

King's Pawn  
By BC Jarvis

Dedication:

I dedicated this to my friends and family. Thank you for all your love and support.

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During a terrible fit of manic apartment cleaning, King discovered the spying devices by accident. The splintered circuits of a surveillance device were exposed before him. He looked at the bizarre specimen of broken fiber optics, meshed electronics and pinched the mass of it together. He drew it closer for inspection and studied it as best he could.

Trying to make sense of it wasn't easy, but soon a great epiphany overcame him. His heart raced. His blood pressure ballooned and he knew. He knew that his paranoia of the past few months had been justified. All because he listened to the alien voices and started inventing again.

#

Though he was seemingly out of luck, friends, money and all measure of hope, one thing remained--the voices. Every superhero has an origin story. Every universe a big bang. For King, his was the static. He never really pinpointed the exact moment, the

inciting incident or root cause.

It all started one day. Extraordinary. At first, he felt like he was going insane. A headache, followed by the whirls. Inside his skull, his brain was doing back flips. Olympic worthy back flips. His total lack of outward balance caused him to crash to the floor of his apartment, striking a coffee table on the way down.

Not long after reeling with pain, the static oscillated greater. This time, when it started, the soft mumble of voices grew clearer. Within minutes, the pitches were distinct.

The only thing that stopped him from checking into an asylum was the logic of the voices. They weren't telling him to harm himself or others. They were giving him detailed instructions, both awake and in his dreams about how to create fantastic inventions. For an engineering grad, it was too perfect for words. Once he got over his initial barrier of questioning his sanity and accepted it, the thoughts and ideas flowed like a torrid rainfall.

At first, they were simple ideas. Ideas on how to improve upon everyday gadgets. A few extra bells and whistles here and there. He was unable to sit around for long without acting on them. His hands and fingers moved independently of his mind. Those first few weeks were blessed times.

The dozen odd items he invented were sent to the patent office. It took many months to hear anything back. During that time, he was increasing his output of ideas and inventions, both in scope and complexity.

By the time he had heard a reply from the patent office, he estimated maybe fifty completely new and exciting inventions were sitting around collecting dust. He grew excited when the patent office granted him a number and certificate. His mind fluttered with thoughts of being a new Tesla.

Since his first few ideas were mere improvements upon existing products, he judiciously contacted their respective makers. His hard work was rewarded when all of his ideas were bought, with a few striking a bidding war. He went from a borderline poverty case into an instant millionaire overnight. It felt good.

Eventually, he turned to developing the rest of his ideas. He sent them to the patent office in bulk. They ranged from harnessing the power of energy that existed in the dimensional folds of space to a working teleporter that relied on magnetic

impulsion to move space and time.

He was sure true greatness was within reach. He knew that faster than light travel was possible and was well on his way into working out the kinks when he received notice from the patent office. They had declined to issue a patent for any of the recent inventions. The reason was given in carefully worded jargon that all spelled out one word: impossible. It was suggested that patents can't come from comic books or silly cartoons, and he would be better off trying his hand at both than wasting their time.

King was perplexed. He knew his ideas were sound. They worked. He tested them all out, provided working examples along with all the diagrams. He was completely sure of their veracity that he didn't stop to think about getting his inventions back until a few weeks after the fact.

He wasn't too concerned. He could create them all again without blinking. Besides, it seemed silly, as every day he was pushing the envelope of science and technology to the limits of imagination, which was really nothing more than alien ingenuity.

The patent office responded with a notarized letter saying it was policy of the office to destroy unclaimed inventions. No further correspondence was returned, regardless the volume of letters King produced. Being the forward-looking type, King shrugged off his defeat and pushed onward.

King continued work on his faster than light engine. It was an idea so complex that even the simplest rudimentary parts took weeks of sweat and toil to develop. He wasn't worried about money. The royalties from his first inventions were far exceeding his wildest expectations.

Then he met them.

