"Have you ever debugged code in your life?!" Richard found himself shouting as he typed frantically on the outdated keyboard before him. He could hear the crowd gathering on the other side of the curtain and Erlich wasn't making his life any easier.

"Yeah, but I'm not usually debugging code written by a four-year-old with MS," Erlich spat back from the console on the other side of the table. "It's so garbled. Did Big Head write this thing? Was he trying to use his gigantic head to code instead of his fingers?"

"It doesn't matter who wrote the code!" Richard moaned. "What matters is getting this demo up and running so our potential investors can see the compression algorithm working in real-time. And for your information, it was Danesh! Just find the timestamp error and shut up!"

"I'm sorry, who?" Erlich said casually. "What's this name? Danesh? You mean that guy who's dead to me now? Fuck!" He began banging his fists on the keyboard in frustration.

"Stop punching the computer! That machine needs to run the demo!"

"Fuck the demo, man! It's two minutes until show time and we're dead in the water!"

"No, we can fix this," Richard said in a way that said "I wish I had never been born."

"Seriously, this code though," began Erlich with an irritatingly ponderous tone. "Why is this thing so beefy? It's like two million lines and all it does is compress files. What gives?"

Richard was not in the mood for criticisms from the likes of Erlich. He sighed, put his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands. He took a long breath.

"Erlich, you don't get the highest Weissman Score in history by writing five lines of code, okay? It's a bit more complicated than -"

Erlich cut him off. "Oh here it is! Look at me; I'm Richard! I got the highest Weissman Score ever and now Erlich can blow me even though he's just here to help after the dick-hole twins abandoned ship!"

Richard had stopped listening. He was back to scanning the code on his display. "Ah!" He chimed, pointing at his computer screen. "Erlich! This is what you're looking for! VAR NUMS = PPS.RUNTIME 344. It should be somewhere near there."

"Okay! Okay, I got it, but no go. It's still crashing."

"Did you compile?"

"Should I?"

"Compile!"

"Fuck. Fine. Compiling. Take a fucking Xanax, man."

Jared appeared from the other side of the curtain. Richard and Erlich groaned. "Hey guys, just checking to see if maybe that demo was up and running?"

"Fuck you, Jared," Erlich shouted.

"It's not ready, Jared," Richard breathed.

"Oh," said Jared. "It's just that I don't know if you know the time…"

"We know the time, Jared!" Richard seethed.

"We're supposed to be starting now and - "

"Fucking fuck off, Jared!" Erlich screeched. Jared jumped and ran back through the curtain. They could hear him make his apologies to the crowd.

"Still crashing. Fucking call it, man," urged Erlich.

Richard shook his head, frantically typing code as he did so. "We can't let him win, Erlich. He thinks he can buy us, but he can't. We'll show him."

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Gavin Bellson checked his watch. 7:05. Five minutes late. That's a good sign. He closed his eyes and took a long breath through his nose. He had won.

He looked over at the two idiots sitting next to him in their cheap fold-up auditorium seats. They were whispering to one another. They were nervous. More than that: they were shitting themselves. Gavin grinned.

"What's the matter, boys?" He asked them with the smirkiest smirk his face could muster. "Your team running late?"

"No, Mr. Bellson!" Said the brown one immediately. What was his name? Ganesha? That sounded right. The white one who Gavin had heard Ganesha call "Gilroy" or some shit was nodding frantically beside his friend. Both of them were idiots. And cheap.

"Do you know why I hired you two?" he asked, mostly due to boredom.

"So we can help you backwards-engineer Richard Hendrix' compression algorithm?" said the white Gilroy guy. Bellson raised his eyebrows. It was a surprisingly blunt answer from such an idiot.

"No," he said shortly. He didn't want to make it seem as if he had been impressed by the idiot's answer. "Brown guy?"

The brown guy frowned and swallowed his chewing gum. "Uh…" he mumbled after a moment, "to screw Richard before the product launch?"

