

## **Flash Fiction Inspired by *Neuromancer***

By Conner Roy

### **Night City**

The job was simple. A delivery. Briefcase, uptown to downtown. Take it to the Dojimas, and keep it away from Kuzuris. Yak business. The courier never learned Yak politics. Every job was a new name, a new affair that he flushed down with bourbon at the bar. It was better not to get involved. More business that way.

Of course it was raining. The streets were a painting of the neon gothic, a street decorated with damned souls. It was hard to blend in at this part of the city. Nobody ever walked with purpose around here. A man with a briefcase, going straight from point A to point B, no matter how he tried to stumble, tried to act or drunk or tired or confused, was gonna stick out like a sore thumb. He had a briefcase. Business.

“Experimental smart-combat gear,” they told him. “It’s like an exoskeleton. Can make a killer out of anyone.” The courier was never one for computers. He wasn’t born for it, even a field was enough to send his heart racing, and even a paper-thin sheet of ice could get him dangerously close to a flatline. He had to stick to the physical. He didn’t understand the armor, but he trusted it. Makes for one heavy briefcase, though.

“Use it if you have to. As long as it gets to the Dojimas.” The courier hoped he wouldn’t have to. He hoped it would be simple, no blood, no chase. But he was cornered in the alleyway. Two Yaks on each end of the dark, damp passageway. All of them armed. So he opened up the suit, felt the thin strips of metal wrap around each of his limbs, twirl around his torso. It wasn’t

armor, it left most of him exposed, and the metal enveloping his body was no more than a centimeter thick.

The courier prayed to no god in particular, and reached for his gun. He felt the metal bend, poke and prod at his nerves, handling his flesh with surgical precision as it aimed and fired. Two shots. Two begin to fall. The metal swung him to the side, he felt the air from a bullet nearly brushing his arm. He takes another shot, and he's pulled in the other direction like a human pinball, feeling the air brush by his head as he tilts to the side. The last shot rings throughout the alley, and all four bodies seem to fall at once.

He stands in the alley, dazed like a frightened animal. His heart slows down, and the metal returns to its steel-lined, faux-leather shell. The courier never liked to get involved in Yak politics, but he had a feeling he wouldn't be working with the Dojima's rivals for much longer.

## The Sprawl

In an abandoned nightclub deep in the Sprawl, the Panther Moderns assemble. An emergency meeting, called by Lupus early that morning. They stand in an amorphous circle, their minds thoroughly programmed against order and cleanliness. The neon is dead; warehouse lights shroud the room with an oppressive sterile white.

Lupus speaks. “I’m cuttin’ right to it, no bullshit. Sense/Net sent a rat after us. And we’re not leaving this nightclub until this game of spot-the-cop is over.”

The Panthers look each other over, each of their eyes suggesting youthful paranoia, each putting on their own performance to skirt around suspicion. *These fuckin’ idiots, making this cop’s job so god damned easy*, Lupus thought. “Let’s start with a question, then. What did we do to get this much heat in the first place?”

There were five of them, and they each answered when Lupus pointed to them.

“Caused a little ‘altercation’ at our sacred Sense/Net,” a red-haired kid answered with the perfect amount of irony. Likely safe.

“Fuckin’ nothing. We didn’t pull a single trigger!” joked a Panther with green hair. There was a faint spell of laughter before the crowd was silenced by Lupus. A smart answer. Maybe a little too smart.

“We were just teaching them a little lesson.” This panther had more implants, more prosthetics than any of them could count. They called him Dion. And his answer was terribly incorrect.

Five sets of eyes looked upon Dion; the four boys and their leader Lupus, a meaningless pantheon, a lawless jury.

“Lesson? I didn’t know that Panthers taught lessons,” said Lupus.

“You know what I meant, Lupus. I know we ain’t teachers or anything, I meant ‘lesson’ like, y’know, pullin’ their heads out of their asses for once, sticking it to ‘em, y’know?” Dion’s voice was pleading, but his eyes were empty.

“We want their heads in their ass, it’s funnier that way,” said the red-haired one. Lupus silenced him.

“You know what we’re really about, ‘Dion’?” Lupus stepped towards his suspect.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he sounded intimidated, but he stood his ground.

There was a bang.

A door was kicked open.

Another bang, another door.

The Panthers reached into their pockets, and each put in sets of earplugs. Dion didn’t move.

The red-haired Panther reached up to his ear, and a bullet entered his chest, blood staining his jacket, the same color as his dirty hair. He fell to the ground as he pinched down on his earlobe, clicking a prosthetic button. It was wired to the nightclub speakers.

