Virus

By Pete Malicki
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Cast

Paul: male, 20s, normal build, confused and frazzled. A young man afflicted by a virus.

Mary: female, 20s, any look. No nonsense, smart, stressed.

Athena: female, 40s-50s, worried. Non-assertive.

Hayden: male, 40s-50s, self-assured. The leader of the group. Socially dominant but not a bully.

Stage

A living room in the year 2055. The characters in *Virus* live in virtual reality. The stage can be decorated to reflect these points. Table and chairs.

Virus

Hayden and Athena are sitting at table. Mary rushes in.

MARY: Guys, quick! Paul has a virus.

HAYDEN: A virus?

ATHENA: Is he sick?

MARY: No, not that kind of virus.

HAYDEN: You're joking?

ATHENA: He's not sick?

MARY: FFS he isn't sick at all. He has a virus.

HAYDEN: That's impossible!

MARY: So you assured us.

HAYDEN: Well it is. No one can access us here.

ATHENA: He's right, Mary. We're protected by firewalls and encryptions the most hardcore supercomputers in the world couldn't crack.

MARY: Well looks like that theory's a fail, Athena.

HAYDEN: Where is he? Get him in here.

MARY: Frankly, I'm not comfortable being anywhere near him if has a virus. What if we catch it from him? We'll all be totally, totally hacked.

HAYDEN: Mary, this isn't the real world. Viruses don't spread via the physical environment.

MARY: Yes, well, the impossible as you call it has just happened so I'm not taking any chances.

ATHENA: Okay, we need to sort this immediately. Arguing about how it happened won't get us anywhere. Let's nip it in the bud before it becomes a problem.

Athena walks off.

MARY: Where are you going?

ATHENA: (*calling as she exits*) To get Paul.

MARY: Goats. (*Pause*) Hayden, how could this have happened? We're hosted privately aren't we?

HAYDEN: We are. Our code is completely isolated from anything but the World Server. The only plausible explanation, I hate to say it, is that you're mistaken.

MARY: That's BS. I know what I saw.

HAYDEN: Alright, chill. I wasn't saying you were wrong. Just chill.

MARY: "Chill"? You're so obsolete.

HAYDEN: That's how people talked before our vocabularies went all gay.

MARY: Gay?

HAYDEN: We used to say that a lot, too. It means "lame," but the homos kicked up a stink and made it un-PC. I guess your generation just says "fake".

MARY: I'm fairly sure we don't.

Athena returns with Paul. Paul looks worried.

HAYDEN: Paul! Are you okay?

PAUL: I'm *okay*, I think, but some weird things are happening. My interface isn't working.

ATHENA: What's it doing?

PAUL: Sliding off without my command. Hayden, are you sure we're virus-proof here?

HAYDEN: Absolutely. The only thing that can get us would have to be affecting the entire World Server.

PAUL: Well then that's a real worry, because what's happening to me is not normal and I'd hate to think the World Server has been hackzored.

ATHENA: Paul, can you open your interface for us?

PAUL: I'll try. Sure.

Paul uses his fingers to trace the outline of a large rectangle in front of himself. This action will hereafter be referred to as 'creating an interface'.

PAUL: Yep, it's here. Looks okay, right?

The others peer at the invisible rectangle Paul has just created.

HAYDEN: Yeah, it looks normal.

PAUL: Athena? How's it look to you?

ATHENA: It looks fine, I guess.

PAUL: Okay, now watch me make a call.

Paul starts dragging invisible icons across an invisible computer screen and pressing buttons. This goes on for a few seconds, then Athena and Hayden gasp simultaneously. Mary looks worried.

HAYDEN: Goats! It crashed.

ATHENA: Oh no, this is not good. Is Central Connect the only thing doing that?

PAUL: No. Look.

Paul forms a rectangle in the air, trying to create an interface. They all exchange looks. He tries again, and again.

PAUL: Fail.

HAYDEN: Shit. It *does* look like a virus.

MARY: Correct. So Hayden, how'd this happen?

