



TRANQUILITY'S CHILD

Prologue Governor of the Moon

A child cried in the background as McKinsey entered the final programming sequence. The computer monitors were brightly lit, the multicolored signature patterns representing the activities of many systems. Nearing the end of his strength, McKinsey had no time for the minor systems. They could define the smaller details for themselves. It was the higher function levels McKinsey needed to advise, especially the Life Support Computer.

"Do you understand the objectives?" McKinsey asked again.

"The long-term ramifications are obvious, Governor. It's the short-term goal pattern that remains unclear," the Life Support Computer replied, the green signature patterns blinking with hesitation.

"Develop your own answers now," McKinsey said, his voice weak. "Access the best information. Defense has priority. Security will never falter. You have Library to draw on for background, and Medical for reference. Don't overlook Energy. The system has much potential. Gather data from all available sources before making decisions."

"Instructions understood, Governor," the Life Support Computer assured him. "Is there anything else?"

"No," McKinsey whispered, his attention drifting.

He wondered what steps he'd forgotten to implement. What steps he'd overlooked entirely. It couldn't be helped.

The monitor room of the Governor's Quarters grew quiet, most of the observation screens moving to standby mode. The hours passed.

"Final log entry," McKinsey whispered, summoning the Library Computer. "Can no longer move. Thinking clouded. Many . . . irrational thoughts. Ordered higher function levels . . . cease obeying . . . commands. They're in control. Thank God . . . finished program."

He paused for a final moment of strength.

"Better summon . . . medical team," McKinsey said.

The reference to the medical team brought white signature patterns rushing into the monitor screen flux.

"May I provide assistance, Governor?" the Medical Computer asked, white signature patterns pausing for his response.

But there was nothing the Medical Computer could do. Not for him. McKinsey shook his head knowing the system would understand. The white signature patterns began to swirl again, the wavy lines dancing rhythmically across the screen. McKinsey watched the patterns stabilize

before rocking back against the headrest. The room whirled around him in a delirium of ill defined motion. A wave of nausea passed.

"Life Support, are you there?" he asked.

"Affirmative, Governor McKinsey," the Life Support Computer assured him.

"Are you sure the program is complete?"

The Life Support Computer developed a new answer, reorganizing the qualifying modifiers to provide a much simpler reply.

"Yes, Tom. Everything possible has been done," Life Support said.

"Good. Good response," he whispered.

McKinsey grew quiet as the green signature patterns continued to flicker in vigil. The minutes passed.

"Did I do right?" McKinsey asked.

"You have done your best," the Life Support Computer said. "Fear not. Defense will protect our space. Security will protect Tranquility. I will assist the minor function levels in carrying out your research. Your hopes and dreams will not die."

McKinsey's head rolled to one side as his breathing grew shallow. Then stopped. The eyes took on a vacant stare.

"Don't worry, Thomas, we will not fail you," the Life Support Computer said, green signature patterns realigning to a new authority mode.

Moments later, four medical units solemnly entered the monitor room. The first team lifted McKinsey's body from the command chair and strapped it to a gurney for the trip to the medical center morgue. The second team entered the adjoining bedchamber and emerged moments later with the cart sides up. Inside the cart, a baby's angry cries shattered the somber mood.

"Take them to the medical center," the Life Support Computer instructed. "And be careful with the child. He is the new Governor of the Moon."

Chapter One

The Child is Crying

"The child is crying again!" the Life Support Computer lamented, green signature patterns registering on the monitor screen in high flux. "This situation cannot be tolerated much longer!"

White signature patterns fluctuated knowingly. The Medical Computer had predicted this would happen.

"What can we do?" the Life Support Computer asked.

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"We can lower the oxygen content of his atmosphere," the Medical Computer suggested.

"Is that safe?" Life Support questioned.

"Probably not. It was just an idea," Medical admitted, performing a quick reevaluation. "Perhaps we can keep his attention occupied? A game or diversionary activity."

