maintenance or hand holding on the technologically talented coyote's end could keep those things running for more than a couple hours at a time. "Shoo, go make yourself useful. Whining isn't going to help me figure this thing out any faster." Head still buried against chest, Maylene's eyes remained glued to the readouts.

"Fiiiiiiiiiiiiine." Plodding over towards the forklift, Hunter bent down and curled his fingers around its cargo, a thick wooden crate. The leathery pads on his fingers dug into its cubic form, causing its sides to creak and bow ever so slightly inward. Splinters of wood brushed harmlessly against his massive digits. "Unwieldy sumabitch," he gasped, awkwardly wrapping his arms around it. "What's in here, anyway?"

With a tap of a finger, Maylene brought up a new window on the flexible piece of glowing plastic held firmly in her grasp. "Fiber optic cables, I think. Drop it off over in the electronics section." A series of thooms rattled the warehouse, every one of Hunter's heavy steps rattling the shelves. The coyote slid off of the mouse's desk and kicked back on the computers lurking beneath it. "There's gotta be some fundamental difference between Hunter's homebrewed instance of Creationeer and the one on the work machine..."

Creationeer synced to local user

Detecting previous instance of program

Initiating remote connection

May watched on intently, curious as to the nature of the commands suddenly populating the monitor on the mouse's desk.

Generation complete

Please package product before moving onto next item in the queue
Moving on to next object in queue

"That'll do it." Hovering the mouse over the list of items in the queue, half the options were greyed out. Most notable of which was the 'Halt' command. 'Force Shutdown' was just as unresponsive. "Hacking away at basic functionality is not exactly what I would call trimming, Hunter." Waves of dense and frigid air washed over her toes without warning. "Uhhh. Hunter?"

Tops of his ears just a few feet short of leveling out with the third story of shelves, Hunter wheezed heavily as he hoisted the crate up. "Little busy right now, remember?"

"Yeahhhh I'll just get to work on fixing that queue." Fingers tapped frantically at the screen, the coyote hurriedly trying to summon the Virtual Interface that handled all of the shipping orders and requests.

"*Huff huff* Ha, don't even know my own strength." Hunter mused. Wait, was that pride he was feeling just now? In having done work? Manual labor even! The feeling wasn't at all unpleasant, foreign as it was and oh goddammit never mind. That was the least of his worries now.

"MAY!" Three stories tall and rising, his nose brushed against the supports holding up the graphene sheets. An entire set of shelving creaked ominously while bearing down painfully on the bridge of his muzzle. "What did you even... THIS ISN'T HELPING." Stumbling back, the titanic mouse bumped back into another graphene structure. "No no no no no I already have enough to put up with." Toes curled, Hunter was more than a little surprised to find he had steadied himself by digging grooves into the floor. Fingers wrapped around the supports, he pulled back on the wobbling shelf and steadied it in place. A fast approaching cloud comprised of equal parts tires, lamps, and greeting cards congratulated him upon a crisis averted. Billowing up in height and thickness, the mega mouse's tree trunk thick legs effortlessly knocked aside the wall of crates and pallets that had been looming overhead moments earlier. "MAY."

Username: CreationeerAdmin

*Password: ******

Which utility would you like to open?

- *Maintenance Operations*
- *Business Operations*
- *Administrative Operations*

“Eeengh!” Bouncing up into the air, Maylene’s wiry fuzzy hands clung tight to her computer. Contact was reestablished with the floor only briefly before she was rendered airborne once more, the vibrations in the cool concrete floor seemingly lifting her airborne as they shot up through her padded soles. “Hunter, would you stand still? I can’t work like this!”

Every one of the mouse’s footfalls reverberated throughout the entire warehouse. “But then I’ll just grow even faster!” Tail wrapped around his waist, Hunter nervously peered over his shoulder. Danger loomed close behind in the form of a veritable wall of growy goodness hot on his trail.

“You’re making a... whatever, I’ll find a way around it.” Property damage wasn’t entirely unexpected at this point she had to concede. He was already having to duck to avoid cracking his head against the rafters. Shit was going to get knocked over one way or another. Hopping off sync to the mouse’s gait, the coyote managed to find her tempo.

