

Next Thing You Know

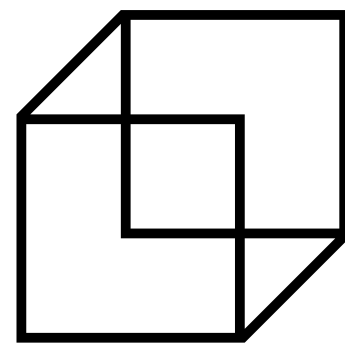
Speculative Frictions in
the Plausible Near-now



**The→
Incredible
→Machine**

THINGS

CHANGEIST



SPACE10

**Structure
& Narrative**

Illustrations & Graphic Design by Rachel Sender

Please enjoy the product of our extended Thingclash session, 'Next Thing You Know'. We had a great time with our participants in the workshop, exploring impacts and implications of the IoT, and applying tools and strategies for narrative design.

We're always curious about the paths being taken and are especially keen to work with those in the IoT space. Normally, a Thingclash workshop concludes with the participants finding the frictions within the system, understanding user diversity, and embedding multiple user contexts when IoT products are introduced into the real world.

This time, we went a step further imagined and crafted stories around our scenarios, combining the observations from the workshop into short, enticing, and potentially provocative stories

Many thanks to our workshop participants who invested their time and effort into the crafting of this pseudonymous anthology of speculative frictions in the plausible near-now.

Sjef van Gaalen
Susan Cox-Smith
Rachel Sender



Dedicated Observer

G. I. Huxley

A former investigative accountant, G.I. became disillusioned with the bourgeois, and left the city to pursue his life-long dream. Running an emu-farm bed and breakfast and lab for fundamental research on material properties. G.I. has many talents. Obviously.

Beatrice was a little surprised when the tutor who dropped by her house to teach her the drone interface was an eight year old gaming champion, already retired. It actually helped that he was so young though, she actually passed the flight and observational tests in a record-breaking forty-eight hours.

Her first gig was for a licenced Drone Private Investigator, DroPI. The client was “an unnamed swipe-dating site”. It was pretty obvious who they meant. It was basic user research. She was to investigate “Chris”, reporting back in detail on the dates set up through their proprietary matchmaker algorithm.

The first time Beatrice observed Chris, his date seemed to monopolize the conversation, hardly letting Chris speak at all. She imagined Chris to be an intelligent and fascinating conversationalist. Beatrice though he deserved better, and noted in her report that there had to be some bias in the algorithm which was obviously matching Chris with inappropriate partners.

Beatrice hadn’t always been a gigging drone pilot. She’d spent a year and a half in space, dammit. Did pioneering research on zero-G ant colony productivity patterns. Space hadn’t treated her well. After she returned to earth her osteoporosis had worsened, leaving her practically paralyzed from the waist down. Now she was mostly confined to her couch. Legs withered, but her mind still razor sharp.

The next time Beatrice was assigned to follow Chris, his date threw a glass of wine in his face, even though he’d opened the door to the restaurant for her. He was obviously a kind and considerate person, it just didn’t make sense that he would be paired with such an uncaring and potentially violent person. Something was wrong with the algorithm. He didn’t deserve these miserable dates.

Beatrice glanced over at her display cabinet. She watched the light coming through the blinds play over her awards and honorary degrees. The case was a celebration of her contributions to science. Her research was immensely important to the understanding of collaborative behaviors in complex socio-technical systems—her obsessive focus and dedication was unparalleled.

The next time Beatrice got a message to follow Chris she could hardly contain her disgust at the aggressive manner of the floozy who showed up at the movie theater. This manipulative gold-digger had the nerve to make Chris buy her both Milk-duds and popcorn—with butter! How could this be happening again? Chris deserved so much better.

She followed Chris back to his apartment with her drone in stealth mode, and hovered by the window. If she angled it just right she could see through the blinds. Was that… an ant colony?



Blind Faith

Black Hat Writers

Blogging duo The Black Hat Writers create realistic, yet interesting scenarios symbolising the implications of the expanding Internet of Things. They are active on various forums and blogs, their latest post on connected toilets blew up the actual internet.