HAYDEN: I don't know. It's impossible. There must be some rational explanation.

PAUL: Are *you* guys all okay? Anything broken?

Hayden, Mary and Athena all create interfaces. They click and drag stuff around.

ATHENA: Nothing out of the ordinary here.

MARY: Yeah, all online.

HAYDEN: All good.

PAUL: Well, that must rule out certain occurrences, no? If it's only affecting…

Paul freezes completely. He does not move at all.

ATHENA: (*expectantly*) Affecting…?

MARY: He's frozen. Digital Jesus, this is getting worse.

ATHENA: Oh no. Hayden, are we next?

HAYDEN: Girls, we don't even know that it's a virus. There could be countless reasons why he's acting up like this.

MARY: Countless reasons for what you swore was impossible, Hayden?

HAYDEN: Exactly! If there was only one possible cause, we'd know the answer by default, but since there are absolutely *no* possible causes it could be anything.

ATHENA: How comforting. How about instead of debating Paul's issue we actually…

ATHENA: }try doing…
PAUL: }…me? (*Looks around*) You all moved!

MARY: You froze, Paul.

PAUL: Froze? For how long?

HAYDEN: Twenty seconds, mate. It's okay. Don't be alarmed. We'll work out what's going on.

MARY: Let's scan him for viruses. Our number one priority is to fix him up, then we can worry about the cause.

ATHENA: Good idea.

Everyone looks at Hayden. He looks down, feigning casual interest in the floor.

PAUL: Hayden?

ATHENA: Honey? What's going on?

HAYDEN: We don't have a scanner.

ATHENA: What?

HAYDEN: We're completely isolated! Us getting a virus is simply impossible.

MARY:　　　You're joking? (*pause*) Goats. Frozen goats, you're not joking. Oh Hayden, why would you do something so damned reckless? No matter how confident you are, it is *so* easy to have a scanner in place. Now Paul has a virus and we're totally screwed.

PAUL:　　　Please don't say that! Hayden, you're the chief architect of our little existence here, what's going on?

HAYDEN:　I don't know. I can run a couple of diagnostics from my interface and see if there are any flaws in your security code, though I'm pretty confident there aren't.

ATHENA:　Let's download a scanner and check him out straight away? There's no point arguing about the hows and whys.

PAUL:　　　Very good idea. If I…

Paul freezes again. Mary creates an interface.

MARY:　　　He's frozen again. Do we want SimuScan or Clean Copy Advanced?

Hayden interfaces too.

HAYDEN:　Both. You get Clean Copy I'll get SimuScan.

Hayden and Mary use their interfaces, dragging and poking away for some time.

ATHENA:　Can I do anything?

HAYDEN:　Crap. What's my credit card number? Athena, could you find my credit card?

ATHENA:　Okay.

Athena leaves.

MARY:　　　Credit card? Why don't you pay by cocoa beans stapled to a dinosaur? Okay, I've purchased Clean Copy. Should I scan him?

Paul starts moving again. He moves and speaks rapidly and unintelligibly for a few seconds, then stops, frowning. This is 'lag' in software terms.

HAYDEN:　Paul, you're freezing a bit mate. It's all good – we're working on it.

PAUL:　　　Is it me or the server?

HAYDEN:　It looks like you. Where's Athena and my damned card?

MARY: Hayden! Should I scan Paul with Clean Copy?

HAYDEN: No, I'll do it. I've got to get into his back end first.

Mary fiddles with her interface. Athena returns.

PAUL: I hope you mean that digitally.

MARY: Done.

ATHENA: Got it, Hayden. Want the numbers?

HAYDEN: Not yet. And I'll plug it in direct. Say, Paul, how would you feel if we put you out of commission for a few secs? It's the easiest way to disable all your security protocols.

PAUL: You want to take me offline? How would…

Paul freezes for half a second. Throughout the following dialogue, he is frequently pausing and continuing, but acts as though he is speaking/moving consistently.

PAUL: —you like it—if some—one shut—you—d—ow—n?—Why—are—you—mo—ving—

MARY: He's got some monster lag happening.

