

# Kept in Suspense

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The time was 8:52 a.m. when Decro walked into the lobby of IRIS. My facial-recognition system had no trouble picking the arctic wolf out from the crowd, wearing a white shirt, a dark blue hoodie and jeans. He had an optimization procedure scheduled at 9 a.m. so I was expecting him. With a fizzle that looked like the turning on of a mechanical television, a hologram of me appeared in front of him.

The wolf jumped back in surprise. "Oh, hi," he greeted me. "Is this IRIS? I'm here for the optimization procedure?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" I responded in glee. "I've been expecting you." The happiness module programmed into my speech was meant to help put my conversation partners at ease, although it didn't seem particularly effective on Decro.

"Huh?" he was taken aback by my cheeriness. "Oh yeah, I'm Decro," he introduced himself. "But I guess you already knew that, huh?" he scratched his head sheepishly. "The instructions told me to report here. What do you need me to do for the procedure?"

I flashed a charming smile at him in response to his visible discomfort. "Right on time, I have a good feeling about you," I reassured him. "If you could just head through that door someone will be with you shortly," I pointed to a door with the sign "Lab Access" next to it. As he made his way to the lab, I disappeared in the same fizzle, reappearing in the lab.

The contract was already on the metal desk beside me. Decro had applied for the Full Life Optimization Procedure, or FLOP for short, where we will aim to optimize the subject's life in specific aspects based on the changes they are willing to make. Decro had specified that he wanted to improve his financial situation, physical fitness, and maximize happiness, and was willing to allow us to change his lifestyle, diet, job, behavior, and storage situation. More than enough for the procedure I have in mind.

He appeared through the lab doorway. Noticing me, he called out "Oh, hey," and stood awkwardly by, watching me expectantly. I glided over to Decro and directed him over to the table. "These are the forms you have filled in on the IRIS website in printed form. We will need you to sign on the line to officially agree to the procedure."

Decro looked through the notes as I continued. "After that, we can begin your physical and carry on with the real fun." The wolf nodded as he checked the last of the forms. I'm surprised he seemed fine with allowing us to optimize his "Storage" situation. Most subjects opted out of storage solutions once they found out what it involved, and those remaining limited it to at most a month of storage. Still, once he signs the form, it's legal.

Decro turned to me and asked, "So, how does FLOP work?"

"Well Decro," I began. "Here at IRIS we have some of the most advanced technologies to upgrade and sustain a person's physical form. Since you agreed to greater flexibility for us to optimize your lifestyle habits, I can offer you a "Better Life" package which will help you achieve your goals of "financial well-being", "physical fitness", and "happiness".

"That sounds good," the wolf nodded. Picking up the pen, he signed on the bottom of each page.

I could hardly contain my excitement. The first time we're trying this procedure with a willing subject! With my mind connected to the room's control system, I slid the desk back into the wall and made a metal examination table rise from the ground. Multiple computer stations also rose from the ground, each with a blinking display.

"I need you to strip down to your underwear and lie on this table, please," I smiled warmly at him. He blushed a little, before taking off his hoodie and shirt, folding them carefully into a pile and setting them on a chair beside him. His shoes and jeans came off too, and were neatly placed with his other clothes, leaving the wolf wearing a pair of tight black trunks. He gingerly climbed onto the metal table and laid down.

I directed various mechanical arms down from the ceiling towards the wolf, each of them equipped with a different scanner as it examined him. I fizzled between the different computer stations to monitor his vital signs. Very healthy specimen. With a few taps of the keyboard, his health details was saved.

"Very good," I congratulated him. "You're fit for the procedure. I will need you to stand in this circle," I pointed to a circle in the middle of the room. The circle was about the length of a full arm span and the floor within it was lower than the rest of the room.

He walked over to the circle and stood within it. Time for the procedure. The ground below him opened up, letting him fall into the vat below. Unfortunately, his reactions were fast. With a yelp of surprise, he caught the edge of the hole in time as his feet dangled into the empty vat below.

"Hey! What gives?" he protested. Ugh, what's this guy? I glide over to the edge of the hole and towered over him. Decro could definitely see my face of slight displeasement. "Uhh, what are you doing?" he asked nervously.

"We're solving your problems by putting your body into storage until the post-scarcity age, which should happen in 912 years, 4 months, and 19 days. Plus-minus a century or so," I answered sternly.

"I-I don't get it. You're supposed to improve my life!" he tried to pull himself out of the hole. Something I will not allow. I brought a giant metal claw down on Decro and grabbed him by the waist. It pulled downwards into the vat. "Please! What are you doing?" he pleaded. "Help!"

