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mpoNDUST



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Dennis 2.7 was in the middle of loading a truck for its trip up the haul road when an LED inside his helmet blinked on. The telltale flashes in the static shield as workers made their way down the carved-out hillside meant the relief crew had finally arrived. His voice synthesizer shook with relieved laughter as he slipped his earthmover into neutral, and began preparations to return home after six long months. Mining Oceanus Procellarum's rich deposits of helium and other valuable elements was not an assignment most of the all-mech work force hoped for.

The earthmover's tank-like tracks settled into the lunar surface and Dennis felt the bearings in Track 3 slip yet again. Beneath his company-issued space suit, Dennis was a typical robot worker. His boxy-humanoid design marked him as one of the original robotic crew that built Lunar Colony 8 two centuries ago.

When he touched down all those years ago, he was a slave, and Man in the Moon Mining Company just another struggling start-up. Now he was a free mech and married with offspring. He still felt pride when he recalled changing the designation plates on his temples from Dennis 2.0 to Dennis 2.7 on the occasion of his marriage.

Dennis lay back in his seat and gazed upward, waiting for his replacement. Dust from the mine formed clouds as it reached the static-charged mesh two hundred metres in the air as the particles were propelled up and through the net. Three months apart from Gertrude had been more than enough. A few hours on the squat, blocky transport back to the colony, and he'd be home.

Dennis checked the screen mounted on his suit's forearm. No new messages. In his eagerness to get home he hoped he didn't get any messages today. Guilt washed through him. The time off would be no solace without some news that might help his search for Rhiannon.

Ten months ago, Rhiannon 1.0 had disappeared. Since then, he had been searching for the reason, and he was finally on the verge of finding her when the trail went cold.

Rhiannon 1.0 had been Mech of Honor at his wedding, and was a trusted friend. Before she disappeared she had mentioned to Dennis that she felt she might have been the victim of, as she put it, "a kind of identity theft." The last time Dennis saw her, she was on her way to the Central Library to search for some vital piece of evidence. She never returned.

After months of searching, someone calling themselves "Zed" had contacted him, warning Dennis he had been flagged as a security risk by Management. Zed kept in contact, offering no help, but seeming genuinely interested. Dennis never had much to share, but he felt better knowing someone believed him. Whoever Zed was, Dennis was grateful. On his way out of the dome to begin this shift, Zed said they should meet in person, to discuss Dennis' recent discoveries and to give him a piece of information Zed would only share in person. Dennis couldn't delay his departure time. He had told Zed that he would be back in six months, and to contact him then if he still wanted to meet. There had been no response. Despite this, Dennis had found some time to probe the payroll system over the last three months during breaks and had uncovered some very interesting--

Dennis jumped in his seat as Walt's face popped into the earthmover's window. His helmet's comms unit crackled to life. "Hallo," Walt said with a jovial wave. "Apologies for my tardiness."

"Not to worry," said Dennis. "Stand by for decontamination." Walt moved back, keeping his distance for safety purposes. Dennis checked the seals on his space suit. This suit had to last him all the way home, and even these nano-weaved suits quickly accumulated serious wear and tear after direct contact with the abrasive quartz dust covering the lunar surface.

Dennis detached the umbilical connecting his suit to the earthmover's power supply. Automatically, a static charge activated on the cabin's exterior. The thin film of dust clinging to the outer cabin became visible as it, and all other dust within two meters of the cabin, was repelled by the charge. Dennis activated his suit's personal static shield and exited the cabin.

"All yours, Walt," Dennis said as they passed on the gantry. "Alert maintenance to check Track Assembly 3. It's been slippery for weeks."

"Thanks, Dennis, I'll have it checked as soon as possible. Regards to Gertrude and Jeff."

"Have a productive shift." Dennis stepped off the gantry and took the last twenty feet to the surface in freefall. None of the mining equipment had ladders. Low gravity and legs with superhuman strength meant the work force preferred to use their own power when possible.

As he boarded the magnetically propelled train back to the dome, a light on his wrist blinked, indicating a new message. It was scanned, replied to and deleted in less than half a second. It read:

*If you are still interested in finding the truth, come to Eastern Airlock Six
on your way back to the dome.*

-Zed

Dennis didn't feel the fans that blew the remaining dust off his suit as he tried to formulate an excuse for his wife as to why he would be home late without revealing anything about where he was going or why it was so important. He didn't like lying to Gertrude. He would explain himself to her in person, when they probably weren't being watched. The truth, Dennis thought, was worth any price. He almost believed it.

Hours later, in a small, dark room, a screen blinked on. Pale, green text crawled across it, bathing the small, curtained space in sickly green light. The message read:

Job done. I am clear. Back inside dome, 20 mins.

The recipient sighed in relief. *One less thing to worry about today*, they thought, and deactivated the screen.

Rocky 7.0 peered through the reinforced glass that separated him from the returning robot miners in their dusty space suits and was once again grateful for his job. He had never liked the idea of being in the presence of dust. It could chew up a mech's joints with minimal contact, which gave him the shivers. He had been lucky to land this job, inside the dome where it was bright and airy; the massive geodesic structure protected the human and robot populations of L8 from all the things that would kill them before unprotected exposure to the sun burned them to bits. And there was no dust. Ever.

Rocky enjoyed being manager of the crew that decontaminated the miners and welcomed them back to civilization. Every mech that came through his airlock always wore a smile of relief as they saw the colony again, with its gleaming pillar of brushed metal and glass reaching up to the apex of the dome at the centre of it all. The Pillar was where Central Control kept a watchful eye on the citizens, and broadcasted the news they needed. To Rocky, it was the most reassuring sight in the world.

Rocky supervised Cluster Nine, the most heavily trafficked airlock. Most airlocks weren't used much. Humans rarely ventured outside, and had little regard for tourists who did so. Rocky agreed with this sentiment. Going outside was like swimming in the middle of the ocean: certain to cause terminal malfunction.

On a good day, Rocky co-ordinated his team's efforts from the management station at the rear of the airlock's control centre and could decontaminate several thousand workers in only a few hours. First the robots' space suits were recycled, followed by 90 seconds in a high magnetic field drawing most of the remaining regolith to the ceiling. Finally, a shower caught everything that remained. Today was not a good day.

Nothing had gone right from the moment Rocky arrived. It had started when airlock C rejected his security clearance, so they had to make do with only airlocks A and B. An hour later, the polarisers on airlock A's static scrubbers malfunctioned, leaving only airlock B. Now, one of the workers to be decontaminated had not gone through. Everyone who went through was logged, and everyone who was supposed to go through Cluster Nine had been logged except one. Rocky was going to have to call Central Control again. He sat looking at the comm link, in fear of the questions that would be asked. If metal skin could sweat, Rocky would need a towel.

In Central Control, a message scrolled across the Colin's screen. Colin was a Grade ZZ Civil Servant. He had thinning hair, soft hands and a severe caffeine deficit. Far too many messages had crossed his screen today. His job was to monitor vital dome functions and dispatch appropriate personnel to deal with problems, but he was not paid to deal with hysterical robots, which were the only calls he had gotten today. He took another sip of his tea, grimacing at its bitterness. *It's Cluster Nine again*, Colin thought. The message started blinking. Colin added some milk to the tea and sipped again. No help. The message finally, in desperation, beeped at Colin.

"Got another one, Colin," said Abby, his supervisor. "Pick it up quick, remember the officer on duty today."

Colin tapped the infernal blinking beeping rectangle on his monitor, connecting the transmission. Attempting to sound cheerful, he said, "Hello, this is Colin, how may I help you communicate today?" As AC9's supervisor began to speak, Colin pinched the bridge of his nose in the way phone workers must to deal with their most frustrating clients.

Once AC9's manager settled down and explained his problem, Colin was actually pleased to talk to him. A missing worker was highly unusual, and so the issue needed to be escalated. Colin loved escalations; they meant finding somebody else to deal with the problem. You got to get up and walk about, find a person you didn't like very much and--

"What's that?" a deep voice rasped behind him.

Colin's heart sank. There would be no pleasant walk around to find someone to deal with this now. He didn't even have to turn around. Everyone knew that voice.

Detective Inspector Raymond Haskett was infamous in Central Control. Once Haskett took your case for escalation, your next step was to start a running list of all the forms and paperwork you were going to have to file. If he didn't find your H/990-AD Official Annotated Call Log from one of his cases, his perpetually squinted eyes would find you and he would make you wish he had just thrown you in jail. His attention to detail made him despised by the Civil Service. His one exception was his personal appearance. All his clothing was wrinkled; his chin unshaved. If he wore armour, it too would wrinkle somehow.

Colin was lazy, not stupid. He surrendered to the inevitable. "Manager of Cluster Nine wants permission to send someone outside in search of missing worker. A mech coming back from the mine didn't check in, sir. Possibly he didn't make his transport." Colin knew that last bit was a mistake as soon as he said it.

"Possibly?" Haskett sneered. "Let's make sure. Call the pits. Tell AC9's manager to get his metal hide out there himself and look for our man. And get ready for a long night. I'm escalating this."

Lunar Colony 8 is a fully functioning city, which means food, shopping, entertainment and cuisine. It also means neighbourhoods with their own cultures, usually designated by social strata. The borders between neighbourhoods can be very distinct, such as on Dearborn Avenue in Lunar Colony 8. One side of the street had all human pedestrians, and on the other side, only robots.

From an alley on the robotic side of the street emerged an oddity: two humans coming out of the robotic ghetto called the Gearbox. The elder was a man seemingly in his thirties, with unruly hair and a light tweed jacket. His pale green eyes searched for something across the street while the girl paused, tying back her dark auburn hair.

"Ah, here we are at last, Miss Redfoot." He pointed to an establishment across the way. The sign above the door said "Xeno's Gyros: Best Gyros outside of Greece!"

Hannah gave the Doctor a sideways look as she finally got her hair out of her face. "Doctor, are you sure this isn't just the first place you found that serves food? Because that's what this looks like."

"Nonsense," the Doctor said, crossing his arms. "The food here is too good to stumble upon by accident."

"You're lucky I'm hungry," Hannah grumbled.

"You are the lucky one," said the Doctor leading the way across the street. "We'll get some takeaway and I'll show you the Moon."

Colin took another sip of tea. The alert he was avoiding now was of a different kind than he had gotten in a while. Thankfully, this warning didn't involve talking to an insufferable idiot on the phone, but it was odd. He was glad Haskett had left to search AC9, because this was definitely the strangest thing Colin had seen today. Against his better judgement, he caught Abby on her next round through his area.

"When did this happen?" Abby asked. "I didn't think this sort of thing happened."

"It doesn't," Colin said. "How can you have 1.78 cubic metres of air displaced without some other change in the atmosphere? It's like a box just appeared out of nowhere." He decided to put his cards on the table. "Look, this happened in the Gearbox, right? Whatever it is, it's not dangerous and it's in the middle of thousands of mech workers."

"That's an awful lot of paperwork," Abby said.

Colin felt a glimmer of hope. "It's not dangerous and the only people who are going to notice aren't even people anyway, really."

Abby closed the atmospheric displacement alert. "You're right. This never happened."

Hannah and the Doctor strolled down the streets of the Gearbox, eating their gyros, which were, Hannah had to admit, everything the Doctor had said and more. The Doctor was giving one of his lectures as he nibbled his last surviving bit of pita.

"There are twelve other colonies like this," he said. "Most are smaller, but still, the human race is really on its way now."

"They've certainly perfected the gyro," Hannah said, her mouth full.

"Indeed," the Doctor grinned at her mood finally perking up. "Look at this place, Miss Redfoot. Robot citizens, and only two years ago they were treated as nothing more than machines. Now here they are, standing beside their parent species. Living freely, marrying, divorcing, earning wages, paying taxes and reproducing just like every other race in the cosmos."

"Reproducing?" Hannah said, tossing her wrapper into the circular opening in a waste atomizer. A green flash inside the machine startled her.

"Yes, reproducing," the Doctor said, dodging a robot as he tossed his own wrapper into the atomizer. "Of course it's more a feat of engineering for them, you understand."

Colin's monitor flashed bright orange. "Come on," he moaned. "What now?" He looked at the screen. "Oh no. Abby? Abby, seriously, get over here." The only thing Colin could do was sound the colony-wide alarm, get his manager involved and hope for the best.

The Doctor and Hannah had just turned a corner on to a narrow side street when the klaxon sounded. Everyone stopped short before rushing inside the nearest buildings, panicking, moving with the rush of a herd of threatened animals.

"Doctor, what is this?" Hannah shouted over the horrible noise. Even with her hands over her ears, she could barely stand it.

"I have no idea," shouted the Doctor. "I think we should ask someone."

Abby stomped up to Colin's desk. "This had better be good," she said.

"Contamination. Lunar soil in the air." Abby swore. "In the Gearbox."

"My God, Colin, they'll burn us alive for ignoring that displacement earlier. We need to dig into the records and erase it."

Colin stared, slack-jawed at the suggestion that they commit a felony. Then he came to his senses and started digging.

The klaxon stopped. A soothing female voice came over the tannoy. "Citizens," it said, "remain in your homes. This matter is being dealt with. Remain in your homes."

The Doctor's mouth drew down to a thin, resolute line. "Miss Redfoot," he said, "I think we should seek shelter immediately."

The first two doors the Doctor pounded did not respond. "It's not as if we're selling something," Hannah muttered.

"They're magnetically sealed," said the Doctor, ignoring her. "You know, I think these buildings are airtight, with their own atmospheres. Well, we can but continue."

The third door at least gave a response. A speaker clicked on above the doorknob. "Apologies, citizens," the synthesized voice buzzed. "There is no room here. Take the alley to your left, and make a right on the street. There is a school there. Plenty of room. Quickly, citizens, I fear for your safety."

"Thanks for nothing," Hannah said. "Now what, Doctor?"

"We take this alley, make a right turn and look for a school," the Doctor quipped. "I'm sure you heard quite clearly. In my experience, when a robot tells you to make haste, you should act according to instructions." Then he was off, running down the alley at full speed.

The Doctor was only a few feet ahead of her as they emerged onto the street. A smell hit her nose, acrid and sour. It reminded her of her father coming home from training days with the Sheriff's department. A figure was on the ground, its limbs splayed out in strange directions. Time seemed to slow down as she realized it was a robot with a hole in its chest. Its eyes were flickering almost the same green as the Doctor's. There was black dust all over the body, rolling down the robot's skin on to the pavement.

Less than a second had passed when the Doctor spun around and leapt toward her. His hand clamped over her nose and mouth. "Close your eyes and hold your breath!" he barked. He saw how scared she was and softened his tone. "Hannah, close your eyes, do not breathe. Right now." She did as the Doctor ordered.

He spun her around and began walking her away from the body. "We must get away from here," he said. He coughed, and Hannah wondered if she had ever heard him cough before. "We'll be all right, just keep your eyes closed, and keep moving." Her chest began to tighten as her body demanded oxygen.

Sirens approached and the Doctor quickened his pace. She was going to black out soon if she didn't breathe. The sirens got louder. Finally the Doctor stopped and removed his hand from her face. Hannah gulped in air, panting with the fatigue of holding her breath.

"That's the best I can do," the Doctor said. "I hope it's enough."

Squat, blocky emergency vehicles screamed on to the scene. Uniformed people flooded the street.

"We've been exposed! The Doctor said, coughing again. In seconds, they were surrounded by armed figures - law enforcement, Hannah assumed - with weapons drawn. Finally getting her breath back, Hannah noticed how little police uniforms had changed in hundreds of years. Although it seemed the traditional mirrored sunglasses had evolved into a helmet that covered the entire head.

"Hello, I'm the Doctor, and this is my associate Miss Redfoot," said the Doctor. He coughed again. "Who's in charge here?"

"We are in charge here, sir," said one of the helmets.

"Yes, yes" said the Doctor, waving a dismissive hand. "But which of you idiots is the idiot in charge? When I find a gaggle of you, I like to talk to the idiot at the top of the food chain."

A narrow-eyed man in a rumpled suit stepped into the circle. "I'm Detective Inspector Haskett," the man said in a low growl.

"You're in charge?" said the Doctor.

Haskett's jaw tightened as he tried to keep his cool. "That's right."

"I thought so, since you're the only one with a face." A ripple of irritation went through the police officers. "Miss Redfoot and I have been exposed to the dust," the Doctor said and the circle around them suddenly widened. "We need medical treatment."

"Of course," said Haskett. "Right this way." The circle opened, and a squad of people with full-body plastic suits and air tanks on were bearing down on Hannah and the Doctor.

They were taken to a massive truck. On the inside, it was a hospital on wheels. Someone slipped a breathing mask over her face. She was told to take deep slow breaths. A thin tube ran from the mask up to the ceiling. She looked over at the Doctor, who gave her a reassuring look through his own mask. A nurse took Hannah to a small cubicle and shoved a square of folded fabric at her.

"You will wear this," the nurse said through her plastic helmet in a tone that brooked no argument, while we clean your clothes." She indicated a hole in the wall. "Deposit your clothing there." The nurse turned smartly on her heel and was gone.

Hannah unfolded the garment and saw that hospital gowns had evolved as far as they ever would by 2014. "Some things never change," Hannah said under her breath. "God, I hate hospitals."

Once Hannah had donned the gown, she was, in the words of the nurse, "decontaminated." That meant walking through something that made her hair stand on end, then having her hair scrubbed (Hannah asked to do it herself and the nurse said absolutely not), having a thorough shower (without any help at Hannah's emphatic request), and having her hair washed again. During all of this her breathing mask stayed on.