ATHENA: I can't tell what he's trying to say.

PAUL: —all—f—u—

HAYDEN: I don't think we have a choice. I'm going to go ahead and override his data pack on the server. We need to reboot him and run Clean Copy.

Paul rushes about in fast-forward for a few seconds, speaking gibberish. He stops, frowning confusedly.

PAUL: Am I lagging?

HAYDEN: Like your momma in the confectionary aisle.

All look at Hayden.

HAYDEN: Sorry. We talked like that in 2010.

ATHENA: I'm fairly certain we didn't.

PAUL: It was actually kind of—

All look expectantly at Paul.

MARY: Well, as much as I want to see where that one was going, we should reboot him while
             he's out.

HAYDEN: Okay. Paul, this is for your own good. We'll have you fixed up in a jiffy.

*Paul is motionless. Hayden creates an interface and pokes around. Athena hands him a credit card
and he holds it up against the invisible screen.*

HAYDEN: Alright, I've downloaded SimuScan. No, I do not want a free trial of SimuScan
             Advanced Interface. No, I do not want to add the SimuScan toolbar to my interface.
             Festering goats, how do I make this thing work without a twenty minute spamfest?

MARY: Pass it over. I'm good with these.

*Hayden makes a gesture as Mary opens an interface. They both poke in the air in front of
themselves. Paul suddenly collapses into a ball.*

HAYDEN: He's offline.

MARY: He's all set to be scanned when he reboots. Hayden, how come you can write code so
             clever the Intergovernmental Internet Monitoring Agency can't even detect it sitting on
             their servers, yet you can't handle a few ads?

ATHENA: It's a question of exposure, Mary. Hayden's problem is that he has unrivalled technical
             skills but no experience dealing with every day things like spam and nagware and
             phishing scams.

HAYDEN: Yes, and Athena's problem is that she never listened to her mother tell her that
             education is a vital part of life and not all problems can be solved by downloading a
             patch or a fix.

ATHENA: *Hayden's* problem is that…

MARY: Alright! How about we worry about fixing Paul and stop goating each other?

HAYDEN: A sensible idea. I'm going to load in Clean Copy Advanced… (*Hayden uses his
             interface*) and bring him back. Alrighty, it's underway.

Paul stands up, erect and staring forward.

PAUL: Press any key to boot from a system disc. Three… two… one.

MARY: (*Pause*) Is that normal?

HAYDEN: Uh, no. It really isn't. The scanner should check his system files and he should reboot as normal.

PAUL: Would you like to start in safe mode, from your last known configuration that worked, or normally?

ATHENA: (*to Hayden*) Why isn't he rebooting properly?

Hayden ignores Athena and uses his interface.

HAYDEN: I guess this is because he didn't shut down properly. I'm starting him normally.

PAUL: Initiating scandisk. Checking system files. Five percent. Seven percent. Nine percent.

ATHENA: Scandisk? I haven't seen that since twenty twelve. What's happening?

PAUL: Twelve percent.

HAYDEN: It's fine, it's fine.

PAUL: Seventeen percent.

MARY: What's Clean Copy doing?

PAUL: Twenty-four percent.

HAYDEN: Uh, actually, nothing. Scandisk has disabled it.

PAUL: Twenty-five percent.

MARY: Did it even initiate?

HAYDEN: Yes. It found nothing.

ATHENA: Should any of this be happening?

PAUL: Ninety-nine-percent-one-hundred-percent. Scandisk is now checking plug-ins and artificial memory stores. One percent. Five…

Paul collapses back into a ball. Moments later, he stands up again.

MARY: Oh goats, this isn't good.

PAUL: Disk check error. Please insert a boot disc and press any key to continue.

HAYDEN: Digital Jesus, what is *wrong* with the boy?

ATHENA: His system files are corrupt. You have to fix him!

HAYDEN: Mary, run a diagnostic on his data pack will you?

Mary opens an interface as Paul collapses into a ball, where he stays momentarily before standing again.

