The Human Experience

By Baily Vis

**Chapter 1**

 This was it! The opportunity of a lifetime. Ever since she left community college and moved to Miami, Sienna had spent countless hours looking for the interview that would skyrocket her career. Now – thanks to an anonymous tip from Twitter – she finally had it. At least, she hoped she did. Her journalist instincts had taught her to never trust social media. That much was common knowledge. But in this case, she had to take a leap of faith. Her meager earnings from her start up blog was barely enough to make rent. Even then, she never managed to pay on time. According to the tip, her potential subject lived in a boat house on the south end of town. She had no time to waste, so she grabbed the nearest pair of tattered jeggings, her favorite purple flannel, and the one shoulder Batman tank top she had worn at the bar the night before. Once dressed, she ran out the door like her ass was on fire.

 Just before she got on her Ducati, her phone buzzed, alerting her to a new text. She looked at her smartwatch and it read: “RENT!” Her landlord, Mr. Aziz, was rightfully upset that her rent was over a week late. He’d been gracious to Sienna for the last year, but his patience only went so far. *“Sorry, Mr. Aziz. Hopefully, after today, I’ll be able to pay you back everything you’re owed.”* She thought solemnly. Without another thought, she slapped on her helmet, got on her bike and headed for what was potentially the interview of the century.

 Ezra Riley was just your average Vectroid. In fact, if you didn’t know what a Vectroid was, he would appear to be an average human man. 5’11 in height, 28 years old, and about 200 pounds – most of it muscle. He had brown hair and spoke with a slight New York accent. But perhaps his most distinguishing feature was his purple eyes. That, and the tiny mood indicator in the side of his head where the temple would be in humans. Ever since his kind had arrived on this world in 1979, humanity had never been the same. They became even more distrusting than they already were. All his kind ever wanted was to blend in peacefully and help mankind however they could. That’s why his species was created, after all. However, by the time his “parents” formed him in 1993, the government had done everything they could do to reject them short of kicking them off the planet. That’s why he and all other Vectroid’s had resorted to mundane human jobs. Until recently, he’d been a park ranger at the Oleta River State Park. When that didn’t work out, he started a nature blog and worked very part time at the local senior center. In fact, he had just gotten off a shift and was getting ready to shave his synthetic goatee when he heard a knock at the front door. He shaved at literal light speed and then went to answer. When he opened, what he saw was quite surprising.

**Chapter 2**

 Ezra couldn’t believe what—or more accurately, who –he saw before him. Standing on the front deck of his boat house was an interesting looking young woman. She wore a purple flannel over a Batman tank top and a very tattered pair of what he believed humans called “jeggings.” Her hair was dirty blonde with an auburn streak in the front, curly and shoulder length. “Hi. I’m Sienna Arrin. Can I come in?” She asked with a slight French-Canadian accent. Ezra took a moment to respond so he could compute the sight in front of him. She appeared to be about 5’7 and no older than 23. One would have mistaken her for a Caucasian if it wasn’t for the slight Hispanic accent to her skin tone. He couldn’t believe he was thinking this, but she was gorgeous. “Mind if I come in?” she repeated. “Oh! Yes, please do. Sorry about that.” He stepped aside, allowing her entry and continued “It’s just not often that I get visitors.” “It’s alright.” She replied.

 As Sienna had come across the property, she took note of everything she saw. Outside there was a navy-blue mid-80’s model Ford Bronco and a late-60’s silver Dodge Charger. But perhaps the most noticeable attraction were the bleachers surrounding the waterfront. A large group of millennials and Gen-Zer’s were cheering and laughing as jet-skis zoomed by. *“So, this is peak Miami culture.”* Sienna mused.She approached the property and looked closer. The house exterior appeared to be stained oak wood with a bamboo roof and awning. There were very few windows near the entrance, so she had a hard time telling if her potential interview subject was home. When he answered her knock, he stared at her wordlessly, forcing her to politely ask twice for entry.