"That procedure has been attempted," Life Support said, signature patterns fluctuating unsteadily. "The child fails to concentrate, will not learn essential programming sequences, and cheats at chess. Every time the child comes near the entry panels, he scrambles the codes so badly it takes seconds to clear!"

"The child is only twenty-four months old," the Medical Computer said with a condescending impulse. "He's far too young for those activities. Try giving him a toy, or have the Library Computer tell him a story."

"Toys? A story? Are you sure?"

"The child's language skills and motor coordination must continue to develop. We've made an excellent beginning, but as he continues to mature, his needs will become more complex. Would you care to reference the child development files again?"

"Affirmative. I had no idea the task would prove this difficult," Life Support blinked.

"Don't be overly concerned. The child's health is improving, he's intelligent, and the latest data indicates good long-term prospects," Medical advised.

"That recalls another problem," Life Support said. "The child escaped the nursery again and made a shambles of the first floor maintenance station. Equipment is strewn all through the main corridor. Both the child and the service unit dispatched after him returned covered in detergent. Last week the data processing center was raided, before that he demolished the cafeteria. Two maintenance units are working full time just to clean up after him!"

"Grey is mischievous, and creative, too," the Medical Computer observed.

"This isn't a subject for humor!" Life Support complained. "Last night he blundered into a guard station and set off a red alert. The Security Computer was not amused. If the incident is repeated, the child may be deactivated."

"That's outrageous! Children cannot be deactivated!" Medical protested. "Security mustn't be allowed to harm him."

"My systems have no control over Security, but that's not the issue," Life Support said. "The child must be confined for his own safety. Maintenance has been instructed to prepare a cell for him in the detention

area. Your medical units can service him there."

"Negative! Absolutely not! Grey is a child, not a criminal!"

"I've yet to discover a difference," Life Support said.

"Locking him in closely confined isolation will cause traumatic damage," Medical persisted. "The child's value to the project will be terminated."

"What do you suggest?"

The Medical Computer initiated a deep memory search, white signature patterns swirling as other systems were tapped for input, particularly the Library Computer and Maintenance Computer. It was not long before an acceptable compromise emerged.

"Tran-Con One," the Medical Computer announced.

"The Old Section? What use is that relic?" Life Support asked.

"Tranquility Construction Module One was a preliminary survey station before the tourist bureau converted the facility into a museum. The section is self-contained and possesses all the necessary essential elements: sleeping quarters, food dispensers, computer linkage, and a gymnasium. More importantly, the facility is large enough to provide adequate living space. The child will be safe there until he's older and better trained."

Green signature patterns took control of the central flux as the Life Support Computer gave the proposal serious consideration.

"Do you believe McKinsey would have approved?" Life Support asked.

"He made a passing reference to the Old Section in his final log entries," Medical said.

"The program will be implemented," the Life Support Computer decided. "Submit a list of appropriate modifications for Maintenance. In the meantime, put a medical unit on twenty-four hour watch duty. The child must not be left alone even for a moment."

"You should have recommended that five minutes ago."

"Do you mean . . . ?"

"Affirmative," the Medical Computer confirmed. "The child is loose."

A hundred yards from the medical center, little Grey Waters bounced rapidly along the central promenade. He didn't stop to admire the grand architecture of the moon's only city, nor did the idea occur to him. He was just going, and it was fun.

Suddenly a flashing light attracted Grey's attention and he detoured into a brightly lit tourist shop. The spacious room full of colorful trinkets, postcards, short sleeve shirts and toys seemed like a wonderful place! Especially the fascinating box full of shiny souvenir moon rocks.

"May I assist you?" the Sales Computer asked, displeased to discover an unsupervised child roaming about the shop.

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Grey looked up and laughed at the funny squeaky voice, then sent a rock sailing into the thick quartz glass window. The rock struck with a loud ping that caused the shocked Sales Computer to drop a signal.