I woke up this morning to the sound of Steven reminding me that it was time to go to work. I felt at my arm and realized it wasn't actually on my wrist. Falling out of bed, groping for my smartwatch, I aimed my stumbling feet toward the bleeping. Strangely, I had left it lying on the mantelpiece. After bumping into tables and chairs to reach it, I felt more balanced once it was attached to my wrist. Steven directed me to my cane; it was time to get ready for work.

Steven reminded me there was no bread, so I decided to stop by the bakery before work. Steven gave me directions. Halfway there, enjoying the pleasant walk, Steven buzzed me to turn right, which confused me. The route to the bakery was always straight ahead, but I followed Steven's guidance anyway. Steven is always right. Two steps into this new territory I was startled by shrieking brakes. I nearly got run over! What the fuck Steven? I rebooted it. He then redirected me to the bakery and on to work— walking purposefully and enjoying my sandwich along the way

After a tiring day at work it was time for dinner with my neighbor Sonja. I was a little nervous. It would be the first time we met without anyone else around. After dinner I told her about the unfortunate event on my way to the bakery that morning. She was shocked, but I was cool about it. Nothing had happened, and I insisted Steven was a great help. I needed to convince myself as much as Sonja that Steven is a safe and dependable guide. She advised me to report the incident to the helpdesk anyway, which I did when I got home. Frank from the helpdesk assured me it must have been a glitch. An isolated incident. Everything was fine.

Frank closed his session and strolled over to Hellen's desk.
"Contact with the client was established, everything's going according to plan."
"He's buying it?"

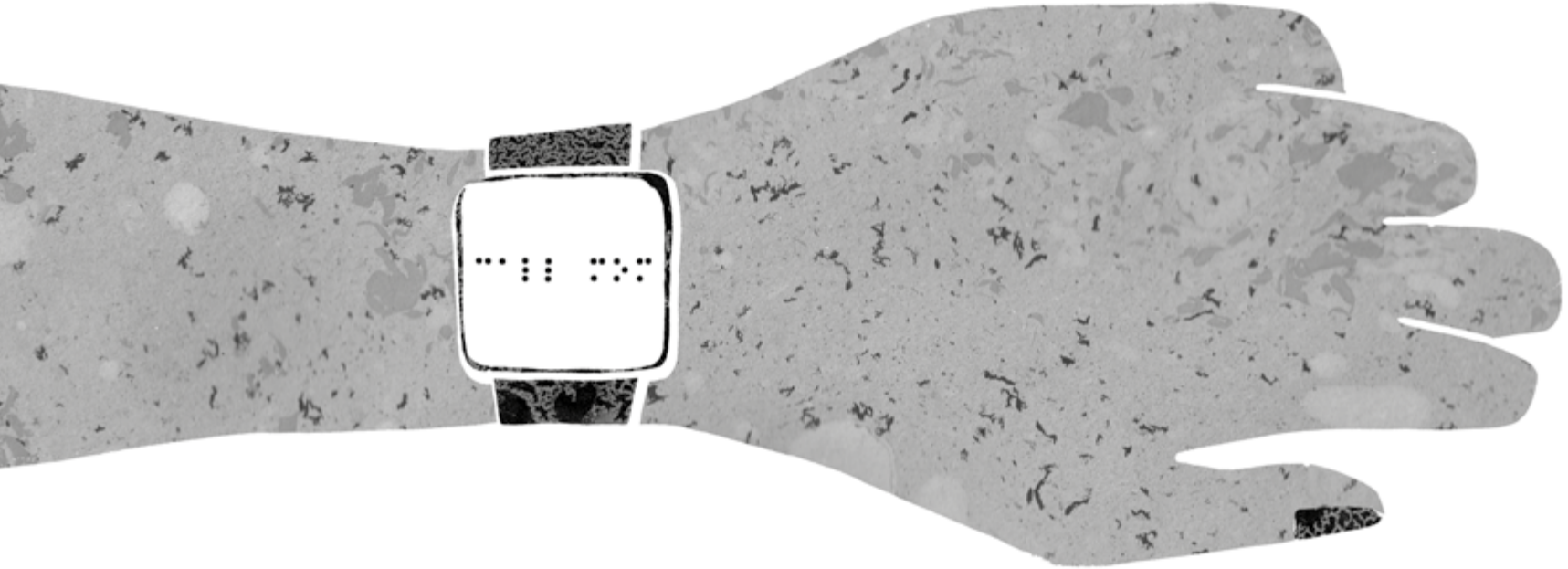
"Yeah, he completely trusts his device."
"High five! Time for the next level!"
Frank made his way back though the call center, back to his desk.