 Once inside, she noticed that the interior was as modest as the exterior. The floor was carpeted in nearly every room she could see and all the walls in the immediate area were beige. She sat down on the white couch in the combined living room/dining room area and began to speak. “Well, again, I’m Sienna Arrin. I really hope I didn’t come at a bad time?” “Not at all, Miss Arrin. I had just finished shaving when you knocked. My name is Ezra Riley. And you’ll forgive me for asking but, why are you here? Very few people ever come to me for a social call.” “*He’s almost indistinguishable from a human. I wouldn’t know the difference if it weren’t for the glowing light on his temple. And his house is surprisingly low-tech for a glorified android.”* She thought. “You see, I’m sort of an aspiring journalist. I actually just moved here a year ago and started my own blog called *The Sienna Segment.* Maybe you heard of it? No? That’s okay. No one has. Anyway, I need a big story to pay my rent and maybe get a real job. So, I was hoping to ask you a few questions?” He studied her for what seemed like an eternity, the light on his temple flashing. He then replied, “I’d be honored, Miss Arrin.” She felt an overwhelming sense of excitement and replied, “Great!”

**Chapter 3**

She pulled out her phone and opened up the voice memo app before saying “Before I begin, please, call me Sienna. Too much formality makes me uncomfortable.” She said with a laugh. “Well, we don’t want that.” Ezra said with a chuckle and a smile. “As you wish, Sienna.” Ezra was shocked at the events currently unfolding. Just 30 minutes earlier, he’d returned to his modest home from another day at his remarkably average job. Now, here he was about to answer questions for a beautiful, young, human girl. His internal cpu wasn’t quite sure how to process this dramatic turn of events. Instead, he had to do what humans referred to as “winging it.”

“So, I guess what I want to ask first is what are Vectroids really? Like, not what the tabloids or conspiracy theorists define you as. I guess I just want the truth.” Ezra was shockingly caught off guard. Though he was still willing to answer. “That’s a very loaded question, I’m afraid. If you don’t mind, I believe the best possible way to answer that would be to start at the beginning. Do you mind?” Sienna shook her head slowly and said, “Go ahead.”

“Our origins lay in the year 2040.” He started saying before she interrupted “Wait! What? Are we talking about…”? “Yes, but it’s more complicated than that. Please, just follow me.” Sienna nodded and Ezra continued “In the year 2040 our creator –Gideon Lee –was deeply saddened by the current state of the world. Everything from the geopolitical climate to the environment, all of it was going to hell. Thankfully, Lee was one of the most brilliant and richest humanitarians in the world. So, he spent the next 15 years working on “*Project New Dawn.*” That’s where we Vectroid’s come from. Our purpose was to assist in advancing humanity and help them find ways to survive without destroying the planet. Unfortunately, the project was completed too late and ….” He trailed off and looked wistfully out the window at the lake. Sienna gave him a concerned look and placed her hand on his shoulder. “Are you alright?” “Yes, of course. Forgive me.” Sienna leaned back and he continued.

“After 15 years of hard work, Lee had successfully given birth to our species. There were 2,000 of us already out among the people. But, as fate would have it, it was too little too late. The core of the earth was decaying and, before long there wouldn’t be an earth left. So, Lee gathered 1,000 of us and 1,000 humans onto his ship called, “*The Ark”* And we blasted off into the cosmos, never to return. Then, about 3 months into our intergalactic journey, a wormhole opened at the edge of the Milky Way galaxy, and we were teleported to this earth in the year 1979. So you see? We didn’t just travel through time. We traveled across dimensions.”

Sienna was awestruck. This sounded like an obvious lie told by a good Samaritan who wanted to help a struggling Gen-Zer. Yet, something about the way he told the story and the way he was currently carrying himself told her that he wasn’t lying. This was a real traumatic event. She pressed on “You don’t look like you’re almost 50 years old. How do you remember all of this?” “Vectroids age much slower than humans. And besides, by your standards, I’m only 28. Also, all “newborns” of our species inherit the entire history of our race. So, I essentially remember it as if I were there the whole time.” He didn’t know why he was telling her all this. Most Vectroids preferred to keep their shared history to themselves unless absolutely necessary. “How about some less-heavy questions?” Sienna asked. “Do you eat, drink, sleep?” Ezra smirked and said “We can, and we do, although we don’t have to. Those functions were built into us to make humans more comfortable around us. And the reason we live so long is because we are all powered by a substance called “*Element Z”* that can last nearly 1,000 years.” “What about illness or broken bones?” “Irrelevant. Standard illnesses don’t affect us. But 0.1% of our kind have a glitch called “Social Integration Disorder.” Basically, we have a difficult time expressing a full range of emotions and we don’t do well in large groups of people. For example, You and I are communicating perfectly normal. However, If I were to be at a large social gathering, my processing power would slow down, and I wouldn’t be able to compute everything I was experiencing.”