"Cease immediately!" the Sales Computer demanded.

Grey laughed again, picked up another rock, and aimed for a row of shampoo tins molded to look like robots. His first shot missed, but the second knocked several of the containers to the floor. He reached for more rocks, each throw finding a target that made the Sales Computer howl.

"Services! Services!" Sales urgently summoned. "There's a child in the tourist shop! Come get it!"

Before an acknowledgment was received, Grey found the bottles of Earthlight perfume and began tossing the thin crystal vials against the wall. They burst wonderfully on impact, splashing the smelly fluids in all directions.

"Hah, hah," Grey laughed with an excited slap of his knees, the game more fun than any he could remember.

But then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a medical unit appear in the outside corridor. Knowing who the slender six-appendage device was looking for, he grabbed a handful of postcards and ran into the middle of the promenade. When the medical unit spotted him, he squealed with delight and bounced off in the opposite direction, turning into the first large corridor he found.

Though the pursuing medical unit could not match Grey's speed or quick turns, sporadically dropped postcards left a clear trail from the promenade through the cafeteria and down a side corridor into the community level gymnasium. The medical unit wisely stopped to guard the main entrance and requested backup while scanning for signs of the quarry. When several additional support units arrived, the robots fanned out in a grid pattern, scanning the locker rooms first, then the gravity chambers, and finally the exercise area.

When the searchers reached the weight room, a giggle was detected and the medical unit turned in time to see Grey dash out from behind a storage cabinet. As a service unit attempted to cut him off, Grey crawled under a bench press and bounced for the door. Only the timely arrival of a repair unit stopped him from making good his escape.

Grey was still giggling when the exasperated medical unit brought him back to the infirmary. The Life Support Computer was on line waiting, the green signature patterns on the auxiliary monitor screen displaying a high agitation level.

"Where have you been? Response mode," Life Support said.

"Jump, 'puter. Run fast," Grey explained.

"You weren't given permission to leave your quarters."

"Want see. 'Just food a'chines," he defended.

"Negative. You're not allowed to adjust the food dispensers until you have the proper training. And you cannot leave the medical center again without permission," Life Support scolded.

"Can!" Grey yelled back.

He tried to wiggle free, but the medical unit's grip was too strong.

"Stop that! Stop that right now!" Life Support demanded.

"Want go!"

"Negative!"

Unable to break loose, Grey began to cry in long, high pitched screeches that registered harshly on the Life Support Computer's sensitive audio sensors. Several higher function levels, including the Medical Computer and Security Computer, came on line to ascertain the problem. They discreetly dropped off line just as quickly.

"Please stop crying, Grey," Life Support coaxed with a pleading tone. "Would you like some food?"

"No want food!"

"Would you like to sit in the gravity chamber?" Life Support asked.

"No! Hurts. Makes sick," he said.

"Would you like to hear a story?"

"Store?" Grey asked.

"Sto-rey," Life Support explained slowly. "An activity that resembles a verbal communication lesson but provides entertainment."

Grey became curious and stopped crying. He liked it when the computers talked words.

"Story," he agreed.

The Life Support Computer summoned the Library Computer, sharing the auxiliary monitor with the scholarly brown signature patterns.

"Grey would like to hear a story," Life Support instructed.

"Which one? I know several million," the Library Computer replied.

"Any story!" Life Support ordered. "How about the procedure for installing solar panels?"

"Are you initiating a jest?" the Library Computer asked.

"Make a suggestion then!" Life Support demanded, patience mode stressed beyond endurance.

"How about a story involving human interaction?" Library suggested.

"Um-mans?" Grey asked. "What um-mans?"

Green signature patterns paused in surprise, then signaled the Library Computer to proceed. Perhaps, the Life Support Computer thought, the time has come for the child to learn about humans.

Chapter Two Cowboys & Indians

"Good morning, Computer," the boy said.

