

Cerebrum

By

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Saturday

“Ever dreamed of going back to when life was simpler, easier, more gratifying? To go back and relive those special moments to their fullest. To feel the hug of your grandma, taste your sweat in that championship basketball game, or hear a long-lost voice tell you they love you. At Cerebrum we’ve assembled some of the brightest and most innovative minds in the world and they have discovered how to interact with the human brain in ways never before thought possible. In this immersive experience you can relive those memories all over again down to the smallest detail. Our groundbreaking technology will pinpoint the memory you want to access and replay it for you in virtual reality. You will experience every detail from the conversation you had, the hand you were holding, the kiss you shared; all the way down to the sound of the lawn being mowed down the street and the feeling of the wind in your hair. The Cerebrum Experience will not disappoint you and it will be a moment you will want to relive, again and again.”

The glowing screen faded to black and rolled up into the ceiling as the lights in the conference room came on, making visible all the faces sitting around the white oval table. A man in white pants, white flip flops and a pink and white Hawaiian shirt walked from the back of the room and stood where the screen had just hung. Behind him was a backdrop of glass overlooking the lab floor. From the table the attendees could see men and women in white pants and white shirts milling around the shop floor. Most were sitting in front of computer screens, some were sitting in white recliners with white Cerebrum headsets on, and still others were standing in front of white boards, discussing diagrams and charts drawn in red and black marker.

“Well folks, there you have it, the Cerebrum Experience in full display”, Tom said as the room erupted with applause. “We are doing today what people told us was impossible when Alonzo and I started this project over two decades ago. Everyone told us it was impossible, except for you.” The clapping tapered off, everyone in the room looked around at each other, congratulating each other with nods and smiles. Tom paced quietly for dramatic effect, “You know when Alonzo approached me with this idea, I thought, ‘*Who is this guy and what the hell is he talking about?*’ But I gave him a shot, and then everyone thought we were both crazy,” he glanced at Alonzo sitting at the back of the room, “well, no one thinks were crazy anymore, do they?” A couple people cheered from around the room and applause started to rumble. “What

you just saw was over twenty years of research and development. Millions of dollars, your millions of dollars, spent to achieve the unachievable, and on Thursday the entire world is going to see what the Cerebrum Experience really means.” The applause grew louder, and people started to hoot and holler. “We’ve got shops in Asia, South America, North America, Australia, the United Kingdom, Africa, he looks to the back of the room, “am I missing anybody, oh yeah and for some reason Antarctica. By the end of the week Cerebrum is going to be a household name.” Tom grabbed a glass of Champaign off the bar along the wall and held it up to salute the crowd. Through the door men dressed in tuxedos pushed stainless steel carts full of hors d’oeuvres and alcohol. Everyone stood from their chairs, applause turned to chatter as the crowd began to mingle.

Alonzo weaved through the crowd from the back of the room. Tom who was being bombarded by investors, saw him coming. “And this is the mastermind behind it all. Everyone, this is Alonzo”, Tom held his arm out to Alonzo. The group of well-dressed men started clapping and reaching out to shake his hand.

Alonzo, feeling a little embarrassed, gave them a wave, “Hi. Hey Tom, can I talk to you?”

“Of course. Excuse me, I will be back shortly,” he said, walking through the crowd that parted for them to come through.

“So, Thursday? I thought we still had a few weeks? When we talked about this in our last meeting, we had agreed that we were going to launch mid-September?”, Alonzo said as they walked through the crowd.

“Yeah well plans changed,” Tom said without looking at Alonzo as he shook hands and waived at people as he passed.

“Plans changed?!? Why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

Tom looked at him now, “Calm down, you’re raising your voice”, without breaking his smile.

“Damn right I’m raising my voice, I thought we had weeks until deployment, now we have five days.”

Tom didn't say anything until they had walked out into the hall and shut the door. The closing doors had silenced the crowd. Along the walls were pictures of flowery fields and trees and directly across from the conference room doors was an autographed picture of Tom and Alonzo shaking hands with Jack Nicholson.

Alonzo continued, "It's going to be impossible to deploy by then, we haven't even fully tested..."

"I thought nothing was impossible," Tom said with his charismatic half smile.

"Don't pull that crap with me," Alonzo paced back and forth. He stopped and looked back at Tom who was admiring the Jack Nicholson picture. "I don't understand what happened, we've been working on this for years and now all of the sudden it's a rush to get it out?"