 So far, if this interview had taught Sienna anything, it was that these otherworldly beings were not as perfect as they appear. Sure, there insides were a complex system of circuits and wires. But they were just as human as you and I. Maybe even more so. “If your species was created to help humanity evolve, why hasn’t more changed since your arrival?” “That’s difficult to answer. I suppose the short answer is that, because mankind is so afraid of us due to the fact that we are not from this dimension, any attempt by us to help you would be seen as potentially hostile by humans. The unfortunate truth is we Vectroids are seen very similarly to the minorities here in the United States. We are seen as less than and untrustworthy and, therefore, we are to be feared.” Sienna could’ve shed a tear when she heard this, but her professional integrity forced her to choke back whatever she was feeling. She could hold it in at least until she left. Instead, she sighed and asked, “If people are so afraid of you, how do any of you manage to live normal lives?” Ezra pondered that for a moment before saying “It hasn’t been easy. Mostly, it’s about keeping a low profile. Many of us, myself included, have managed to create a happy and fulfilling life here so long as we don’t make a scene or get in trouble. In fact, many Vectroids have managed to get high profile jobs in the fields of computer, science, and medicine. I guess you could say we are helping humanity, just not in as significant a way as our creator had hoped.”

 As much as she didn’t want to admit it, Sienna was emotionally invested now. But she couldn’t tell if her investment was in the story or in him. Perhaps it was both. She was certain she had enough material for possibly her best blog post ever, but she decided to ask one more question as icing on the cake. “What would you say to all those who are afraid of you and your fellow Vectroids?” Ezra sighed and sat quietly for what felt like an eternity. “I suppose I would say that your fear is unfounded and unnecessary. If we had any harmful intentions, you would have seen them by now. Our sole purpose for existing is to live among you, learn from you, and –hopefully one day—help you survive and achieve far more than you can imagine. We only wish to be seen as equals. Only together—Vectroids and humans of all shapes and sizes—can we achieve the future that my creator envisioned before he died. No one should die without meaning. Only through unity can we accomplish our dreams.” Sienna knew she had a winner now. Yet, she still felt something was missing. But this interview had gone on long enough. “Thank you.” She said as they both stood up. “Anytime. It’s my pleasure.” Ezra replied. “Perhaps your story will help more people to see the truth.” Sienna looked sad as she said “I sure hope so. But right now, I’m just hoping to get some eyes on my blog. And hey, I know you said earlier that you have trouble embracing your emotions. Want some unsolicited advice? All I can say is to let it all in and not be afraid to do it. In the end, that’s what being human is all about.” “I will take that under advisement.” After exchanging goodbyes, Sienna left and returned to her apartment. That interview had hit her harder than any other in her amateur career. She could feel her emotions flooding in, so she kicked off her shoes, pulled off both of her tops, buried herself under her covers, and let them all pour out. Meanwhile, Ezra was still standing silently in the living room and, for the first time in his 28 years, he shed a single tear.

**Chapter 4**

 Sienna spent the majority of the next day editing the audio and typing up the interview word for word into her blog. After adding some narration over the audio, she copied it into the post and hit the “Upload” button. All she had to do now was wait. Hopefully, this interview would put “*The Sienna Segment”* into the mainstream. Hell, maybe this would even get her a reporter job with a legit news outlet. As she sat staring at her computer and checking her various social medias countless times, she couldn’t shake this feeling she had ever since leaving Ezra’s boat house last night. He said he had never been able to fully experience humanity because of his “glitch.” That didn’t seem right to her. Maybe the real reason was because he didn’t have the right guide to show him the true wonders of the world. But there was something else. She had this strange feeling. Was it—no—it couldn’t be? She looked at her phone. They had exchanged numbers before she left in case she had any follow-up questions. So, even as she thought she was pushing down this strange sensation, she found her thumb pushing Ezra’s name on her phone.