#

One night, on the way back from a coffee shop that doubled as a laundromat, King met a force of evil. King walked into his living adobe and immediately came face to face with a man dressed from head to toe in style, as if he stepped out of a historic painting. His white hair was thin and good amount of the crown of his head was exposed. Time's blunt ravages had left noticeable marks all over the man's face. His forehead contained heavy furrows, where year after year, waves of stress and worry came to crest, failing to recede a little less with each passing

cycle.

For a loner like King, strangers put him at ill ease. This elegant man put King at maximum on the uncomfortable scale.

The man extended his hand. His face wore a Cheshire cat smile and he spoke in a loud, atonal cadence. "So you're the man who's caused so much grief?"

"Who are you?" King asked.

"My name is Mr. Barlow. And you, Mr. King, have caused my organization a great deal of sleepless nights."

"What?"

Barlow clapped his hands together. Out of the shadows two figures of supreme girth stepped. They looked like shaved apes in suits. Except for a few minor details, they could have been clones. Both were broad shouldered. Both looked like they could fell a man with one punch, and both were heavily armed.

"For a man of extreme genius, you can be quite daft, Mr. King."

"I don't understand what this is all about."

"No? What a pity. If you want to play games, so be it. Kruger. Heigel. See to it he understands."

With the snap of his fingers, Barlow's command was followed. King didn't have more than a few lingering seconds to react. A tenth degree black belt with full grappling expertise would have been hard pressed against these behemoths.

King wasn't some chemically enhanced street fighter with a physique on loan from a Greek God, either. It took a slight tweak of one pressure point for him to see engulfing blackness.

#

When King woke up, his head was screaming. Any voices of inspiration or comfort were missing. He felt exposed.

His eyes slowly regained focus and when they did, the two behemoths were staring at him with emotionless faces. Aside from the two men, King found his surroundings surprising. He lay slouched in the leather-clad backseat of a luxurious limousine that was traveling to destination unknown.

Barlow's voice rang out from nearby speaker. "Are you ready to cooperate?"

King focused on the guards and the tinted windows that obscured spots of light trailing outside. He was lost. He heard the words. Didn't respond. Every second seemed to linger. The pause stretched into a chasm.

His hands dug into the leather and made deep indentations. Stress was pouring out of his body with each breath. King swallowed hard. His mind was locked with fear.

At what to say. At what to do. What was really happening? Where were they going? Locked.

"You enrage my better senses. Kruger, show him how serious we are."

One of the twin monsters named Kruger outstretched his hand to King. Kruger's hand enveloped King's forearm and a tight, constricting grip caused pain to flare like a raging fire. King squeaked out a meek cry. The grip tightened. He yelped.

"Kruger can crush your arm like a soda can. If I tell him to. What should I tell him? That you wish to respond or that you wish to be thrust further into hell? Trust me. If you want hell, we can get you much, much closer. What should I tell him?"

King's eyes were horror stricken, frantic and looking only at the source of his increasing pain. Sweat was beading on his head. He said, "I will cooperate fully. Whatever you want. You got it. Just. Tell him. Please. Please tell him to stop."

"Agreed. Kruger."

With that one word, the pain ebbed. King's breathing was easier. He rubbed the wounded arm. It felt only seconds away from breaking.

King looked into the eyes of Kruger and Heigel. Neither one returned a glance. Robots exhibited more feeling.

"Now that I have your attention, maybe we can talk. Really talk," the voice of Barlow said. "I'll grant you that this whole situation seems baffling. You may in fact know nothing about the storm you've unleashed, or the havoc you've caused many great and powerful people."

"I don't. I swear I don't. Whatever you need --"

"Mr. King. Save your groveling for later. If you're smart, you won't need it. And I do believe you are one smart man. So I implore you to use that better judgment, when rendering a decision. I will remove the veil of any lingering misconception. If after tonight, you continue with your work. Well, foretold is forewarned."