"Bingo! Brown guy wins," Bellson enthused, waving his right hand in the air in a mimicry of what could be interpreted as masturbation. The white guy seemed surprised.

"You hired us back just so you could ruin this presentation?" he asked like an idiot.

"Of course, you idiot," Bellson growled. "When this shit flops, the value of Pied Piper is gonna hit the toilet and I'll snatch it up and turn it into my pool room."

The white guy had the gall to speak again. "So you're saying you're not interested in the algorithm that produced the highest Weissman score-"

"Let me make one thing clear," Bellson cut in. He wasn't here to make conversation with his own pawns, and this pawn was getting too friendly. He continued. "There will always be a new algorithm or a new app or a new, better, faster something. Every goddamn nerd with a big idea always thinks they were put on this earth to give the world that next big thing. You say Richard Hendrix got the highest Weissman score ever? Great. He can shove his Weissman score up his ass. What he doesn't realize is that in two weeks some other hacker-wannabe-motherfucker is going to beat his precious score and then what will Richard Hendrix have? Yesterday's high score and the lingering taste of my cock in his mouth.

Do I care about his algorithm? Sure. Why not? I might even make a little money from it after I buy it from him for a bag of peanuts and a good whiff of my balls, but don't delude yourself into thinking that I'm in the business of innovation for innovation's sake. I'm not here to give the world the next great bigger, faster thing. I'm here to watch Richard Hendrix bleed out in front of a thousand of the most well-connected people in Silicon Valley."

The idiots looked appropriately stunned. Bellson smiled, but then the sound of hundreds of phones chiming simultaneously distracted him. The idiots checked their phones. He pulled his out of his jacket pocket and saw that he, too, had just received a text message from an unknown number. "What the fuck?" he asked himself as hundreds of small screens began appearing from every pocket in the auditorium.

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"What the fuck?" said Erlich as he stared at his phone. Richard was doing likewise from his prone position on the floor. He had decided that the best way to deal with his current world-ending predicament was to lie down and wait for the end-times.

He stared unblinking at the message for a long moment. It read: "Panflute from Pied Piper! Sign up for the Beta," followed by a link. Richard clicked it, which took him to a signup page. "It's my app. What the fuck?" he asked himself quietly.

"Everyone in the auditorium just got the same message," said a woman's voice from the stage door. Richard sat up in a daze and saw Monica standing there. He suddenly felt very embarrassed that he had given up and taken to lying on the floor. With a jolt, he rose to his feet, swayed slightly as the blood drained from his head, and dropped his phone with a crack on the polished concrete.

"Monica!" he croaked. "What… Hi!"

"Hello Richard," she said with a flat tone. "You better get out there and say something, because I just bought you fuckers two extra days."

The words didn't make sense to Richard. They entered his ears, bounced off the mush that used to be his brain, and fell back out again. He expressed this verbally. "Hhwhaaa?"

Monica walked over to Richard and put both hands on his shoulders. It felt nice.

"Richard, please," she said as she shook him like a ragdoll. "Peter heard the demo wasn't ready, so he sent me to buy you some time. That's what I did, and it wasn't easy to get eight-hundred mobile numbers and create a fictional beta test for your bullshit app in, like, five fucking minutes. You understand?"

He nodded his head, but he couldn't tell if he actually understood or if he was just nodding because that's what Monica wanted him to do. Erlich piped in.

"Fuck, bro. Everyone out there just got this message? They'll assume this was part of the plan! An exclusive invite!"

"What?" asked Richard.

Erlich ran over to where Richard and Monica stood and slapped Richard across the face.

"Ow!"

"Dude, you have to get out on stage and thank everyone for being a part of the beta! Tell them they'll be able to get their hands on Panflute when the beta launches! That's way better than a stupid fucking on-stage demo!"

Monica, having backed a few feet away from the men, nodded. "And this new beta of yours starts in forty-eight hours. Now's your chance, Richard."

Richard stared, dazed at Monica for a long moment, then threw up on the floor.