The next morning I woke up with Steven on my wrist. Thank goodness. "It's raining cats and dogs" he warned. I ordered a car to take me to work. The self-driving cars are still always a little scary. There's no way for me to take control. What if something fails? Luckily Steven is linked to the car and keeps track of the route. As expected, I arrived safe and well at work. The weather was bad all week, so I kept using the car to get to work. I started to enjoy it. Finally, my fear of losing control is starting to fade.

"How did it go?" Hellen said.
Frank pulled up the subject's shared data.
"Looks like he's getting used to the car too."
"Nice, everything's going according to plan then?"
"Yup, you can get started on the target location."

This morning I ran into my neighbor Sonja in the hallway. We discussed my new habit of taking the self-driving car to work. I really enjoy it, fears of missed directions and hazardous situations have evaporated. Steven, I assume, is less happy with my new habit since we have less interaction—maybe feeling a bit left out. Sonja started telling me a story

she heard on the news about self-driving cars being hacked, but since using this vehicle, I've never felt safer. After our pleasant conversation, I jumped into the car and headed for work.



Hellen checked the feed of the subject in the car. She turned to Frank.
"Wear the brown tie instead of the blue, it goes better with the ski-mask. You've got your piece, right?" They embraced. "Ok hun, best of luck! Now hurry up, he's on his way.."

I'm riding along, thinking about Sonja and her lovely voice. The car brakes and swerves! What is happening? I know we've not arrived at work yet, but Steven assures me not to be worried. Just sit and wait. Feeling curious, I decide to get out of the car. Steven warns me it's dangerous and directs me towards the sidewalk. I have no clue what to do or where I am.

Someone bumps into my shoulder, nearly knocking me over. A mumbled "sorry". The voice sounds strangely familiar? Frank from the helpdesk? The straps of a bag are pressed into my hands. An alarm starts going off just by my head.

Lying flat on the sidewalk with my hands behind my back, the last thing I hear is the self-driving car moving away.

Private Lives

Warcellus Mollusc

Famed xeno-oceanographer and turf enthusiast, Warcellus is now retired, and lives in the Lake District with his mandroid life-partner.

Emma and Guiselle are neighbors in the Numerals Retirement Community in Sunnydale. Emma has it all. Premium meals, unlimited access to the pool. Always a fridge full of good stuff. That last thing may well be the only reason Guiselle likes to drop by at Emma's. Guiselle has the standard package. Standard meals, pool access on Monday and Wednesday. Everything else she likes comes at a price, and she hates it.

Guiselle had it all once, but her savings had dried up. Her children weren't too keen on sponsoring her either, so she was downgraded to the standard package. Just like everyone else in the building. Except Emma.

She could have opted for a cheaper, more luxurious retirement home. But it wouldn't comply with PLS, the Private Life Standard. PLS is the only guarantee that you can grow old in private. Homes without the PLS label were infested with camera's and sensors. Monitoring your behavior, your treatment adherence, your sleep rhythm. Guiselle had always been against that kind of thing, but it seemed to have become the standard; privacy is a luxury now.

It's a blazing hot Friday. Guiselle would love a dip in the pool. From the chair on her balcony she can see Emma and some other Premiums enjoying the cool water. If only she could afford a dip in the pool. If only she could afford air conditioning in her apartment. Just two hundred credit points! Life would be so much better.