A short time later, Hannah was given her own clothes back. She had barely tied her shoes when she was taken out of the hospital truck and thrown in the back of an equally large but even less friendly truck with the word "Police" on the side. A few simple metal lockers were against the wall adjoining the van's cab. The only other things in the room were a table, chairs and the Doctor, impatient to be done with the authorities.

"You were treated as poorly as I was, I assume," the Doctor said. Hannah could see him marshalling his strength to really have a go at whoever showed themselves next.

"I suppose so," Hannah said. "Oh, the wonderful places we go."

"It is a nice place," the Doctor said. "It's just a bad day to visit."

Hannah played the memory of coming around that corner over and over. That smell meant something. She *knew* that smell. Why did it remind her of her father?

"Gunpowder," Hannah said, "that's what it was."

"Pardon?" said the Doctor.

He's being polite, thought Hannah. *That's a bad sign*. "The dead robot smelled like my Dad when he came home from the shooting range."

"Oh, yes, well spotted," said the Doctor. "It wasn't gunpowder, but the smell is very similar. That smell, Miss Redfoot, was, in fact, moon dust. That dust is the reason we have been so thoroughly scrubbed. I am never wearing another hospital gown. Every time I end up in one, something terrible happens."

"I can't imagine," Hannah said, holding back a laugh at the vision of the Doctor in a hospital gown, his Lord Byron hair all over the place, barefoot, demanding to be placed in charge. She kept talking, trying to kill the laugh. "Why is dust so frowned upon? Sure the place is clean, but I can't imagine calling the police over some dirt."

The Doctor smirked. "Moon dust is quite dangerous - to humans and robots. There are strict decontamination rules, and they are enforced. Not a speck of dust from the lunar surface is allowed inside. I shouldn't be surprised if that little mound we saw today is the largest ever breach of that security."

"Okay, I'll bite, what's so dangerous about some dust?"

"The moon is completely blanketed with the remains of cometary impacts," the Doctor said in his professorial tone. "Mostly powdered quartz from mixed with pulverized igneous regolith from the moon itself. There's no weather here, so it's completely un-eroded."

Hannah thought for a moment; then it hit her. "Breathing that would give you something like Grinder's Asthma?"

"There's the geologist," said the Doctor, who had become his usual self again.

Hannah knew about silicosis. It was an ugly disease that would kill you slowly and horribly. Miners were most susceptible. The incident her professors at UW talked about was Hawk's Nest, a tunnelling project in West Virginia in the 1920's. Breathing the dust in the tunnel killed 750 workers, and left a thousand more with impaired lung function for the rest of their lives.

"As bad as Grinder's Asthma is," the Doctor continued, "this is much worse. I could tell you all about ferrous nano-particles but I'm sure you get the idea."

"I can see why they're so careful, but why are we being detained by the police?"

"I get the distinct feeling we are suspects."

"Not again," moaned Hannah.

In the small, dark room, there was bad news on the monitor.

Complications are not acceptable, the shadowy man typed.

A moment passed, then the text *It will be handled* crawled across the screen.

This is the last one, the shadowy man typed, *there can be no mistakes now. The slate is almost clean*.

Another moment, then the text, *It will be fine. The police have two tailor-made perpetrators*.

The truck's door opened and Haskett entered, accompanied by a robot. This robot was different from most of the robots Hannah had seen. Those robots were basically boxes: boxy legs, boxy arms, even a boxy head. This was something different, all rounded edges and curves. It leaned forward when it walked and moved its head to look around as opposed to the others, which just swivelled their eyes. Also it had no reflective surfaces on its skin, just a series of contoured matte black plates that shifted with its movements, giving the impression of living muscle beneath. It was like an old sports car that got revived years later by the manufacturer. The classic design had been updated with smooth, sleek lines.

"This is my partner, Lieutenant 1.5.4," Haskett said.

"Ned 1.5.4," the robot said with an easy tenor that clashed with his near-predatory stance. "Call me Lieutenant Ned. Everyone does."

"Are we being interrogated?" the Doctor said in a tone that said no such thing would happen.

"Of course not," Haskett replied. "We'll split you up to interrogate you."

"Absolutely," chimed Lieutenant Ned. "Interrogation comes later."

Haskett held up a restraining hand. "If they're charged with anything."

"They'll be charged with *everything*," Lieutenant Ned said, "starting with the murder of robot Dennis 2.7, and felony destruction of property."

"Excuse me," said Hannah. "What property?"

"I repeat, felony destruction of property. Namely, the body of robot Dennis 2.7, and I advise you not to interrupt me again."

"This is ridiculous," said Hannah. "All we did is make a wrong turn."

"A wrong turn in The Gearbox," Haskett said. "Not many humans in this neighbourhood. I'm not prejudiced, you understand, but some people might find your presence here suspicious."

"I'm just hoping this is a hate crime," said Lieutenant Ned. "Been a long time since we charged anyone with a hate crime."

"I've had enough of this," said the Doctor. "I asked for the idiot in charge and I got a bonus moron for my trouble. You, sir," the Doctor said as he jabbed an accusing index finger at Haskett, "are not only an idiot, but a bad actor. I've been around a long time and I've never seen a worse "good cop" act. And you," the Doctor's finger moved to Lieutenant Ned, "are an impossible thing: a robot with an inferiority complex. At least Haskett here has an excuse; with humans you never know what genetic material you might get. What happened, Ned? Did your parents not build you smart enough?"

"Are you finished?" said Haskett.

"You have nothing to charge us with. If you did, we'd be in chains by now. We had less than thirty seconds exposure to the body. Any longer and even your medical staff could tell. It would be everywhere."

"There should be a trail right back to the airlock," Haskett said, "but there isn't."

"Noticed that, did you? I guess even a blind squirrel finds a nut now and then."

"That is not evidence you didn't do it," Ned spat. "It's evidence you were very clever about it."

"Then it would be in our lungs," said Hannah. "We did nothing. Absolutely nothing. I don't know about you, Doctor, but I've never been less guilty."

"I work hard to keep my conscience clear," said the Doctor. "Now, may we please leave?"

Haskett folded his hands on the table. "You're right about the dust in your lungs. We will be able to tell. We're just waiting for the test results from your respirators."

With perfect timing, there was a knock at the door. Haskett's grin was smug and triumphant. Ned opened the door, and a tall woman entered. She had a badge on her jumpsuit. "Natalie Runcorn, sir. Forensics," she said, her lilting alto voice and salute contrasted with her pink bobbed hair.

"No need for the salute, Runcorn," said Haskett. "How's clean-up coming along?"

"Almost done sir," Runcorn said. "We should be able to give the all clear within the hour."

"So soon?" said Haskett. "That's good work, for the worst breach ever recorded."

Runcorn beamed with pride. "Thank you, sir. The new static attractors worked better than expected, and the breach was so localised--"

"Sorry to cut you short," said Haskett, "but you did bring the test results on these two?"

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir." She handed him a small, flat electronic screen reminiscent of the tablets people used in Hannah's time.

"No, no, Runcorn," said Haskett with chummy camaraderie, "I wouldn't dream of stealing your thunder. Read the results to us."

"Sir?" Runcorn said, confused.

"Those are the results? Double-checked and accurate?"

"Yes, sir. We actually triple-checked them, because we couldn't believe it."

Haskett turned the wolfish grin on the Doctor again. "Is that right? Well, then, let's have the results, Runcorn."

Runcorn looked at the screen. "Okay, sir, both subjects had less than forty seconds exposure to lunar regolith."

Haskett's face froze. "What?"

Lieutenant Ned folded his arms and shook his head in a very human way.

"Like I said, sir, we triple-checked it," said Runcorn, whose proud moment had turned sour.

"Forty seconds? That's it?"

"At most. Really, it was probably less than twenty, even accounting for the slightly anomalous readings from the male subject."

Haskett had found a life belt in his storm-tossed sea. "Anomalous? Well, there you go. Take them away, Ned."

"No. Sir, no," Runcorn said.

Hannah was taken aback. Runcorn's meek demeanour had suddenly evaporated. In its place was a tall, angry woman who could loom over Haskett in his chair with the best of them.

"The anomalous reading was that he had less damage than he should have, and his pulse had a strange echo." She turned to the Doctor, clearly concerned. "I wish we'd had more time to look you over, but you should get checked out. I think there's something really wrong with you."

Hannah put on the most sincere face she could muster. "I've been telling him the same thing. Maybe he'll take it seriously coming from a professional."

The Doctor was nonplussed. "How very kind."

Runcorn wheeled back on Haskett. "There is no evidence of a crime. There was barely any dust on their clothes, there is no evidence they've worn pressure suits in the last week. Sir, you will let these people go, or I will report you."

A look of terror came over Runcorn's face as she realized she had gone too far. Haskett's eyes bored into her. "May I have a word?" he said with the even, yet unhinged tone indicating someone is about to be beheaded.

Haskett and Runcorn left the truck. Muffled sounds of shouting came through the walls. Lieutenant Ned listened to the shouting get louder. Finally, he shook his head, looked at the Doctor and Hannah and said, "This isn't over." He left the truck in what would have been a huff if he were human.

As soon as the door clicked shut, the Doctor was up in a flash, opening the lockers, one after another. Inside were space suits, each with a different name on them. The Doctor looked at the name on the suit, then sniffed it and moved on. "What are you doing?" Hannah asked.

"I'm guessing these are the space suits from Investigations and Forensics departments of the local constabulary," the Doctor said. "I'm looking for Ned's suit," he said sniffing another sleeve, "or anyone's suit that smells of gunpowder."

"Would you like some help?"

"Miss Redfoot, have you not been exposed to enough deadly moon dust today?"

"It's not as if you're invulnerable."

"No, but I'm a lot less vulnerable. If you want to help, stand watch at the door."

Hannah peered through a tiny rectangle of a window. "I can't see much, Doctor."

"Neither can I," the Doctor said, slamming the last locker closed. "Nor can I smell anything."

"What now?"

The Doctor ran a hand through his hair and exhaled in frustration. "Well, there's nothing more to find here. Probably it would be best to start thinking about escape, don't you think?"

"Good idea. Lieutenant Ned didn't strike me as the kind of robot to just let us go."

"No, indeed. Did they have the foresight to lock the door?"

The door swung open and in stormed Haskett, with Lieutenant Ned hot on his heels. "Get out of here," said Haskett. His hands were balled into fists, and he quivered with suppressed rage.

"We're free to go? Just like that?" said Hannah.

The Doctor jumped in before Haskett could respond. "Of course we are." The Doctor sent a look in the direction of Lieutenant Ned. "So. I guess this is over. Right, officers?"

"We have no evidence with which to hold you," Ned said, disappointed.

The Doctor followed Hannah out of the van stretching his arms and pitching his voice to be heard through the van's open door. "Ah, freedom," the Doctor crowed, "is there any smell as sweet?"

The van's door slammed shut.

"Miss Redfoot, if we meet Ms. Runcorn again, remind me to thank her for her timely assistance," the Doctor said. "She seemed awfully intent on making sure we were released. Curious, that."

During Hannah and the Doctor's interrogation, a crowd of robots had surrounded the crime scene. There were a few small barricades set up, with the border of the crime scene defined by a yellow plastic strip reading "Caution - Police" that was virtually identical to the tape Hannah had grown up seeing on television. The robots milled and shuffled, straining to see whatever they could. The decontamination team seemed to be wrapping up. Still, the robots stared. *They look so human*, she thought. Their eyes darted back and forth, hoping for some clue as to what had happened.

What surprised Hannah was how different each of them looked. Her image of robots had always been of something manufactured, mass-produced and all the same. The reality surprised her. The crowd had robots of every size and shape. Most of them had a humanoid, two-legged, opposable-thumbed shape, but a few were decidedly odd, including one that looked like a shiny pyramid on wheels with two skinny arms attached to its sides. Many had bodies covered in plastic plates and a forward-leaning predatory stance. In her mind, she already thought of these robots as "Nedlikes." There was something organic about them. It was unsettling, especially when the other odd thing about the crowd struck her. The robots were silent.

It wasn't as though they weren't expressing their grief. Every member of the crowd Hannah focused on was trying to cope with possibly losing one of their own, but there were no fists shaken or barricades stormed, no rocks thrown. A short, brushed aluminium robot put a comforting arm around a tall, plastic-skinned robot.

"Yes, it's strange," said the Doctor, catching Hannah's mood. "Mankind just cannot help but do things all the way. In their minds, the very best a computer could be is the human brain. So they made minds in their own image."

Haskett and Ned emerged from the van, the former already barking orders at the latter.

"They've been told to clear off and we don't need a bunch of looky-loos hanging around a crime scene like this one." Haskett glanced over at the Doctor and Hannah and gave an exasperated sigh. He leaned over to Ned and whispered to him before sauntering back toward the barricades.

Ned approached them with an appraising look. The apertures in his eyes widened, and he was calmer than before. "You should go now," he said. "We need to clear the crime scene, since we are still looking for evidence." Behind him, a squad of officers were forming ranks, riot shields and truncheons at the ready. He glanced in the direction of the crowd gathered at the fringes of the scene.

The Doctor took in Ned's changed attitude. "It looks like there might be an incident here soon. I think I can speak for Miss Redfoot when I say we'd like to avoid any further trouble."

Ned considered the Doctor's words. "I think I'd better show you the way out. Stay close to me. My fellow officers can be touchy in situations like this."

Ned took them around the edge of the scene, past where the Doctor and Hannah had come upon the body. The body had been cleared away, and a twenty-meter circle of metal rods had been placed around the place where it had lain. A faint hum came from the rods and between them there was a purple tinge to the air. Hannah assumed these were the "static attractors" Runcorn had talked about. Inside the ring, a team of Nedlikes in protective suits were pushing along machines that reminded Hannah of the contraption the janitor of her high school would use to buff the floor. On the far side of the ring, a small structure had been erected that looked like an airlock. Runcorn dashed out of the airlock, with a large

burly man whose stance and bearing screamed "aggravated manager" pursuing her. As she fled the man, now waving his arms and pointing back towards the static attractors, she caught Runcorn keeping an eye on the Doctor.

In the distance, back toward the crowd, a loudhailer commanded something unintelligible. Ned picked up his pace; a feeling of tension had entered the air.

"You have an awfully lot of space cordoned off for this crime scene," said the Doctor.

"Yes, there is," said Ned, "but there are rules in place for emergencies involving a breach of atmosphere. Also, in this case there were other considerations."

A slow clamour had been gathering as Ned stopped at a convenient place on the edge of the crime scene. He lifted the tape for them. "This is as far as I can take you. Head away from the noise and get out of the Gearbox as soon as possible."

As Hannah ducked under the tape, the Doctor turned to Ned. "Is there something brewing back there?" he asked.

"No, but I feel I may be needed," Ned said in an even tone only a robot could manage.

A grim smile ran across the Doctor's lips. "I called you stupid earlier, Lieutenant. I'd like to take that back."

"You called me a moron, sir. Stay out of trouble."

And with that, he loped back toward the other side of the crime scene. The Doctor was staring off into the distance, and Hannah got the feeling that they weren't going to take Ned's advice and leave the Gearbox at double time. He spun about with a decisive look Hannah knew only too well.

"I've never seen a robot riot, Miss Redfoot, and I dare say we may never have a better opportunity. Let's amble in that direction, shall we?"

The disturbance at the crime scene was getting louder. The announcements over the loudhailer were getting more urgent and commanding, but she still could not make out any words.

She walked with the Doctor down the deserted streets of the Gearbox. Everything was sealed tightly, the rounded doors impenetrable. She and the Doctor seemed to be the only living things between here and the disturbance. Were all these houses empty? Had every robot in town turned up to gawk at the police?

The Doctor tapped Hannah on the shoulder and pointed to the first floor windows of a building across the street. "There are signs of life after all." Through the blinds a few robots were peering down at them. "They look worried, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," said Hannah, "and they're not even walking toward a riot."

"Not to worry, Miss Redfoot," said the Doctor in soothing tones, "we're only going to look, not join in."

The loudhailer echoed again through the streets. This time recognized the words "disperse" and "force." The Doctor eyed her with a smirk. "I'm sure you remember times where we've been in considerably more danger than a bit of civil unrest."

"Yes, Doctor, but usually when we walk into danger we don't do it with such a cavalier attitude."

They finally reached the last turning before the riot. The Doctor peered around the corner. "Everything looks more or less localized. Come have a look," he said, walking into the street. Hannah had no choice but to follow.

About two hundred meters down the street there was a mass of robot bodies pressing against a wall of riot shields. The police officer's helmets were all reflections of the disturbance they were trying to suppress. The robots were agitated, yet most of the blows came from the other side of the clear acrylic riot

shields. Truncheons rained down on the first line of robots. "Ah," exclaimed the Doctor, "that is what I came to see."

Hannah looked at him, shocked at his blasé acceptance of this violence. "Doctor, the police are hurting those people. Those helmets make them look less human than the robots, like they don't want to show their faces. Isn't there anything we can do?"

"What? Yes, I see, and I wish we could help, but what I was referring to is there," the Doctor said, pointing to the side of the crowd.

A Nedlike had his arm around the shoulders of a boxy robot, leading it away from the crowd. They stayed close to the buildings and moved at a quick walk away from the crowd. They turned the corner and nearly ran into the Doctor in their haste.