 Ezra was getting his morning news update as he reflected on the events of the previous meeting. Why had he been so willing to answer her questions? Nobody before her had been able to break him down like that. His glitch made it almost impossible. Yet this young and ambitious girl was able to walk right in and get every answer out of him. He was still stunned. So much so that he was barely paying attention to the four different news channels flashing on his tv screen simultaneously. Suddenly, he felt a buzzing feeling in his wrist. It was his phone implant. A feature built into all Vectroids. A holographic display showing Sienna’s number appearing out of his hand. *“She must have more questions.”* He thought to himself. He answered and heard her voice on the other end. *“Hey! What are you doing?”* She sounded much happier than she had the night before—almost like a completely different person. Hearing it brought him unexpected joy. “I’m doing fine. I’m not doing anything now. Just work at the senior center in about an hour until 5pm. Did you have some more q— “”*No! I mean, no, no questions for my article. I was actually going to make you an offer.”* “Oh really? What might that be?” “*Okay, yeah. So, the carnival is in town for the next three nights. I don’t know if you’ve ever been, but it’s not half bad. My point is I’m wondering if…...you would want to join me?”* Ezra stood quietly while considering what she had just asked. “*Hello?”* She asked nervously. “Oh, yes. I suppose I could do that for you. Are you assuming tonight? Because I can join you there at 6pm.” “*Great! I’ll be there. I just remember you saying that you’ve never had the full human experience, so I thought I would help you.”* “I suppose it couldn’t hurt. Alright, I’ll see you tonight then, Sienna.” And he hung up the phone. He sat down on his couch for a moment, mulling over the conversation. He’d had very little experience with emotions, but he knew he was feeling one now. Though he didn’t know which one. If only he could see that his mood indicator light had just begun to glow pink.

 The rest of the day, Sienna ran around like a woman possessed. She pulled out her best-looking clothes that were still fit for walking around a carnival and she put on makeup for the first time in months. They weren’t going anywhere fancy, so she decided to go with casual, yet attractive. A beanie, her red Adidas high tops, a shirt that read “*I heart Florida”* and jean short shorts. She didn’t quite understand why she was so flustered. Ezra wasn’t even human. And yet, in many ways, he was more human than any of the guys she’d dated in the last 2 years. Though her mom wouldn’t approve of her current course of action. “*Why can’t you find a nice man who’s the same age as you? You’ll never get anywhere by dating bad boys and having one-night stands.”* Her mom would never understand that Sienna might have a legit chance if she played her cards right tonight. The carnival was about 20 minutes away and it was now 5:30pm. She hopped on her bike and started on her way. “*Rather be early than late.”* She thought to herself.

 Ezra arrived at the carnival entrance at precisely 5:50pm. The entry sign read, “*Russo and Berlanti’s’ Crazy Town Carnival.”* “What an interesting name.” He mumbled to himself. He had never been to a carnival or anything like it before, so he had the feeling of what humans would call anxiety. Still, he somehow knew that Sienna would make this trip worth it. He also hadn’t known what to wear, so he chose khakis and a green sweater. Not exactly the best choice for the middle of July. Good thing Vectroids couldn’t feel temperature. Suddenly, a pair of dainty hands covered his eyes as a female voice said, “Guess who?” “Ms. Arrin?” Sienna suddenly appeared in front of him and happily yelled “Bingo!” They both laughed quietly before Sienna grabbed his hand and ran into the carnival, dragging him behind. “Come on!” She said excitedly.

 Ezra was seeing a very different version of Sienna tonight. During their interview, she spoke with a slightly deeper voice and carried herself as though the weight of the world were on her shoulders. Now though, it was as if that burden had been lifted. She laughed, moved with a pep in her step, and acted as if she didn’t have a care in the world. Sienna felt the same about herself too. She felt unburdened for the first time in years. She showed him all the attractions and rides that were considered “good” and, from what she could tell he was enjoying himself immensely. At one point he even squirted her with a water gun after winning a prize at one of the festival booths. He laughed, and in retaliation, she tackled him to the ground. They both laughed before getting up.