Without looking away from the picture, "It's out of our hands now, word came down from the higher ups," he looked at Alonzo, "deadline got moved up. Sorry I didn't tell you sooner, but everything was decided earlier today."

"Decided by who? And higher ups? This is our company we're in charge."

"It is still our company, but money talks pretty loud and we have some investors that were pretty vocal this morning. They are sick of waiting, but I didn't think this would be a big deal, you said in our meeting last month everything was done, ready to rock and roll."

"I said development was complete, but we haven't finished our testing. We are finding new issues every day, bugs, graphic glitches, you name it. I guarantee that since we've been talking, our quality team has found more than one issue. We are not ready to roll out."

Tom walked up to Alonzo and put his hand on his shoulder, "I have complete faith that you can get this done." Tom gave him a nod, tapped him on the shoulder and walked back to the white double doors. "Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a party to get back to." The chatter from the crowd filled the hall and then was cut off with the snapping shut of the door. Alonzo looked at the picture on the wall of him and Tom smiling, he shook his head and walked down the hall passed the murals of wooded scenery and bright flowers.

He got to an office with smoke glass doors with Alonzo B. Etched across the surface. Inside was a bookshelf along the entire East wall. The wall adjacent to this was covered in

marker board notes and hand drawn sketches of ideas. In the middle of the room was a big desk with three monitors glowing with pictures of his mom and dad, and nieces and nephews. On the other side of the desk was a wall of windows looking down onto the shop floor, which on a Saturday was normally dead, but lately no one was taking any days off.

Alonzo sat at his desk and unlocked his computer. The three screens now filled with lines of code and three-dimensional drawings of the Cerebrum headset. He entered a command and put the headset on. It looked like a white motorcycle helmet that covered the entire head down to the neck. Out of the back of the headset cords draped and connected to his computer. He sat back in his chair as the Cerebrum Experience began.

Sunday

A cell phone rang in the quiet office, Alonzo sat up. The skylight was glowing bright white and the sun from the windows in the shop was piercing to his sleepy eyes. He squinted to help his eyes initially adjust. His bedroom at his house is much more peaceful, but last night he figured with the hour-long drive to and from his house, it would just be easier to sleep on his office couch for the night. He got to his phone just as it stopped ringing. He picked it up, the screen read “1 Missed Call – Jackie”. He tapped the screen and held the phone to his ear.

“Hey, where are you? I might need you to come into the office, something weird has been going on since our last update,” the voice from the phone said.

“Well good morning,” he said.

“Sorry, good morning. How did the meeting with the investors go yesterday?”

“Oh ya know. Lots of schmoozing and drinks, my two favorite things.”

“Not so good then?”

“It was fine, Tom handled most of it, he loves that stuff.”

“You talked to him yet?”

“No, and since it’s not even eight o’clock in the morning yet, I don’t think anyone will hear from him for a few hours. Hey, did you hear they pushed the roll out date up?”

“Yeah, that’s kind of why I’m calling. When could you be here? I have something to show you.”

“Let’s see...two minutes?”

“Oh, good your already here.”

“I don’t remember the last time I left.”

“You need to find a girl.”

“You and me both.”

“Ha, right. So, can you come down to my office?”

“Do you need some coffee?”, he asked.

“Yes. See you in a few,” the call ended. Alonzo dropped the phone into his pocket and grabbed a sweatshirt off the back of his chair.

On the way to the shop floor he stopped by the food court and grabbed two drinks and a breakfast sandwich from Shooters. Alonzo didn't mind living at his office for extended periods of time, he had access to everything he needed here. It was like its own little modern ecosystem, always fulfilling all his basic needs. They even had a merchandise store in case he needed a new outfit. He made his way through the office and out onto the shop floor. The floor consisted of chairs that look like a cross between a recliner and a dentist's chair, each with a Cerebrum headset connected to giant computer towers. On the flip side of each chair was a desk with monitors for programmers to analyze the data they are receiving from the users experience. Jackie was at her desk in the center of the shop floor. On both ends of the shop were walls of windows to let in as much natural light as possible, and on a bright day like today it was hard to recognize the shop was actually inside.

