

The Nexus

By:

Rachael Harbourne

OVER BLACK:

The sound of a typewriter is heard as the word CHICAGO is slowly typed out, followed by the numbers 2138.

The text cursor blinks on the screen for a few seconds before the sound of a *click* sharply cuts to a blinding white screen.

The white screen glows intensely bright as a high pitched ringing echoes in the background. It increases the brighter the screen gets.

Just as the light becomes blinding, it begins to fade out and the sounds of a bustling city can be heard, muffling the high pitched ringing as the sounds of honking horns and speeding cars gets louder.

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

There are a mixture of different vehicles zooming through the city. Some drive along the streets and others fly through the air.

Skyscrapers loom above the city, some towering high enough to reach through the clouds. Many of the buildings stand at gravity-defying angles while others twist into the sky, spirals of sparkling glass and aluminum glinting in the sunlight.

A few of the buildings are made with kinetic glass or "living glass" that helps to regulate the carbon dioxide riddled air.

These buildings expand and contract as they work, and appear to be breathing.

EXT. MILLENNIUM PARK - DAY

Alex, 17, is waiting at a crosswalk. He pushes the "Push-to-Walk" button. A blue light flashes and an automated voice of a woman projects through the speaker imbedded in the button.

AUTOMATED VOICE

(gently)

Thank you for choosing to walk safely. You will be able to walk in 2 minutes.

(CONTINUED)

He sighs and runs his hand through his hair. His foot taps impatiently against the concrete. Alex looks down to see that his shoe lace is untied.

ALEX
(grunting)
Stupid vintage shoes.

He bends down to tie them in a sloppy bow. Standing back up, he smoothes out the wrinkles of his faded maroon t-shirt and pulls up his dark blue jeans. As he does, one of the belt loops snaps off.

Alex sighs again as he adjusts the strap of his brown leather messenger bag more securely on his shoulder.

Cars whoosh past, swerving in and out of traffic as horns blare and tires squeal against the road. People drive erratically, all laws of traffic long since forgotten.

Alex looks up at the transparent roads above him. Blue lights flicker along the edge. Only government officials are allowed to use those roads.

Higher above the roads, hover cars dot the sky, whooshing in and out of the multi-million dollar SkyLine apartments and weaving around buildings.

Jumbotrons float across the sky, ads and commercials playing across the screens.

Alex turns back to the button and persistently jabs his thumb into it. The blue light flashes repeatedly as the automated voice tries to repeat the message to him but is constantly interrupting herself each time the button is pushed.

Another voice is heard over the rush of traffic and the automated message.

Noah, 17, jogs over to the crosswalk, waving his arm to catch Alex's attention. His shaggy blonde hair bounces across his forehead. His white and blue haptic suit glitters as he moves.

NOAH

Hey Alex!

Alex barely glances up as Noah stops next to him and adjusts his backpack.

ALEX

(mumbling)

Hey Noah.

NOAH

What are you do-?

Noah notices Alex still jabbing his thumb into the button. He's pushing it so fast now that the blue light looks like a strobe from a nightclub and the automated voice is just a jumble of sounds.

NOAH

Whoa dude chill! You're gonna break the damn thing.

ALEX

I've been waiting here for longer than two minutes. This thing is a piece of junk!

Suddenly, a shrill screech reverberates from the speaker and a spark shoots from the button. Alex jerks back, clutching his thumb to his chest.

AUTOMATED VOICE

(incensed)

STOP IT!

The two boys stare at the button in shock.

AUTOMATED VOICE

(calmly)

Thank you for waiting. You may now safely cross. Enjoy your day!

They stand there for a second before Noah grabs Alex's arm and pulls him towards the crosswalk.

Alex stares down at his thumb, a little red welt forming at the tip where the button shocked him.

(CONTINUED)

As they begin to cross the street, the automated voice speaks again.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Jerk.

Alex whips around and his mouth falls open in shock. Noah pulls him back around as they cross the intersection.

ALEX

Th-the machine it... it called me
a-

NOAH

Yeah yeah cmon keep walking or
it'll probably shock you again.

The boys reach the other side of the street and look back at the machine. Noah smirks as he looks at Alex.

NOAH

You know, I've never heard of
someone making an AI mad. They must
really not like you.

ALEX

Oh shut up.