"My work? You mean my inventions?"

"Your inventions. Yes. Mr. King. Your inventions. The first few odd dozen or so. Those were fine. Progress for sure. Meted out slow. With improvement over known products. Clever. Brilliant."

A light came on inside of King. He felt a warmth rush over him. He reached his Eureka moment. "Sir. If my newest inventions are causing problems --"

"If? If? You have no idea."

"They work. I can prove --"

"Of course they do. That's the problem. They all work. Have you ever considered the consequences of a world with your inventions? Much like a Cro-Magnon with an A-Bomb, modern man is neither equipped nor capable of handling such awesome power. If your inventions were turned loose upon the world, with little in the way of a barrier or some restricting force to regulate, then utter ruin would befall the world in short, short order."

"I can stop," King said.

"You will stop. At once. And any further action along these lines will be stopped. And so will you."

"I will?" King asked with a quivering tone.

"Yes. And this is how it's going to be. You are done. Finished with this nonsense. You are going on a little trip. Not to here or there but around the world. It's all arranged. First class. When you are finished, your traveling will be over. Permanently.

You will be given a house in upstate New York. Away from people. You will lead a quiet, normal life. As normal as normal can get. You will be given a bank account, which will never fall below a sufficient sum. You will be happy and want for little, if

anything, in the material world.

This is how your life will be. No deviation. No grand excitement. Usual and boring. If that isn't to your liking, then we can stop the car and give you three bullets to the head and end it all right now."

"That's, fine. I guess. I mean. Yes," King said as he slowly nodded, unsure.

"Well, which is it? There's no bartering involved. A simple yes or no answer is required."

"Yes. But."

"Ah. But. But what?"

"I've been raised to believe that you can't get something in this world for nothing. What's the catch?"

A loud cackle reverberated through the speakers. Raw. Hard. Long. It stopped with fits of snorting and started again. When Barlow composed himself he said, "You've been raised right. Of course there's a catch, and here it is. You will invent what we tell you to invent. When we tell you. We are your exclusive partners. Does that sound like a hell of a deal?"

When a man like Barlow has you backed into a corner, there is no choice. King gave little more than a moment's hesitation and agreed. It didn't matter that the voices weren't at his beck and call. If King had laid it all out, his head would be sporting several graphic holes. He needed time to think and plan.

He knew there was no place on this Earth he could hide. He felt it inside him, like a thick growing vine, branching out from his churning stomach. He knew they would find him. Just as sure as he knew he would never forget the name Barlow. Barlow. That was the creepiest part about the whole experience. Barlow. The man threw his name around with weight, as if he wanted you to remember it. Maybe so when you died, you could tell the next world who sent you.

#

Time came. It stretched on and on. In the mail, King received his around the world ticket. It sat on his desk, like a millstone. Unmovable. A reminder. He hoped there was still some out. Still some way of putting the breaks to this train that had

skipped the tracks.

King spent days staring at it. He wanted to will it away. He went to sleep at night with the thought of waking up in the morning and the ticket being gone. Morning came. Still there.

The situation would have stayed that way until the phone call. It was late in the afternoon, about a week after the ticket arrived. The voice wasn't Barlow but it was no less adamant. King had one day to get on a plane or never take another trip as long as he lived.

King knew in the primal part of his being that to take the trip was to court death. Maybe not physical death but something worse. He reflected on the odd thought that was gaining traction inside him. The alien voices had gone silent.

He worried they had forsaken him, or maybe he had forsaken them. He knew that he wasn't chosen at random, and that the inventions were building towards some greater than goal. He assumed they had others like him. It was a thin hope. Instead, he was trading his role in the cosmic play for digits in a computer and a chance to breath another day.

#

That final night, sleep was hard. When the dreams came, they were vivid. For the first time, King felt connected to the world. No longer a passive viewer, he traveled to various points around the world.