Jackie was standing over a worker in a white lab coat, going over some data. Alonzo approached without saying a word and set a cup of coffee in her hand as she talked without breaking her concentration. He looked around at her set up, her desk was always so organized, it made him jealous. Hanging on her cubical wall were pictures of her and her sister and her sisters' kids. Jackie finished with the younger girl in a lab coat and walked around to her desk to sit down. She pulled up some data on her computer and blew it up to full screen. “Okay, I need you to see something,” she said as she spun around in her chair, Alonzo was still admiring the photos on her wall.

Alonzo pointed to one of the pictures hanging on her wall. “This is cute, where were you guys at?”

Jackie seemed caught off guard by this and it took her a second to shift gears. “Um, that was at the botanical gardens. I went there with my sister and her kids last summer.”

“Cool, did you camp?”

“We rented a cabin.”

“Nice,” he sat down on her other chair and took a sip of his coffee.

“Are you done? Can I show you this?”

“Of course,” he stood back up and walked over to see her screen.

“Last week we rolled out an update and ever since then we’ve been getting some higher than normal brain wave readings. At some points they’re spiking off the chart.”

“So, let’s roll back our system to before the update.”

“I did, the numbers stayed the same,” the look of concern on her face got Alonzo’s attention.

“Did you reboot the servers?”

“Yes.”

“What about the entire system? Can we reboot that?”

“Did that last night. Nothing changed.”

“Alright then. What are the numbers averaging?”

She spun back around to look at the wave chart, “They are about 45 BETAS.”

“And what do they spike to?”

“Depends, some get as high as 120.”

“One hundred and twenty? That’s impossible.”

“Yep.” She started pulling up the code. “The main update was here. We were adjusting the extraction rate of the data from the user’s headset.”

They looked at the code, Alonzo bent over her desk reading the lines on the giant monitor. “You’re sure this was the only code updated?”

“Positive. Anything that is rolled out to production is run through me. And I compare the code to the existing code as a safety precaution. I personally checked all the lines of this update. This is it.”

Alonzo looked up at the server room, thousands of green and red twinkling lights flashed at him through the glass walls. “What about the Machine Learning program? What did that update?”

“It couldn’t have updated anything. We have all the suggested edits sent to our development team for consideration before we roll them out. Then those suggestions are sent to me and my team. Nothing gets sent to production without my approval.”

“If you could, have someone check those logs to see what she’s been building up there. And in the meantime, have any users experienced anything abnormal?”

“No. Without the wave’s going off the chart, I wouldn’t have been able to tell anything was behaving out of the ordinary,” she said, running her fingers through her short brown hair.

“Okay, well keep me posted of anything you hear. I am going to work with Tom and try and get this deployment date moved back.”

She laughed, “Good luck.”

Alonzo walked back through the shop up towards the gym locker rooms, he needed a shower.

Monday

The birds were chirping, the ocean breeze cooled the warm air as the morning turned to afternoon. A man in his early thirties, holds a little girl's hand as they walk along a busy street. The road is the only thing separating them from the ocean. In front of them are the man's wife and son.

This is exactly how I remember it. The man thinks. We were on our second day of vacation and we went whale watching that day. This must be us on our way to the marina. He looks down at his daughter in her yellow sundress as they hold hands, she's skipping as they walk. Oh, Cassie you were so young. He looks ahead at his wife and son walking in front of them, we were all so young. Sarah, you were so beautiful and Brandon, you still thought I was a superhero, you idolized me. Oh no, where did the time go? He feels like he is going to cry, but he doesn't feel the tear running down his cheek. They stop at a crosswalk, It's all so real. The sounds of the cars, and the people passing by. The wind off the ocean. He closes his eyes and takes the moment in with a deep breath. Even the smell of the saltwater and fish, this is unreal.

He feels the small hand pull on him, he opens his eyes, "Let's go daddy," he keeps walking. The stimulation of the moment causes him to become lost in it. The overwhelming feeling of nostalgia, the memories of being young and the life he used to have, he felt completely at peace. He felt the tiny hand slip from his as Cassie kept going across the street. He closed his eyes again not wanting the feeling to end, when he opened them, he realized he was controlling his body, he wasn't just a passenger along for the ride anymore, he was in control. He stood in the middle of the street, looking down at his hands and moving his arms. *I was told I wouldn't be able to do this. I'm going to be able to really re-live the moment. It won't just be a flashback, this is impossible.* He looked toward his family who was across the street already, he raised his arm above his head, "Sarah, wait..." his call was cut off by the sound of tires screeching, he saw the truck at the last second, right before it plowed into him.