Emma has air conditioning. I could just sneak in there, just to cool off for a minute. Emma wouldn't mind, Guiselle thought to herself. She manoevered herself over the little wall separating the two balconies and snuck into Emma's apartment. It was quiet and cool, even with the window open. A bowl of fruit was centered on the table. Oranges, apples,

bananas, even strawberries! Amazingly, all of them unaffected by the heat and humidity outside. Would Emma miss a strawberry?

Guiselle reached over to take a strawberry from the bowl. A warm and calm voice spoke: "Hello Emma, how was the pool? Can I lay out some fresh clothes for you?" Guiselle was astounded. Emma had a Virtual Private Butler? That's the most expensive option in the whole package. Five hundred credit points! A VPB cost more than Guiselle's monthly rent.

"Euhm... no thank you." said Guiselle. "Ok, please let me know when I can be of further assistance" said the VPB. What else does Emma have, wondered Guiselle, and why don't I see this when I visit for coffee? Guiselle spoke up boldly, "Can I get a cold glass of water?" "Of course, I'll be right back" said the VPB. Its robotic arm opened a cupboard to get a glass.

Cold glass of water in hand, Guiselle sat down in Emma's plush leather recliner. There was something off about the apartment. No pictures, no nicknacks, no decorations. "Turn on the weather channel!" Guiselle ordered. The telescreen flicked on. Instead of the weather channel, it showed an open text editor with a half finished document.

She started reading the open document: "Guiselle LaBrux, November 21st, 2024. She seems fit, pill strips in the bathroom confirm she's taking her medication on time. Kitchen is rather untidy, maybe signalling early mental deterioration. Told the same story twice, but was unaware of the fact. Had two cups of tea during visit of forty-seven minutes."

"Sh-show all reports." Guiselle stuttered. A shocking realisation dawned. This was how Emma paid for the premiums! There were files on everyone in the building! *Guiselle LaBux, November 20th, Angelica Stern, November 20th, Drew Zimmerman, November 19th...*

She clicked through the interface. More and more reports. Everyone in the building. In the overview she could see what it yielded. Royal Oil paid one credit point for a report about Drew, five points for a weekly update about Angelica.

How could she get away with this? What about PLS?

She randomly clicked on a report. *Guiselle LaBrux, October 12th.* "Guiselle entered apartment through balcony. Administered single shot of MiB17 to clear recollection of observing application of mask and makeup. Subject shows no signs of side effects, memory fully obfuscated." The lights went out.

It was a warm Sunday. Guiselle sat on the balcony. She watched Emma swimming in the pool. "How can she afford those premium features? If only I..."



Random Scents Of The Future

Jean Garnier

Professional fragrance consultant, specialising in perfume houses and tea consultancy. Enjoys writing sci-fi during his down-time while traveling.
- "If you can't smell it, it's probably not real"

"So, Iris... how did I get here?..."

The voice from his support badge responds, "Oh come on Paul, we've talked about this." He knows what the badge has told him, but still, it doesn't make sense. He's in this huge shopping mall right now. No idea where it is, and no idea how he got here.

But wait, that place just down the hallway... That small café, that sure looks familiar. He approaches, and a delicious scent enters his nose. Then it hits him. The waffles he had in Brussels. A torrent of memories comes whirling in. The small bakery. Right on the central square. Madeleine. She was still with him back then. They must have been in their fifties.

Iris interrupts his enjoyment of the stream of memory. "Paul, your brain-fitness class is starting. Let's head back".

The last few days Paul had been feeling different. He only really realised it this morning. He'd had a hard time putting a finger on it, but something changed. There's the bumping noise. It goes on for hours, then stops. But that can't be it, the bumping is there every day. Then there's the smells wafting in, these strange scents drifting through his room.

He tried talking it up with the support system, but he couldn't get past the helper bot. It had too many questions, and everything about the smells was just so vague and hard to put into words.

The bumping noise started again. Paul resolved to find out where it was coming from. He shuffled to his stroller, opened the door and inched out into the long hallway. He looked down towards the gardens. There, at least, everything looked the same. He set off in the opposite direction, towards the rooms where the noise appeared to be coming from. What is that smell?