He saw war, strife, poverty, abject misery and all the low points of human suffering. He saw new development and a sparkle of hope spread out few and far between. Most of all, he grew immersed in human culture and better came to understand the dilemma: the human race was killing, crowding and poisoning itself off.

It wasn't merely a problem of climate change, environmental degradation or resources depletion. It was the totality. Taken as one problem, it would be difficult but manageable to overcome. Taken all together, it seemed apocalyptic.

#

It was upon waking that King's focus narrowed to the past and he started thinking about his life. His father's untimely exit when he was still in diapers. A victim of a hit and run. His mother



forced to take him to live in a crummy New York City ghetto. Truly, it was the crème of the crud.

A boy with a brain couldn't find enough safe hiding places. Bullets rang out at all hours of the day and night. Drug deals gone shady could be heard through walls no thicker than cardboard.

It was no minor miracle when King graduated high school and left the area. Of course that meant working sixty hours and going to school full time. Even a genius has a breaking point. His grades in college were solid but never stellar.

Still, he had a chance at several internships, which is the best way of getting a foot in the door. The kind of opportunity most people could only drool about. He would have taken any of them if he had the time and money. He was short in both and had to settle for finishing school.

When it came time to find employment, all the interviewers wanted to know was how much experience he had. Catch-22.

He didn't dwell in self-pity. He took it upon himself to refortify his efforts and sprinkle in a dash of hope and let the chips fall where they may. Then the voices started. Thinking about the warmth they gave him made him snap back into the now. He had lost the only thing that mattered to him and he wanted it back. At the moment when atonement seemed to glow around him, it happened. The voices started again.

King felt he had no choice. Money brought him only hollow happiness. Fame, if he had it, would have been crushing at first and eventually fleeting. The aliens conveyed to him quite simply that they had been unable to find another anywhere near him in terms of response. They'd managed to find a few children, some half-brained hermits and an odd assortment of people who were too disposed of to be of useful assistance.

The voices never begged, only made proclamations with adamantine hard logic. Like all good logic, it bypassed the emotional defenses and burrowed deep into the control center of the brain. In so doing, every emotion, every electric impulse was naked and exposed.

King knew he would never be happy with his progress stalled and the world rapidly being torn asunder. A situation he could help, if not reverse. The inventions would give all humankind equal and total access to near limitless energy, and all that entailed.

Any negative that would result from this would be seen as the price of admission to a greater society. From this introspective analysis came immediacy.

Of all his most prized inventions, the 3-D printer with nanobot precision and matter transmutation capabilities was his favorite. It was bulky and weighed more than a small car. He used it to craft parts and further his adventures in science. In Barlow's hands, it would be a tool to spread destruction and demise.

For the first time, King realized it could also print gold, precious jewels and alleviate all material scarcity. It was the part about gold that intrigued him.

#

In order to break free from Barlow, King needed funds. Knowing that all parts of his life were being surveiled, especially financial transactions, King devised an idea of using his inventions to stealth his wealth.

While he went through the motions of preparing for a long trip with the purchase of luggage, clothes and electronic gadgets, he also went about printing a chess set composed of pure gold but cloaked and plated in a lead veneer.

#

Upon leaving for his trip, King programmed the printer to self-destruct and consume the entire lab. At the airport, he used his unchecked luggage to change in the bathroom. He left disguised with a baseball cap, sunglasses, ear buds and a backpack that sagged low from the hefty contents. Most of all, he blended in and melted into the masses, moving through the city as a generic nobody.

#

Though the voices helped him with flurries of inspiration, they did little to help cope in the ways of man. The seeds of King's paranoia were sown, and every move he made was with calculated forethought. He traveled home to the ghetto. His mother was dead but he knew the area well enough to live, be shielded and buy some time.

He spent the better part of week finding a place to live. Gentrification was taking place in parts of the neighborhood, but plenty of snake pits remained. The duality was off putting.