"Oh, please excuse me," he said, as if he hadn't known the robots were coming. "I'm afraid my colleague and I were so intent on the noise we didn't notice you coming."

"It's fine," the Nedlike snapped in a high, male voice, "we were just leaving."

As they attempted to brush past him, the Doctor put on his most winning smile and politely refused them passage. "I'm so very sorry," he said, "but we were mixed up in this business earlier and were just wondering if you could shed any light on why we were detained."

The boxy robot looked up at this. "You were there when the body was found?" she said as she stood up to her full height, which was head and shoulders above the Doctor.

Hannah wondered how strong these robots must be, and the amount of damage they could do to if they were angered. The Doctor had apparently thought of this as well, taking a step back before he continued. "Unfortunately, yes, we found the body as we sought shelter from the atmospheric alarm. We were questioned, and cleared of any suspicion," he added, a touch too hastily.

The Nedlike stepped in front of the boxy robot in a protective manoeuvre. "On what evidence were you cleared of suspicion?" he asked.

"The body was covered in lunar dust and we were not. I'm the Doctor and this is my associate Miss Hannah Redfoot. We're looking for the family of the deceased, would you help us?"

"Possibly," the Nedlike replied. "It is rumoured the victim was a robot called Dennis 2.7. Is this true?"

The Doctor thought for a moment, weighing the consequences of telling the truth. "Yes, I'm afraid so. Will you help us find his family?"

"You have found us, Doctor," said the boxy robot, "I am Dennis' wife, Gertrude 1.7 and this is our offspring, Jeff 1.2.7."

"I would have thought you would be in front of that mess," said Hannah, indicating the small mob that was finally beginning to disperse.

"When we received the report that Dennis had been killed, we risked breaking quarantine to come here and find the truth," said Gertrude. "Dennis was a figure in the community; so many others did the same. The police refused to tell us what had happened. Then they came with their batons, and we knew we would learn nothing."

"I can't believe how they treated that crowd," said Hannah. "Nobody seemed violent before they showed up."

"We were surprised they exercised restraint for as long as they did," Jeff laughed. "I'm still waiting for them to open fire on us."

"As it is, we shall never know why Dennis was killed," Gertrude said, anguished.

"Oh yes?" said the Doctor. "This is how the police normally treat robots, is it?"

Gertrude and Jeff both went rigid and looked around as if afraid they were being observed. A long moment passed before Jeff finally said in a clear voice that carried, "No, on the whole there is little conflict between the robots and police of Lunar Colony 8."

"Would you allow us to serve you dinner this evening?" Gertrude asked. "As a small thanks for your concern over Father's death."

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder before answering. "I think that sounds very nice, don't you, Miss Redfoot?"

"Oh yes," she said, "very nice, Doctor."

Several pops came from the direction of the dispersing robots. A small beanbag, ammunition for a riot control weapon, landed at the Doctor's feet. "And we shall see about finding your husband's killer and putting a stop to this conflict you robots obviously haven't got with the police."

The small, dark room was crowded now, with two people attempting to occupy it. The first voice was high, male, and annoyed. It said, "I hope I don't need to tell you how displeased I am."

The second voice was lower and with worried edges, like a dog caught eating something he shouldn't. "I told you there were complications, and I did my best to resolve them."

"If this is your best, I tremble to imagine your worst. I did not think "complications" involved an atmospheric breach. Now the by-products of our little enterprise are the top news story in the colony."

"I thought you could suppress anything. Besides, those two found at the scene will still take the blame for this."

"I don't see how. You let them go. They were in your hands and then they just walked out and disappeared into the riots--for which I also hold you responsible. Please tell me you had the good sense to tail them."

"Of course. They aren't going to escape. I'm just waiting for the right time to apprehend them. And I didn't let them go. That was the doing of a forensics officer who has been implicated in the crime as well. She should be in custody within the hour, and good riddance to her."

That afternoon, Hannah learned robots' domestic life was extremely domestic indeed. The apartment shared by Jeff and Gertrude was a kind of classic family home in its own way. There was an open plan kitchen and living room, four charging rooms and even a bathroom for humans. Hannah asked about this and was told that federal regulations classified a dwelling as having running water and sanitation, so any apartment a robot could live in was also suitable for humans, right down to food dispensers.

Jeff cleared the last of the plates away. As good as the meal was, Hannah could not help but address the elephant in the room. "Thanks for the hospitality, of course, but I don't think we're here just to scarf down some excellent ravioli."

"There are certain things one cannot say on the street," said Gertrude.

"And some things shouldn't be spoken of even at home," said Jeff, stretching himself out on a sofa as he returned from loading the dishwasher. "But we do, nevertheless."

"And I'm afraid there is further news as well, but let's save that for last." Gertrude paused, collecting her thoughts. "The truth is, Doctor, there is much conflict between the police force and the robot citizens."

"They're not very good police, for a start," said Hannah.

"Miss Redfoot's father is a sheriff back home," the Doctor said.

"Then I'm afraid you won't like hearing what we have to tell you," said Jeff. "There has always been trouble between the police and the people of the Gearbox, although it has escalated greatly since last year, when the Mechanical Life Act went into effect."

Sensing Hannah's confusion, Gertrude said, "Giving robots the same civil rights as humans. I am surprised you have not heard of it."

"We're constantly travelling, so many things which would seem common knowledge are lost on us," the Doctor said.

"Well, Man in the Moon Mining, which owns the charter to this colony, is now obliged to house, feed and pay us like the other workers because supposedly we're no longer slaves," Jeff said.

The Doctor began pacing behind the couch. "Yes, please, do go on," he said.

"We do get paid now," said Jeff, "but I doubt we are making nearly as much as the humans. Governor Trask's media police censor the news, so how would we know?"

"And last year," Gertrude said, "robots started to go missing."

The Doctor peeked out the window behind him and drew the curtains tight. *He's seen something*, thought Hannah.

"I have a feeling the authorities may attempt to stop our efforts," said the Doctor, "and they may arrive at any time, so I must ask you to give us the condensed version of this story."

Gertrude looked perplexed. "Pardon?"

Hannah, attempting to smooth things over, said "He means we need to get this information much faster than you're delivering it."

A look of recognition passed across Gertrude's face. "Why didn't you say so? Of course, Doctor." She grabbed the Doctor's head. He gave out a cry, but before Hannah knew what was happening, Jeff's hands were at her temples and her world exploded.

Images sailed by her mind's eye faster than she could keep track of them. By the time she could identify what a particular image was, it was memory. A year of looking for a friend named Rhiannon, messages from someone using the name Zed, increasing suspicion that the government was quietly eliminating robots and nobody seemed to notice, and finally a powerful urge to go to the third floor of the Library after the next shift in the mines--

--And she was awake; in the middle of a particularly coarse swear. Her eyes watered and a terrible smell seemed to be coming from inside her sinuses. Her fist was inches from Jeff's face, too late to stop it, she watched the sinuous plates that allowed him to show expression buckle and shift, like a spoon smacking into a cr me brulee's crust. She was immediately sorry, not just for Jeff, but herself. It had been years since she had skinned her knuckles on someone's jaw, and Nell Granger from fourth grade had not been made of metal.

Across the room, the Doctor had one hand pinching the bridge of his nose and the other braced against the wall to control his wobbling. "Language, Miss Redfoot," he said. "What did you do to us? Why does everything smell of burnt lemons?"

"That's it!" said Hannah. "Burnt lemons!" Turning to Jeff, she said, "I am so sorry I hit you. I sometimes do that when people do things to my mind. Are you're okay?"

"No, it's all right. Usually we ask first, but I thought...anyway, I'm not hurt, but you hit me surprisingly hard. I wouldn't have thought you were so wiry. No offense," Jeff said as Hannah helped him off the floor.

"Robots sometimes share memories with each other," Gertrude said. "We can also share with humans, but they usually would prefer we didn't. I had Dennis' memories up to the time he left for his last shift. I'm so sorry, Doctor, I thought you were asking us to share with you."

"No, no," said the Doctor, "no harm done, I think, but please ask from now on."

"Yes, of course. Pardon me, Doctor, but I meant to share only selected parts of Dennis' memories, but I think you got considerably more," said Gertrude. "Your mind felt strange. Are you sure you are human?"

"I'm sure I am not, but like I said, no harm done."

"I'm afraid that relates to my last bit of news, Doctor. The police department informed us shortly before we met you that they are retaining Dennis' body for a few hours before we are allowed to have the Final Sharing with him."

Recognizing the Doctor's quizzical look, Jeff chimed in, "When a robot dies, each member of his family takes a copy of his entire memory. It started out as just a way to pass learned skills on to spouses and offspring, but it has become--"

--Sacred," said the Doctor.

"Yes," said Gertrude, "and now they are delaying The Final Sharing. It is almost unheard of."

"It sounds like they're destroying evidence," said Hannah.

"I'm sure they are," said the Doctor. "That might explain why Runcorn was so keen to let us go. She may be in on it; possibly she is the murderer. What's the official excuse for not handing over the body?"

"They say his body is contaminated with dust," said Jeff with a scoff. "They think this will all blow over and there will be no more trouble with robots once they finish building our facility beside the colony," said Jeff. "They're just getting in their last chances to take a dig at us."

"What does that mean, 'your facility'?" said Hannah.

"They're building a separate, smaller colony beside this one," said Gertrude. "Robots will live by ourselves, govern ourselves and police ourselves. They say things will be much better then."

"Nobody believes that," said Jeff.

"Nor should you believe it," said Hannah. "Doctor, they're moving them to a Reservation."

"No, Miss Redfoot, they only think they are. We will put a stop to it," said the Doctor. Then, to the robots he said, "With your help, I am reasonably sure we can recover Dennis' memory unit if we move quickly, but I'll need to use the city computers, so I'll need a friend with access to help me violate the terms of service." The smile on Gertrude's face said it all.

Once they had resolved themselves to action, the plan took shape quickly. None of them were sure what was on the third floor of the Library, but Dennis was so convinced there was something there he considered missing his shift to go and check. The Doctor thought Dennis' body held the key to the whole mystery, and was determined to find it, so they decided to split up. Hannah and Jeff would check the Library and the Doctor and Gertrude would see to Dennis' body.

The street outside Gertrude and Jeff's apartment was bustling again, as if today's events hadn't happened. Before they set off in their respective directions, the Doctor pulled Hannah aside.

"Careful as you go, Miss Redfoot," he said. "Lieutenant Ned followed us here and has been watching the place. I assume he will follow one of us. If he is not alone, we may both be followed."

"Well, I've already punched one robot today," Hanna smirked. "Which means I've got one good fist, and I have a wicked left hook."

The Doctor smiled. "My confidence in your ability to handle yourself is absolute, but be watchful. I don't feel Lieutenant Ned is actually violent, but let's not put that to the test."

Hannah gave a little salute and joined Jeff on the sidewalk as the Doctor and Gertrude sidled down a back alley toward Isaac Newton Memorial Educational Facility, where Gertrude taught.

As they walked, Hannah found that she liked Jeff. He had seemed intense before, but of course he had just found out his father had been killed. Now he was almost jolly, walking down the street and taking genuine delight in showing a stranger his neighbourhood. She took a chance and broached the subject of his bereavement, but Jeff gave a shrug and a rueful shake of his head, saying, "Mechs process their grief differently from your kind. I miss my father very much. I may never be whole again. And yet the day is beautiful." That was the only moment Hannah was ever jealous of a robot.

It was perpetually summer inside the colony. Every day was warm and sunny, so Hannah was glad to be walking in the shadow cast by the tracks of the elevated commuter trains. Hannah had hoped to ride one, but Jeff said that surveillance was tighter on the trains than anywhere else in the city, and if they were spotted, there was nowhere to run. Jeff was even taller than the Doctor, so it wasn't easy keeping up with him. As it was, she got the feeling he was trying to make himself walk slower for her benefit. He had a bouncy gait, his long arms swinging as he walked reminded her of a large ape. He just seemed so youthful. Finally she had to ask his age.

"I must tell you that many mechs find such a question distasteful," Jeff said. "I think they like to pretend that our minds don't develop over time as human minds do. Luckily I was raised to know better. I'm almost five years old, but robots have accelerated emotional maturity. Mother says this is because we have no glands. In human terms, I'm in my late teens."

Their route took them from a residential neighbourhood in the middle of the Gearbox to a commercial area with an edge adjoining an affluent human sector, giving Jeff an opportunity to show her an unusual feature not found anywhere else in the colony: stores staffed by robots with goods and services aimed at a human clientele.

The strangest of these was The Library of Janus, which was really two stores in one. Jeff led Hannah through a side entrance in the rear of the store. In this section, robots browsed at kiosks that offered digital facsimiles of antique books from Earth. Everything from Agatha Christie's personally marked galley pages for "Murder on the Calais Coach" to Shakespeare's quartos were available, and the shop did a brisk trade. In the back was a blank wall behind the counter with a door marked "Employees Only." Jeff nodded at a boxy robot with a nametag that said "CURTIS" and took her to the door.

As he pushed it open, he winked at her and said, "I used to work here."

On the side facing the human neighbourhood, a small staff of robots created and sold loving reproductions of the very same books. They were painstaking in their work, doing all of the binding themselves, by hand, in a section of the shop that had been walled off with glass. Jeff made his way through the shop with a blissful smile on his face. "I love it here," he said. "Don't you just love the smell?"

On the street, Jeff lost his faraway look and became very sharply focused on the crowd around him, though his smile never faded. At first it seemed like wariness to Hannah, an animal on its home turf looking for intruders. As the moments passed, she realised that he was just looking for people he knew. Jeff waved at robots as they made their way down the street. He never spoke to them, but related a steady stream of commentary to Hannah.

"Lucas 9.0 has not had an easy time in airlock security today," he told her, "He did not get his full charge time last night, so he's dragging. Tina 4.0.5 is having trouble with her daughter again. I told her to be so strict with a young mech will never have the desired effect, but does she listen?"

"How do you know all this?" said Hannah. "Are robots mind readers?"

Jeff laughed. "In a sense, yes. We are all networked into the Robotic Infohub."

Hannah laughed, "Oh my God. Robots use wi-fi for gossip."

"And many other communications functions." Jeff went on as if he was trying to make a child understand the beauty of a Rembrandt. "It's one of our greatest achievements. It is located in the centre of the Gearbox, and is the only source of transmission that cannot be monitored by the government. As soon as we won the right to manage it ourselves, we encrypted the hub as well as we could."

"I imagine robots could scramble their data pretty well," Hannah said. "I'm sorry I laughed. To tell the truth, I'm very impressed, but the idea that robots streamline their small talk that way is a little silly to me. In a good way."

Jeff gave her a quizzical smirk. 'Yes, I can see how you might see it that way, had you never heard of such a thing before. The gaps in your knowledge are strange, Hannah.'

She wracked her brain for some kind of excuse for her ignorance that didn't involve time travel or aliens.

"Of course, your friend is not human, so that probably accounts for it," Jeff mused.

They turned a corner and up the street there were three police cars. Two blocked traffic while the third had parked on the curb. Their lights were blinking and two officers had truncheons at the ready as they commanded the crowd, who were mostly robots, to stand well back. One of the shops had its windows smashed. The glass on the street indicated something had been thrown from the inside outward to the street.

"What is this?" asked Hannah.

"Hard to say," replied Jeff. "Either police getting their kicks by arresting robots, or perhaps a robot committed a crime." An officer pushed a boxy robot in cuffs toward the cruiser on the curb. Jeff caught Hannah's look. "Yes, we commit crimes. We are not perfect people." The robot didn't get in the back of the cruiser fast enough for the arresting officer. He shifted the hand protecting his suspect's head as he entered the vehicle to the back of the robot's head and rammed its face into the hard edge of the top of the cruiser's rear doorway. Even a hundred meters away, Hannah heard a horrible crushing sound. The

robot cried out as he hit the ground, small bits of metal dangling from his dented face. "Either way," said Jeff, "it usually ends the same."

The officer hauled the robot to his feet and threw him bodily into the cruiser as the other two officers threatened the onlookers when they seemed on the point of intervening.

Jeff hustled Hannah down a side street, further into the Gearbox. "We shouldn't have come this close to the border. A human walking along with a robot will be looked upon unfavourably in this neighbourhood."

"I'm surprised you don't have more riots on your hands."

"Things have escalated," Jeff said, a touch of weariness in his voice. "Most of us just want to live our lives in peace. Some say if we just hold out until we are moved to our own place, things will get better."

"What do you think?"

"I think 'better' depends on one's point of view," said Jeff. "I doubt we will get justice by moving out of the colony, it will just be easier for the humans to ignore us. Right now, the police have to look the other way if a mech is the victim of a crime. Once they are rid of us, they will never even have to know about the crime in the first place. As it is, few police officers will investigate a crime against a robot. The only one I know of is Detective Inspector Haskett. He is the only good one of which I know."

There was an awkward silence as Hannah tried not to voice her opinion of the police officer that attempted to imprison her. Finally, Jeff broke the ice. "We are being followed, you know."

"Human or robot?" asked Hannah.

"Robot. He is concealing his presence on the hub, but I have seen him three times already. Perhaps he thinks if I don't feel him there, I won't look for him."

"I haven't seen you watching out for anyone."

Jeff smiled. "I have eyes in the back of my head."