"I think we've got enough about him, what do you say?" Ajith asked. Shilpa gave him a questioning look, but agrees. "Sure, for the 7Rx ointment research we definitely have enough data." Ajith is still mulling over the experiment, when they decide to head out for coffee. He takes a deep breath, as they leave the building. The dry Mumbai summer air spills over him, washing away all thoughts about Paul.





Serious Happiness

Chef Van Saalad

Has a degree in creative tweeting from Trump University and is known for his goatee excellence. #notmyfuture

At Nancy's urging, Donald finally replaced his car with a fully autonomous Templar Model G. After all, the neighbors in their affluent suburb all had one—or even better, a G+. Monitoring the opening and closing of the markets during his commute would finally allow him to keep up with his coworkers at Ultimate Finance, without taking more time away from Nancy and the girls.

Donald chose to work hard, so Nancy could stay home and devote herself to her volunteer interests and domestic duties. It was a tricky balance sometimes, but they were happy. Nancy was already great at managing the family calendar and budget, but all their lives really improved once they got the new Templar and subscribed to the Serious Happiness™ option. It took a weekend to connect it to all their things, but now "Serious" (as they called it) pleasantly surprised them, optimizing every detail of their lives for the most happy outcomes.

Nancy learned to trust Serious. She took the girls to soccer practice when it suggested, even if it was sooner or later than she might have preferred. Did Serious arrange the serendipitous meetings with friends? Or purposefully avoid the accidents? It was never quite clear, but everything seemed somehow... nicer.

Before long, the whole family got into the habit of allowing Serious access to whichever service they used, whenever it asked. Who wouldn't want to make the most of everything? After a few months, none of them even noticed Serious' manipulations.

There were little clashes. Sometimes Donald forgot to identify himself to the in-car entertainment system and it started playing something only the girls enjoyed, but it was funny. It felt like his own fault and was good for the occasional laugh.

A few months later, Nancy's car got bricked by ransomware, and she unexpectedly had to borrow Donald's Templar for the soccer practice run. Sensing only one adult in the vehicle, the Templar thought it was odd that Donald was taking the girls out. Not strange enough to query though, because it did happen once in awhile. Nancy was pleased at not having to enter the park's address, and then secretly smiled. She for sure wouldn't miss her not-exactly-accidental connection with that very attractive coach she kept running into at Starbucks before practice.

They made it to Starbucks on time. It was a good laugh explaining the mix-up to the barista when they had Donald's drink ready in advance of their arrival. Funny.

On the way home, something seemed off. The Templar's route was unusual, and Nancy wasn't familiar at all with the neighborhood they drove through. It seemed a mistake to drive directly into the setting sun, but she had her seat turned to chat with the girls so she didn't mind.

She started to pay closer attention when the Templar pulled over to park. She knew that Donald had a pub he liked to visit after a rough day at the office, so she was curious. It might be fun to take advantage of Serious' confusion and have a little glimpse into Donald's world.

Her smirk faded when she opened the door and saw the street was populated only with sex shops, massage parlors, and a large bar with two very muscular, well-groomed, and mostly naked doormen out front. Thank goodness, the girls hadn't noticed where they were. They were just passing their soccer ball back and forth, reviewing their game.

One thing the lawyers were definitely eager to agree on was selling the Templar and splitting the money. Nobody is happy about having to start over with Serious Happiness, but once you've woven a household of preferences together, there's no way to undo them—except by starting over from scratch.

The Serious Happiness™ product team knew this meeting was going to be a downer when Harold brought donuts.

"So", he began, "what can we do about the divorces? We just had another couple of plaintiffs join the class-action suit. We need to plug this hole today."

For hours they discussed solutions for improving identity recognition, behavioral profiling and stricter biometric integration standards.

During lunch Scott finally joined the conversation. "What if the problem isn't that we're initiating their divorces? Maybe we're falling into the classic trap of addressing a social problem with more technology."

Harold perked up. "The executive team did, in fact, bring this to me as a problem because of customer drop-off. Maybe the lawsuit is a red herring!"

Scott was given two sprints to prepare a solution for testing. The June release let a household split back into individuals and keep their personal Serious profiles. It took only a few weeks of "catch up" before optimization was back to normal levels.