He settled on a rat hole of a building where he could pay extra upfront in cash to ensure privacy. It took months to become acclimated to the pace of life. It also took him this long to get the necessary parts together to begin his mission.

The most important piece was a metallic briefcase that was purchased with the express purpose of concealment. It was a custom job and had to be ordered, but the steep price he paid was well worth it.

Inside, secret compartments abounded. Space was ample. The silver finish gleamed with importance. The lining inside was made of new alloy that concealed the contents. King spent the bulk of the remainder of his wealth on electronic components of all shapes and sizes.

With all the puzzle pieces assembled, King went about putting together his masterpiece. He was nearing the end when he found the surveillance devices.

The disclosure of the devices had come too easy. King knew his friends were merely announcing their presence. All the pains he had taken to conceal his person and property, all for not.

It also meant that the imaginary death clock ticking above King's head was running down and falling close to zero. Any second could be the moment.

He reached into the back of his brain and grasped for something, anything. The grand plan had to be sped up. Quickly. Only a fool goes into battle unprepared. He had to scout his enemy.

#

Whenever he walked the streets, he felt the cold stare of them. Their eyes gave them away. They preferred to dress in plain suits and were incessant about wearing sunglasses.

If he bumped into one, he could tell right away. Any other person would react. Anger. Contempt. Fear. Any sort of emotion. Not them. These agents as he called them hid behind a poker player persona. If he did bump into them, they walked on, ignored him and pretended the event never happened.

He got to be good at spotting them. They boxed him in wherever he walked. Four if the time of day was business hours. Eight or more if after hours.

He couldn't shake them. Couldn't shake the chill that they gave him. Even in the dead of summer, he felt ice envelop his body, almost as if they knew they could grab him anytime they wanted. He knew it.

All he could do was simple tests. If he walked off the busy street, down an alley, it looked odd with four or more spooks trailing you. They were scary, not stupid.

He'd walk down the alley then bump the heel of his hand to his forehead, act like he forgotten something and quickly turn around. Not more than a few paces away, a spook. That's how he bumped into them. That's how he got close and looked into their eyes. He could only see their real eyes if he bumped into them hard.

It took a few tries to get the right shoulder movement, but when he did, he saw. On two occasions, he was able to see their eyes. Narrow. Beady. Eyes are windows to the soul. Behind the inward looking eyes was a vacancy and it chilled King to the bone.

Maybe it was the way they kept coming for him. Maybe it was the way they never let up. Kept sucking the life out of him, like a parasite does a host. Maybe it was these actions and nothing more than caused his waking thoughts to be haunted to the basement of his being. They could either kill him at any time, or he would die trying to escape. It was this realization that made King make a bold move.

#

By now, King was a desperate man. Being off-grid, his only currency was gold and cash. Any time he needed money, he went down to the metal exchange and made due. His gold chess pieces were almost depleted.

Any chance of getting on track with his life was diminishing. He had no real home to go back to. No true friends or close family to turn to. They had him squeezed between the cross hairs.

When he made up his mind, he walked the pavement of the city with confidence. Underneath his arm he carried the metallic briefcase. It was attached to his left wrist by a handcuff. Its glare was conspicuous, even when he tucked it in tight like a football.

His plan was nebulous, but with each step he saw the seeds of an idea grow wild and ragged before his eyes. When he walked, they

followed. It had gotten to be routine. King decided to change the routine.

He shifted the streets he walked to busier ones. The ones where millions of disjointed New Yorkers walked everyday. King made every attempt to avoid that flood of people for the very reason he was steering for it now--confusion.

A light breeze nipped at his face. The odors of the streets, the people, and the shops all flooded into one strange sense. A hyper smell blocked any chance of distinguishing.

King bobbed through the sea. He matched pace with the people in front of him, then caught an opening and slid over, bumping shoulders with some self-important white collars talking about stocks. Greeting fingers were exchanged.

King snaked through the crowd, feeling the breath of all those around him. Tasting small snippets of their barely digested lunches.