The speakers let out a noise that sounded like the ground itself splitting open. The Sense/Net agents, flooding into the room through the two open doors, put their hands against their ears and writhed on the floor. Dion did the same, splashing around in the blood of the dead Panther that lay next to him.

Lupus looked at his Panther Moderns, nodding to them before walking with confidence through the backstage exit. The Panthers giggled as they left, but nobody heard. As they walked out into the abandoned Sprawl city block, they tore through a strip of caution tape reading “WARNING: BUILDING MARKED FOR DEMOLITION”.

They didn’t pull a single trigger.

## Freeseide

Mr. Taylor was locked up in an Intercontinental Resort suite in the heart of Freeseide, counting a bag of cold paper cash. Mr. Taylor was always a high roller, but never *this* high. He never thought his gambling, his charisma, his dedication to the high life would ever get him off of Earth's surface, despite his gilded bloodline. The course seemed natural, however; he was blacklisted from every casino worth a damn in the Sprawl, and his family still owed a considerable debt to the Yaks, so no Night City for him; where else did he have to go?

He noticed he was being followed to his hotel after collecting his earnings from the Paradise Resort. That's when he realized that he'd made a mistake. He wasn't sure what mistake he'd made, but Mafia heat was not to be taken lightly. So he picked up the pace, tried to lose them in a Rue Jules Verne tourist crowd, and carried himself to this room, where he stayed crouched in front of a pile of money, a Tessier-Ashpool pistol resting on the floor next to him.

There was a knock on the door.

They found him.

Mr. Taylor picked up his gun and headed towards the door. Looking through the peephole, he saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with greased-back black hair. Mafia, without a doubt. He put the barrel of his pistol against the door, and cracked it open to speak to the man.

"Who are you? What do you want?" There was terror in his voice.

"You should put down the gun, Mr. Taylor. If you were rolling clean, you wouldn't have needed one in the first place," answered the mafia man.

Mr. Taylor swung the gun around, pointing it at the windows towards the other side of the room. There was only darkness.

The man behind the door took advantage of his fear and kicked the door all the way open, knocking Mr. Taylor to his feet. Mr. Taylor shot blindly into the air, putting two holes in the roof before the mafia man pulled out a gun of his own, and put one right between the high roller's eyes.

Silence. The mafia man searches the corpse's coat, checks the pockets, rifles through his luggage. Frustrated, he clicked his tongue and spoke into a microphone implant.

"I didn't find shit on him," he says. "He was clean. Killed him for nothing...yes, of course I'll still bring our money back. Send a cleanup guy to Room 475, I'll be back at the bar in a few."

## **Cyberspace**

It began as a lone wanderer, a solitary life on a digital shore. Soon, it was a tribe, traveling together to find the rations that wash up on the shore, collecting sticks for a campfire, where they would gather around and tell stories of the lives they had before they washed up. Amnesia plagued all of them. Every story was roughly the same.

“I felt I was being chased near the arcade, and then suddenly I was here.”

“I was hang-gliding in Freeside, and then I woke up here.”

“Was making a deal by the coffin-house, heard a bang and now I’m here.”

The stories multiplied, and soon a forest was razed with stone axes to make room for a small village, mud and tree-branch shelters with crude thatched roofs. They decided to build a town hall, their largest project yet, to gather around to tell their stories. This was where the first death happened: Jack Ray’s foot slipped while patting dried leaves down into the muddy roof. He hit his head on a rock on the ground, spraying blood against the dirt.

Jack Ray woke up ten minutes later with a splitting head-ache and bloodstains on his only set of clothes.

In a new world where death had no meaning, violence grew exponentially. Arguments became duels, games became hunts, and the village prankster would be charged with multiple counts of first degree murder in any other world. As violence grew, so did the population. Artisans, scientists, and architects washed up on shore and modernized their village, expanded it, and increased its infrastructure. Soon, the “village feud” became the “forever war”. Bombs hurled across the island, a toppling skyscraper was a weekly occurrence. Destruction to property meant much more than the destruction of life. In that way, it wasn’t too different from the old world.



The old town hall, which had since become the lecture hall, then the concert hall, and now the stadium, was left unused for many moons; the war effort was simply too important. Except for one day, when a great philosopher called the entire island to the concert hall; couriers crossed enemy lines to deliver the invitations, most were gunned down at least 10 times before reaching the city for their invitations to be collected.

The philosopher claimed to have discovered the truth of where they were, of what they lived in, and the entire village found their way to the stadium on a ceasefire day to learn. He told them the truth, the *real* truth. Neuromancer. The constructs. The history. He told them that they were no more than a computer simulation, an updated version of Conway's Game of Life, that they weren't real, they had no meaning to any world except for this one. And they all laughed, went home, and went right back to war the next day.

They knew the truth. But what could they do to change it?