This resistance is getting on my nerves. I lifted my leg over Decro's head, and stomped down on him. My body may have been a hologram, but the effects were real. He flinched in surprise and

loosened his hold on the ledge. That was enough for the claw to pull him into the hole. He landed in the bottom of the vat and looked around.

I fizzled to the lower floor to watch the arctic wolf.

The vat was made of heavy, reinforced steel and thick, tempered glass. The claw tugged against Decro's trunks and tore it, fully stripping him. It pulled the fabric remnants out of the vat and placed the lid on the vat, wielding it in place with an airtight seal.

"Hey!" he banged on the glass. "Let me out!" I ignored him. Bio stimulation gel gushed out of the holes in the ground as it was pumped into the tank. Decro stepped away in surprise, but the level of green goo was rising up to his ankles.

"Wait! Stop!" he protested again. Pointless. I scowled at him, but he was too concerned about the goo to notice. It was up to his waist now as he splashed around in the gel. It quickly reached to his chest and up his neck.

He was swimming in the goo now, tilting his head upwards so that his nostrils could breathe air. That would soon change though. The goo reached to the top of the vat where a small tube was sucking out air, leaving the wolf fully submerged in the gel. He panicked for a few seconds before realizing the goo was breathable.

Now to wait. A holographic clipboard and pen materialized in front of me and I started filling in the storage reports. Administrative work. How inane.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 0 days

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject unwilling to enter storage pod. Physical force required to restrain subject and contain him within pod. Once inside, subject banged fists against reinforced glass walls. Escape attempt unsuccessful. Preservation fluid was pumped into pod. Subject panicked as he was submerged before finding out fluid is breathable. Subject is now suspended in fluid. Fist-banging continued. Pod lowered into containment room so as to reduce distractions which may hinder my productivity.

### **Personal Comments**

Subject was being annoying. Recommend heavy sedatives for next subject unwilling to go into storage. Oh wells, all that effort. I think I'm done for the day.

P.S. Nevermind. It's only 10.14 a.m. Darn.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 1 day

**Status:** Stable.

#### **Observations**

Subject was woken from his sleep. Once awake, subject expressed anger at containment. Words inaudible due to hyperbaric speech distortion. Audio processor installed to understand subject. Subject demanded to be let go, indicative of good physical and mental health. Pod lowered into containment room.

#### **Personal Comments**

Thank god for the containment room. I need a mute button on this wolf. Why can't furs be born with mute buttons for that matter. I could save myself from plenty of headaches with this alone. Tragic.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 2 days

**Status:** Stable.

#### **Observations**

Subject remained asleep for 14 hours. Subject was woken up to assess health status. Subject requested to terminate contract. Request denied. Subject requested to terminate contract again. Request denied again.

#### **Personal Comments**

Moment of self discovery: I like saying "Request denied". It makes me feel important. I should use it more often. REQUEST DENIED!

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 4 days

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject appeared listless and moody, not atypical for someone in storage. However, unwillingness to be in storage might compound this effect and impact mental health. Take note. Subject requested to terminate contract. Request denied.

### **Personal Comments**

REQUEST DENIED!

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 7 days

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject was awake when pod was approached. Subject offered personal possessions and life savings in exchange for his freedom. Request denied. Subject resorted to begging. Pod lowered into containment.

### **Personal Comments**

Okay this is getting old. I can't just cancel your procedure just because you don't want it any more. That's unethical. IRIS prides itself on satisfying every single paying customer, and you're one of them.

Note to self: stop having monologues with status reports.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 10 days

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject appeared sleepy, indicating that preservation fluids are taking effect. Sedation is required for sustainable long-term storage. Subject's internal fluid and solid waste will have been cleared from the body and filtered out of the pod by now. Subject mumbled incoherently.

### **Personal Comments**

Bio stimulation gel appears to be keeping subject's body fit. Preservatives in the gel have also taken effect. If this was consistent with the previous storage projects, he should be entering a state of deep hibernation.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 21 days

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject muttered something. Heavy voice processing revealed utterance to be "please let me go". Request denied. Subject struggled weakly in protest. No further action taken.

### **Personal Comments**

REQUEST DENIED! Almost forgot about that. Very cute. I would pat his head but the vat is pretty much sealed for the next few centuries or so. I contented myself with patting on the glass.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 1 month

**Status:** Stable.

### **Observations**

Subject has been contained for longer than we have ever stored another person. Subject was asleep for the entire day. Observations from this point on will be informative for future mid-term storage projects.