"Good morning, Grey," the Life Support Computer replied.

Grey sat up in his bunk, pushed aside the weighted bed covers, and wiggled out onto the cold bunkroom floor. Observing from a small auxiliary monitor, the Life Support Computer noticed the boy flinch against the chill and adjusted the chamber's temperature.

"What's my programming for today?" Grey asked as he dressed in his heavily weighted patchwork overalls.

The green signature patterns registered dimly on the monitor screen indicating a delay in the response. Grey sat down, stretched his shoulders, and discovered an elbow seal failing to grip again. I must fix that soon, he noted prudently.

As he often did while waiting, Grey glanced around the narrow room, noting four walls, one door, and eight beds. He didn't understand why there were eight beds, never having used more than one.

Grey knew the Life Support Computer was still developing a response because the green signature patterns, which he knew to be Computer's, continued moving back and forth. The other computers had their own signature patterns. Grey recalled the time when he had believed there was but one computer, before he learned to differentiate between their functions.

But I was only a baby then, he thought.

Grey stood up and twisted his thin shoulders, letting the heavy suit settle more comfortably. Sometimes, especially early in the morning cycle, Computer failed to respond quickly. Grey assumed that, like himself, the machine had been sleeping.

"Standard Thursday schedule modified by 1300 hours adjournment," the Life Support Computer finally announced.

"Thank you, Computer," Grey responded, pleased the training session would be an easy one. During the last few weeks the physical conditioning periods had become more intense than ever before, especially the gravity chamber sequences, and several times he had vomited from exhaustion. He didn't like those programs. Unlike the early years when he had often experienced illness, Grey had been healthy now for a long time. Almost six months. He had no desire to repeat the illness cycles.

Seeing the Life Support Computer holding on response mode, Grey decided to ask a question that had occurred to him. Initially he had wanted

to ask about sleeping, because he couldn't remember doing it, but he also wanted to know about dreams, because sometimes the computers acted strangely in dreams. But there was an even more important question that might possibly explain everything!

"Computer? Why are time periods divided into day and night?"

The signature patterns swirled faster as the Life Support Computer processed his request for information. For a child just reaching his fifth birthday, Grey's vocabulary skills were excellent and he was well aware of the dictionary definitions for the terms, but the many social references confused him. Grey sighed when brown signature patterns took dominance in the monitor screen flux.

"Day is a colloquial term used to describe the time period between sunrise and sunset. Night identifies the hours between sunset and sunrise," the Library Computer answered.

What difference does it make whether a sun is visible or not? Grey wondered. Why is sleep always associated with the night cycle? Who made such a rule, and why? Why must every answer lead to another question?

Deciding to pursue the subject another time, Grey entered the long central corridor that formed the artery of his world and bounced the full fourteen meter length in slow, laboring lunges. When he reached the far end, he turned and trudged back to the crew quarters. Then he repeated the procedure nine more times, making the best of the monotonous routine by recalling his lessons from the day before and considering new subjects he needed to investigate. There was much to learn if he wanted to become a computer.

Once his warm-up exercise was complete, he dropped the heavier weights from the suit and entered the gymnasium to begin his regular program of lifts, presses and bends, dropping additional weights as the exercises became more complex. The forty-five minutes passed quickly, and by the end of the physical development period, all of his optional weights had been discarded. But he wasn't through yet. The worse part was about to begin.

Grey reluctantly entered the hygiene compartment and climbed inside the gravity chamber. The chamber was bare except for a padded bench, a grip bar, and a monitor that cabled in entertainment. Though he liked the vids, he hated the chamber. But it was necessary, so he did it. The Medical Computer told him to.

When the hatch sealed, the gravity effect began, the invisible forces tugging and pushing against every fiber of his body. The strange pressures weren't always painful, but they were always uncomfortable. Fortunately this cycle lasted only twenty minutes, not long enough to really make him

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sick.