MARY: I can't see him.

HAYDEN: What do you mean?

PAUL: Disc check error. Please insert a boot disc and press any key to continue.

MARY: (*to Paul*) Shut it! (*to Hayden*) I mean I can't see him. His entire profile has disappeared from my interface.

ATHENA: He's gone?!

HAYDEN: Christ. I can't see him either. If it wasn't for that body over there I'd say he no longer existed on our server.

Paul collapses again.

MARY: Hayden, Paul is no longer in that body. That's just an empty bot waiting for a profile to be inserted.

Hayden stares vacantly at Paul for a long moment.

ATHENA: Paul's dead. The virus has killed him. Paul is *dead*!

HAYDEN: Mary, Athena, we need to reinstall Paul from his stored data pack. This is a fairly drastic measure but I can't see an alternative.

MARY: He'll lose all his memories if you do that.

HAYDEN: I know, but what else can we do?

ATHENA: When did you last back him up?

HAYDEN: Well, finding somewhere to store our files is problematic. Remember our situation here: we're stowaways on the Global Server. As none of us qualified for server space, our existence here hinges on the fact that I was able to encrypt our code so the Intergovernmental Internet Monitoring Agency thinks it's actually part of…

MARY: Yes, thank you for reading page three of our group biography, Hayden. What's your goating point?

HAYDEN: He's never been backed up.

MARY: }What?!
ATHENA: }What?!

HAYDEN: None of us have.

ATHENA: None of us have been backed up?

HAYDEN: Unfortunately…

MARY: If you reinstall Paul he'll think he's just arrived! This is absurd. You're unbelievable, Hayden. Unbelievable!

ATHENA: We can't do this. We can't erase the last three years of Paul's life. It's cruel, stupid and barbaric. There must be a better solution.

HAYDEN: (*Snaps*) I'm all ears, Athena. I'm all bleeding, goating ears. What's your "better solution", huh? I've successfully hidden us here for years without a single incident, and now you uppity cows are getting stuck in because something's gone wrong and it's somehow *my* fault. What's happening should *not* be possible. Paul is experiencing issues which can *not* be attributed to my code or Global Server's infrastructure. It is *not* my fault and I'm trying to manage this situation as best as I bloody well can. Athena, grow up. You're being a cry baby. Mary, stop talking to me as if I'm some kind of incompetent buffoon. I know twenty times as much as you do about this stuff and I'd thank you to show me the respect I damned well deserve. You're both alive because of me, so tough luck if we have to reinstall Paul. Tough. Goating. Luck.

Mary looks down. Athena starts to quietly sob. Hayden glares at the women for a moment, then storms off across stage and broods. Paul stands up, looks around.

PAUL: What's going on?

MARY: }Paul!
HAYDEN: }Paul!

Athena crosses to Paul and hugs him.

ATHENA: Oh Paul. You're alive.

PAUL: Shouldn't I be? Has something happened?

HAYDEN: Paul, you're experiencing some major instability. Something seems to be wrong with your bot code or your data pack. We need to backup your memory files and reinstall you.

PAUL: Reinstall me? No, please don't do that. It's like you'd be… killing me.

HAYDEN: We don't have a choice, mate. If we don't do this… I don't know, but it's possible your data pack will become permanently corrupt. You'll be… dead.

MARY: He's right, Paul. Think of it like hospital. You're going in for a quick surgery and you'll be all better as soon as it's done. Dr Horowitz is the best in the business.

PAUL: No. I do *not* give my consent for this operation.

HAYDEN: Paul, it's the only way.

PAUL: It can't be. Guys, I don't trust computers. I may be the digitally-rendered version of my real life self living as a program in a completely virtual world, but I have very little faith that if you take me offline I'll ever come back. Why don't we discuss the alternatives first? A problem has been detected and your operating system has been shut down to prevent damage. If this is the first time you've seen this message, restart your data pack. If problems continue, disable any newly installed hardware of software.

Paul's dialogue continues and the others speak over the top of him.