Gertrude led the Doctor through a maze of back alleys toward the Newton School. There were civil computer terminals inside, and hopefully they would go unnoticed if they accessed the civil network from there. It was always fascinating to watch humans deal with their frustrations, and the Doctor was an interesting case--not least was the fact that she believed him when he said he was not human.

The Doctor's hair was almost standing on end by the time they reached their destination. "This must be the school Miss Redfoot and I were seeking when we found Dennis," the Doctor said. She had paused with her hand above the keypad. The Doctor, for once, looked embarrassed and said, "I'm sure I don't want to re-open fresh wounds--"

Gertrude waved away his sympathy. "No, no, I was just thinking that when I enter my door code, it'll be registered by Colony Security."

The Doctor brightened, ran his fingers through his hair and said "Well, we'd best not use it, then." He pulled a thin, cylindrical metal object from his pocket and took a cursory look at the door. "Not to worry, madam," he said, "I'm an old hand at opening doors." He held the object at arm's length pointing at the door. It whirred for a moment, and then, to Gertrude's surprise, the door opened.

"How marvellous," said Gertrude. "Do you commit many crimes of breaking and entering?"

The Doctor gave Gertrude a jaunty grin as he ushered her through the door. "Sadly, yes, but I never use my talents for evil."

Over the years, human methods of education improved and degraded, class sizes grew and shrank, as did the funding, but somehow the basic design of schools never changed. Large corridors with rows of identical doors and a faint, sour antiseptic smell characterized human schools throughout all time and space. Somewhere in the distance a water fountain's cooling compressor kicked on.

Gertrude's classroom was just as clean as she had left it when the summer holidays began. The Doctor stared out the window as Gertrude's computer terminal activated. "I do not believe we were followed," she said.

"Let's not be too confident about that," the Doctor said. "How is the computer coming? Faster, hopefully? Certainly couldn't be slower."

"Yes, Doctor, thank you for your input." The computer interface finally appeared. "And here we are. I hope you know how to convince the computer to give us the information we need."

"Possibly," said the Doctor as he moved to see the screen. "Is this terminal isomorphic?"

"What does 'isomorphic' mean in this context?"

"All right, that's 'no'," said the Doctor. "Budge over madam, and let me see what we can see."

Gertrude was impressed as the Doctor hacked the colony computer database with no difficulty. He seemed in his own world as he sped through the records. "Ah," he finally said, "here we are."

Gertrude looked in horror over a small string of orders regarding the fate of Dennis 2.7's body over the next few hours. "Cogs of our Ancestors," said Gertrude. "They're not going to allow Dennis his Final Sharing. They're just going to smelt him down like an old cargo rover."

"I had hoped I was wrong about that," said the Doctor. "Where will the smelting take place?"

"There is a facility outside the colony. I know of a disused airlock that will shorten our travel and allow us to leave undetected, but time is short. I hope you are a good runner, Doctor, because carrying you would be very uncomfortable. For you, I mean." She added quickly.

"Madame, I have run on more planets than I can remember. Lead the way."

The airlock was only a half a kilometre away, but slowing down enough for the Doctor to keep up made Gertrude feel every excruciating centimetre. It was like she was already outside, swimming through the weak gravity on the lunar surface. The Doctor was suiting himself up for the walk outside with an ease that came with expertise, and she began to allow herself to hope that maybe her husband's memories could be retrieved after all. She had the normal doubts of human ability that most robots had. A silly prejudice, but one couldn't escape one's programming without serious, prolonged effort. Teaching young humans had helped enormously. Her batch output leader, the mech equivalent of "parent" before they adopted human genders, would have been aghast at seeing her fraternizing with unpredictable biologicals. Q279 had been an obstinate old bigot, but she still thought of him fondly.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to check the seals of my suit, please," the Doctor said, with unusual respect for a humanoid. "I've never really used one of this design before, and I think one should always seek expert advice." He held up pleading hands in a space suit whose sheer bulk made the Doctor's normally quick, sharp movements so slow that Gertrude imagined he must be quite uncomfortable.

"A wise policy," Gertrude said, checking his gauntlet gasket.

"I'm afraid all the equipment in this airlock is nearly obsolete," said Gertrude as she checked the oxygen mix in the Doctor's atmosphere. "The new suits are much more mobile."

"Yes, but it is a suit, and it appears to function, so let's not be greedy."

The seals checked, they turned their attention to the next obstacle. Gertrude had described this airlock as "disused," but the actual state of it had her thinking she owed the Doctor an apology for her gross understatement. Some years back, the airlock had been closed down. The small number of humans and robots that actually needed to pass through it did not justify the cost in maintenance and energy to keep it open. Technically, it should still operate, but the last time it had been closed, it was with the intention of never re-opening.

"How will we open it?" asked Gertrude. "There is power, but I'm not sure all the systems will still function."

"I'm certain they won't," said the Doctor, holding up a severed length of important-looking cable, "but we only need to get outside without de-pressurizing the colony."

Gertrude navigated through menus on the dusty old terminal. This one was so old, it still had the old lime-green tinted screens. *Was it that long ago they closed it?* Gertrude thought.

"Doctor," Gertrude said, "we have a problem."

"That's to be expected. How large of a problem?"

"I fear this trip is impossible for you."

"Oh, madam, if only you knew how many people have said those very words to me and been wrong," He smiled behind the helmet's visor.

"The atmospheric regulation system within the airlock is not functional," Gertrude insisted. "I can't remove air from the airlock."

"So you're afraid getting blasted out of the airlock from explosive decompression might injure me? I'm more resilient than I look."

"Well, yes, that might injure you, but that old suit cannot shield you from the pressure differentials. You will die from the bends before you can break your neck, Doctor."

"Luckily, I'm immune to decompression sickness," said the Doctor. "And I think I have an idea how we can both keep from breaking our necks. Unfortunately, though, this is a one-way trip."

"Yes, we will not be able to re-pressurize the airlock to get back inside. We can sneak out, but we cannot sneak back in this way."

"Then we'll have to be more clever on our return trip," said the Doctor. "Meanwhile, help me with this cable."

Haskett sighed and tried to lay his head on his desk, but only succeeded in knocking over three soft drink containers (two of them empty), a furry coffee mug and last week's blueberry yogurt. Fifteen years ago, when he joined the force, he thought if anything about the job would do him in, it would be some perp on the street who squeezed off a lucky shot. Now he knew the horrible truth: the paperwork would be what killed him.

It was still called paperwork, even though no paper had been involved for generations. The name persisted in deference to the suffering and frustration of millions of police in times gone by. This particular run of paperwork was even worse than usual. There had never been an atmospheric breach, so how did you report it? Usually, the rough edges of bureaucracy are worn smooth by the efforts of those who came before you. This was a horse of a different colour. Whatever colour horses usually were, this was not that.

The best the computers and Internal Affairs could come up with was a two-hundred-year old, seventeen page monstrosity. Everything about it looked old. The shape of the letters, the outlines on the boxes--it all looked old, and about as clear as mud. He lifted his head to the tablet displaying the form and imagined it was yellowed with age. The form was programmed to require a badge number. He didn't have a badge number; nobody did anymore. He didn't even know who he was going to turn this in to when he finished.

His communicator buzzed in his pocket for the third time in the last hour. He ignored it yet again, and wondered what "CID" was supposed to stand for. For the first time in his career he felt sympathy for all those civil servants he had dogged to fill out every last bit of paperwork he could find. The crusty old sergeant who found the form told him in no uncertain terms that if he did not fill out his paperwork that would trigger an automatic investigation by Internal Affairs. If there was one thing he didn't need in his life right now, it was an investigation.

A fresh-faced young constable poked his head through Haskett's door. The perky ginger monster still had his shiny epaulets from the Academy. Kids like this never brought good news.

"Yes, Constable?" he growled.

"Are you all right, sir?" the Constable asked.

"Yes, now skip to the part where you tell me why you're bothering me."

"You weren't answering your communicator, so I was sent to tell you Governor Trask wants to see you."

"Well, it's never too late for the day to get worse."

The poor kid, Haskett thought. The guys in Operations sent him here just so he could be the one I gutted instead of them. And he's too dumb to know it.

Haskett decided to have pity on the boy. "Thank you, that'll be all."

The Constable closed the door firmly and was gone. Governor Trask was not someone who liked to be kept waiting. Even so, Haskett took a moment to check the duty roster and see who was working

Ops this shift. He made a mental note to go extra hard the next time he had the cause to dress them down. That kid was easy pickings for someone like Haskett, but one thing he could not stand was cowardice.

It had taken Haskett almost an hour to finally stand before Simon Trask and take his medicine. Haskett thought Governor Trask looked like one of those doctors he saw on the Soap Opera holovids his ex-wife used to love. He could have been anything between late thirties to early fifties, average height and build with a perfectly coiffed head of hair coloured to keep him looking youthful. He always wore a suit, and his teeth were so perfect, they could bring tears to the eyes of orthodontists. His skin was so perfectly moisturized it looked like a latex cast of a real face.

Part of the reason for Trask's finely manicured appearance was that his office and quarters had cameras everywhere. Almost everything he did and said was recorded. He said it was his effort to "create a more transparent government." If Haskett didn't know any better, that would make him extremely suspicious.

Not everything was broadcast, of course, but theoretically everything the Governor of the colony did was a matter of public record. In truth, people barely saw one percent of what Trask did, and that included his frequent, scripted speeches delivered from this office. The rest was all in a computer archive. Haskett suspected the room containing that archive had one key, and it was in Trask's pocket.

The office itself was as dubiously perfect as its occupant. Navy blue carpet, walls a shade of white that looked perfect on camera, polished wooden desk with virtually nothing on it. Trask had been Governor for twenty years, and would be until he died, most likely.

"Well, Detective Inspector Haskett, what do you have to say for yourself?" Trask asked, in his usual tone of voice: as commanding as it was controlled, but never angry.

"Governor, I am in the process of filling out the official report, which I will be filing as soon as possible. I invite you to inspect it at that time," Haskett replied in an equally even tone.

"I certainly shall," Trask said, a smile whispering across his lips, "but I'm not terribly interested in your formal report. I'd like you to précis it for me. Now. And when I say 'I'd like,' I should really say 'The Board of Directors for Man in the Moon Mining would like', because they are watching us. Live. Now, D.I. Haskett just what happened out there today?"

Haskett felt himself start to sweat under his collar. Trask's smile said his life would be miserable for the foreseeable future. He had come here planning to throw that pink-haired brat under the bus, which he still planned to do, but that wouldn't be enough. Most of his life on the force had involved walking a political high wire, and he began to feel the deadly urge to look down. He didn't know exactly how he would talk his way out of this, but the first order of business was clear. Set the hounds coursing for Nat Runcorn.

Hannah felt reassured at the sight of the Library. It was one of the few buildings in the colony that had an "Old Earth" feel to it. It was enormous, as a central library in a big city should be. It had Ionic columns and more decorative scrollwork than any other building she'd seen in the colony. Another unique feature was its revolving door, which Jeff said was the only one on the moon. This had been one of the first buildings to be built after the first humans arrived here. The robots had built everything necessary for life before humans set foot here. What was now the Library had once been the seat of government, before everything had been consolidated, along with media, communications, and police in the colony's central pillar. Some previous governor had wanted the citizenry to equate the government with the physical structure that held the colony up.

"Well," Jeff said as they passed through the doors, "we're here, but what are we here for?"

Hannah shrugged. "No idea, really. We're following a hunch I got from memories in your mind. Why do you think we're here?"

Jeff rubbed his hands together, lost in thought. "I don't remember Father knowing why he wanted to go to the third floor...I don't think he knew, but he believed the answer would be found there."

Hannah had become accustomed to pursuing a line of inquiry without actually having enough to go on. It was part of life with the Doctor. So they climbed the steps to the third floor because the cameras in the elevators would certainly catch them quicker than those placed throughout the library floors.

A small, mean-faced older lady behind the counter on the third floor informed them that her floor was reserved for judicial records, then turned her back, leaving Hannah and Jeff on their own again. Jeff decided to look over the records starting six months ago, just before Dennis went on his last, fateful shift. Hannah decided to look even farther back. Her guess was maybe there was a larger pattern of robot deaths at work, possibly repeating over generations. They agreed to meet near the back of the stacks in an hour.

That hour was one of the most excruciatingly boring hours she'd spent since grad school. Filling the first twenty minutes was a review of the births and deaths of robots on the moon that almost went back to her own time. The human race sought to preserve everything about itself, and had gotten quite good at it. Then she dug into the even more daunting task of tracing the chain of ownership of the parcel of land now called the Gearbox. Everything was digital, of course, but nothing was networked. To see a record, you had to find the number of the hard drive you wanted and track it down on the shelves. Each of the bulky boxes felt heavier than the last. It was a terribly inefficient way to store public records but, she thought, a highly efficient way of making it difficult to catch the government breaking its own rules.

An hour later, Hannah found Jeff spooling through the records at high speed at one of the terminals in the stacks. There were four piles of hard drives on the table beside him. At first he seemed to be watching the blur of images and messages go by on the device's small screen, but as she got closer, she saw that in fact, his right thumb was plugged into the terminal itself.

"Hello, Hannah," Jeff said as the screen continued to flicker as images flew past. "Did you have any luck?"

"Not much," said Hannah. "Mostly I found a lot births and deaths, legal precedent stating that Man in the Moon had to provide mechs living space, but not much was ever said about how much or where that space could be. How about you? Have you gone through all these records in just an hour?"

"Yes, although I have not found much. Lots of circumstantial evidence of private citizens bending or breaking the law for this or that reason, but nothing pertinent to our case. In fact, I only have two interesting things to share."

"That's two more than I've found, what have you got?"

"First, I went through archived records of press releases and news stories about human-robot relations," Jeff said. "They are heavily censored to make it seem like there are no problems in the colony whatsoever. So the humans probably think robots are just being uppity."

"Tell me something we don't know," quipped Hannah.

"The second item is more interesting." Jeff spooled back to an image of a large spreadsheet. "Look at this."

Hannah moved over to see the terminal better. "What am I looking at?"

"Arrest records for Natalie Runcorn, the officer the Doctor mentioned. She's only been with Forensics for two months. Before that she was a regular beat cop. Look, sixty-three of the eighty-five cases she was assigned last year involved violence of some sort against a robot in which the prime suspect was human. None of them led to an arrest."

"Okay," said Hannah, "so do you think letting us go was just another manifestation of prejudice against robots?"

"It seems plausible," said Jeff.

Before she could reply, Hannah felt something press into the back of her head. The telltale click of a weapon being cocked confirmed her suspicions. "Or maybe," a familiar alto voice lilted, "it was just a terrible mistake."

Gertrude stood at the end farthest from the airlock's outer door. The Doctor was using his whirring device to seal the inner door. As it slammed closed, Gertrude found herself experiencing something not common among her people: second thoughts.

"Doctor," she said, "are you sure this will work?"

"Absolutely," the Doctor replied, his confident grin hung in the air, even though he had polarized the visor on his space suit, so she only saw her own suit reflected back at her. "There is no doubt at all that this will work."

"Are you sure it will work safely?"

"Reasonably so," he quipped.

"How reasonably is that?" Gertrude pressed.

"Reasonably enough to expect an apology when this works," the Doctor growled. "Now hang on."

He checked his grip on the cable attached to his suit as his right hand aimed the device at the outer door, and activated it. The soft buzzing noise echoed so much in the airlock that for Gertrude it became ominous. The tumblers inside the door began to turn and the Doctor quickly stowed the device in one of his suit's large pockets.

"Hang on," the Doctor said.

The seconds before the seal on the door broke ticked by in Gertrude's mind. She fixated on the doors. They looked heavy. Extremely heavy. Would they move enough before she flew through the doorway? She would not survive the impact if they didn't. She checked the knot the Doctor had tied through the metal anchor ring on her suit. Her eye followed the cable back to the machinery he had tied the length of cord to. Would that stay in place? Probably not, she decided. Klaxons sounded and it was too late to turn back.

Everything went silent as the air needed to carry sound found better places to be. The mighty rush of air escaping into the vacuum threw her forward faster than she had imagined. The doors did just barely manage to move aside before she shattered against them and she began to enjoy the ride, thinking *It's like a roller coaster*. To her side, she saw the Doctor being blown along the surface, a huge plume of dust rose behind him as he scraped across the ground.

She was about to call out to him when her cable ran out. Her momentum vanished. In the low gravity she fell to the ground slowly, but painfully.

"Doctor?" she called through her radio as she rolled around in the dust, trying to get back to her feet. "Doctor, can you hear me?"

The Doctor's knot had held so well Gertrude had to tear the rope apart to free herself. He was easy to find; she just followed plume of dust. It would take hours to settle. As she approached the body, she was sure the Doctor was dead. He lay there in a crumpled heap, perfectly still. "Doctor?" she called one last time, even as she began to work out how to accomplish her mission without him. A low groan came through her radio.

"Gertrude?" he said. "Gertrude, are you there?"

She laughed with relief. "Yes, Doctor, I'm on my way to you now."

"You're all right, then?" he said.

"Oh yes, quite all right."

"Excellent. I'll have that apology now, thank you," he said.

She picked him up and set him back on his feet. "Your suit really is worse for wear," Gertrude said, tearing his anchor cable apart.

The Doctor looked down at his suit, and Gertrude thought there would have been a mild look of fear on his face if not for the polarized visor. Down the left side, the outer layer was mostly peeled off, exposing the first layer of metal mesh beneath which had also been damaged, in some places quite severely.