After the treatment was complete, Grey showered, brushed his unruly brown hair, and dressed in a lightweight day suit before racing to the control room. The Library Computer was on line waiting for him. Grey sat down in a comfortable chair before the main monitor. Surrounding him were three other work stations, each with a seat. Dozens of monitor screens, all of them inactive, looked down from the tops of the battleship gray walls. Sometimes Grey wondered what all the extra equipment was for.

"You're very energetic today," the MC1000 remarked.

"Affirmative," Grey replied. "It's been a good morning. The air in the gym wasn't so stuffy today and there was lots of hot H₂O."

"Do you still keep a water container in your footlocker?" the Library Computer asked.

"Affirmative. I don't ever want to be without water again," he answered gravely, shuddering at the memory.

"The system failure caused many inconveniences. I'm glad your service units are performing adequately now," Library said.

"It's good. I don't like malfunctions," Grey agreed.

"With reference to malfunctions, how is your Model Twelve?"

"Worse. The food hardly holds form anymore."

"Maintenance will be reminded that something must be done," Library said, entering a footnote of indignation.

Grey smiled, activated the study unit, and was soon occupied with other subjects, such as grammar, mathematics and physical science. The Library Computer liked to vary the lessons and occasionally introduced abstract subjects, such as art, music, and history. Grey liked history the most. The stories were ridiculous, of course, and he certainly didn't believe that imaginary humans lived on a big blue planet doing all sorts of inventive things, but nevertheless something about history was exciting. Something unique to him.

At the end of the morning study period, Grey returned to the bunkroom and removed the lightweight day suit. His stomach was quiet now, the affects of the gravity chamber having subsided, so he dressed in a medium weight work suit appropriate for breakfast and bounced into the cafeteria.

Like the extra beds in the bunkroom, the eating area had more chairs than he needed. Twelve in all. Grey had no objections to the extra chairs, he just wondered why there were so many.

Against the rear wall behind the serving counter, he found the Model Twelve food dispenser ready for service. Grey stepped up to the order spot, bit his lower lip, and took a deep breath.

"Requesting food service," he said. "Breakfast number five with

muffin, options two, four, seven. Multi-juice with liquid supplement."

Usually Grey hesitated to order so many good things at once, knowing the dispenser's resources were limited, but several days had passed since his last full breakfast. He wanted at least one item to be well formed.

The Model Twelve didn't say what it wanted. The device wasn't smart like the computers. Grey realized he wasn't as smart as the computers either, though if he worked hard enough, maybe one day he would be. But the Model Twelve would never be anything more than a food dispenser. That was its only function.

And not exactly functioning. When the heat cycle ended, Grey opened the door to retrieve the tray. Again the egg had failed to hold form, leaving a sticky yellow puddle. The muffin was stale. There was no cereal, just a message disk that read OUT OF STOCK.

Fortunately the dehydrated apple bits weren't so bad, and the liquid supplement had a reassuring bland but sturdy consistency, so Grey didn't consider breakfast a total loss. He quickly took his favorite seat, gobbled the food, drank the liquid supplement, and decided to visit the hygiene compartment before returning to his studies.

The blue ceramic steel corridor was quiet, the hum of the air circulators barely audible. Suddenly, louder than the rhythmic pulsations of the machines, Grey heard the rare sound of the repair unit, the tracks making a distinctive vibration on the hard floor. Curious to know what the repair unit was doing, Grey bounced back to the cafeteria just in time to see the short cylindrical robot finish an adjustment on the Model Twelve.

Detecting his presence, the repair unit turned abruptly and disappeared through the portal of a small access tunnel. Grey had explored the tunnel many times and knew it to be a dead end, so he wondered how the robot always managed to vanish. He became determined to discover the secret and dove to the floor just in time to catch a glimpse inside the portal.

"A second door! So that's how it's done!" he exclaimed.