His body started to shake and convulse uncontrollably in the white chair. "Help" a guy in a white lab coat yelled as he ran to the man's chair and pulled the headset off. The man's eyes were rolled back, and blood oozed from his ears and nose. People on the floor flocked to help and tried to hold him still as he shook. A shout echoed through the shop, "We need a

paramedic.” From the courtyard, Jackie heard a code blue over the intercom and quickly made her way to the shop. By the time she got there the young people in paramedic button up shirts were performing CPR. Jackie watched in horror for over ten minutes until they finally stopped. From across the group of onlookers, she saw Alonzo. She could see the same look in his eyes that she felt, confusion and fear. From his office Tom watched, standing in full display of his wall of windows. The man was eventually loaded onto a stretcher under a white bed sheet and hauled off. By the time Jackie and Alonzo got to Tom’s office, his team of lawyers were already busy at work.

Tom sat at his big desk with Arti, his main lawyer, sitting next to him. Arti was the worst kind of lawyer you would ever want to go against. He is ruthless, not afraid to lie or bend the rules or extort people, he has become one of Tom’s bests friends over the years, and Alonzo despises that. There is about five other people buzzing around the room, frantically talking into cell phones or writing up documents on their laptops. Alonzo and Jackie sat at Tom’s desk, who was in an abnormally somber mood, he is rarely in any mood beside friendly, “So what happened?” he asked.

Arti cut in with his thick New Jersey accent, “Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to Tom. It was a heart attack. He was prone to heart disease before he ever walked in our doors, the situation was completely out of our control. Our wonderful first response team did everything they possibly could to save him. Besides he signed a waiver when he volunteered for this that we could not be held accountable for any accidents while on our property. Case closed.”

“Not now Arti,” Alonzo said.

“Not now? Not Now! Now is when you *need* me the most. I am your only line of defense between keeping this thing under wraps and complete annihilation. If word got out that this crazy new experimental mind trip machine killed someone, you can kiss this whole thing goodbye.”

Jackie stood up, firmly placing the palms of her hands on the table, “Someone just died while using our product, we can’t just pass the blame on this Arti.”

“Someone just died of natural causes while using your product, it had nothing to do with Cerebrum,” Arti said.

“You don’t know what happened, none of us do. We can’t just assume that it was something unrelated to Cerebrum,” Jackie said.

“But we cannot *assume* that it was because of our product. Don’t start making assumptions you can’t prove. At this point there is no other explanation except heart attack.”

“You are unbelievable,” she said.

“Believe it baby,” he said with a wink.

Jackie looked around the room at Alonzo and Tom, “I can’t deal with him right now, call me when Arti’s gone,” flipping Arti off as she walked away.

“Love you too honey.”

The three sat silently around the giant desk, Tom and Alonzo exchanged looks and Arti flipped through his phone as the team of people continued to mill around Tom’s office.

“So, what now”, Alonzo said.

“What do you mean,” Tom said.

“What are we going to do about this?”

“Well I supposed we let Arti and his team handle it, and we continue to get the product ready for launch,” Tom said.

“Your joking right? You want to still roll out on Thursday, don’t you? We just had a guy die on the shop floor while hooked to the system. That doesn’t concern you at all?” Alonzo stood up and began pacing the floor behind his chair.

“Look, we don’t have anything to worry about. I’m sure it was just a freak accident. I mean, how well do we vet these lab rats before they come in here? He could’ve taken a hot rail before he walked in here. We don’t know. Or he could have some other major health issues.”

“An underlying condition”, Arti said without looking up from his phone.

“Yeah an underlying condition,” Tom repeated, “whatever happened had nothing to do with Cerebrum. It couldn’t have been anything our machine did, that would be impossible.”

Alonzo quit pacing and stood silently, “Right? It couldn’t have been anything Cerebrum did?”
Alonzo stared blankly at the floor, “Zo what’s going on?”

“Yesterday Jackie brought something to my attention, some weird readings from the system. Brain wave activity was acting more erratic, and at some points jumping off the charts. It started about a week ago, but we don’t have any explanation for it.”