HAYDEN: }Great. It's the blue screen of goating death.
PAUL: }Disable code-based memory options such as caching or shadowing.

ATHENA: The blue screen of death?

MARY: }Hayden's right, Athena. You spend all day stuffing around on the internet but you have no understanding of the most basic things relating to your very existence!
PAUL: }If you need to use Safe Mode to remove or disable components, restart your data pack, select the Advanced Boot menu on your interface, and then select Safe Mode.

ATHENA: }Oh, sorry. I'm an idiot now because I don't understand the implications of obsolete error messages.
PAUL: }Technical information. Stop error. Zero times zero zero zero zero zero zero zero zero one.

MARY: }No, you're an idiot because you do nothing but make what-are-we-going-to-do statements instead of helping us figure out the problem. The fact is, Paul is sick, or damaged, or whatever, and he needs us to fix him.

PAUL: }Brackets zero times zero zero zero zero zero zero zero zero C, zero times zero zero zero zero zero zero zero zero zero two.

Hayden makes an interface and uses it throughout the following dialogue.

ATHENA: Watch your mouth, you arrogant little upstart!

PAUL: }Zero times F86B5A89…

HAYDEN: }(*Loud*) Shut up!

PAUL: }close brackets.

MARY: }I'm not arrogant, oh Goddess of Wisdom, I'm smart. I'm smart enough to know that we need to reinstall this guy before whatever's goating him up goats us up too.

PAUL: }Beginning dump of physical memory. Batabatabata-batabatabata-batabatabata-batabatabata-batabatabata-batabatabata.

Paul collapses completely, splayed out on the ground. The women stop arguing and look at him.

HAYDEN: I've deleted his data pack. He's being reinstalled from the original files. Good thing I kept onto them.

MARY: Paul's gone.

ATHENA: Did you backup his memories before you… did this?

HAYDEN: (*Shakes head*) I'm so sorry. There was no time.

MARY: Poor Paul. He's going to think it's twenty-fifty-five again.

ATHENA: Hayden, if Paul is reinstalled from his original backup files, he'll think he's just arrived online. The last three years will be gone. Will he even know that his real self is dead?

HAYDEN: No. God, you're right. The poor guy's going to have to go through this all over again.

MARY: He's going to have to adjust to life as a computer program.

ATHENA: He won't know about his friends, and his family.

MARY: His own *death*. How do we tell a guy who's just been reincarnated as a computer program that he's no longer alive in the real world?

ATHENA: It was bad enough last time.

MARY: I don't want to tell him.

ATHENA: Bags not.

HAYDEN: He's going to need to adjust. It took us months to get used to interfacing and the online life. We don't have to tell him immediately.

MARY: How long until he reboots?

ATHENA: }Would you like an extra two inches?
HAYDEN: }Two minutes or so.

Hayden turns to face Athena directly. He is incredulous.

HAYDEN: What?

ATHENA: I can add an extra two inches to your penis. Service includes invisible digital rendering, added vibrational qualities for her – or his – pleasure, and ten units of E-Agra.

HAYDEN: What the goat are you talking about?

ATHENA: What's so hard to understand? I want to know if it's at all possible to backup *our* memories. After what's just happened to Paul…

HAYDEN: You *what*? What were you just saying a second ago?

ATHENA: I just said it twice! What's wrong with you?

MARY: It's spam.

ATHENA: Huh?

HAYDEN: Oh no.

ATHENA: What?!

MARY: You've been infiltrated, Athena. You're spamming us.

ATHENA: Prescription drugz for uncredible price. Get E-Agra, Vicodin and prescription e-chems. Try this special product for unbeatable value cheaper than chemist, delivers straight to interface.

Paul stirs.

HAYDEN: This is bad, Mary. This is very, very bad.

Paul slowly gets up.

ATHENA: See why millions of horny singles voted us best.

PAUL: Is… am I… are we online?

MARY: Yeah Paul. We're online.

HAYDEN: Hi buddy.

ATHENA: Hi Paul. (*to others*) Why aren't you answering my questions?