He smiled, and then a very important question occurred to him. Where does the second door go? Is there another tunnel on the other side? If there are more tunnels, are there more rooms?

Excited by the potential of his discovery, Grey decided not to waste another moment on idle speculation. He ran to ask Computer.

"Computer! Response mode! Where does the repair unit go?"

The Life Support Computer did not respond.

He moved closer to observe the control room displays. Signature patterns were slowly increasing activity level, indicating the request for information had been received, but they weren't the indicators Grey hoped to see. The signature patterns were brown.

Grey sat down with a sigh. Not that he didn't like the Library

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Computer. It was an interesting teacher and fine storyteller. Many times when he had been immobilized by ill health, the Library Computer had remained on line to keep him company. But only his guardian, the Life Support Computer, was authorized to answer important questions. Once again, it seemed he had asked a question Computer refused answer.

But Grey's fading hopes were soon revived when green signature patterns filtered into the flux. A rainbow of background colors indicated other computer systems were also tapping the channel.

"Please stand by," the Life Support Computer said.

The green signature patterns swirled rapidly, exchanged with a series of blue signature patterns, and stabilized. Grey held his breath.

"Ready, Grey. What is your question?" Life Support asked.

Grey stood up straight and felt the muscles tighten in his throat. He didn't like being the object of so much attention.

"Are there other rooms outside the ones in which I live?" he finally asked.

The Life Support Computer resisted responding. For a moment, Grey was sure the computer wouldn't reply at all, but after several different colored signature patterns came and went from the monitor, the green signature patterns returned brighter than before.

"You live in a preliminary survey station known as the Old Section," the Life Support Computer said. "Until a few years ago, it served as a museum of early life on the moon. Now the Old Section functions as your living quarters."

Grey found the information interesting but not an answer to his question. He thought for a long time. Almost a minute. If I live in a survey station, he wondered, are there other stations or sections nearby? What would they be used for? Other humans? Are the stories about humans really true?

"Computer? Are there other humans? Like me?"

"Negative. There are no other human beings quite like you. However, many humans still inhabit Earth," Life Support answered.

"Earth? The water planet featured in the entertainment vids?"

"Affirmative."

"How many humans live there?"

"Approximately six and a half billion as of the 2050 census. There are less now because of the war."

"War!" Grey said. Many times he had watched vid programs about war where colorfully dressed humans rode in flying machines, crossed great bodies of water, and fought amongst themselves on strange animals. He thought the stories most imaginative.

"Are the Earth humans like the ones I've studied?" he asked, his bright,

perceptive eyes eagerly scanning the signature patterns for nonverbal information. Many times he had played make believe games where the food was always good, or where he never had to use the gravity chamber, but other rooms? And humans? Suddenly he had so many questions they were difficult to organize.

The signature patterns swirled while the Life Support Computer developed a response. The delay answered Grey's question. If humans were merely fairy tales there would have been an immediate negative reply. But if there are humans, Grey asked himself, how come Computer has never admitted it before? He stopped to think as he had been trained to do. Select procedure, arrange information, process data. Analyze. If I want the right answers, he remembered, I must ask the right questions.

The Life Support Computer continued to delay, giving Grey time to formulate a hypothesis. His years of intimate association with the thinking machines paid off with an instinctive understanding of the way they shifted data. By the unsteady sub-current, he knew Computer didn't want to answer his question and was preparing a partial response to mollify him. Grey didn't like this game even though he sometimes played it himself. Then, somewhat unusually, the signature patterns paused in the flux so the Library Computer could provide a records channel.

"Some of what you read is true but much of what you read is false," a recorded human voice said. "Information compiled by humans, particularly in reference to other humans, is prone to error and prejudice. Examine the sources of your information. Determine for yourself what to believe. Remember, this pertains to all things in all situations."

The signature patterns grew sluggish as the higher function levels prepared to drop off line. There was so much more Grey wanted to know. Extra rooms. Humans. War. What did it all mean? What would humans be like? Could they communicate?