- *Business Operations*
 - *Received Shipments*
 - *Outgoing Shipments*

‘Received Shipments’ took on a blue hue after being selected. A dull gray mist temporarily clouded the screen as it loaded to the next page. “Finally.” Constantly populating with new shipments, the warehouse’s Virtual Interface effortlessly handled the thousands of orders that poured in from local businesses on a daily basis. Mom and Pop shops made their orders, suppliers digitized them, May and Hunter zapped those atoms and electrons back into something a bit more recognizable, and then ground crews transported them to the Mom and Pop shops. “Turning off the VI should give us some breathing room,” May mumbled. Or at least it’d render Hunter’s growth finite. Digging through the dropdown menus, she finally found what she was looking for.

“Greetings, authorized administration user.” A loud hum registered from Maylene’s computer. The entire screen went blue, ripples of light traveling along its surface. Congealing at the center, a luminous blue cog hovered above the coyote’s wrist. “How can I help you today?” It politely inquired in a pleasant, albeit monotonous, tone.

“HELP,” Hunter screeched, lapping around Maylene a second time. Coming to a halt before Maylene, the cloud of heavy gaseous matter buzzed with energy, almost as if in frustration. Ever so slowly it snaked away from her, picking up speed while it circled the warehouse opposite the direction Hunter was.

“I’m sorry, but the nature of your inquiry is too vague. Could you be more concise with your request?” The cog twirled in place, patiently waiting for a response.

"I need you to—" a terrified shriek painfully wrung apart her ears. Moments later Hunter bolted past by, having reversed direction. The latest order wrapped around his ankles, forcing the mouse to hunch further and further lest he become intimately acquainted with the ceiling rafters he had been so dutifully counting off earlier today. "—Freeze all incoming orders," the coyote barked.

"Command accepted." The cog's soft blue hues darkened to a lime green. *"For reference purposes, please provide a comment explaining the reason for the shutdown."*

"Uhhhh..." May could only bite her lips in response. Each successive order adopted an increasingly random pattern of movement, darting around the downed shelves without rhyme or reason to throw off the evasive mouse. "No comment."

"Initiating shutdown." Flickering rapidly in succession, the cog fizzled into sparks. Maylene's computer screen faded to white, booting her back to the Admin login page.

"Good news, Hunter!" She proudly barked, her excited tail kicking up a faint breeze.

"What." Laid flat out on the ground, chest to the concrete, the massive mouse could no longer sit or stand within the confines of his workplace. Rendered unable to offer any form of futile resistance, what items remained in the queue took their sweet time sauntering over to his swollen form.

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: Potatoes

WARNING

Template already exists at target designation

Commencing transfer of mass...

"Good news first. Managed to halt all incoming orders, so there actually is an end in sight. Oh, also I—"

Lips curled down into a frown, Hunter snorted derisively. The blast of hot air surging out of his nostrils bowled over the coyote. "Bad news. Now." Body spilling out, Hunter's form took on the properties of a liquid, slowly but surely filling up and taking on the properties of its container. Or maybe it was the other way around. The steel sheet walls bowed out and curved around his shoulders, hips, and toes.

Acquiring template...

Template acquired

Matter Type: Solid

Designation: French Door Set

WARNING

Template already exists at target designation

Commencing transfer of mass...

Climbing atop a nose as large as she was, Maylene flopped onto Hunter's muzzle, narrowly avoiding being trapped between a hard place and a pair of lips. Both furs awkwardly waited out the mutual embarrassment and reddened cheeks that followed before striking back up the conversation. "Right. Bad news." Crawling forward along the bridge of his nose, Maylene's dainty feet pressed into his brow to gain footing. After navigating the furry forest that was the fuzz atop his head, she slid down his back and meandered towards his right arm. "There isn't any more to report, thankfully." Staring down at his wearable computer, she was relieved to see that the Creationeer's queue had finally emptied.

"That's something I guess," he responded with a tired sigh.