"In the spirit of seeking expert advice," said the Doctor, "how compromised is this suit?" While it looked worse than it actually was, it was still quite bad, and she told him so.

"I'm not leaking air at the moment," he said, "but from what you say, I gather that's sheer luck."

"And your luck will not hold forever, Doctor," Gertrude said. "It would be foolish to attempt the return trip in that suit."

"Well, then, let us steal a newer, tougher suit next time."

While it was not uncommon for robots to spend time outside the protection of the colony, it was highly unusual to be simply bouncing across the surface. There were paved roads, static shielded against dust settling on them, and scrupulously maintained. As they passed into the shadow of the smelting facility, Gertrude's optics relaxed as her visor depolarized. She looked over and saw the Doctor through his visor, taking in the view and seeming to file it all away. Almost like a robot.

It was only half a kilometre to the smelter's secondary airlock, and when they reached it, the tattered state of Gertrude's boots shocked the Doctor. The tread on the soles was almost completely worn away.

"We are lucky once again," Gertrude said. "I think we may be pushing the maximum stresses these suits can withstand."

"Agreed," he said, examining the door. "I don't suppose your codes will get us through?"

She shook her head. "No, this is, as humans say, out of my pay grade. Can't you just use your device again?"

For the first and only time, Gertrude observed the Doctor looking sheepish. "I'm afraid not," he said. "It's a sonic screwdriver, you see, and there is no atmosphere for it to be sonic in, so..."

"I see. One moment, please."

Gertrude dove back through the memories of her family, searching for someone who knew what she needed to know. Finding nothing, she swam deeper, into the memories absorbed by her loved ones. These were people she didn't know well, people she would recognize at a party and would need a moment to find their name. Now she was as intimate with them as anyone had ever been. Still nothing. Swimming deeper, her central processor started to struggle to maintain the loads of data she was sifting through. Her consciousness would slip if she went much deeper. Still nothing. She steeled herself and went one more layer down...

Gertrude's eyes suddenly refocused as she came back from the inside of her mind. The Doctor was a metre closer to her than before, looking worried. "I have it!" she said, and shoved her fist through the bulkhead on the right hand side of the door. The hole revealed a mass of wires and fibre optic cables. Her robotic eyes scanned the thousands of fibres to find the one she needed. She pulled one tiny section of cable out, no wider than a hair and the outer door opened.

As they stepped through the outer static shield of the structure, she saw the Doctor studying her.

"Where did you go just then, and how did you come back with a complete schematic of the door mechanism?" he asked.

"My great-grandfather's wife's cousin's husband designed these doors. I went back into the Shared memories and found what I needed."

The door closed behind them, and the decontamination field began to charge. The Doctor was still concerned. "It looked...dangerous."

"It was," Gertrude said. "The farther from yourself you go in the chain, the thinner your connection to yourself becomes. But my husband is dead, and my government wants to destroy his memory," she said. The Doctor's face was unreadable. 'The risk was worth it, Doctor, whether or not you understand why I would take it.'

"I may understand better than you think. You are a courageous and admirable robot, madam."

Gertrude was grateful the liquid phase of decontamination began; filling her vision with electrically charged chemical rain. She did not want to look at him just then. Once the final pass of static scrubbers had finished, the Doctor began to reach for the pressure seals on his suit's helmet. Gertrude grabbed his wrist.

"Dennis had dust all over him," Gertrude said. "This facility is probably at least mildly contaminated by now. Let's find a terminal and check the atmospheric status before exposing ourselves."

The Doctor recognized the wisdom of Gertrude's advice, even though he was unhappy at the prospect of continuing to waddle about in his space suit. There was a terminal in the decontamination waiting room, which was open - completely without security.

"That's a bit odd, don't you think?" asked the Doctor. "The security was tighter at the school."

"Inside the colony, security is a concern everywhere," said Gertrude. "In manufacturing facilities, locking off the terminals could cause trouble in the event of an emergency evacuation, so by law they are open. Security on the entrances is supposed to be very tight."

"I didn't find it to be so," the Doctor said drily.

"Nor I," said Gertrude, "but, as they say on Earth, 'any port on a storm.'"

"Any port *in* a storm," said the Doctor, "and in my experience an open door usually means someone wants you to walk through it."

Gertrude managed to find the atmospheric readings. She double-checked them before calling the Doctor over. On the screen was a graph of air quality over the last twenty-four hours. There were some slight rises in particulate matter, and one or two dips, but basically, it was no more than a day in the middle of allergy season on Earth.

"There is no lunar dust in the air, nor has there been in the last day," said Gertrude.

"That can't be right. Make sure the body is actually here."

Gertrude found what she was looking for more easily than she thought she could. "Doctor, he is here."

The Doctor had already begun disengaging the seals of his suit. "Excellent. Where is he?"

"Smelting chamber beta. We are just in time."

Reginald 4.0 pulled the lever and the next tonne of wet moon rocks dropped onto the conveyor with a mighty slap and so began its final journey to the furnace. Reg wasn't ungrateful for his job, but he did feel his talents were not put to their full use at this occupation. He knew he wasn't alone in this feeling; practically everyone got bored on the job now and again, but he felt his case was special.

All he did all day, every day, except for Saturdays and Sundays, thanks to the Mech Rights Movement, was pull the lever...wait...and pull the lever again. Apart from that he had no responsibilities at all on a daily basis. True, he was also there to make sure nothing got jammed in the chutes leading to the conveyor, but that had never happened in nine years at the lever. Occasionally he got to officiate at the ceremonial smelting of a robot. Reg looked forward to the funerals because he got an extra break to smarten himself up, plus he got to meet people. Even sad folk were better than nothing. There was a mech scheduled for smelting today, but there would be no ceremony. Apparently, the robot would just be in a load of rocks any second now. Reg chuckled over this, thinking *If this poor mech had any family, they surely must have hated him*. The ore fell over into the furnace far below and a cloud of steam erupted from the shaft as the water clinging to the rocks vaporized.

The terminal next to Reg's lever blinked, displaying a message in large, orange letters so as not to be missed. "INCINERATION," it said. Reg felt a pang of guilt for the poor bugger, whoever he was. It wasn't right, just burning up a mech like this, with no respect paid to his memory. *Someone should stop this*, he thought. Nevertheless, he pulled the lever anyway.

Another crash of rubble, and there he was. A forsaken robot lay atop the ore. *Not even a coffin*, Reg thought. It was a travesty, and would have pulled on Reg's heartstrings, only this was his third hour of overtime. Reg found it hard to feel bad for someone while he was making time and a quarter. The conveyor pulled the body along with the rubble toward the gaping maw of the furnace.

As the pile of rocks carried its robotic burden toward the inferno, Reg was shocked to see a human gent in an antique frock coat running at speed toward the conveyor. Thinking the poor fool was trying to kill himself, Reg sprang to the rescue. At least he attempted to spring to the rescue. A hand

grabbed his right arm and threw him to the ground. When he recovered his senses, there was a tall robot standing over him. He noticed this robot was made in the blocky style of the Originals--that is to say, the first robots sent here to build the colony.

"Here," Reg said, "that mad human is going to kill himself, you know."

The robot leaned over, a menacing look in its eyes. "How do I stop the conveyor belt?" she demanded. Reg was so engrossed in watching the human try to drag the robot off the line he barely heard her. A swift kick restored his attention. "Now!"

Reg pointed at the console behind her. "Big red button, miss," he said.

She spun and slammed her hand into the button. The conveyor stopped as the shattered button crumbled to the floor. "I'm a missus, thank you very much."

"Beg pardon, missus," he said as she stomped off to help the human. "Reginald," he said to himself, "you would do well to remember in future that boredom is actually very nice." He hauled himself to his feet and made his way down to the strange scene unfolding to the side of the conveyor. He thought he should learn all he could about the situation since he was surely going to be called to the carpet to explain it later.

The human introduced himself as "The Doctor," whatever that was supposed to mean. In Reg's opinion "The Loony" would be a better title, though Reg had to admit, hauling that body off the line took more strength than he would have thought the Doctor possessed. Reg's assailant was Gertrude, and she was much more pleasant when she was not throwing a mech about.

"Look at that," Reg said, craning his neck over the Doctor's shoulder, "he's got a great honkin' hole in his chest." The Doctor gave him a withering look, which Reg ignored. "What's he supposed to have died of, anyway?"

The Doctor's look hardened even further. "It was, if you can believe it, murder. You know, I've been on the moon nearly an entire day now, and everyone I've met has been an absolute idiot, with only two exceptions." Reg shuffled his feet in shame. "Possibly three." Seeing Reg's brighten face at this, he turned back to his work, growling, "Not you."

Gertrude had popped off Dennis' cranial shell and was digging around in the dead mech's skull. She extracted a small, black sphere with a plug point from inside the corpse's head. The sphere was not perfect, but made up of dozens of tiny plates, giving it a look like a faceted jewel. Some of the plates were missing, revealing tangles of fibre optics within. "Why's he still got his memory unit?" said Reg. "Belongs to the family, that does."

The Doctor ignored him, continuing to probe inside the chest cavity. "You noticed, Gertrude, the state of the body?"

"No dust," replied Gertrude.

"So the reason given for the quick destruction of the body was a lie."

Gertrude slid back a small facial plate between her eyes, revealing her external memory port. "Yes. Hopefully the Final Sharing will reveal something useful, although his memory unit has been tampered with." She plugged the memory unit into her forehead and her face went slack.

"Who would do something like that?" said Reg, horrified.

"Someone covering their tracks," the Doctor said. "Also my suspicions about how the dust made its way into the colony have been confirmed."

"Really?" said Gertrude, with a far away look in her eye as she tried to split focus between the things happening now and the memories she was assimilating. "How was it managed? I can see...nothing here concerning it."

"No, you wouldn't," said the Doctor. "It happened at the moment of death."

Gertrude removed the memory unit from her forehead and the plate slid back into place. "Sorry, you'll have to tell me again," she said. "The tampering impaired my cognition. The last few moments of his life have been erased." Two panels in Gertrude's chest folded outward, revealing a recess into which she placed the memory unit. The Doctor gave her a quizzical look. "For Jeff," she said.

"Of course," said the Doctor. "You were saying Dennis' memories have been selectively wiped?"

'Without a doubt, Doctor.'

He looked confused. 'Shouldn't that be impossible?'

"Not exactly, sir," Reg piped in. "We can erase our own memories if we like, though it's frowned upon." He considered for a moment. "Or, of course, there are humans who could probably do it, but it would take a prime expert. Looks like they knew which bits to prise off in order to get at the insides, that's for sure."

"He is correct, Doctor," said Gertrude. "We encrypt our own memories very heavily to prevent exactly this kind of human tampering."

"Well, that dovetails nicely with what I've found here," said the Doctor. He indicated the shredded metal and wiring around the fatal wound. "Dennis was killed as something punched through his chest, crushing what looks like the remains of his personality processor."

Gertrude examined the wound. "Yes, whoever did this knew robotic anatomy. They destroyed the hardware that makes him a unique individual, leaving the software untouched."

"Blimey, that's morbid," said Reg. "Do you two do this for kicks or something?"

The Doctor sighed with frustration. "Yes, we do as a matter of fact. Tell you what, why don't you start the conveyor up again before your boss notices the shutdown?"

"Sure thing, sir. Uh, Doctor," said Reg. "I can take a hint."

"If it's offered enough times," the Doctor said as Reg walked off. He turned his attention to Gertrude. "Yes, the killer knew something about robot anatomy, but not everything. If they had struck four centimetres to the left," the Doctor said, indicating the location on Dennis' chest, "they wouldn't have severed these power relays, and most likely the killer would never be caught because the crime would seem routine."

"Of what significance is that?" said Gertrude.

"Robots of your type are heavy and bulky, mostly because of your skin," said the Doctor. "A large part of the alloy that makes up your skin is iron and cobalt."

"Cogs of our Ancestors," said Gertrude, "magnetic elements."

"Now you see!" said the Doctor. "The wound is made quickly, and the shredded cables of the power relays turn Dennis' skin into an electromagnet. The static-charged moon dust clings to it, because even though Dennis is dead by any meaningful standard, his power cells still function. The killer doesn't notice because everyone is covered in dust until they go through decontamination. "So, back comes the killer, intending to dump the body in the Gearbox where it won't be noticed--"

"--and doesn't know anything is wrong until he finds he cannot decontaminate the body," said Gertrude.

"Yes, indeed. But now what can the killer do?" said the Doctor. "If they disconnect the power cells and run both themselves and the body through decontamination again, that would probably take more time than the killer had. I expect they came through an airlock at a time they knew it would be unstaffed, as opposed to a closed airlock as we used, or this mistake would not have been made. Instead, in desperation, they threw the body into a transport, and rushed to the Gearbox, hoping against hope the cells didn't give out before they got there."

"Yes, I see, Doctor, but how does this get us closer to finding the culprit?" asked Gertrude.

"I'm afraid it doesn't help much at all," admitted the Doctor. "I was sure the answer lay here, in the body. Failing that, I thought Dennis' memory could help, if it were intact. I'm afraid we're at a dead end." He thought for a moment, and then said "Is there any way I could view the memories?"

"Of course, Doctor, if you think it will help." She reached for the Doctor's temples and he grabbed her wrists, stopping her.

"Madame, knowing how...intimate and private your memory sharing is, I am deeply flattered you would be willing to do so once, let alone twice," the Doctor said with a soothing tone. "But going through that once was enough. I was hoping for a more technological approach this time."

Gertrude considered this, then her face suddenly lit up. "Yes, Doctor, there is a way. If you could, begin disassembling Dennis' head. We'll need the port between his eyes, and the optical circuitry behind it, leading to the brain." She stood up, a determined look on her face. "I'll speak to Reg and see if we can use his terminal."

As Gertrude finished connecting the circuits cannibalized from Dennis' body to the back of Reg's grease-smear terminal, she could feel Reg behind her, dry washing his hands and generally being annoying.

"This don't seem entirely natural to me," Reg whined. "I think maybe we should call this off, eh?"

Gertrude was grateful the Doctor had more or less taken over managing Reg. The Doctor seemed to enjoy torturing the odious little robotic worm. The Doctor clapped a friendly hand on Reg's shoulder. "Not to worry, Reg," the Doctor said. "All of robot kind is artificial, so what could be more natural than this?"

"Beg Pardon, sir...Doctor," Reg said. "But that makes no sense."

The Doctor barked a laugh. "Oh, Reg, please," he said, full of chumminess. "How would you know?"

Gertrude completed the connection between the terminal and the optical circuitry. Finally, she connected the circuitry to her own memory port. "There," said Gertrude. "It's done. I'm not sure if this will work the way you want it to, but I should be able to scan and display the video."

"Excellent," the Doctor said. He turned to Reg. "See? Nothing bad has happened, and so we charge forward." Focusing again on Gertrude, he said, "I think the last five remaining minutes of the memory will probably give us what we need, if you would be so very kind."

Turning her mind's eye inward, she slipped into Dennis' memories, when the images in her mind displayed on the terminal, she saw it, but it was so very far away...

Gertrude, looking through Dennis' eyes, was standing in a long queue of robots, all in their space suits for protection against the dust outside the airlock. Dennis turned to the right and left scanning the queue as everything faded to black. This was the end of the memory. She waded through Dennis' life, moving backwards. The world faded into view again, and as he walked backwards, the queue got longer and longer as scores of robots backed their way out of the airlock.

From a million miles away, the Doctor said, "I think that's enough, Gertrude."

Gertrude stopped wading backwards and let the memory run its course. He walked forward again, and as the minutes passed by, Dennis shuffled, turning around, looking for something. All there was in the memory was the lunar landscape, with Earth a massive blue orb up above. Once again, Dennis left the queue. Everything began to fade.

"Stop," said the Doctor. "Go back again, just to the last time he turned to look behind him."

She waded backwards again and Dennis re-entered the queue, turned around to look at the crowd of robots behind him. She stopped. "Here, Doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you," the Doctor said. "Just give me a moment to look. I saw something...something."

Gertrude focused on the crowd of robots before her. They all looked the same. Polarized visors obscured their faces and one space suit was much the same as any other, except for nametags.

"There!" said the Doctor. "On the left, just at the edge of the crowd, there is one space suit that is not dirty enough to have been worn day-in day-out for six months. Can you make out his name tag?"

Gertrude did her best, trying to focus on the object in the distance. It was like squinting at an object in the distance, but without any eyes in the conventional sense, the process felt more difficult. Finally, the image of the nametag resolved. It read "Ned 1.5.4"

"It seems I have miscalculated," said the Doctor, tension straining his voice. "Miss Redfoot and young Jeff may be in considerable danger."

Gertrude yanked the cable out of her memory port. "We must return at once."

The Doctor rounded on Reg. "Where is the nearest airlock with space suits we can steal?"

"Here now," said Reg, "I can't let you just steal company property and waltz off."

Gertrude picked him up by his neck. Reg's feet kicked out, searching for a floor that was far out of his reach. "I think you can, Reg," she said. "I believe in you."

During her time with the Doctor, Hannah had come to recognize the terrible tingling on the back of her neck that indicated immediate, mortal danger, but she had never gotten used to it. Runcorn's gun was a hot circle pressing into Hannah's back between her shoulder blades as she was pushed along, preceded by Jeff, back into the stacks.

"I really am very sorry about this," Runcorn whispered, "but I am innocent, and this is the only way to prove it."