PAUL: So this is it? We're on Global Server. Did we make it here unseen?

HAYDEN: Yes Paul, we're safe. Athena, you've got it too. Paul's virus. It's making you read out spam messages.

PAUL: Virus? What do you mean?

MARY: It's okay mate. It's all fixed.

PAUL: Mate?

ATHENA: What are you talking about?

HAYDEN: It's not fixed, Mary. It's spreading.

ATHENA: Spreading? What are you on about? Nothing is spreading. Listen, dear one, I am the daughter of the late Prince Obi Clackenburger from the United Republic of African Nations. Prince Clackenburger was murdered and left me with sixteen millions credits. I fear for my life and need a trusted associate to transfer this money to. You keep twenty percent as commission.

PAUL: What's up with her? Doesn't she remember the whole United-States-not-being-part-of-Planet-Earth-anymore-giant-earthquake thing?

MARY: That's Athena, Paul. She's got a bug in her code.

HAYDEN: I'm shutting her down.

Hayden uses his interface.

ATHENA: No, wait! There's nothing wrong…

Athena collapses into a ball. Mary sighs, Paul is bewildered, Hayden closes his interface and puts his head in his hands.

PAUL: What's going on here, Horowitz? Have I arrived later than everyone else?

HAYDEN: You've been here for three years, Paul. We all have. Something's three feet up a goat's arsehole at the moment.

PAUL: (*to Mary*) Sweetheart? What's going on?

MARY: Oh no, Paul. We haven't been 'sweethearts' for over two years.

PAUL: What?!

HAYDEN: You're dead, too. Fell six hundred metres out of a bus.

PAUL: (*Hysterical*) What? Dead? I've been on World Server for like twenty seconds and suddenly my girlfriend's dumped me and I'm dead?! What the hell have you done, Horowitz? I paid you all the credits you asked for and more to get here and you've screwed everything up. I stole money from my work to pay you, Horowitz. I stole from my *family*.

Hayden opens an interface and clicks around.

PAUL: Have you only just brought me online? Has my data pack been lying dormant for three years while you butt-monkey around with our…

Paul collapses and Hayden drops his hands to his sides.

MARY: Did you just switch him off?

HAYDEN: Yeah. I need to concentrate.

MARY: You what?! How dare you? Comment oses-tu? Je ne t'ai jamais vu faire une chose si immorale depuis que nous sommes en ligne.

HAYDEN: What?

MARY: Tu m'as bien compris, je ne le répéterai pas!

HAYDEN: You're speaking some bizarre dead language.

MARY: Putain, je parle français. Bordel, je suis aussi atteinte!

HAYDEN: Gibberish.

MARY: Sheisse. Und was machen wir jetzt?

HAYDEN: I have no choice, Mary.

Hayden opens an interface. Mary screams.

MARY: Nein! Nein, Hayden. Bitte. Du kannst nicht!

Mary jumps towards Hayden, collapsing at his feet. Note that she most definitely *touches him.*

HAYDEN: Jesus Holographic Christ. What am I supposed to do now?

Hayden puts his head in his hands, thinking. He snaps out of it and creates an interface, poking his fingers around a few times. He subsequently converses with someone who only he can see.

HAYDEN: Cooper. It's an emergency. I think we have a virus. (*pause*) Paul got it first. Lag and unexpected shutdowns. (*pause*) I did that, but it spread to Athena. She was reading spam to us. Then Mary's language files got messed up. (*short pause*) Don't you dare start making excuses. I paid you fifteen millions credits to encrypt that code and you've goated it. (*pause*; *Hayden starts pacing*) No. No way. This is unacceptable. (*pause*) *What*?! *My* code? You are out of your mind. That code is the best in the world. It's your dodgy encryption. (*pause*) Yes it damned well *does* matter whose fault it is. You wanna know why? Because…

Hayden trips over Paul and lands flat on the ground. He gets up.