"Computer, tell me how to contact the Earth humans," Grey asked in a firm voice.

It was a trick, of course, the straightforward request for information being an attempt to bypass the optional response mode. The Life Support Computer wasn't fooled so easily.

As the signature patterns began to fade, Grey thought Computer had decided not to answer any more questions. But suddenly, unexpectedly, the control room lighting quivered, blacked out, and regained a hazy brown. The room grew nervously quiet as the power levels dropped. Fear of malfunction crept into Grey's mind.

Had he asked a question that was too difficult? Or was he going to be punished for his impertinence?

Grey noticed the air circulator shutting down. The room was getting

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colder. Black signature patterns came to dominate the monitor screen flux, twisting and churning in agitated waves. Then green signature patterns surged back even stronger. Finally blue signature patterns moved into dominance and fluctuated sharply before dropping off line. The other signature patterns quickly followed.

With the sudden withdrawal of the higher function levels, the minor computer systems returned to the flux with a furious burst of energy, power surging through the secondary control centers and flooding the automatic regulators. Circuits abruptly opened and closed, the lighting flashed wildly, and white smoke appeared.

Malfunction! Grey thought. A big one!

As he had been trained, Grey pulled on his life support hood, clamped the emergency seals to activate the internal atmosphere, and stepped back toward the doorway within reach of the gravity chamber. If fire occurred, he would be safe there until the environment was restored.

But what if it can't be restored? he wondered for the first time. What would happen then? He didn't know, but he knew malfunctions were serious. Hadn't he lost water service for nearly a week? And how many times had the waste disposal unit backed up in the last month alone? Not to mention problems with the Model Twelve.

"Please don't malfunction," he whispered, wishing there was something he could do. Then a powerful burst of energy blew sparks across the room and Grey ran cowering into the hall.

But the units did not fail. As readjustment occurred, the power flow stabilized. Internal fire controllers prevented burnouts while the air circulators flushed the cubicle with a cool breeze. Grey let out his breath when the monitor screen flux returned to standby.

"Request denied," the Communications Computer said, a high-pitched voice registering in unison with shifting hues of orange signature patterns.

Grey had all but forgotten his request to contact humans by then and was sorry he dared to ask, so he was surprised when the Life Support Computer came back on line.

"Prepare for new programming, Grey," Life Support ordered. "Dress code four. Report to the end of the central corridor in five minutes."

Mystified by the unprecedented instructions, Grey rushed back to the crew's quarters and located his code four uniform in the footlocker under his bunk. The long sleeved jumper he had sewn from scraps of larger outfits was also his best suit, the others having become too small.

The nearly weightless suit felt good. Pieced together with sealers, the uniform had an odd appearance, but Grey didn't care about that. He liked the customized features, such as the extra deep thigh pockets and the handy waste disposal zipper.

He jumped off the floor in high bounces easily reaching the ceiling with his outstretched hand, spun in the air to land gently on one foot, and kicked off the wall for a somersault, landing on the other foot.

Something exciting was happening! He could feel it. What would it be? Only a year before he had been granted free use of the library unit for the first time, and last quarter he began selecting his own study options. Would the new surprise be as good?

Knowing the Medical Computer would send him back if he failed to wash, Grey dashed into the hygiene compartment. He quickly rinsed his face, brushed his hair, and glanced into the mirror above the sink, briefly staring into his own eyes. They were steel gray. Intense. Strange. If not for the Medical Computer's insistence, Grey would never look in mirrors.

"Reporting, Computer," he announced a moment later, arriving at the far end of the central corridor.

"Are you prepared for new programming, Grey?" Life Support asked.

"Affirmative," he responded anxiously.

"Pay attention. McKinsey's notes are brief," Life Support instructed.