Alex rolls his eyes at Noah and begins to walk towards The Cloud Gate sculpture, "The Bean". Noah stands still for a moment as he looks back at the machine and chuckles. He jogs to catch up with Alex, who's almost to the sculpture.

NOAH

She freakin shocked you too! I
didn't even know they could do
that. That's hilarious!

ALEX

Yeah I know I was there. And it
wasn't funny.

(mumbling)

It really hurt...

Alex and Noah stop and look at each other. After a second, they both bust out laughing and continue walking towards The Bean.

EXT. THE BEAN - DAY

People hurry along the sidewalk in every direction. Many were gathered around The Bean, waiting to enter the portals. Every second, people emerged from hidden doors in the sculpture with a flash of blue light.

Alex and Noah push through the crowd of people and stand in one of the shorter lines.

Alex turns towards Noah and stares at his suit. He pinches a piece of the fabric between his fingers, feeling the material.

ALEX

Is this the new 1400 Ultra Speck
High Intensity Body Simulation
suit??

NOAH

(proudly)

Mmmhmm.

ALEX

But I thought it wasn't supposed to
come out for another 2 weeks!

NOAH

Nah they decided to push the
release date up. All 10,000 units
have already been sold out too!

ALEX

You're kidding.

(skeptical)

Wait... how'd you get one?

NOAH

(smirking)

I have my ways.

Alex raises one of his eyebrows at Noah. Noah sighs.

NOAH

My dad got a promotion and the new
suits were included as a publicity
stunt. They had us pose for

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NOAH (cont'd)
pictures this morning.
(glancing up)
Yeah see? There I am.

Noah points up at the Jumbotron slowly drifting towards them. Alex raises his hand and flicks his fingers in an upward gesture towards the screen. The sound of the ad booms out of the speakers, but only Alex and Noah are able to hear it.

JUMBOTRON

The 1400 Ultra Speck High Intensity Body Simulation suit is the newest addition to the Xio Industries Simulation Module. Players will now have full access to controlling their favorite gaming character's movements, emotions, and speech patterns.

Images of gamers in the Simulation Suit fade across the screen. Some are standing still with their wrap-around visors secure across their eyes.

Others are posed in action shots, fighting, jumping, running. Some appear to be sitting in midair, the vehicles in their games invisible to the rest of the world.

NOAH
(excitedly)
Look! There I am!

Noah points up as an image of him and his family appear on the screen. They are huddled together in a circle, back to back, their hands clasped around invisible handguns and rifles.

The image fades out and is replaced with SETH RIDLEY, mid-20's. He's the president of Xio Industries. He stands with his arms crossed in front of his chest, smiling down at them. He's wearing a grey pinstriped suit with a red tie.

JUMBOTRON

Thanks to Seth Ridley, it's now easier than ever to become someone entirely new.

The screen fades to black as the Xio Industries logo appears.

JUMBOTRON

Xio Industries: Where virtual
reality can become your new
reality.

Noah flicks his fingers down, shutting off the speakers before turning back to Alex. The Jumbotron floats away.

NOAH

I'm famous now!

ALEX

Hey maybe girls will finally talk
to you!

NOAH

Oh ha ha ha you're SO funny.

Noah shoves Alex and the boys laugh as they reach the front of the line.

ALEX

Ladies first.

Noah chuckles as he steps up to The Bean. The curve of the reflective metal distorts their bodies. Noah fixes his hair and checks to see if he has anything in his teeth.

ALEX

Oh my god you look fine! Will you
just hurry up before I psyche
myself out?

Noah looks at Alex in the reflection of The Bean as he continues to fix his hair.

NOAH

You still haven't gotten used to
it, have you? Don't you think
you're a little too old to still be
scared of it?

ALEX

I'm not scared of it. It just gives me the hibbie jeebies...

(shivers)

I don't think I'll ever get used to the feeling.

Noah places his palm flat on the metal surface. It softly hums as the light of a scanner moves up and down his hand. A small indentation in the metal forms with a soft click and slides open. Blackness fills the open space.

Noah turns around and smirks at Alex.

NOAH

Well get used to it cupcake. This is reality.

Noah punches Alex on the shoulder and winks before he steps through the opening. A flash of blue light appears as Noah disappears.

The door quickly slides shut and the holographic image of a handprint appears on the metal. Alex takes a deep breath and places his hand against it. After a few seconds, the door whooshes back open and Alex stares into the blackness.

