

## The Quarantine

The lid slid back with a 'Shoosh' and Canby Starr wearily sat up. "What now!" He said, largely to himself and the Attenderbot stood next to the Cabinet.

"Sir" said the 'Bot," The Captain has requested your presence on the Bridge as a matter of urgency".

"Oh Baffage! I was just being dealt a winning hand at the Virtual Casino! What's he want now!"

"I couldn't say sir, that information is outside of my jurisdiction".

"Oh crumbs, me joints! Help me up if you will, me knee piston has seized up again". The 'Bot reached in to the Cabinet and lifted Canby out of the structure.

"Ahh! I think I need a refit; muttered Canby.

"No sir, you aren't due for an overhaul for another two hundred years, so it would not be authorized"

"Oh! shut up!"

"Yes sir".

The 'Bot released Canby and stood to one side, ready to give assistance if needed. Canby stood for a minute and tested his left leg, loosening up the rather sluggish knee piston.

It was over twenty years since it was fitted, it was after his first solo flight in an Ornithopter. All was going well until a rather large Bat Eagle had taken a shine to the 'Thopter and had tried to take it, and Canby to its nest at the summit of mount Tenon.

He had crashed into the side of the nest and tumbled almost two miles towards the valley floor below. He was saved from certain doom by a single stump of a tree jutting out from the cliff side that caught the only surviving wing of the machine, sending it slamming into the rocky outface.

Canby's left leg was badly mangled in the crash and it took the rescue team several hours to extricate the remains of the Ornithopter along with Canby and then, several months to rebuild the damaged leg.

His knee joint was replaced with a mechanical unit that; according to the medical team, would last at least a half a millennium! Unfortunately, it was an early prototype model and though it operated extremely well, it was subject from time to time to seizures; especially when not activated for a while (as in the Stasis Cabinet).

After a few moments, Canby was satisfied that he could walk without the aid of the 'Bot and made his way up to the Bridge and Control Room.

As he entered the Bridge, the Captain stood up and greeted him, also on the Bridge were two others; Thomas Crane, the Navigator and Dyane Combs the ships Evaluator.

The Captain indicated to Canby to take a seat which he gratefully did next to Dyane.

"Sorry to have taken you out of stasis a little early, but we have a possible problem with the ship and the route through this system we will be entering in a few hours' time".

"The course takes us through an ancient Solar System that is in quarantine. Unfortunately, we have little choice as we are running low on Deleriumite our primary fuel type".

"I have woken you, because you; or at least your ancestors, originated from this system and you might help us through as the quarantine field; we think, could recognize your genetic make-up".

"You mean this is SOL 'A!'" exclaimed Canby.

"Yes, it is" replied the Captain.

Dyane spoke then, "Canby, we do understand the risk and in any other circumstances we wouldn't get within two million lightyears of the place. But the meteor strike we had shortly after you entered the stasis cabinet severely crippled and drained our fuel reserves and this is the only option, we have of returning to Vega four".

"I have calculated the probabilities from Thomas's route plan and we have a good percentage rate of completing the system transfer; but only with your help".

Canby absorbed the information with growing concern, "Are you as sure as you can be?"

"Yes" said the Captain, looking squarely at Canby, as far as we can be with probabilities; but Dyane is the best Evaluator in the fleet and I trust her judgement one hundred percent".

"Very well" replied Canby, "What do I do?"

"We need you back in the stasis cabinet" said the Captain, but not in complete stasis, the quarantine field will interact with the cabinet field and 'read' your DNA gene code. Because you are a direct descendant from the 'Firsters' of SOL Three it should allow us to penetrate the field and hopefully; be allowed through the Hallusiagenic Visions that sent many of the early travellers insane as they approached the inner system".

"The rest of us, including the 'Bots, will be in deep stasis in the shielded Emergency Chamber on level three".

With that, they all stood; "Good luck Canby" said the Captain, echoed by the others as they filed out.

Canby, assisted by the Attenderbot, settled into the stasis cabinet he had vacated just a short time ago.

Before closing the lid on the cabinet, the 'Bot placed a metallic hand on Canby's shoulder, causing Canby to look up into the ovoid mechanical face.

"Good luck sir" the 'Bot whispered, "My predecessor was aboard the last ship to pass through this system before the quarantine was put in place two millennia ago. It took many years to erase what he had sensed and felt from this sector of space, to be honest, he never fully recovered and spent the rest of his service on the hospital world of Neturia" helping others who had also passed through this system.

Releasing his hold on Canby's shoulder, the 'Bot closed the lid on the cabinet and engaged the 'Slumber Only mode before making his way to the Emergency deck and the deep stasis cabinets.

Canby lay quiet and drifted off to sleep as the 'Slumber Field' took hold. "What happens now?" were his last thoughts before blackness arrived.

"Hello Canby" said a voice just outside of his ear, "Hello Canby" said another, "Hello" said yet another. This continued for quite a while and was starting to agitate him.

Another voice raised itself, cutting through the others, it was a metallic sounding voice but quite mellow.

"Welcome Canby Starr to SOL Three" said the voice. "I'm The Quarantine monitor and will guide you through the history layers captured in this system. "I recognized that your genetic sequence is linked to SOL Three, known as Earth and as such are a part of the history layering in this sector of space".

"The layering will pass through you and not interact with your cell structure, unlike those not from this system, they were engulfed in the resonant layers and became a part of that history time period. Most travellers, because of their stable cultures, could not mentally handle the harsh and sometimes brutal times that they found themselves in, and became mentally unstable".

"This is the reason why this system is considered a danger to voyagers and why the quarantine was set up".

As Canby lay there, he became aware of those time periods, something like an observer watching a pageant go by. A cooling planet, huge meteor and comet impacts, oceans forming, the first life, early man, wars, diseases, technology, more wars, peace, space flight, exodus.

Canby passed out; the flow of data overwhelming.

"Sir, sir; you must awake" said a distant voice, slowly awareness returned.

"Sir, sir; said the voice, "you did it! You got us through!"

Canby cautiously opened an eye then both of them, holding a shoulder and gently shaking it was the Attenderbot. "Sir you did it!" repeated the 'Bot.

As he became more fully awake, he could see his companions stood around the cabinet, all with very wide grins on their faces and relief that the ordeal was over.

He was helped from the cabinet and stood unsteadily flexing his reluctant muscles, especially his rebellious knee piston, for once; it seemed, it was behaving itself.

"My goodness, I'm not surprised this region drove so many insane, the history of this system itself is insane!"

Canby looked towards the 'Bot, remembering what it had said just before closing the cabinet, he placed a hand on the 'Bot's shoulder, "I truly understand why it affected your predecessor so badly, and am glad we came through this so we all didn't end up in hospital on Neturia!"

They made their way to the Bridge and Control Room, the Captain looked over the various instruments, occasionally twiddling a knob or two and keying in commands. Satisfied all was as well as it could be, he joined the others and sat down.

"We should just about have sufficient fuel now to reach the Vega Four outpost, I've sent an Acoubier Gram ahead so that they have the refuelling station on standby for when we arrive".

"It seems we have become quite famous, especially you Canby; we are the first ship to come through this system since the quarantine was set up two millennia ago!"

"It seems that having you on board Canby, was quite literally; a one in a billion chance, as there are only a very small number of citizens that are direct descendants from SOL Three and even less that are actually in the fleet service!"

As they sat in contemplation, Canby reflected on some of the images he had seen, the struggles and hardships, the stupidity and the triumphs.

Looking at his colleagues (friends), he wondered how they had made it at all!

**Ho Humm!**