 After they had gotten food and were making their way towards the exit, she noticed that his mood indicator light was glowing a bright baby blue, “What’s it mean when your light is blue?” she asked. He replied, “I believe it means I’m feeling great joy.” Sienna blushed, knowing she had been the reason he was feeling this way. It gave her a sense of pride she hadn’t felt since her first article in “*The Sienna Segment”* went viral. That had been a long time ago. “This cotton candy is very satisfying. What is it made of?” “It’s literally just some sugar, some flavoring, and probably some other preservatives I’d rather not think about.” She responded. She looked down at the cup of miniature donuts in her hand. “Ever had one of these?” She asked as she held the cup up. He shook his head. She grabbed one and said, “open up, you!” He reached for it, but she stopped him saying “Ah ah, don’t you trust me?” He hesitated, and then nodded before opening his mouth. She fed it to him, and, after a moment, his eyes lit up. “Now this is fantastic! What are they called?” “Mini Donuts.” She said, laughing. Ezra looked at the cup in her hand and then back to the cotton candy. After a second, he handed the cotton candy off to a little girl passing by and grabbed another mini donut as he and Sienna walked out of the carnival, giggling with smiles on their faces.

**Chapter 5**

 They were practically inseparable after that day at the carnival. They met at almost every opportunity they had, and Sienna kept introducing Ezra to new experiences. Going to the movies, sporting events, bar hopping, street dances, you name it. In return he would tell her everything she didn’t know about Vectroid culture. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement. But even if those things weren’t already agreed to, more than anything, they enjoyed being around each other. Sienna understood more about cultural differences and Ezra kept learning about the joy of humanity beyond the hate and bigotry. But they were the source of joy for each other. After a while, neither one of them could imagine their lives without the other.

 Several weeks later, they were enjoying dinner at Ezra’s house. It was his first attempt at making authentic Mexican tacos and –if it weren’t for Sienna—he would have failed miserably. “I’m telling you; you need the cheese to get the full experience!” she exclaimed. “You say that, but true Mexican tacos don’t have cheese. That’s an American thing. You should know this.” He teased back. “Okay, first of all, I’m only a quarter Hispanic, not even pure blood. And what can I say, sometimes Americans do make things better!” She bit into her taco and, before she could stop it, a small pile of sour cream and salsa dropped out the opposite end and onto her leg. “Damn! Of course, that had to happen.” She rolled her eyes and continued “knew I should have worn long pants.” “Well, then you wouldn’t have fit in. This is Miami. No one wears long pants, except for me. But I’m “socially awkward” as you would say.” “Yeah, sure but I just moved here from North Dakota last year. I’m not used to it yet. Whatever. Anyway, can I use your bathroom?” He nodded before tossing his used napkin at her. She batted it away, glared at him, and then walked into the bathroom.

 As Ezra waited for Sienna to come back, he threw away their paper plates and then looked at his reflection in the kitchen window. His mood indicator was intensely glowing pink. He’d suspected this for some time now. Pink indicated love. He had never experienced it before, but it made sense considering Sienna was the only human he had really connected with. And although they’d only met a few months ago, their connection was strong and intense. He didn’t know yet what to do about it, but he would have to decide soon. His feelings could no longer be denied, and he suspected she felt the same way. He opened the window in front of the sink and stuck his head out, taking a deep breath of the cool night air. After just a second, and jet ski roared past and splashed Ezra with icy lake water. He stood paralyzed for a moment before hanging his head in defeat and closing the window. Clearly, the universe was sending him a signal.

 Sienna was washing the salsa and sour cream off her leg in the restroom. “*At least it didn’t get on my sweater. That would have never come out.”* She washed her hands and then her face before looking up at herself in the mirror. After all these weeks she had spent with Ezra, she knew finally what that odd sensation was that she had felt at the very start. It was love. Not exactly the reason she moved out to Miami. Actually, she had planned to avoid it at all costs. Too many toxic relationships in the past. Yet here she was, falling madly in love with this Vectroid who was almost more human than anybody else she had ever met. Even after only knowing each other for a few months, she could see a future with him. She knew they could make it work. But, how to tell him? She couldn’t hold out for much longer, she knew. She also knew Ezra was probably waiting for her impatiently. She scrubbed her face with warm water once more and left the bathroom.