Alex turns around to look at the person behind him, trying to stall.

ALEX

Pretty cool huh? You ever wonder how it works?

(beat)

I've *been* wondering about it for a while.

Alex nervously laughs as the man glares at him. He lifts up his wrist to check his watch, but doesn't even bother glancing down at it. He continues to stare at Alex, who awkwardly laughs again before turning back around.

Alex wrings his hands together as he takes a step towards the opening. Hesitating, he turns back towards the man, opening his mouth to make another joke, but he's pushed in before he can.

(CONTINUED)

Alex shriekes as a blue light envelopes him and he disappears through the door.

INT. THE NEXUS - DAY

Alex lands face first onto the floor as the door behind him clicks shut. The Nexus goes quiet as everyone stops and stares at Alex. After a few seconds, the clamor of voices picks up again and people continue to move about their business.

Various shops line the circular room. Some of the shops are clothing stores, some sell food, others are car rental services.

The majority of the stores sell and fix electronics or virtual reality upgrades and apparel.

In the center of the room hovers a giant holographic image of the world, slowly spinning clockwise. People stand around it, grabbing the hologram and pulling down to look at their own mini version of the world.

They flick their hands back and forth or zoom in and out on the holograph as they look for their next destination.

Alex places his hands under him, groaning as he pushes himself off the floor. Noah runs over and tries to help him up.

NOAH

You okay?

ALEX

(grunting)

Yeah, I'm fine.

NOAH

What happened? Did you forget how to walk or somethin'?

Alex shoots Noah an irritated look. He brushes his hands down his shirt, and bends to grab his messenger bag off the floor.

Hoisting it onto his shoulder, Alex and Noah start walking towards Vision Vistas, a visor repair and enhancement shop.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

No. Some *asshole* pushed me through.

NOAH

You were trying to tell jokes again weren't you?

ALEX

(defensively)

No.

Noah turns to look at Alex, unconvinced.

ALEX

Maybe... Look, it's not my fault! I just need a little time to gather my thoughts. Since when is that a crime?

NOAH

(chuckling)

It's not.

ALEX

Exactly. People are so impatient now. No one has a sense of humor.

NOAH

Or maybe... no one else is scared of the portals.

ALEX

I'm not scare-

Noah stops walking and turns to stare at Alex.

NOAH

(interrupting)

Oh really? Then what would you call that little girl scream everyone heard?

Alex rolls his eyes and pushes past him.

ALEX

Screw you.

Noah catches up to Alex and slings his arm around his neck,

(CONTINUED)

pulling his head in to give him a noogie. Noah laughs as Alex tries to squirm out of his grasp.

INT. VISION VISTAS - DAY

Alex and Noah stroll through the entrance to the shop and head to the back.

A MAN, mid-30s, sits behind the counter with his face propped in his hand, softly snoring. A line of drool drips from his own mouth and onto the shiny white counter.

Noah looks at Alex and puts a finger to his lips. He quietly climbs over the counter and positions himself behind the man's right ear.

He looks up at Alex, trying not to laugh, and holds up three fingers. He silently counts down, mouthing the numbers, and as he reaches one, yells into the man's ear.

NOAH
RISE AND SHINE JIM-BO!

JIM jerks awake. His elbow slips and his forehead slams into the countertop.

Alex and Noah laugh hysterically. Noah places his hand on the counter and jumps back over to stand with Alex.

The boys double over, laughing harder than before as Jim looks up at them. He reaches up to touch his forehead, which is now partially indented.

Jim glares at Noah. Noah sighs, wiping the tears away from his eyes, still chuckling.

NOAH
Man for all the crap they do to
AI's now, you think they'd be able
to give you a harder head.

Noah leans forward and raps his knuckles against Jim's head. A metal clanking rings out.

JIM
This will take me weeks to get
fixed Noah. Remember the last time
you pulled a prank on me? I was

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JIM (cont'd)
walking around without an arm for a
month!

NOAH
Nah you'll be fine Jimmy Boy, don't
stress.

JIM
Noah I swear-

ALEX
It's alright Jim I can fix it. I'll
bring my tools tomorrow.

JIM
(pointing)
You see? I like this kid. He's
nice. He's respectful. You're-

NOAH
(interrupting)
The light of your life and only
customer. I mean best customer.

Noah gives a big smile. Jim sighs and dismissively wags his
hand.