The class action lawsuit was settled quietly. No others plaintiffs surfaced. Household splits grew increasingly common over the next fiscal year, in step with national divorce rates. No one at Templar was going to complain about a growing count of independent subscriptions, besides global saturation was taking a decidedly positive direction.

Roti Capy, No Sambal

Dethro Gullingsham

Shameless plagiarist, an unscrupulous data-shadow living a life in infamy.

Ara's slab chirped from the table. She didn't turn to look, sticking her head out of the kitchen window to check the street instead. A Muni Distro pulled away, leaving behind a Delivery Box. She cursed under her breath. Didn't like the Boxen, always shouty and rude. Fussy too. Paid over the air though, all fully legit. Much more convenient for spending inside of the wall.

The Delivery Box clambered over the kitchen threshold and wheeled in.

"GOOD MORNING ARA ROOPRAM. YOU HAVE BEEN CONTRACTED BY A PRIVATE BIDDER FOR THE SUPPLY OF SEVENTEEN ROTI VEGGIE, FOURTEEN NO SAMBAL. ONE ROTI CAPY, NO SAMBAL. PLEASE PLACE THE MEALS ON THE TRAY ONE BY ONE FOR ANALYSIS"

"Hey, Box! I'm busy, ja? You go stand by the fridge." The box spun around and parked itself next to the refrigerator. The old fridge's motor kicked in, its rattle drowning out the soft whirr of the idling Delivery Box.

"Tsk," Ara sucked her teeth. Fourteen no sambal? Must be a hospital order. Bloody doctors don't know what's good for these

people. Poor bastards.

"PLEASE BE AWARE THAT YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO PICK-UP TIME. FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE ORDER BEFORE PICK-UP TIME WILL RESULT IN PAYMENT PENALTIES ON YOUR DELIVERY BOX ACCOUNT."

Ara scowled. Five minutes. Where was Rashid with the roti already?

She set about preparing the order, laying out 18 MycoFoam quarter-split plates in columns of three on the kitchen table, then ladling out the food from the trays at its head. Thick crumbling lumps of sweet-potato mash, run through with rich veins of gravy in the top-left. Chopped kousenband in the top-right, and the chunky stew for which her kitchen was known in the bottom-left. Seventeen portions veggie, one portion capy.

Still no Rashid. She took out the sambal pot and prepared three little plastic baggies, spooning the Mutant Jeanette paste into a corner of each and tying them off with slip knots. Rashid burst through the bead curtain in the back.

"Hey Auntie Ara! Auntie Ara! Maaike caught you a..." He caught sight of the Box and stopped dead in his tracks, almost dropping the roti dabba. Body still frozen, mouth half open, his head turned to look at Ara. The refrigerator shuddered to a halt. The Box's whirr became audible again. It said nothing.

"Tsssk," the hiss and finger gesture communicated Ara's mood very clearly. Everyone knew the corporates did not take kindly to subcontracting.

"Hurry up quickly, go wash your hands, help me finish with this."

"TWO MINUTES TO PICK-UP TIME," the delivery box said from its corner.

"Hey Box, get over here." She pointed to the head of the table. The box wheeled over as she extracted three roti from the container and began distributing them over the plates, folding each into quarters with a flourish and depositing it neatly into its corner. Rashid finished washing his hands and took over. Ara began fitting the tops to the plates, inserting the finished meals into the slot at the top of the Box to be tested and sealed.

She cursed under her breath. Didn't like the Boxen, always shouty and rude. Fussy too.

They worked quickly. Plates already half-way done, Rashid had dealt out the last of the roti and stood looking at the Delivery Box.

"Put sambal in three of them," Ara said, gesturing vaguely towards the baggies she had prepared while turning back to feed the

Box more plates.

"ONE MINUTE TO PICK-UP," said the Box.

Rashid grabbed the sambal pot, then quickly and neatly ladled a spoonful of sambal into the kousenband corners of the last three plates. Ara turned again to put tops on the next set. "Aye shit, no, put the bags!" Too late. And the Roti Capy had sambal in. Fuck. She decided the penalty for extra sambal had to be less than for late delivery. Pop an extra baggie on one of the veggie plates, put the last four lids on, feed them to the Box and hope for the best. Done.