 After dinner, they migrated to the swing bench on his deck. There was a full moon that night and Ezra had never bothered to stay awake long enough to see one in person. Sienna could not let that stand, so she dragged him outside to observe the night sky. “It really is beautiful.” He spoke. The light of the moon reflected in the lake, giving everything in the area a slight blue hue. “See? These are the things you miss by being such an introvert.” She said as she gave him a light punch in the arm. He laughed and they sat quietly for a while before she broke the silence. “There’s something I didn’t ask you when we first met.” “What’s that?” “You say that you all are able to experience a full range of emotions. What about fear? What are you afraid of?” He hesitated for a moment before saying “I’ve never told anyone this, and I suppose I’ve never admitted the possibility to myself, but I guess it would be the concept of death.” When Sienna heard this, she lifted her knees up to her chin, leaving her flats on the surface of the deck. She looked at himsadly and said, “that’s awfully fatalistic.” “Right. Here is the thing though; you humans all know where you are going after your time on Earth is over. It varies depending on the religion, but most could agree there’s a good afterlife and a bad one. You all believe there is an immortal deity that created everything. However, my creator was a mortal man. He was one of you. And since I’m not flesh and blood, I don’t know what will happen to me. There are no certainties. And more than anything, I did not like the idea of being alone.”

 Sienna couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She expected a thoughtful answer, but nothing so deep and philosophical. Death was something that everyone feared. It was true though, most people had at least a rough idea of where they would go after their life was over. But people like Ezra, their fate was uncertain. Much to her dismay, she had no real answer for him. She turned her head away and discreetly wiped a single tear from her eye and, almost subconsciously, she leaned in closer to him and put her head on his shoulder, almost instinctively. “I don’t know what will happen to you when your time is up. But I promise you, you’ll never be alone.” Ezra looked at her thoughtfully and placed his hand on her round cheek. After staring at each other for a few more seconds, the inevitable finally happened. They kissed, giving into every impulse and emotion they had been holding in since the day they met. It was worth it for both of them, and it lasted so long that anyone passing by was probably mildly embarrassed. When they at last parted, they knew it was destined. “Sienna, I – “” shhhhh. I know. I love you too.” She said placing her pointer finger over his lip to shush him before kissing him again. As for what happened next, well—let’s just say she didn’t leave his house that night.

**Epilogue**

 Sienna and Ezra returned to their home after a very long 24 hours. 18 months had passed since they first met and, 6 months ago, they had decided to move into together. “Sienna, darling, your acceptance speech was fabulous!” “Thank you, my love. But if you don’t mind, I think I’m going to bed. It’s been a long day. Care to join me?” She said as she pulled on his tie. In the past year and a half, much had happened both in their personal lives and around the world. Sienna’s interview with Ezra had become one of the most viewed articles on the topic of Vectroids in history. Because of this, not only had she landed a reporter job at “*The Miami Herald”*, but it had also won her a Pulitzer Prize. The happy couple had actually just returned from the awards ceremony. Her article had also brought about change on a global level. Hate crimes against Vectroids had gone down 55% and general hate crimes had dropped by nearly 33%. As a result, both Sienna and Ezra had been invited to speak at the World Leaders’ Summit in Washington DC. Thankfully, Ezra had overcome his issues enough in order to give one of the most heartfelt and impactful speeches President Parker had ever heard. His words.

“You did it, Sienna. You changed the world.” “We both did.” She responded. “And it would have never happened if we hadn’t met. Who knew our love had the power to bring about real change? I guess miracles can happen.” “Well, our love AND your article.” Sienna rolled her eyes, grinned and said, “You give me too much credit.” “You deserve it. Without your article, nothing in the last year would have happened. My part was inconsequential.” Sienna bit her lip and looked at him with hungry eyes filled with passion and love. Clearly his words had stirred her inner desires. “How ‘bout you come give me some of that credit I apparently deserve.” She said with a silky voice. Ezra smiled, kissed her intensely, and then pulled the bed sheets over them. Life was better than either of them could have ever imagined.