JIM
What do you want Noah?

NOAH
Could you upgrade Alex's visor to
the new VR 1400 system? His new
suit will be pointless without the
upgrade.

ALEX
(confused)
Uhhh Noah? What are you talking
about? I don't have a new suit...

Alex glances at Jim, who is equally as confused. Noah slings
his backpack off and yanks open the zipper. He pulls out
metal canister and tosses it to Alex.

NOAH
(smirking)
You do now.

Alex barely catches the canister and spins it around in his hands. The Xio Industries logo is imprinted in the metal. He looks up at Noah.

ALEX
You didn't.

NOAH
I did.

ALEX
No way! You're shitting me.

NOAH
(gasping)
I would never.

He takes a step back, placing his hand on his chest in mock disgust.

Alex stares back down at the canister. He rubs his thumb across the logo. They stand in silence for a few seconds.

Jim clears his throat and Alex looks up at him.

JIM
Soooo you wanna give me your visor
so I can start the upgrade?

ALEX
Oh shoot yeah. Here.

Alex rummages around in his messenger bag with his free hand. He pulls out the visor and tosses it to Jim, who takes it into the back room.

ALEX
(calling after him)
Thanks Jimmy!

Alex looks back down at the canister.

NOAH

Are you just gonna stare at the can
all day or are you gonna open the
damn thing?

Alex laughs and quickly unscrews the top. He dumps the can
upside down and the suit slides out.

Alex tosses the canister back to Noah and unfurls the suit.
It rolls out, glimmering in the florescent light of the
shop.

ALEX

Holy cow... How did you...

NOAH

It's not important.
(winking)
Just think of it as an early
birthday present.

ALEX

Thanks Noah... This is incredible.
I can't wait to try it out.

NOAH

Just don't let your mom
accidentally wash this one too.
This suit will 100% blow up the
washer rather than just catch it on
fire.

ALEX

Oh god don't remind me.

Alex and Noah laugh.

INT. THE NEXUS - NIGHT

An hour later, Alex and Noah emerge from Vision Vistas. Alex
puts his visor back in his bag and glances at his watch.

ALEX

Damn I didn't know we were in there
for that long. I gotta go, my mom's
gonna kill me if I'm not home
before dinner.

(CONTINUED)

(sighing)
Which is in 5 minutes.

NOAH
You wanna play tonight?

ALEX
Yeah totally. 8 o'clock?

NOAH
Sounds good.

Alex runs over to the holographic world. He looks back at Noah over his shoulder.

ALEX
Thanks again!

Noah waves his arm in acknowledgment and strolls off into another store.

Alex quickly pulls down the image of the world. He taps on North America, and then Illinois, and scrolls through the list of cities. He finds Galesburg and taps on the name. He inputs his address into the empty box and hits enter.

Words appear in front of him as a voice plays out the message.

AUTOMATED VOICE
Would you like to travel to 1476 N
Prairie St., Galesburg, IL for 20
Netcoin?

ALEX
Yes yes yes hurry up.

He taps the confirm button and a door whooshes open to his right. He flicks the world back to the original holograph and races towards the opening.

He flings himself through as another flash of blue light engulfs him.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Alex stumbles forward as the portal spits him out on his front lawn. He runs to the front door and flings it open.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Alex's MOM is leaning against the doorway of the kitchen, arms crossed, tapping her foot against the wooden floor.

MOM

You're late Alex.

Alex kicks the door shut as he walks through the living room to get to the kitchen.

ALEX

I know I'm sorry. Noah and I lost track of time with Jimmy. He got me that new suit and Jimmy had to upgra-

MOM

(interrupting)

You can tell me all about it later. But dinner's already getting cold. Go quickly put your things away please.

Alex runs upstairs, his feet pounding against the wooden steps.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex slings his bag off his shoulder and takes out the canister. He lets the bag fall at the foot of his bed.

Alex unscrews the canister and sets it aside. He lays the suit against his bed, smoothing out the wrinkles. He stares at it for a few seconds.

MOM

(distant)

Alex!

ALEX

Coming!

Alex takes one last glance before racing downstairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Alex shuts his bedroom door as he walks in. He quickly pulls on the Simulation suit and admires it in the mirror.

He runs his fingers along the smooth material. The metallic nerve wires lining the suit makes it glitter as Alex moves.