"Killing us won't prove you are not a murderer," Hannah retorted in a whisper. "And you don't need to push the gun through my back to scare me. Just having it is enough to terrify me, thanks."

"What?" Runcorn hissed. "I'm not going to kill you."

"Are you sure?" said Hannah. "Because I think you may be lying to me. It's the gun that gave you away."

"No, I have no intention of killing you," Runcorn said. "Now hurry up."

"You promise you won't kill me?" said Hannah, "or Jeff?"

"Of course not, that's horrible."

"Promise?"

"Fine, I promise, now pick up the pace."

Hannah spun around to face Runcorn. "No," she said.

"What?" said Runcorn. "Are you crazy?"

From behind Hannah, Jeff whispered. "Hannah, don't."

"You won't kill us, so you have nothing to bargain with. Break your promise and kill us or put down the gun, but get on with it either way."

In a flash, Runcorn grabbed the front of Hannah's shirt and put the gun against her leg. Runcorn's pink hair and perfect makeup seemed to clash with the police uniform and the look of rage fixed on her face. "No, I won't kill you. But I will blow your leg off at the knee. When they ask me what happened, I will tell them I feared for my life. And make no mistake, everyone will believe me because I'll have cleared my name by capturing you and I'm a cop. You have two arms and two legs each and that means I have plenty to bargain with. Do you understand?"

Hannah forced her face into a sarcastic smile. "Oh well," she said, "it was worth a try."

"Move," said Runcorn. Hannah knew when she was beaten. She moved.

Deadly danger notwithstanding, she could not help but notice the change in the Library as they moved further back into the stacks. Out in the front, it had looked like she expected a Library from the future to look--clean, shiny and lots of tablets and screens on the shelves that allowed people to read the books in digital form. In the back, though, things looked a little closer to libraries of her time. True, instead of the paper books at the University of Wyoming, these shelves held large, rectangular, business-like metal boxes that contained hard drives, but the seemingly endless aisles broken with reading tables, the oppressive silence, and the carts containing material to be re-shelved were very familiar indeed. Even the ugly, yellowed fluorescent lighting was perfect.

Finally, Runcorn turned them down a path that led to a corner. Hannah noted they passed a stairwell leading up to the fourth floor on the way to the corner. Always being aware of one's escape route was another thing the Doctor had taught her.

Runcorn had brought them to a secluded corner of the stacks. Every library has areas like it: small out-of-the-way places that, while open to the public, are known only to a very few patrons. There was a dusty old terminal stuck against the wall, but the screen faced down the right-hand path out of the corner. It was awkward, its placement felt like an afterthought or a mistake.

"All right," Runcorn said, in a low voice, "here we are."

"Yes," said Jeff, "but where is here, and why did you drag us back here?"

"At gunpoint," Hannah added.

"We're here because I made sure you were released from police custody, and that made me a suspect for some reason," said Runcorn. "Something crooked is going on, and right now, you and your

friend are the only people who owe me a favour, so I'm calling it in. You're going to help me even if that means turning you over to the police."

"Again, the gun is really not helping your case at all," said Hannah. "I know the Doctor and I didn't kill that robot, and everyone wanted to blame us. If you didn't kill him either, then help us catch who did. That will clear your name. Now for God's sake, if you want us to help you, stop pointing that thing at us." Runcorn lowered her weapon. "Thank you," said Hannah. "Now what's this all about?"

Runcorn took a deep breath. "About a year ago, I noticed there were a lot of robots turning up as murder victims." She punched in a sequence on the screen of the terminal, and then, turning to Jeff she continued, "Sir, if you access that terminal, it's exclusively for police records. My code in this terminal gives access to my hidden, nested directories. Look in those."

As Jeff plugged himself into the terminal, Runcorn continued. "These murders had a pattern. All the victims were killed after they came off a mining shift. Somewhere between the pits and their homes, they died. Usually, when we have a murder of a robot, it's a hate crime. The killer usually just beats the robot to death. These were different. The methods were all different: electromagnetic bombs, collision with traffic. One was even dropped from the twentieth story of a half-built block of apartments. The only commonality was the methods were all swift and sure. Hate crimes usually involve taking out your frustrations on the victim. These murders were precise. I don't know if you'll buy this anymore than my Sergeant, but the murders were psychologically wrong for hate crimes."

"Then I noticed, as this mech will notice, that the official police records that I filed were tampered with. Most of my evidence was both deleted on the computer and removed from evidence lockers. Once the records were changed, the news stories changed too. About a year ago, an uncensored story about the murder of a mech got out, and the next day the reporter, Dane Kooper, had to get on the air and apologize for his shoddy reporting. He swore there not only was no murder, but no such robot. And people believed."

There was a sharp crack and Runcorn collapsed, unconscious. Behind her, with his hand still raised from knocking Runcorn out stood Ned 1.5.4. "Don't worry," he said. "You're safe now."

Gertrude found the newer-model space suits were, in fact, more light and snug than the older models, but there is only so much technology could do to compensate for the weak lunar gravity. Going was slow, especially by Gertrude's robotic standards.

"We must waste no time once we get back inside the colony," said the Doctor as he drifted back to the ground. He leapt into the air again. "I'm afraid we may have to add grand theft auto to my earlier breaking and entering."

"Considering the speed at which you are making this leg of the trip, I am quite comfortable with that, Doctor."

"This is not my fault," the Doctor protested. "If you know of a faster way to travel, I am open to suggestions."

"I accept your generous offer."

"Pardon?" said the Doctor, touching down again.

Gertrude grabbed the Doctor round the waist and threw him over her shoulder. "Steady on," the Doctor said. Gertrude sprang up as far as her robotic legs would propel her, which ended up being quite a long way. Halfway through the jump, a hundred metres up and five hundred along the ground, the Doctor finally settled down. "I realize I asked for this," he said, "and I do want to get back with all possible speed, but I was hoping for a method more dignified than this."

Once they landed again, she shifted her grip to hold her in front of her like human parents carried their newborns. He did not complain, which Gertrude incorrectly interpreted as the Doctor being happier with this arrangement.

Ned cuffed Runcorn and she began to stir, mumbling incoherently.

"I've been trailing Runcorn, since she left the police station," Ned said, "but I never expected her to actually threaten you. Are you both all right?"

The high wail of approaching sirens wafted through the air. "My backup is early. I'm just glad I managed to apprehend her before she hurt either of you."

The Library's intercom system activated with a squeak of feedback. "Attention patrons of the Library," a stern voice said, "this is the police. We have reason to believe suspects in a major crime are in the Library. Please stay calm and lay face down on the floor while we sweep the building. Anyone seen moving will be treated as a suspect. Your compliance is mandatory. Thank you."

Ned's facial plates moved into a comforting smile. "Just a standard message in a situation like this. All the same, you'd better lie down while I straighten this out." He waited in silence until Hannah and Jeff lay down on the floor. "I'll be right back," he said.

Hannah waited for a fast count of ten before saying "Jeff, he wasn't tailing us and Runcorn at the same time."

Jeff lifted himself off the floor. "Noticed that, did you?" he said. Hannah noticed a cable was still running from his thumb to the terminal. "I was sifting through records the whole time he was feeding us his transparent lies. Runcorn is right. Her records have been falsified. Nine murders with records altered to look like anything but murder. A few records deleted. This probably was done at the source: police headquarters."

"All right, let's get out of here. Take a copy of those records if you can," Hannah said.

"Agreed," said Jeff, pulling apart the hinge of Runcorn's cuffs. "As for the records, I'm way ahead of you. I copied every directory I had access to. Who knows what's really in there?" He lifted Runcorn off the floor and tucked her under an arm. "And I think we shouldn't leave her behind."

As they fled up the stairs, the sounds of running feet chased them.

The Doctor heaved on the parking brake and the centripetal force of the sleek orange wedge of a car drifting round the curve tossed Gertrude against the passenger-side door. As they came out of the turn, she fixed him with an expression of pure fury. "You did that on purpose. Revenge for carrying you before."

"You wound me, madam," the Doctor said, his impish grin giving away the lie. "I am neither spiteful nor childish. We must reach Miss Redfoot and your son as quickly as possible."

"You do not need to remind me Jeff is in danger-what are you doing!" she screamed as the Doctor skidded into an alley. The car bumped and tossed as ran over rubbish cans, bicycles and alley trash. "Doctor, where did you learn to drive?"

He laughed as if it was some great joke and rocketed them out of the alley and into oncoming traffic. "The 1970's, if you must know."

In the small, dark room the monitor blinked on. A message displayed on the screen.

Good news, finally. Two fish in the net at the library. I expect the other will come looking for his friend.

In the shadows, there was a chuckle, then a reply that read:

At last. This must be cleaned up now. Do not fail me.

The Library's fourth floor was an enormous reading room. It was just a large space crowded with reading tables. The ceiling stretched up almost thirty feet, and was lined with bookshelves accessible by wrought iron catwalks built into the walls, which were reminiscent of New York City fire escapes. Hannah and Jeff were carefully stepping over the bodies lying down in the aisles. This was encouraging. *At least they're not shouting, "they're here, they're here,"* she thought. Maybe these people felt the oppression their government was inflicting on them and their robot neighbours.

Jeff carefully stepped over a plump old lady and Hannah thought she might have to go around, the woman just had too much of an equator for Hannah to step over.

"Look out!" the old lady screamed. "Police! Police! Here they are and they've already killed somebody!"

Hannah leaped over the lady, wishing she had time to toss a sarcastic size-ist remark her way, but the cops had obviously heard the horrible woman because the footsteps started again, and this time they were hurried, scrambling sounds of hounds on the scent.

Gertrude was the first to notice the police barricade around the Library. The Doctor pulled into an alley and they proceeded on foot. He trotted towards the building, his head darting from side to side. He passed three more houses before his face brightened. "Here we are," he said pointing to the rear of a brick townhouse. "Service ladder straight to the top. The buildings in this part of the city are so dense, we can easily make our way across the rooftops to the library unseen."

"And then what, Doctor?" Gertrude asked.

"I'll tell you as soon as I figure it out," said the Doctor, scrambling up the ladder.

Hannah was grateful for the sixth floor's many rows of tall shelves. *Nothing like decreased visibility to make you feel more secure when on the run from an Orwellian nightmare,* she thought. Jeff stepped over a young man who was quite polite and did not scream for the cops.

Jeff wore his anxiety on his face. "It'll be okay," Hannah said.

"I don't know why they haven't caught us yet."

"They can afford to take their time," said Hannah, repeating something her father had told when she had been caught at Susie Ketchum's kegger in high school. "Police know you can't come down without getting caught, so they've got you as long as they're careful to make sure they don't move past your hiding place. If they walk past you, you can be down the steps and out the door in the blink of an eye."

"Do you have any plan for getting out of here?" he asked, panic creeping into his voice.

"We keep going up, what other choice is there?" said Hannah.

"We can't keep doing that forever," said Jeff. "The Library only has two floors above this one. We're cutting off our only escape route."

"Well, there's always the possibility of the Doctor and your mom showing up to get us out of here."

"We're doomed," said Jeff.

A whirring, buzzing noise drifted to Hannah's ears from a floor above and a grin broke out on her face.

Gertrude pulled the window open carefully, determined not to make any more noise than the Doctor had already made opening it with his sonic screwdriver.

"This window will lock again if it's allowed to close," Gertrude said. "I will stay here and keep it open. You must find Jeff and Hannah on your own."

The Doctor nodded and slipped through the window on to the top floor of the Library.

The eighth floor also had a maze of aisles, but Hannah was much less careful in her navigation now that she knew rescue was at hand. Runcorn had finally stirred enough to awaken and was half-staggering along behind them, although she was recovering far faster than Hannah would have after being popped in the back of the head by a robot.

The intercom crackled back on. "Attention, Library patrons," said Haskett's deep and almost gravelly voice. "And also to the criminals seeking refuge on the top floor. We know you're there. We have you surrounded. There is no escape. You have ninety seconds to surrender, or we will come in and get you. That will be highly unpleasant and may lead to bloodshed. The choice is yours."

Jeff turned to Hannah, his eyes wide with fright. "What do we do now?"

A voice behind him said, "I think we should escape as quickly as possible," said the Doctor, a mischievous grin on his face.

It was possible their time ran out during their rush to the window Gertrude held open, but Hannah suspected the police may have just gotten bored and decided to go ahead and storm the place. The window clicked back into place just as the police flooded the floor.

Runcorn had finally woken enough to walk by herself, much to the Doctor's delight. "Ms. Runcorn, I must thank you for your assistance earlier," the Doctor said in his most charming voice. "I think you will find that single act will change your entire life from now on."

Runcorn regarded the Doctor as if he were a strange, yet very happy dog. Hannah couldn't help herself, and chimed in "It's already happened, Doctor. Her career is probably over, and she has a mild concussion." The Doctor gave her a stern look when Runcorn laughed, but he kept his mouth shut. *He's improving, slowly but surely*, Hannah thought.

As they made their way across the rooftops, they exchanged stories of what they had learned on their separate adventures. Gertrude carried Jeff, as he was engaged in Final Sharing with his father, but they had no time for him to lie down.

"The problem here hinges mostly on the distribution of information," said the Doctor. "All the channels of information that lead to the public are heavily censored, so to break this story, we'll need a way to get the word out."

"The robot gossip network," said Hannah, "that's what you need."

Gertrude looked completely baffled. "Excuse me?" she said.

"She means the Infohub," Jeff said. He was back on his feet and stowing the small sphere in his chest as Gertrude had done. "To her, it seems like a gossip exchange."

"Well, it really is," said Gertrude.

"Could you upload Dennis' memories to the hub? Then everyone would know what he knew, and if you add on your own experiences today, everyone will know Ned has been killing off his fellow robots," Hannah said.

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Gertrude said. "For a package of information that large, we would need to be inside one of the hub's substations in the Gearbox."

They came to the service ladder. Someone had stolen their stolen car, so there was no choice but to hoof it back to the Gearbox. Runcorn, having nowhere else to go, decided to tag along. After a few blocks, just as they were about to cross the border into the Gearbox, Runcorn stopped short.

"Wait," she said. "I just remembered something I saw before I left the precinct. There are orders to establish a perimeter around each Infohub substation."

"That's completely illegal," Jeff said, aghast. "We have absolute control over the hubs. It's the only territory we really have."

"Who's going to stop them?" said Runcorn. "Besides, the orders were very specific: establish a perimeter, nobody in or out. That could be interpreted as not technically infringing on your rights to manage the stations."

"Oh dear, has it really gotten that bad?" said the Doctor.

"Well, we do have to maintain law and order, and like I said, technically--"

"Oh, Ms. Runcorn. Do not finish that sentence; it will not go well for you. You seem like a decent person, and decent people don't split hairs over the civil rights of others. Do they?"

"Fine," said Runcorn. "Have it your way. But the substations are still surrounded. You can't go in the front door, so you'll need a back door, and I happen to know of one."

The Doctor smiled. "I knew you were one of the good ones. Take us to this back door, and we shall yet win the day."

Fifteen minutes later, Hannah was shuffling along on her belly, bringing up the rear behind Jeff, the Doctor and Runcorn crawling through a space neither people nor robots were ever meant to crawl. They left Gertrude behind, since she simply could not fit into the tunnel. She took up a post on a roof a block away from the substation to keep watch in case anything went wrong, but it was plain she did not enjoy sending her son into the belly of the beast alone, and Hannah couldn't blame her.

Hannah thought the building that housed the substation to be true robotic architecture, if there was such a thing. It was a cube that butted up against the adjoining building, a garage specializing in large vans and trucks, right on a corner. It filled up all the space possible, and was made of some sort of brushed metal. Building codes required each structure to have two doors, so two doors it had--and no windows, since they would serve no purpose. Conduits like the ones she was attempting to crawl through ran from the substations and into private homes. The fibre-optic cables that lined the small tunnel pulsed with soft light, so at least it was possible to see.

The tunnel seemed to go on forever, but finally, Jeff, reached the end of the tunnel. It seemed to take forever for the others to get out of Hannah's way so she could get out of that tunnel. She wasn't claustrophobic, but she could definitely see herself developing a case with too many more trips like this one.

It was essential that Jeff lead the way in order to avoid being discovered. The wireless network signal was never stronger than inside a substation--so strong, in fact, that he could sense the presence and movements of the other robots in the building. Runcorn had said if the police found out their suspects were inside the substation, the robots' sovereignty over their network substations would vaporize, and once discovered, there was no chance of escape if they were cut off from the conduit, the entrance to which was located in a corner of the building. They needed to get into the server room, broadcast the information, and leave before they could be located. Hannah would not have liked to bet on their chances.

The layout of the building was something only a robot could come up with. The building did not have interior walls, in the strictest sense. The walls were composed of sections, each section about the width of a door, and went from floor to ceiling. They were magnetically attached, so if the needs of the substation changed, if the server room needed to be expanded, for example, they would simply move the walls until they had enough room. There were two types: standard walls, and sections with doors built in.

This made remaining unseen fairly simple, as long as they took their time. Jeff would wait until the other robots in the building were far enough away not to notice he was about to "walk through a wall," then he simply removed that section, and everyone moved into the next room. Then they did the entire process again. There were hiccups, of course. Occasionally the section Jeff removed had immovable furniture on the other side. In one case the furniture layout left them no choice but to use the old fashioned way and walk down the corridor to the next door. One thing they didn't have to worry about was the sound of their feet. The carpeting was so thick, not even Jeff's weight made a noise.