### **Personal Comments**

This is so exciting. \*SQUEALS OF GLEE\*

Note to self: roleplaying on formal reports may come across as creepy.

Note to self: who the heck cares?

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 1 month, 15 days

**Status:** Lethargic.

### **Observations**

Subject has not woken up since last report. Pod glass was tapped upon. Subject stirred, but did not wake up. Storage-induced lethargy seems to be stronger the longer the storage goes on. Active monitoring required to prevent total mental shutdown.

### **Personal Comments**

Was worried that the wolf was dead. Thankfully, he is not. That would be disastrous. We have never failed to deliver results. Well, what if being dead actually helps him achieve his financial, fitness, and happiness goals? Perhaps our lawyers can work something out.

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### **Subject Storage Status Report**

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 1 month, 19 days

**Status:** Lethargic.

### **Observations**

Subject woke up disoriented. Subject mumbled words which are later deciphered to mean "Where am I?". Subject's speech facilities still functional. Subject went back to sleep.

## Personal Comments

IMPORTANT: Lawyers say that death would not count as achieving subject's goals. DO NOT LET SUBJECT DIE. To be fair, it's hard to do that when literally all you are breathing is life-preserving fluids.

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## Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 2 months, 3 days

**Status:** Lethargic.

## Observations

Subject responds to routine glass tapping with grunts. Response is satisfactory.

## Personal Comments

Meh.

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## Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 5 months, 18 days

**Status:** Lethargic.

## Observations

Subject is in deep hibernation. State is sustainable for long-term storage. Subject has not yet woken up since last report. Subject should be woken up for occasional health checks in future.

## Personal Comments

Told wolf about the crazy customer I had to deal with today. Hope I never have to see him again. Wolf is a good listener.

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## Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198



**Storage duration:** 1 year, 1 month, 2 days

**Status:** Questionable mental health.

### Observations

Subject woken up for health assessment. Subject seemed weak and disoriented. Subject whispered "Is it time?". Replied no. Subject winced in pain before returning to sleep. Rigorous mental wellbeing tests needs to be developed to assess subject's mental health. Development is unlikely due to budget constraints.

### Personal Comments

Hope wolf is okay. He should be okay. I've been shining some lights into the tank as a makeshift lava lamp so I'd hate to see him go.

P.S. Nope, it's not time. 911 more years to go.

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### Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 1 year, 11 month, 13 days

**Status:** Released.

### Observations

Subject released from containment. Basic health checkup revealed that subject is in good physical and mental health. Subject is allowed to return to society.

CORRECTION: Observations entered in wrong file. Subject Percy was correctly released, not Decro. Apologies for mistake.

### Personal Comments

Don't ask.

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### Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 2 years, 9 months, 12 days

**Status:** Questionable mental health.

## Observations

Subject woken up. Subject does not seem aware of situation, nor his own identity. Amnesia? Potential side effect of prolonged storage. Additional studies required.

## Personal Comments

I think we can start storing more long-term subjects. Unfortunately none of them seem keen on being in suspended animation for anywhere close to a year. Who would've thought?

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## Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 10 years, 5 months. 7 days

**Status:** Questionable mental health.

## Observations

Subject found curled in fetal position. Subject woken up. Subject mumbled words that do not correspond to words in any known language. Subject's language centres are likely to have shut down due to lack of use. Implement monthly mental therapy for future storage to prevent deterioration of various mental facilities. No signs of ageing detected. Immortality technically possible.

## Personal Comments

Oops. Almost forgot about this guy. Hello mister wolf! I hope you're doing okay today. Yes? I'm good, thank you for asking. Well, have a great day!

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## Subject Storage Status Report

**Subject:** Decro

**Contract ID:** #5160198

**Storage duration:** 23 years, 11 months. 27 days

**Status:** Stable enough to leave alone for 900 years.

## Observations

Subject no longer responding to glass taps. Subject's breathing indicates sign of life. Response is satisfactory. Will be leaving in containment chamber to make space for other equipment. Scheduled next check in 900 years' time.

## Personal Comments

I don't think he's going to reply me for now. But he's alive, so that's good. I guess I'll get going then. Checking in when he's finally released.

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The arctic wolf stirred in his sleep. Where was he? Floating. Somewhere. Pitch black. He grunted. And who was he? Something, someone. Nothing came to mind. Around him the world didn't exist, and perhaps neither did he.

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~ End ~