Alex grabs his visor out of his bag and places it over his eyes. He gently pushes the sides to his temple, securing it to himself as the thin metal pins attach to the nerves in his temples.

He blinks twice, and the visor comes to life.

INT. THE VIRTUAL NEXUS - NIGHT

A blue light fills the visor. Alex stands in the middle of The Nexus. Instead of a holographic image of the world, an entire galaxy sits suspended in the middle of the room. The galaxy holds thousands of worlds that host different games that Players can jump to at any time.

A mirror hovers down in front of him so he can adjust his features. Alex runs his hands through his hair.

In The Virtual Nexus, the visor disappears, so everyone looks normal.

Alex flicks his wrist and the mirror zooms away. He looks around for Noah. He spots him in Bloodbath and Beyond, the customizable weapons store. He waves his arms.

ALEX

Noah!

Noah glances over and motions for Alex to come to him. Alex jogs over.

INT. BLOODBATH AND BEYOND - NIGHT

Noah is looking at a gun in the display case in the center of the room. He presses his hands to the glass case and the MANAGER glares at him.

(CONTINUED)

MANAGER

Hey! Paws off the case or you're out!

Noah quickly removes his hands, holding them above his head. The manager glares at him for a second longer before turning to a customer.

Noah drops his hands and turns back to the case.

ALEX

Is that-

ALEX NOAH

Jorge's Chaingun.

NOAH

The biggest, most badass gun in all of Halo 5... I can't believe they finally released it.

ALEX

How much do you think that thing costs?

NOAH

(scoffs)

I don't even wanna think about. Come on let's go, I can't look at this thing anymore.

INT. THE VIRTUAL NEXUS - NIGHT

NOAH

Oh hey! You've got the suit on right? Let's try it out!

ALEX

What do you mean try it- OW! What the hell Noah!

NOAH

(laughing)

Isn't it great! You can feel *everything*.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

I mean, yeah I guess so. But why'd you have to punch me so freakin hard for?

NOAH

Cause that's the name of the game remember?

Noah hopped back and forth on the balls of his feet in front of Alex, his fists raised in a boxing stance. He fakes a punch and Alex flinches.

NOAH

"Where virtual reality can become your-"

Noah cuts himself off mid-sentence and stands up straight. His hands fall from his face and his arms hang limply at his sides.

ALEX

What's wrong? Is it the manager again?

Alex turns around, but no one has come out of the store. He nervously laughs and punches Noah in the arm. Noah doesn't react, but he slowly turns his head towards Alex.

NOAH

(monotone)

It's time Alex.

ALEX

Ummm... time for what Noah?

Noah doesn't say anything. He continues to stare at Alex.

ALEX

Okay Noah that's enough. I admit it. You're funnier than me ha ha. Now cut the crap.

Noah still doesn't say anything.

Alex looks around and notices that a few more people across the room are acting the same way Noah is. A few people try to shake the other's out of their stupor, but nothing will

(CONTINUED)

work.

Alex tries to move towards one of the "normal" people, but his feet won't move. He tries to yank his leg forward, but no matter what he does, they won't move.

Suddenly, Alex arches his back and cries out in pain. The metallic nerve wires in his suit glow bright blue. After a second, they shut off and he lets out a breath.

He looks up at Noah and waves a hand in front of his face. Alex lets his hand fall as he notices Noah's eyes. They are bright blue.

Freaking out, Alex reaches up to pull his visor off. He pulls as hard as he can, but it won't come off. He cries out in pain as the metal pins in his temple burn him. Alex blinks twice.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex's room comes back into view. It's coated in a blue sheen as he looks around through his visor.

Alex tries again to pull the visor off, but he can't. He calls out for his mom, but no sound come out of his mouth.

Alex blinks twice again.

INT. THE VIRTUAL NEXUS - NIGHT

Alex is still stuck in the same place. He looks up at Noah.

ALEX

Noah... What's going on? If you're
trying to play me right now, you
better cut it out. This isn't fu-

Alex cries out in pain again as his suit glows blue. It flickers for a few seconds before burning brighter than before. It burns for another second before the light cuts out.

Alex stand straight up and his arms hang limply at his sides. His eyes glow blue. He blinks and everything goes black.

OVER BLACK:

The deep voice of a MAN reverberates across the screen.

MAN

"Welcome to the Spectre Alex. Your
new reality awaits."