It only took one person to disrupt the foot flow. Someone who didn't know how to hail a taxi. Someone that fixed her broken heel right in the middle of the sidewalk. The crowd split around them, always with grumpy consequences. King almost tripped over a flock of small children. One person could disrupt the flow. King was that person.

King used the disruptions to fight against the opposite flow. He turned and headed right for the people walking against him. Their disbelief was quickly followed by a string of words that would make a sailor proud.

King bumped. King shouldered. King looked like a man ready to toss his lunch anywhere at anytime. As he held his hand to his mouth, people made a path for him, though this didn't stop the taunts.

At the point it seemed the confusion was over, King shifted again. He found a side street and jogged the remainder of the block, cutting through every back way and odd point in an area inhabited by low class delis and restaurants.

He looked at his watch, and knew he had no more than forty minutes until the program started. He gauged his surroundings.

Graffiti laced brick. Smoke billowing out of short stacks. Perpetual decomposition all around. The kind of neighborhood a

little old lady could get her skull caved in for fun. He was a little over a mile from the television studio. By the way the crow flies, no worries. By the New York way, big worries. He ruled out ever taking the subway. Too confined and the very real possibility of an unfortunate accident.

King took off in a dead sprint when he connected back with the great mass of people, cutting across both sides of the flow. He sprinted through an intersection, stopping to pause mere inches away from the mirrors of taxis and buses as they blared their horns.

He paused when he had to pause. He ran when he had to run. He felt like a wily fox running some chasing hounds ragged. There was no way outside of electronics that the agents could keep up with him. He knew they had that so the chase he set up was only a prologue.

It didn't bother him that they knew where he was, or where he might be heading. He wanted them to think he was panicking. If they felt he was panicking, then they still would feel in control.

He knew how to use this against them but it wouldn't matter unless he could reach the studio in time. His whole idea was a long shot, but the best shot. The goons wouldn't be able to kill him. Not yet.

It was time he was after. Enough time to let the aliens he was connected with to work their magic.

#

King raced closer and closer to the studio building. It housed a major cable news network as well as the home of satellite radio. It was there he had business. In approximately ten minutes, King would grant an interview, exposing everything.

It was to be broadcast and streamed live on cable, Internet and satellite radio, recorded for posterity and sent out to millions of homes. He was signing his own death warrant but upon reflection, he knew he signed it the day he made the deal with Barlow.

When King looked up, the skyscraper rose above him. It was windowed with obsidian dark glass, looking more like an ancient obelisk than a modern architectural accomplishment. He was across the street, several hundred feet from the main entrance,

when he heard the commotion.

To his right, in front of the skyscraper was a flurry of activity. A crowd was swarming. Much like ants on fallen food particles. People were yelling and screaming. The crowd swelled so large as to bulge into the street and shut down all traffic flow. A flurry of cops darted past King and the other spectators.

King followed. The closer he drew in, the surer he became. His heart sank into his stomach. His veins tensed up. His mind grew heavy with electrical impulses banking off his skull. He knew.

His eyes didn't want to see, but he had to. The crowd wasn't giving an inch to anyone except the police. King heard the words, "Jumper." "Suicide." He managed to struggle his way forward, through the rows of rubberneckers and careless gawkers, most of whom were recording the scene on cell phones. It was pandemonium.

As King inched closer, he saw the first glimpse. A sliver of the scene was all he witnessed. He was four rows back when the stench of rotten potatoes filled him, growing stronger with each hard earned step forward.

He clutched his briefcase and jumped as high as he could, using his free hand as leverage to get higher on the shoulder of a person near him. He only did that once. Any more and he risked going toe to toe with a prison yard brawler.

King saw. One clear picture. The splatter marks of blood with the body face down in the center. Most of all he saw the cloud of flies swarming over the body. No one shooed them away. Even the cops kept their distance. King didn't have to see the face to know that the reporter who was set to interview him was eating pavement.