Finally, they found the server room. It was a small chamber, with six waist-high rectangular plinths. A green light on top and a small plug point on the side were the only indications these objects had anything technological about them. They seemed to be built out of marble, which was unusual from what Hannah had seen of the colony so far. Jeff was at a console in the wall, plugged in and preparing the transfer. He didn't seem to be paying any attention to the rest of them.

"This place is the size of a large broom cupboard," Hannah whispered. "Why do they need this whole building for just these little things?"

"Miss Redfoot, the substation is much more than the server room. Computer technology has always moved toward miniaturization, so we can expect each of these machines to possess a level of computing power that is probably many times that of all the computers in the world you come from. Meanwhile, this structure needs to be heavily shielded against radiation and other forms of electronic interference, and then there is the other equipment required--power for the servers, and while the technology for broadcasting huge amounts of data exists, it is not nearly as compact as the computers themselves. The entire floor above us is one huge transmitter."

Runcorn was giving them the kind of scrutinizing stare only police officers have the training to pull off. "This is primary school stuff," she said. "Where are you two from, anyway?"

"Oh fine," said Hannah. "We're time travellers. I'm from 2014, and the Doctor is from everywhere, I suppose. He won't ever give a straight answer, so don't bother to ask."

Runcorn rolled her eyes in disbelief. "What are you doing here, then? Do you just show up to cause social upheaval?"

The Doctor smoothed his hair down as he tried to hide his embarrassment. "Well, if you must know, we came for lunch."

"You have amazing gyros," Hannah said.

Jeff was back among the living. "I'm ready." The green light on server nearest him began to blink blue.

"How long will this take and how long will we have to get out?"

Jeff pulled his external connection cable from his right thumb and shook his head. "I'm not sure; being connected directly to the server will be the fastest possible connection, so even with the amount of data I'm uploading, it won't take long. As for how long to escape...it's hard to say. We should have all the time in the world, because the authorities are not supposed to be able to monitor the Infohub in any way."

"Yes, but we have solid proof that there is at least one person in the police department who can surgically remove memories from your minds," said the Doctor. "The authorities seem able to do an awful lot of things they are not supposed to be able to do."

"Yes," said Jeff. "Today has been very eye-opening. I would say that we won't have long. If anything goes wrong, we we'll make our way back to the conduits by the fastest, most direct route. Be ready to follow me. Is everyone prepared?" He took their silence as consent and plugged in to the server.

The light on the server went orange, and then nothing happened. Hannah began to hope that for once they wouldn't have to flee for their lives. *We are actually going to get away with this*, she thought.

Then the lights went out. A moment later, strips of emergency lighting embedded in the walls came to life. "This is not good," said Runcorn. "We need to get out of here."

Jeff yanked the cable from the server. "They're too late. The broadcast went through. Now follow me."

Jeff pushed down the wall section on his right, which fell with a *whuff* to the floor. They pelted along in a straight line for the conduit. They were halfway there when the outside doors both crashed in. A loudhailer called "Alpha Squad, engage." The police were in the building.

Jeff pushed down the wall section leading into conduit room--and was greeted by two reflective-headed officers with weapons drawn.

"Hello, suckers," said one. "Told you they would be here."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," the second one said. "I owe you twenty credits, okay?"

"Let us pass, please," said Jeff. "Quickly, before it's too late."

"Shut your noise tube, mech," spat the first. "It's already way too late for you."

"Oh well, I tried," said Jeff. "Everyone, get down!"

Hannah and the Doctor were used to these moments, so they were face down on the ground before Jeff had even finished speaking. Runcorn was slower on the uptake, so she was nearly hurt badly when the bakery van backed through the wall at speed, throwing bits of metal and conduit across the room, as well as the two officers, who ended up under a pile of wall sections fifty feet away, groaning and thanking their lucky stars for body armour.

Gertrude kicked open the large doors in back of the van. "Well, what are you waiting for?" she shouted. "Bloody move!"

Jeff was the first to his feet. "Hello, mother."

"Don't 'hello mother' me, young mech. Get in the van, we're leaving."

A kilometre away, they abandoned the speed of the truck for the relative safety of foot travel. Hannah shook Runcorn's hand. "Thanks for everything. Except the threat to blow my leg off."

"Sorry about that," Runcorn said. "Well, I should be getting back. I can already hear riots starting, and now that my name is cleared, it'll be all hands to the pump."

"How can you go back to the police now?" said Jeff. "After what they did to you, I would expect you to be leading a riot or two yourself."

"Riots aren't going to solve our problems, Jeff," said Runcorn. "When the riots stop, then we can work on moving forward. I'm going to help end them as quickly and peacefully as I can. But I won't tolerate abuse of citizens either."

"In the end, everyone's responsible," said Gertrude.

"Yes, but we're the uniformed police. We are supposed to be your protection. It's up to us to stand down first."

Jeff shook his head in disbelief. "Good luck with that."

As she was about to leave, the Doctor grabbed her shoulder and said something into her ear. She nodded before running off toward the sounds of fighting. "She'll be all right," he said.

"What did you say to her?" asked Hannah.

"I told her to remember the people need her more than the police force."

It took almost an hour to make it back to Gertrude's apartment. Hannah was aching all over, but there was no time to rest. The walk took so long because they stuck to the alleys and several times they had to either double back, or go far out of their way to avoid the violence that was roving through the colony. Hannah wondered how much of this was her fault. They went to great lengths to reveal this information, and now it was sweeping through the colony like wildfire.

"Doctor," she said, "did we do the right thing?"

"I don't know what else we could have done, Miss Redfoot," he said. "Could we let the senseless, systematic murder of these robots carry on for who knows how long?" He paused and his eyes wandered to a column of smoke rising up from somewhere in the Gearbox. "But to answer your question...I don't know. Something's still not right about all this. I think we may have made our move too soon."

Jeff was flabbergasted. "Are you kidding? You've got Ned in that queue. He's not a miner, he's a policemech. He killed Dad, and all the rest of the murdered robots. We caught him red handed."

"Yes, but don't you think that's a bit strange?" said the Doctor as they rounded the last corner on the way to Gertrude's home. "We have all this evidence that he did it, but what's the motive? Why is there a police conspiracy to cover all this up?"

"Who cares as long as justice is served?" Jeff scoffed, punching in the apartment's door code.

They swept into the apartment, eager for the relative safety of a residence. Too eager, as it turned out. Ned lay on the floor of the living area. His hands were cuffed, and he had been badly beaten. He was leaking into the carpet.

He looked at Hannah. "Run."

The door slammed behind them. Haskett stood with a triumphant grin on his face as the four uniformed officers emerged from the charging rooms, cuffs and black bags in hand. "Game's over," Haskett growled.

Across the colony, every video screen blinked on, all at once. The gentle, neutral smile on Governor Trask's face was carefully calculated to convey that the situation was serious, but could be overcome if we all worked together.

"Citizens," he said, "the last thirty-six hours have been trying to us all, but none of us more so than our robotic citizens. To them, I'd like to say that I hear you. I understand your grievances. Truthfully, I agree with you in principle. Your frustration has been a long time building, and I think it's time for me to publicly bear my share of the responsibility for that." He inclined his head in near contrition. The light reflected pleasingly on his coiffure. "But this violence must stop. It only serves to strengthen resistance to your integration into our society. It will not prove your point. It will only negate it. When the violence ends, we will talk, we will share, and together we will heal."

"To the human citizens of the colony, hear me clearly: do not retaliate against this aggression on the part of the people of the Gearbox. Our police, fire fighters and emergency medical teams have enough to deal with tonight. You can only get in the way, and you may possibly hurt yourselves or others needlessly. Stay home tonight. Love your spouses. Love your children, and know that tomorrow will be better."

Finally, he took a deep breath and set out on the home stretch. "And to everyone, organic and mechanical alike, to everyone who works so hard day in and day out to make this the most successful mining operation in Man in the Moon's history, I say this: These incidents of murder and destruction of property which have triggered the suffering, bloodshed and turmoil today were instigated. Yes, instigated-by a small, fanatical group of people. They do not respect life, or property, or the profits of this corporation as you and I do, friends. And they have been apprehended. They are on the way the central court, where I myself shall preside to see that their right to a speedy trial is preserved in the speediest way possible. Watch your screens for further developments. You will see me again."

Well, at least we haven't been beaten yet, Hannah thought. *We've been cuffed, black-bagged, thrown into a truck and we are probably on our way to get blown out an airlock, but apart from that, we've been well treated.* "Everyone stay calm," said the Doctor. "An opportunity will present itself. Be patient."

"I was actually hoping more for a brilliant plan of escape as opposed to a lesson on the Tao of the Doctor."

"You know, Miss Redfoot, I should write that book. Think how many people will be able to learn patience without ever being kidnapped by a tyrannical corporate government."

Hannah was dragged from the van, and cuffed to a chair. The bag came off her head and harsh lighting blinded her. The room felt large and open. She blinked a few times. The chair she was chained to sat behind a plain wooden table. In front of her was a huge desk, behind which, glaring at all of them, was a man who looked like Ronald Reagan. What was this?

The Gipper banged the gavel three times. "This court is now in session," he said with a distinct Texas twang not heard in his appearances on public screens.

"What?" Hannah said before she could think about how bad of an idea it would be to talk at this moment.

"Young woman, you will be silent or you will be found in contempt of court," the Reagan impersonator said.

Hannah took a deep breath, opened her mouth, and the Doctor cut her off. "Steady on, Miss Redfoot," he murmured.

"As I was saying, court is in session, the Honourable Simon Trask, Governor of Man in the Moon Mining Colony L8 presiding." A smug smile settled in for a long stay on Trask's face. "Prosecution's attorney is also the Honourable Simon Trask. Speaking for the defence is Detective Inspector Raymond Haskett." He banged the gavel once more, just for good measure. "Now, let's get on with it, I didn't sleep well last night."

"Would your honour like to read the charges?" Haskett asked.

"No, he would not. The cameras are off, so we're not going to tiptoe around. Moving right along. Which one of you is in charge of this rabble?"

"That would be me," said the Doctor.

"Right. Did you or did you not illegally obtain confidential police records?" Trask said. Waving a dismissive hand, he added "And when I say 'you' I expect you to answer for all of these people."

"Is there any point in denying it?" asked the Doctor.

"There is not."

"In that case, yes. I'm not sure to which records you refer, but certainly at least one of us did."

"As I thought," Trask said, and Hannah saw him doodling on something on the desk. "Did you or did you not steal two space suits from this government, which you then damaged beyond repair?"

"Oh, yes, that one Gertrude and I did. If it helps, I damaged mine the worst."

"It does not. And finally," Trask beckoned to the back of the courtroom. "Exhibit A, please." Two police officers dragged Ned to the front and threw him in front of the bench. He lay in the foetal position and moaned.

Trask was shocked at the state of the prisoner. "What is this? Is he going to survive this?"

One of the officers stepped forward as spokesman. "What it is, your honour, is this robot has been badly beaten, sir. He's still in a bit of pain, but we repaired his vital systems, so apart from the uh...skin damage he sustained, he should recover just fine in a day or two."

Trask turned to the Doctor. "You see what I have to work with? This is why it takes so long to find fugitives. Even fugitives dressed like you people." Turning back to the bailiffs, he said, "Look, justice has to be seen to be done. I can't make it look like justice was done if the accused looks like this. You've ruined my plan, you know. Both of you get out of here and tell your friends to think before they abuse prisoners."

Trask gave a rueful shake of his head before continuing. "Now, were you or were not found this evening by the attorney for the defence in the company of this known murderer?"

"He was handcuffed and beaten so bad he was leaking all over. It was a set-up!" screamed Jeff.

"Aren't you in enough trouble already, sand-for-brains?" said Trask.

Finally he turned back to the Doctor. "You seem more on the ball than your friends. Tell you what, I'll make you a deal. How does that sound?"

"I'm listening," said the Doctor.

"I believe you and your dark-haired friend here are just people in the wrong place at the wrong time. You got swept up in events. Now, I'm no monster, I know what that's like. So does Haskett, don't you, Haskett?"

"Yes, your honour."

"See? He's not a monster either. That's nice, isn't it? So here's the deal I'll make you. Your little stunt with the Infohub didn't quite work. The censors are smothering it like a grease fire. All I want is the

memory unit from miner Dennis 2.7, and you and your friend can go. I'm not stupid, I know one of you has it."

"What do you want it for?" asked the Doctor.

"To destroy it, of course. I never want to deal with this again, you see."

"And what about the rest of us?"

"Let me be perfectly frank. There is no "the rest of you." It's just you and your friend. Everyone else here belongs to me."

"I will not make any deal that sacrifices the lives of my friends," the Doctor said.

Trask stared at the Doctor, sizing him up. Finally he reached a decision.

"Okay," he said. "In that case robot Ned 1.5.4. is found guilty of a whole bunch of murders." Trask grinned, pleased with himself. "Now, thanks to these new civil rights laws, Ned here must be legally treated as a person. Any person found to have knowingly given aid and comfort to a murderer are themselves culpable, so I guess that means the rest of you are also guilty of how ever many murders we decide to blame him for."

"Your honour," Haskett protested, "I must plead for leniency at this time."

Trask picked up the sheet of paper he had been doodling on earlier and squinted at it. "Yes, that is correct, Haskett. Says so right here." He barked a laugh. "It's fun not having the cameras on, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's liberating. Wish I could do it more often." He turned back to the Doctor. "The next item on my agenda is sentencing. Now, usually when we have a disturbance, I prefer public execution. You create a villain, make the villain sit and listen while you tell the whole world how awful he is, and then all the citizens get to watch the villain meet their just and righteous end. They get what's called 'catharsis'." He let out a long sigh. "I wish real life were that way. But in real life, I have cops who destroy the spectacle of public justice. I can't put this beaten up old trashcan on the evening news. He'll be a subject of sympathy. Maybe even a martyr. So, no catharsis tonight. But, all of you need to disappear, and I don't have the patience to have you searched until I find that memory unit. Smelt them, that ought to take care of it." He rose and left the room, never looking back.

They were put back in the van again, this time without hoods. They sat on the floor while eight officers with shiny helmets took the seats. The Doctor gave Hannah a reassuring smile.

"Don't worry, Miss Redfoot," the Doctor said. "We may yet win the day."

Outside the van, the riots were in full swing. As they drove through the city, heavy objects would hit the van, and once the van was made to stop. The angry crowd was close, and seemingly on all sides. The van rocked as the rioters attempted to turn the van over. When they started to move again, Hannah tried not to think about what the driver might have done to get moving again.

After a few minutes of mercifully uneventful driving, she suddenly had the strange sensation that she was in the shallow end of a pool. She began to feel queasy. Was she feeling seasick?

"Miss Redfoot, you look a bit peaky," said the Doctor.

"It's the low gravity," Gertrude said. "It's even worse for robots if we don't know it's coming. You're looking pale. Are you all right?"

The image of what vomit in zero gravity would look like flashed into Hannah's mind. "I'm not sure."

"Stay calm," Gertrude said. "Hold out your hands." Hannah did as she was told and the officers shifted in their seats. Gertrude gave them a stern look taking in all of the officers. "She's feeling sick from the low gravity as I imagine some of you are," Gertrude said in her classroom voice. Taking Hannah's hands in her own, she said, "Watch and learn." She pushed the cuffs as far up Hannah's arms as she could without hurting her, then placed her thumbs about an inch above the crease of Hannah's wrist. Gertrude squeezed, a steady, gentle pressure right between the two main tendons in her forearms.

The nausea subsided. Hannah smiled. "How did you do that?"

"Ancient Chinese remedy," Gertrude said. "I only wish it worked on robots." Then, to the assembled police, "If anyone has questions I'd be happy to demonstrate. I imagine throwing up in those fish bowls must be positively awful."

They hesitated, but in the end two asked to be taught and they helped the others. Hannah thought, *These people are responsible for making sure we die properly.* It was a funny old world sometimes.

They were marched out of the back of the van, into the narrow halls of the smelting facility. The corridors were poorly lit, and the air was hot and humid, like a sauna. Low rumbles and groans of heavy machinery echoed through the corridors.

An officer pushed Hannah to the ground and tied her wrists to her ankles before tossing her on the conveyor belt. As he walked away he said, "All right, two of us have to stay behind to make sure they fry. Volunteers?"

The Doctor landed beside her. "The service in this smelter is terrible," he said.

"Don't worry, Doctor, we won't have to endure it long, so there is a silver lining."

The conveyor started and a hydraulic arm at the other end lifted the lid off the furnace. Even two hundred feet away, she the heat washed over her. Ahead of her were Ned, Gertrude and Jeff. She struggled, but it was hopeless.

The heat intensified quickly. Hannah wondered when her hair would start to singe off. Without warning the conveyor stopped. Hannah couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, what now?" she said in her most sarcastic tones. "They can't even kill us without technical difficulties. Doctor, you were right, this smelter is awful. I've got half a mind to complain."

An officer jumped down onto the conveyor and approached them. "Oh, no, Doctor, now they're just going to shoot us in the head. That's so tacky."

The Doctor continued to struggle to no avail. The officer stood over her. *Here it comes*, Hannah thought, and the officer removed her helmet. "Will you please stop heckling your rescuer?" said a pink-haired vision of salvation.

"Ms Runcorn!" said the Doctor, "once again in the nick of time. Well done."