Tom’s eyes widened. “Oh, that might have been because of me?”

Alonzo looked at him, he could see him fidgeting, “What do you mean?”

They all sat silently, except now Arti was looking up from his phone. “Tom? What’d you do?”

“I may have given the green light to the AI team to start deploying to production.”

“Green light?” Alonzo asked.

“To have the system start fixing itself.”

“Why?”

Tom became defensive, he stood from his chair. “We spent over a million dollars developing that system, and you never use it. And with the deadline coming up I thought you guys could use a little boost, so I gave the AI team authority to start rolling out the machine learning code into production.”

“Tom, we need to push the roll out date back, we’re not ready,” Alonzo said.

“Out of the question,” Arti said with a scowl.

The three stood in a silent stare down. “So, what are we going to do Tom?” Alonzo asked.

“Arti’s going to clean up the mess from this morning and you and your team need to finalize the product for roll out. We need to start deploying to the shops tomorrow.” Tom’s voice didn’t have its regular commanding tone, he sounded hesitant.

Without saying a word, Alonzo walked out.

Tuesday

Given the circumstances of the day before, it felt like a normal day at Cerebrum. No police showed up to interview anyone, reporters weren't hounding employees as they walked across the Cerebrum campus. There was news coverage of Cerebrum, it was all about the rollout of this mysterious and life changing product. People had been camping out outside the retail shops for days, in hopes of being the first to try it, entire chat room boards had been dedicated to it for months, trying to demystify it. No one knew what Cerebrum was exactly, but most everyone had a theory. Rumors were flying about how it was an altered reality that you could be anything you wanted, or that it was a way to see the world through other people's eyes, but others got it more correct. Cerebrum was giving people the ability to "re-live" moments in their past, by scanning the brain and opening those memories to the Cerebrum system. The system then uses the data passed to it to re-create the memory in virtual reality. The true breakthrough of this product is its ability to pull information from the human brain. Everything that has ever happened to us is stored and never lost, Cerebrum's technology can access that information and bring it to life. Regardless of what people said it was and their inability to come to an accurate conclusion, they all agreed on one thing, they wanted to try it out.

In total there were fifty shops around the world ready to start selling Cerebrum technology. All equipped with chairs for people to test the headsets out before they bought them. They all had the same theme, which followed closely to the Cerebrum campus, white walls, white floors and as much glass as possible. Even the headsets didn't have decals or Cerebrum written on them anywhere. They were just solid white helmets that covered your entire head. White signified clean, fresh, modern; which matched Cerebrum perfectly. The Cerebrum name hadn't had a chance to tarnish itself yet, perhaps that's why the death went unnoticed. Their staff and supporters went to great lengths to ensure that.

Everyone in the office seemed to have forgotten it as well, the food court was buzzing, cheery and friendly. The office had people milling about, working and conducting meetings as usual. The only thing that was different, was Alonzo, he was nowhere to be found. Jackie had been texting him, emailing him, calling him, but he wouldn't answer so finally she went up to his office. Everything was there and in its normal place, except Alonzo. He had missed two meetings earlier in the morning, Tom excused his partners absence with an explanation that he had gotten

sick and went home. Jackie said B.S. In these meetings Tom also explained that all outside testing was going to be halted for the time being, and only Cerebrum employees were going to be allowed on campus. He said this was because of an increase in interest in the product since the announcement of the early rollout, and he didn't want any proprietary information leaking out. Instead of saying B.S to this, Jackie simply walked out of the meeting.

Jackie got to her cubicle, the way everyone was acting like nothing happened made her feel sick to her stomach and Tom's response to the whole thing just made her mad. She tried calling Alonzo again, no answer. In the ten years she had worked here, she couldn't remember a day that that Alonzo wasn't there, he had never missed a day, no sick days, no vacations, nothing. Even when Tom had begged him to go with him to Greece for a seminar, Alonzo didn't go. She was fearful that maybe Arti had set something up, or maybe Alonzo was in trouble. Either way, she needed to take her mind off of things, she entered a command into her computer and put her Cerebrum headset on.

Wednesday

When Jackie got into work the next day, she was instantly irked. There were balloons tied to the front doors, and greeters at the door were handing out care packages, with gift cards, cheese crackers and wine, or beer if that's what you preferred. She got through the chaos of the front door, refusing to take any of the baskets and went straight to Alonzo's office. When she walked through the doors, she was astonished. Arti's lawyers were in his room, ransacking his desk, trying to gain access to his computer, going through all the books on his shelf.