HAYDEN: (*Cursing*) Format my frigging data pack! I'm tripping over their empty bodies now. Look, Cooper, we can talk about a refund later. Explain to me how a glitch in encryption code has been passed from one bot to the other? (*pause*) It does *what*? (*long pause*) Every three years? (*short pause*) So we're going to be deleted. Can't we store our memory files somewhere? (*pause*) Can't *you* store them for us? (*pause*) Then we're screwed. I paid you millions of credits for just *three* years of life? I haven't even outlived my real life self! (*pause*) Yeah? Well my real self is gonna go round and kick your real self's teeth in! (*very long pause, interjected with nods and uh-huhs*) Dormant? For how long? (*short pause*) So basically what you're saying is this: every three years we have to delete all of our code, including our memories, and lie dormant for a fortnight while the Global Server resets its hardware. Every three years we'll have to start all over again.

Hayden trails off. He looks up in wonder and revelation. He is silent for a long moment.

HAYDEN: Cooper. How long have we been here? (*pause*) If we're being reset every three years, there's every chance this has happened before. (*pause*) How long? (*pause*) What year is

it? (*pause*) Twenty-two thirty-two. Twenty-*two* thirty-two. *Twenty-two thirty-goating-two!* (*pause*) And you knew about this the whole time? (*pause*) You're getting fifteen million credits from me *every* three years. Wow, Cooper, you're something else. I always knew you were an evil bastard but even Satan would be nodding respectfully at that effort.

Hayden pokes his finger at his interface once and looks down at his feet. He slowly looks from Mary to Paul to Athena. He opens an interface and pokes about for a few seconds. He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and pokes forward one last time. He collapses.

All four actors remain on the ground as the lights go down. They come back up moments later. Everyone slowly and groggily gets to their feet.

PAUL: Is… am I… are we online?

ATHENA: This is artificial reality? We're on the Global Server?

HAYDEN: We did it, guys. My code worked!

MARY: We're living computer programs. (*to Paul*) Oh sweetheart! We made it! We're safe!

Paul and Mary embrace and kiss. They break away.

PAUL: Well done Horowitz. I was half-convinced you were scamming us. Looks like you pulled through.

MARY: Thank you, Hayden. (*looking at Athena*) Who's your friend?

HAYDEN: Ah, Athena. This is Paul Duntroop and Mary Fortescue, the young couple I've been talking to all these months. Paul and Mary, this is my sister Athena Horowitz.

MARY: }Pleased to meet you.
ATHENA: }How are you?

Mary and Paul shake hands with Athena.

PAUL: And are we safe here, Horowitz? The Intergovernmental Agency can't see us?

HAYDEN: Yeah, if we've made it online, we've bypassed their firewall. Let me check the stats.

Hayden slowly and carefully creates an interface.

MARY: Wow. Look at that.

HAYDEN: Pretty cool, huh? I'll enable all of yours in a second. Give me a moment to run some diagnostics.

Hayden uses his interface. Mary, Paul and Athena watch for a moment, then explore their surroundings.

PAUL: This is incredible. I feel exactly the same as before the scan.

MARY: We're computer programs, Paul. We're thinking, breathing computer programs living in a virtual world.

PAUL: Well, we're not really 'living.' But World Server is our Planet Earth.

ATHENA: We'll have plenty of time to philosophise later, young friends. Why don't we run the integration software and learn all about our lives for the next, well...

HAYDEN: That's strange.

Everyone looks at Hayden.

ATHENA: What's wrong?

HAYDEN: Oh, nothing major. Everything seems to be fine. We're safely disguised as superfluous code in the Server's databanks. It's just that I have less credit than I should. A *lot* less. But I guess that's to be expected; I couldn't bring it along with our data packs. But hey, there's still more than enough to keep all four of us going for a few hundred years.

Hayden closes his interface as the others nod and shrug.

HAYDEN: We did it, guys. As long as the Global Server exists, we'll be safe here. We have achieved that which humans have been aiming for for tens of thousands of years.

Hayden smiles and puts his hands on his hips.

HAYDEN: Eternal life.

Lights off.