A few minutes later, Jeff helped Runcorn tie up the other officer left to look after them. He was unconscious and had a nasty lump on the back of his head from where Runcorn pistol whipped him but, Hannah thought, since the man was going to watch them all die, so he had gotten off easy.

The Doctor was the only one willing to move Ned off the conveyor and release his cuffs before they all retreated to an air-conditioned employee lounge. The entire wing had been cleared for their execution, so they had some time before anyone came sniffing around.

The Doctor and Ned sat away from the rest of the group, talking while everyone else collected themselves.

The Doctor finally came over to the rest of the group, his face like thunderheads on the horizon. Hannah said, "You look like somebody just took away your birthday."

"Yes, well, of course I'm glad to be rescued, I just wish I could figure out what this has all really been about. There are pieces missing, and I don't see any way forward. These riots started because of information we released. The governor's talk of quickly erasing the transmission is a clumsy lie meant to scare us into compliance, but we still have multiple murders without motives, and I now believe our only suspect is innocent."

"I cannot believe my audio receptors," Jeff said. "My father saw him. You saw the memory playback yourself."

"I killed no one," Ned said, struggling painfully to his feet. "I would never murder anyone, especially another robot."

"Why would you join the police, then?" Jeff said, on the edge of rage. "You have to know what they do to us. Cogs of our Ancestors, they did it to you tonight."

"I wanted to change things for the better."

Gertrude put a comforting hand on Ned's shoulder. "Jeff, I'm inclined to believe him."

"Come on, mother, not you too," said Jeff.

"Somehow, this leads to the governor's office. If Ned were an assassin for the governor, I don't think he would have been thrown on that conveyer with us."

"Please," Ned said, "ask yourself why would I want to kill your father? What possible motive could I have?"

Jeff paused to get a grip on himself. *It's easy to forget how young he is*, Hannah thought.

"All right," Jeff said, "I get it. I don't know. But I bet I can find out in the records I took from the Library."

"Even if I had a motive, I was nowhere near the locations of the murders. I could not have done it."

Jeff was not yet ready to give up completely. "How can we possibly believe that?"

The Doctor had been watching this unfold. "How extensive are these records?"

"Very extensive, Doctor," said Runcorn. "Two years of my investigations, plus tons of bulk records I pulled to go through later just in case."

"I don't suppose you have network traffic schematics and a directory of individual terminal codes?"

"I can provide those," Ned said. "It's part of my security clearance as Haskett's junior."

"Excellent. We may just crack this case yet. Jeff, get a copy of the schematic and directory from Ned - please don't argue, just do it - and let's dig around in some binary code, shall we?"

"Can we could trust this cop?" said Jeff.

"You trust me, don't you?" said Runcorn. "He's got a good reputation. I think he's all right."

Ned sat in his chair, fists clenched. "One of you, just copy my memory unit and find out. Then you'll know where I was and what I was doing."

"That would be a very painful experience for you," Gertrude said.

"I'm getting used to it," said Ned. "I need a mech to believe me, and this is the only way."

"If you say you'll do that, then I'll take the data the Doctor needs," Jeff said. "If it's faked, mother will know in a few minutes."

The Doctor, Jeff and Runcorn huddled off around a corner terminal sifting through data while Gertrude set up the memory transfer. She was openly uncomfortable with the idea. "I think my son is going a bit too far, Ned. If this hadn't been your idea, I wouldn't dream of it." She attached a cable in the port between Ned's eyes and opened her own port. The connection made, Gertrude felt she had to give Ned one last chance to back out.

"No, it must be done. Just count down from three and do it."

"All right, then," Gertrude said. "I'm sorry in advance for this, Ned. Three...Two...One..."

When Hannah had been around the robots, she had almost forgotten they were machines. They moved like people, and thought like people, more or less. When Gertrude began the transfer from Ned's mind Hannah was reminded that these beings were definitely mechanical. The apertures on his eyes went wide, then slid closed. His back straightened, and from his mouth came a repeating static hiss, like the end of a vinyl record. It looked incredibly painful.

Then it was over. Gertrude disconnected the cable and Ned went limp and slid out of the chair. "Oh my God," said Hannah, trying to help him up, "are you okay?"

Ned managed to get to his feet with little assistance. "I am fine, thank you."

Gertrude rubbed at the plate between her eyes. "I will never do that again," she said.

Hannah couldn't hold the question in any longer. "Is Ned guilty?"

"Only in his mind. He never murdered anyone, though. In fact, he's far too hard on himself."

So much tension left Ned's body that Hannah was afraid he would slide off his chair again.

From the corner, the Doctor said, "Yes, there it is. I knew it was all wrong."

"Find something?" said Hannah.

"Miss Redfoot, we have finally found something that begins to tie all this together. I take it our friend here is as innocent as I suspect?"

"He was nowhere near any of the murders. During Dennis' murder, he was dredging the water reclamation system looking for a deceased elderly human."

"I thought so," said the Doctor, "and now we know so. And it gets more interesting. We went looking for falsified records. Guess what we found?"

Runcorn, in her excitement, grabbed the story and ran with it. "Every terminal has an individual ID code. It's a serial number that gets written in as part of the tagging process. Nobody ever looks at it because it's so far down at the binary code, and looking at a screen full of zeroes and ones doesn't make any sense - except to the Doctor, apparently."

Jeff finally took the baton and ran. "We cross-referenced that against the terminals those records should have come from--and they never matched the reporting officer's terminals. Guess what they did match, though?"

"Yes?" said Hannah. "Spill it, we haven't got all day."

"Every single record that was falsified to cover up a murder came from one of two places," the Doctor said, revelling in his moment of drama. "Either the terminal of Detective Inspector Raymond Haskett, or the private terminal in the sleeping quarters of Governor Trask."

"All right, that's definitely shocking," said Ned. "But what's the motive?"

"The oldest motive in the book, my friend," said the Doctor. "We dug around in the network schematics and found terminals assigned to an organization called United Moon Workers. Ever heard of them?"

"No, what are they supposed to be?" said Ned.

"I would bet fewer than five people in the entire colony have heard of them," said the Doctor. "And yet, their terminals are responsible for almost half of all comms traffic between here and Earth."

"What does that mean, Doctor?" said Runcorn.

"It means I think we can clean up this mess if we act quickly. Jeff, I need a small hard drive loaded with the data we just decoded, and we will need space suits for each of us. But first, I need you to send a message back to the colony, Ms. Runcorn. I need an audience with the Governor."

Haskett was waiting for the Doctor when he came through the unstaffed southwest airlock. The Doctor saw the triumphant grin on his face and knew things were going exactly according to plan.

"Doctor, you are under arrest," Haskett said.

"It's a bad habit I must break one of these days," the Doctor said as an officer cuffed him. "How did you find me? I was the only one who made it out of there alive."

"You must have been in a hurry and didn't make sure of that, friend. Runcorn is alive and well, with nothing worse than a massive headache." Haskett pushed the Doctor into the back of his cruiser. "The Governor would like to see you."

The Doctor said nothing. In situations like these, it's very important to keep oneself from gloating too soon.

The Governor's office was lined with cameras. It was the same man in the same suit as before, but all traces of his accent were gone. This was the controlled, composed face of government the public was allowed to see.

"This is truly a unique opportunity," Trask said as the Doctor was once again cuffed to his chair. "I have never sentenced the same man to death twice in a single day."

"I tried to tell you before, your honour, but I could never find the right moment. It's not me you want to execute."

"Is that so?" Trask laughed. "Oh, please, Doctor, do attempt to talk your way out of this. But first, someone tell Rodney to turn on the cameras. The people should see this."

The cameras in the room suddenly came to life, focusing at different points throughout the room. "Good evening citizens. I must apologize for coming to you at this hour, but justice does not punch the clock. Citizens, this man before me is known as the Doctor. A criminal alias if you've ever heard one, is it not? He has concealed himself so well that we are still searching for his origins. That he can elude us like this is only further proof of his status as a master criminal. Earlier this evening, he was sentenced to death. Before the sentence could be carried out, he appealed to me, protesting his innocence, swearing he had new evidence. And so here I am, duty bound to hear him out, for sending a man to his death for a crime he did not commit is far worse than letting a hundred guilty men walk free. Doctor, please explain how it is possible that someone other than yourself seduced the police robot Ned 1.5.4 - who has been executed for his serial murders - into a life of infamy."

In the control booth for the Governor's Broadcast Suite, Rodney was paying very little attention to the broadcast since a pink-haired police officer had put a gun to his head.

Now a tall, boxy robot and a dark-haired girl were running the suite, plugging in their own hardware. He wondered if it would be better if the lady cop shot him or if he waited for the Governor to do it?

Back in the Governor's office, the Doctor was just hitting his stride. "Well, to be fair, your honour, I didn't because nobody did. Ned never murdered anyone. If Ned 1.5.4 didn't commit any murders, then how could I be an accessory?"

Trask took a moment to straighten his tie. Oh yes, The Doctor was definitely not supposed to leave this room alive now. He hoped Hannah had taken over the control room, because this could all go wrong very quickly if she had not.

"I'm sure you know we keep very careful records of the movements of our police officers," Trask said.

"Falsified," the Doctor replied.

Trask let out a carefully measured, perfectly reasonable chuckle. "Oh, Doctor, surely you can do better than that. The citizens watching us are not susceptible to these wild conspiracy theories."

"Your honour, I would never dare to come before you," he turned to the camera, "or the citizens at home," and back to Trask, "with such a claim if I could not prove it. In my right jacket pocket, you will find a small data drive containing the records that have been falsified along with annotations describing how, why, and in some cases from where those records were tampered with. You will also find a copy of Lieutenant Ned 1.5.4's memories, in which he can be seen plainly going about other business at the times of the murders."

"Haskett, could you retrieve those, please?" Trask asked. "And I think we should get a few officers in this room in case anything...untoward should occur."

Haskett leaned down and as he took the drive from his pocket, whispered gravel into the Doctor's ear. "I almost feel sorry for you."

The drive landed on the Governor's desk. This was the most dangerous moment. If he ignored or destroyed it, the Doctor's plan would completely unravel. Trask plugged the drive into his terminal and began examining the records.

"I see these records are falsified, although the signs are very subtle. And at whose feet do you lay the blame for this outrage?"

"Well, sir, there are two traceable numbers in the files. I could not fully track down the second, but I believe it leads to the same person as the first: D.I. Haskett." As the words left his mouth, he hoped Haskett wasn't quick on the draw.

Haskett's hand went for his jacket as the Doctor threw himself backwards in the chair. The impact knocked the wind out of him, but the Doctor managed get a good swift kick to Haskett's knee, which gave the guards enough time to grab him before he opened fire.

Haskett, on the ground, and being cuffed, was raving. "I won't go down alone!" he screamed. "I'm not the only one! You wouldn't believe how high this goes!"

The Governor took control of the situation. "Gag that man, we have children watching," he said with almost authentic moral outrage. "And release the Doctor, so he may stand at my left hand."

In a flash, Haskett's mouth was taped shut and was chained to the chair in the Doctor's place. He stared pure murder at the Doctor.

Trask smoothed back some hair that had never moved out of its position and smoothed his jacket. "Citizens," he began, and the Doctor could feel an epic piece of political grandstanding gathering steam. "Citizens, I sit here, in the office from which I conduct the people's business every single day as best as my humble talents allow. It is hard work, for lives and livelihoods hang in the balance every second of every day. But, citizens, even my judgement is not infallible. I saw this man, who called himself Doctor, and I let the natural fear of the stranger in town cloud my judgement. I could not see that a man who I believed to be," he took a moment to contain a fake emotion, "a dedicated, selfless public servant was in fact, a liar, a traitor, and a murderer. Doctor, I must do what is right, and beg your forgiveness before these citizens here today. Please, friend, forgive me."

The Doctor provided the solemn moment that was required and said "Of course. We all make mistakes, Your Honour."

The Governor turned to the cameras, a beatific smile on his face. "And there, citizens," he said, "is the gift of redemption." He turned his attention to Haskett. "But for this one," he said, "there will be no redemption. What could possibly drive a man to the depths you have sunk, Raymond Haskett?"

"Money," the Doctor said.

"Excuse me, friend?" Trask said, tension creeping into his voice. He did not want this moment stolen.

"Yes, money, governor Trask. Haskett was skimming money from the pay checks of each and every robot in this colony," said the Doctor.

Trask finally looked nervous. "For mere money he would end seven lives?"

"Oh, no, Your Honour, ten lives. May I have the privilege of explaining my findings to the citizens?"

Trask was stuck and he knew it. "Briefly, yes. It's the least we can do."

"Those ten robots were to be the robot delegates to the board of United Moon Workers for this colony. The citizens watching won't know that name, because its very existence was covered up. See, robots sift through a lot more data than people do, so these robots who were supposed to be on the board noticed their IDs were being used in ways they didn't authorize. A little investigation and suddenly, that mech is a problem that Haskett has to solve. He was smart though: he always made sure the police could not follow the trail: using Ned 1.5.4's space suit to tie the crime to a robot, for example. Those robots were supposed to negotiate for better salaries and benefits for the robots in the wake of the Mech Rights Movement. Haskett saw to it the robots were never informed they were appointed. Meanwhile, as far as Man in the Moon Mining headquarters back on Earth is concerned, they are doing their part by increasing the robots' salaries. But back in good old Colony L8, Haskett is skimming the extra money off the top. The mechs never notice because as far as they know their pay stayed the same, didn't it?"

Trask was sweating now. "That is truly...offensive..." he said, and the Doctor noticed some of the Texas panhandle beginning to creep into the Governor's vowels.

"Oh, yes, truly awful," the Doctor said, "and it doesn't stop there. No, citizens, it does get worse. You see, the scheme for unionization worked so well with robot workers that the company opened up unionization to human workers as well. When this happened, Haskett knew exactly what to do: pull the

same fraud on the humans as well. So you see, everybody in this colony is being robbed every single week by a man who is supposed to protect and serve them."

"Yes indeed, Doctor," said Trask, "and we shall see Haskett pays for his crimes."

"Haskett?" the Doctor said. "No, Haskett is just a cop. He couldn't redirect payroll, negotiate false contracts for the workers and conceal all the money in dummy corporations on Earth. No, Governor, I'm afraid you are the one who did all that."

"How dare you," Trask said, his Texas twang back in full swing. "You haven't got a single shred of evidence to prove this, and you know it, or you would never have handed me this," he said, waving the drive under the Doctor's nose.

"Actually, I do, and my friends, who commandeered your broadcast suite just before we started transmitting have been feeding the evidence to every single terminal in this colony. But here's a fun fact for the police officers in the room with us. Did you know these six officers alone were denied a grand total of six thousand credits on their last pay check alone?"

The officers immediately had weapons drawn and trained on the Governor. The Doctor discreetly stepped out of the line of fire and leaned against the wall to watch Governor Trask crash and burn.

Outside the Governor's office, a police officer shouted through the door, "Governor Trask, open this door right now!"

"You should answer that," the Doctor said. "It's for you." The door crashed open, and newly minted Superintendent Natalie Runcorn, backed up by Detective Inspector Ned took Simon Trask, the white-collar criminal of the century into custody.

Three days later, everything was peaceful again. In fact, it was better than ever as Hannah and the Doctor slipped through the alleys of the Gearbox. In front of the Library, thousands had gathered for a candlelight vigil in memory of those lost in the Trask riots. The facility being built outside the colony, once intended for robots was now going to be a combined botany lab and solar energy research station. Acting Governor Runcorn came up with that idea as a way to turn the colony's past mistakes into fuel for the future. In every window, ten lights glowed to honour the robots now known as Trask's Ten, murdered for their own curiosity.

Hannah looked out at the colony: quiet, peaceful and stable. She turned to the Doctor and said, "This time, I think we did well.

"Miss Redfoot, we did very well indeed."

Moments later, the stillness was broken for a moment as a gentle thrumming grew...and then faded away, leaving nothing in its wake.

About The Author

Nicholas Krohn was unfortunately late to the party with regard to *Doctor Who* fandom, despite the efforts of his best friend. Finally, when he found himself living in a room with walls literally lined with shelves of *Doctor Who* DVDs, he was hooked for life at last. He has spent the last few years working diligently to correct the mistakes of his misspent youth by devouring every bit of *Doctor Who* related media he can find. He is a playwright, screenwriter, actor, sound recordist and engineer who is closing in on completing a fantasy novel. He lives in the U.S. in the state of Indiana with his writing assistant, a cat named Commissioner Gordon.



While visiting Lunar Colony L8, The Doctor and Hannah become the prime suspects in a politically charged murder investigation. The tensions between the colony's populations of humans and robots are running high, and with two human-seeming suspects and a robotic victim, those tensions now threaten to burst into flame.

Seeking to find the true culprit, the Doctor and Hannah race to stay one step ahead of the authorities. Their efforts soon uncover a vast conspiracy that impacts all the citizens of the colony, human and robot alike. There are actually many unexplained robotic deaths that all point to a cover-up by the government itself.

The pursuing authorities finally capture the Doctor, Hannah and their new friends, and a narrow escape from summary execution finally leads them to the final piece of the puzzle. The Doctor finally knows all he needs to know in order to topple the oppressive regime and bring justice to the colony once and for all.

The Doctor hands himself over to the Governor, hoping that he will have enough time during the public broadcast to unmask the true culprit. If he cannot, the broadcast of his trial will become the broadcast of his execution.

This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Tenth Doctor as played by Laurent Meyer

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