This meant that Barlow knew. Checkmate. All the clandestine tricks were for not. He looked for a swift exit from the scene, but grimaced when he saw a pair of spooks smiling at him. They were only a few dozen paces away and didn't seem too interested in snatching him. King figured it was because they could at any time of their choosing.

One of them calmly stretched his neck out, working it around in a circle, taking time to pause with each sharp crack of neck vertebrae.

The sound made King drop his briefcase. Because of the handcuff, it only dangled. King snatched it, tucked it under his arm and

put up a stiff arm and raced through crowd towards the front doors of the skyscraper. He didn't dare look back.

King stumbled into the lobby. A security desk was islanded in the middle. The coal black walls were adorned with ornate artwork or expensive replicas. Fake plants lined the gray marble floor. Security was taking care to rub wands over each visitor into the building.

King knew he wouldn't make it far past that. Even if he scrambled and did, he'd be stuck on an unmoving elevator. Trapped in a cage.

His eyes quickly scanned other methods of entry. The fire doors were accentuated with bright red lettering. He knew because of fire codes they had to open both ways. He wondered how many steps he could make.

He looked to his side and caught a reflection in one of the windows. The spooks were crowding up outside the door, like a starving wolf pack ready to pounce on an animal and rip it to pieces.

The only choice King had was bad or worse. He clutched his briefcase tight and took off in a full sprint for the security checkpoint. The time of day was busy so his reckless movement caught everyone off balance. He leaped over the velvet rope and hit the fire door running full speed.

Inside the fire escape stairway, he cleared several steps with each stride, like a kid would do. Sweat fell into his eye, clouding his vision for a few blinks. He was up two flights when his lungs screamed in fiery protest. His heart was pounding like a jackhammer. He carried on. Two to three steps at time.

He heard the doors at the bottom of the stairway belt open with the crackle of walkie-talkies and pissed off rent-a-cops screaming. King wondered how many flights more he could straddle before they caught him. Four? Ten? It wouldn't be much more than ten and his heart would explode, leaving any hopes permanently dashed.

The only ace King had was the briefcase. No matter the surveillance. No matter the snooping, no one could know what was in the briefcase. King lived with it, slept with it, pissed with it, did everything with it attached to his wrist. What he had in it was all he had left.



Seven flights up, King called off the chase. He slammed through a door to one of the office floors. The fact that he didn't know what was on it bothered him not in the least. His appearance through the doors caused screams to echo through the maze of cubicles.

King worked his way through the labyrinth, stopping and starting several times. He noticed that in every cubicle was a worried worker, hunched on the floor, staring up at him with blinding fear in their eyes.

King's eyes raced around the room. Options were running low. He spotted his security friends, huffing and puffing through the doors. He crouched down so his head wasn't exposed. A cubicle worker spotted him and screamed so loud that people on the street could have heard her.

King gave up the cover and bolted for the closet at the end of the cubicles. It was locked. The guards drew near him. They had the front of the row blocked off.

As King slumped to the floor in panting exhaustion, the guards approached with ginger footsteps and heavy smirks.

King's eyes bulged from his skull. He clinched at his chest and looked primed to scream an animal sound in rage. Instead, he propped himself up and waved the briefcase in front of him. King said, "Anyone gets closer and we all go boom."

Silence. The sound of a few nervous coughs broke the solemn stillness, but all other motion stopped. One of the guards muttered in slow, nervous words, "What do you want?"

"I want a key to this closet. And I want everyone to back off. Everyone."

Another guard bowed up. A smirk crept across his face. "You don't have nothing. That briefcase is full of nothing."

King stared at the man. Long pause. A few hacking, nervous coughs were heard in the distance. The guard took a few meek steps forward.

King said, "You want to find out, Porky? Huh? A few more steps and they'll be picking up our pieces in Jersey. Get me the key. And back off."

It only took a few minutes for someone to materialize with a

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