"What the hell are you doing? Where's Zo?"

Arti came around the desk toward her, "Jackie, how are you?"

"We're in," a guy sitting in front of Alonzo's computer said.

Arti looked down at him, "That's great."

"Would you mind telling me what's going on?" she said.

"Your boyfriend went on vacation, and we are just cleaning up around his office for him while he's gone."

"Vacation? What are you talking about?"

"A vacation, you know, hop on a plain go somewhere nice. I guess the stress was too much for him, he just wanted to get away."

"So, you spoke with him?"

"Yeah I talked to him earlier, he's sitting on a beach right now with a drink in his hand."

"He doesn't drink."

"Listen lady, he's gone alright. What else do you want me to say?"

"I just want to know what the hell is going on and cut the shit Arti."

"Okay, you want to know what's going on," he took a few steps toward her to get within a foot of her, he stood about the same height as her. "We have a multibillion-dollar company on

our hands that is being unveiled to the public in less than 24 hours. One of the partners of said company has gone off the deep end and now I've been sent to play clean up."

"Deep end?"

"Our system was hacked yesterday from a computer connected to Alonzo's home network, and shortly after that large amounts of data started mysteriously dropping from our servers. Now I'm no detective but it would seem to me that Alonzo has other plans for our roll out than we do. So, if you have any more questions one of my associates would be more than willing to answer them, but for now I need to get back to work." He turned and the guy sitting at Alonzo's computer started showing him files on Alonzo's computer.

Jackie suddenly felt sick and the room started to spin, she had to get out of there. She pushed her way out of the building through the greeting committee and found a bench. Outside the weather was a perfect late summer morning. The birds were singing and the breeze cooled Jackie's flushed face. She pulled her phone out and texted Alonzo, "Please call me," slid the phone back in her pocket and closed her eyes. After a few minutes her head was no longer spinning, and her stomach was settled. From the bench she looked at Cerebrum with fresh eyes. The two-story building that looked like it was made from nothing but giant slabs of glass, looked beautiful and inviting. People jovially walked around, smiles and laughing, seeming so happy to be at work. This made her feel nauseous again, but after a long while of contemplating what to do, it struck her. She jumped up off the bench and hurried inside.

From his office Tom and his team were finalizing the last few details before tomorrow. His office was decorated with balloons and streamers. Everyone was drinking and eating, it was a celebration. Tom hung his phone up, "There are people lined up for two blocks in Beijing." Everyone clapped and cheered.

Just then an assistant's phone buzzed. "Hey Tom, we're getting some reports of servers going down. Lots of servers." The cheering stopped and Tom set his drink down and pulled up his computer. A diagnostic of the network showed him they were simultaneously losing connection with all the branches. "Send some people to the server room, it looks like the connections are being physically removed. I've lost connection to everything." A few people ran out of the room, while everyone else sat and looked across the shop to the server room. They

watched as people started to struggle in the all glass server room. Moments later Tom's phone rang. "Alright, good. Bring her up here." The room was silent, no one was celebrating anymore, most of the assistants looked nervously at each other until finally the smoke glass doors opened and two guys lead Jackie in.

"Let go", she said as she got a few steps into the office and pulled her hand loose from the big bald guy.

"Jackie, what's going on?" Tom said.

"We can't roll out until we know Cerebrum is absolutely safe to use. That wasn't an accident yesterday and if we roll out tomorrow, we risk the lives of millions of people."

"So, you sabotage our server room?"

"I needed to do something, no one is listening around here. You're all acting like nothing is wrong, the code is flawed, and we can't go live yet. We're not only putting people's lives at risk, but we are risking the whole project. If anyone gets hurt no one will trust us again. It will all be for nothing and I am not taking that risk. This is yours and Alonzo's life work, and we could lose it all. Please listen, we cannot go live tomorrow."

"Jackie, I appreciate your dedication to the Cerebrum project, but it's too late. We are too far invested in this to stop now."

"Then you have just killed Cerebrum, along with how many other innocent people."