"Annnnd back to the good news. I did manage to figure out how you went and broke Creationeer! Care to hear how?" Clawed fingers digging into the back of his neck, Maylene bounded back up onto the top of his head.

"Do I look like I'm going anywhere?"

"Captive audience, huh? I like." Plopping down on her tush, the coyote reclined against one of his rounded ears, giggling at its every twitch. "So turns out your homebrew allows Creationeer to compile mass onto or into different templates. Use Discombobulator to break down a chair? Normally, Creationeer knows to rebuild all those atoms back into a chair and doesn't give you the option to choose otherwise. With your hacked together instance though, you're allowed to reform stored mass into whatever form you wish! Break down a chair with Discombob, build it back up as a desk in Creationeer. Or a soapbox car, your choice." Maylene was unable to rein in the growing smile on her face as she continued. "Even better, with this hack you can actually add mass onto pre-existing templates! Break down whatever with Discombob, use those bits and pieces to make a bigger... something." Her hand patted against the top of his head. "In our case, a bigger you."

"Okay, so we know how my lack of fucks to give landed me in this mess. How does that help me get out of it?" Shifting in place, the walls of the structure creaked ominously around him.

"Easy." May smirked down at her own wearable computer. Hunter's homebrewed instance of Creationeer was just about finished copying to her device. "What we can do is use Discombobulator to scan and digitize all those parts of you that shouldn't be there. We have a list of all the items that were poured into you from the queue after all, so we'll know exactly what quantity and type of atoms to pull out of you to get you back to your normal sullen self."

"This would be the part where I freak out about the danger, implications, and safeguards in place to prevent using Discombob on a living being," Hunter groaned, "buuuuuut I take it you already

found out I killed all the safety features to get it to run locally, didn't you?" Closing his eyes, Hunter exhaled deeply while doing his best to ignore the coyote technician contentedly tapping her feet against his scalp. "Anyway, you were saying."

"So normally Creationeer would know that mass all came outta you and would want to put it back there. With your little hack job though, we can just transfer it somewhere else and get you back down to size. I would suggest we dump it all back into the quantum computers it all came from," she trailed off knowingly.

"They're somewhere under my thighs," the mouse rattled off.

"In how many pieces?"

"Don't ask."

"Right, so we'll need to dump all that bigness into something," or someone, she mentally noted, "else for now."

"Works for me." Nice as it was to shrug off work, getting back into the normal pace of things would be—wait. Wait. Was he actually thinking such a thought? Was he actually content, no even worse, *happy* to get back to work? The very concept was anathema to him. How could this happen? How could this be?

"Ready whenever then?" Maylene checked and double checked that all of the items from the queue following Hunter's growth had been accounted for and loaded into Discombob. She struggled to keep her arm steady, her own computer, along with the couple of others littered on and under Hunter's person, barely able to handle the strain.

"Yeah, fire away." Starting up at the top of his head, a soft green glow spread over and came to cover the rest of his body. Horizontal and vertical white lines traced across his body, separating his body into lattices of green rows. Buck teeth bit into the concrete, his tattooed circuitry crackling painfully. A feeling of relief accompanied the pain however, much to Hunter's delight his body was no longer contorting the sides of the warehouse into his own image. He fit inside it now, if only barely. Soon his ears weren't brushing against the rafters. Hell, he could even wiggle around a bit now! There was the matter of that growing weight on his back but ehh, that was probably just his spine complaining from being cramped up motionless in one spot for so long.

"By the by," a suspiciously large coyote muzzle nibbled at his ear. "Think I might have found a new pet project. Just saying."

"Oh no," Hunter mumbled. He briefly mulled over whether or not to turn his head back and confirm his suspicions. A fairly large set of growyote feet sliding by his face decided to go ahead and annihilate any uncertainties for him. "Thought as much," he winced as he found himself protectively mooshed between two plushy soft soles.

"It's not work if you enjoy it, Hunter," Maylene cooed. "Remember?" Sniggering, Maylene's head burst out through the ceiling, eagerly taking in the new view. "Er...I can fix that."