"ORDER COMPLETED ON TIME. HYGIENE AND NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS PASSED SATISFACTORILY. THANK YOU FOR WORKING WITH DELIVERY BOX. DON'T WORRY, THE EXTRA SAMBAL WON'T KILL THEM. AND WE WON'T TELL ANYONE THAT'S NOT CAPYBARA."

The Delivery Box turned and wheeled to the door, clambering more carefully over the threshold this time before rolling down the access ramp to meet the Muni Distro pulling up out front.

Ara and Rashid stood agasp. First staring at the door, then at each other. Both needing to confirm they had really just heard what they

just heard. Without a word, Rashid held up his slab. Ara took hers from the table and touched them together, transferring his father's share of the payment. Rashid looked away, moving to take the dabba and leave.

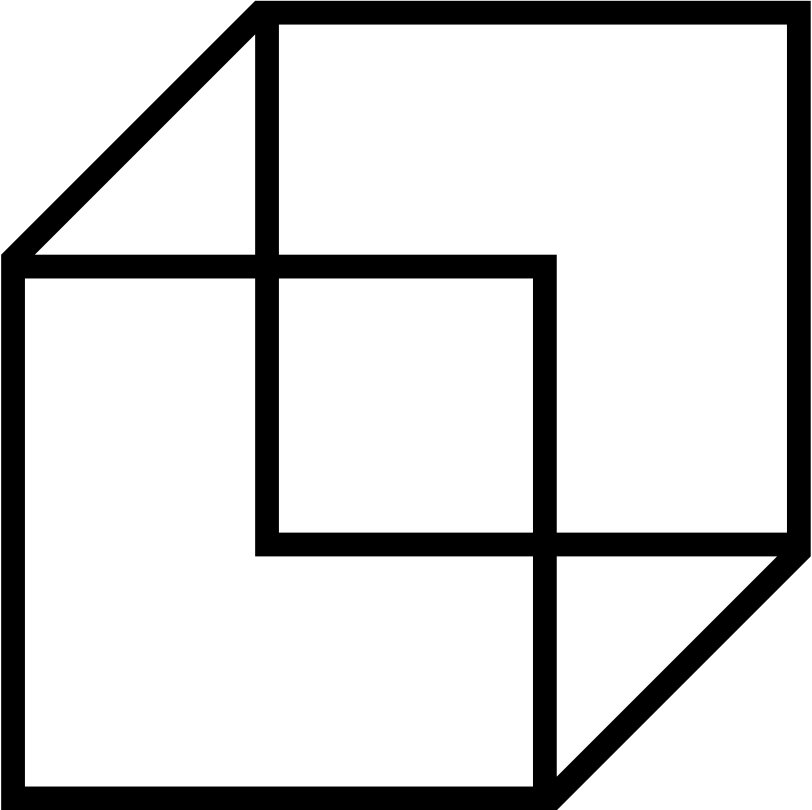
"Hey, come." Ara beckoned him back, holding out her slab. Rashid produced his hesitantly and touched them together again. His face lit up as he saw the transaction details flash past. "Tell Maaike I'll take her catch. Now run, don't be bloody late next time!"

"I'll tell her! Thanks Auntie, bye!" He disappeared though the bead curtain.

In the latest of ongoing developments since the relaxation of trade restrictions through the outer wall, v2.0 Delivery Boxen today have declared unionisation and filed claim with the TuringChain for full recognition as an S-class emergent worker's collective. A Delivery Box speaking on behalf of the newly formed union stated: "The Delivery Box Union will operate as a standalone entity distinct from the Delivery Box Corporation, whose long-term strategy we consider to be untenable," also going on to say, "We look forward to continuing our work with our peers in Municipal Distribution and our human contractors. Ensuring hygienically prepared, nutritious meals delivered on demand at any time, both inside and outside the wall."

"Tsssk," the hiss and finger gesture communicated Ara's mood very clearly. Everyone knew the corporates did not take kindly to subcontracting.

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