A crash broke the tension and the door swung open. There stood Alonzo, with two security guards standing behind him. In his hand was an almost empty bottle of vodka. "Tom you sun of a beech, deed you start the partee without mee?" he spat out his slurred sentence. He was leaning on the door for support and made a lunge for the desk chair. He fell into it and rolled and spun to a stop. "Wow, this chair is sooo soft."

"Alonzo, you alright man?" Tom asked.

"I am sooo good, but not as good as you I bet." He stood up, put his arm around Tom and leaned in, "No one is ever as good as Tom, he'ss juss got it all."

Tom wiped the spit from his cheek, "I can see why you never drink."

Alonzo laughed heartily, "Oh Tom. This is why I love you. You're sooo cool."

"I'm just glad you're okay. We were all a little worried about you. You've never disappeared like that before."

"Disapeeer, I didn't disapeeer. I've ben workink. On something you are gonna love Tom. I created a viruss to bring this whole motha down. Then boom, I uploaded it to our network." He started laughing again.

Tom looked irritated, "You destroyed all of your work? For what? To prove a point?"

"Colm down, I didn't desstroy anything, I ssaved us. Bought uss some time, until we figure out what your computer has been building up there."

Jackie glared at Tom, "I knew you had something to do with this."

"Oh yaa, Tom's been ssneakin around," Alonzo playfully slapped Tom's face and squeezed his cheeks together, Tom pulled his face away. "Tom didn't trusst us, he trusted the computers to do our work. But it doesn't matter now. Since you wouldn't delay the launch, I did." He started to laugh again and took a swig off of his bottle. "Letss Party! Woo!"

In the corner of the room, a programmer was checking the diagnostics of the network, and with his antivirus software he pin-pointed Alonzo's worm and contained it. "I found the virus. It looks like a worm. I quarantined it, and now I'm sanitizing our servers."

"Too late, that baby is probly all the way to China by now," Alonzo said as he sat back in Tom's chair and spun in a circle.

"It looks like, since our servers were ripped offline the worm didn't have a chance to spread to our branch servers," the kid said as he typed away on his laptop.

Alonzo quit spinning, "Say what?"

Tom's face lit, "Well it looks like when Jackie was trying to 'Save the World' she inadvertently stopped your worm from spreading across our network." Jackie hung her head in shame. Tom's phone rang, "Hello...Yeah we are good to go." He hung up and set the phone on the desk. "Our servers are back up." Tom walked over to stand between Jackie and Alonzo and put his arms around them. "I was going to wait for all of us to be together to do this, and here we

are. Team, deploy the final Cerebrum Experience to all the branches.” A few of his assistants got on their phones to give the orders. “You guys shouldn’t be like this; you should be proud. Yeah there will be a couple bugs, but nothing serious. We are about to change the world, come on let’s celebrate.” He grabbed two glasses of Champaign off a tray and held them out to Jackie and Alonzo. Jackie grabbed one and chugged it, and Alonzo ran to the trash can to throw up. “Hey Brad, turn the music back on, let’s party.” Tom walked over to his group of assistants standing by the glass wall overlooking the shop. Everyone on the floor raised their glasses to toast him, and they all shared a drink.

Thursday

The news on that Thursday morning was all focused on the magical Cerebrum Experience. All over the world anyone that could afford it was experiencing their greatest memories all over again. Social media exploded with stories of how they either came out of their experiences in tears, or they couldn't wait to hook back up to the system and do it again. Everyone was hugging their long-lost grandparents or lost children, or they could feel the beauty of their youth again. For a few glorious hours everything was right with the world.

The reports of deaths didn't start coming in until later in the day. The first few were associated with users having heart attacks or strokes from the emotional stimuli, but as the numbers started to pile up, it became clear the deaths were not simply a coincidence.

Alonzo, sat in his office watching the news roll in, and as the death numbers started to climb, he walked over to his office chair. He entered some commands and slid the headset on. Everything was pitch black, then the headset started to illuminate in front of his eyes. The scene faded in. The sun was bright and the dirt under his feet felt soft. He looked down at his short legs and held his little arms out in front of him. He dropped the basketball and ran in through the back door of his childhood house. He could here the T.V. in the living room, it was Oprah. He rounded the corner of the living room and then he saw her. She was as young and beautiful as he had always remembered. He ran and jumped onto the couch. He snuggled up into his moms' arms, her chest was soft and warm. Into his ear she whispered, "I love you".