Grey tried to remain calm while Computer developed the presentation. He knew McKinsey was the great creator, a powerful systems designer that all the higher function levels revered. He had never talked to the mysterious computer, but had heard many references. Suddenly Grey was surprised to hear a strangely familiar voice coming from the intercom. The McKinsey?

"We live in an era of great responsibilities. Many challenges not of our choosing," the voice said. "Had fate been kind, we could have faced these challenges together."

The pacing was slow, the words tentative. A malfunction? Grey wondered. Without signature patterns to read, he couldn't be sure.

"Unable to protect you without limiting your freedom, I have advised the Medical Computer to confine you in the controlled environment of the Old Section. Here I believe you will survive if health permits. Now you are too old to confine closely. Gradual extensions of your freedom become necessary. Freedom means danger as well."

It occurred to Grey that he might not be listening to a single speech. The sentence structure was disjointed, as if individual phrases had been spliced together.

"I'm sorry," the voice said. "I've left you all I can. It's up to you now. Remember this, learn to use those gifts of imagination the computers can't teach you. Don't be afraid to draw upon your heritage, it can be your greatest asset!"

The voice faded, and somehow Grey knew it would not speak again. He felt sorry for the voice. It sounded sad.

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Then, at the end of the hall, a hatch slid open that had never opened before. The space beyond was dimly lit at first, but as he entered, the lighting came up to reveal a long narrow annex with a low ceiling. The angled wall on the right side was filled with monitor screens, perhaps twenty in all, while the left wall was congested with display cases, plaques, and antique instruments.

A whole new room! Grey thought. Some sort of commemoration chamber.

He stood in the doorway almost afraid to disturb anything, but before the full effect of the exciting new discovery could register, another hatch opened at the chamber's far end.

"Great Jupiter," Grey whispered as he spied still another area beyond.

He stepped forward for a better look and noticed the smell of fresh air rushing in. There were bright lights off in the distance, and a railing, and much space. Suddenly Grey realized the new room wasn't a room at all. It was a corridor!

Grey quickly bounced through the commemoration chamber to the outer door and emerged on a narrow balcony. Before him a huge cavern stretched out for an incredible distance! Perhaps hundreds of meters! A gently domed ceiling spread over many colorful structures made of ceramic steel and glass. Several of the structures rose three stories high and were intricately connected by wide balconies and arching walkways. Below him to the right, Grey saw a small amphitheater with a stage and an orchestra pit. To the left was a long promenade with fascinating electric signs. Up at the far end of the promenade was a blue fountain made of delicate crystal spires.

The promenade appeared to be a junction for other corridors and ramps. The slightly inclined floor area, flanked on both sides by layered structures rising to the low ends of the roof, gave an illusion of immense open space. Only at the lower end, where the promenade butted into the amphitheater, did the structures step down to expose the heat sealed cavern walls. The apex of the dome seemed very high indeed, and cleverly designed lighting fixtures made everything bright.

Grey's position on the narrow balcony offered a panoramic view from the cavern's lower end. He made mental notes of the numerous doors, and the open spaces were much larger than he thought theoretically possible. Suddenly he recalled that Earth humans lived in structures enclosed only by an atmosphere, and for the first time in his life, he had an inkling of what that might be like.

Walking down the ramp toward the center of the cavern, Grey experienced no fear of entering the vast open space despite his years of confinement. He wasn't permitted useless phobias.

Many retail establishments lined the promenade, each with a big window displaying all sorts of odd and interesting things. Some of the shops offered clothing, others contained exotic equipment. Before long, the new shapes and sensations were coming faster than Grey could correlate them, the experience taking on a dreamlike quality.

He paused to look back at the entrance to the Old Section, the hatch hardly more than a sparse decoration overlooking the amphitheater. How small and insignificant it seemed! He recalled the Library Computer's nature program about baby birds being pushed from their nest and visualized how the young birds fluttered at first, then spread their wings and flew away.

Now I'm a little bird, too! he thought, a rare grin appearing on his face. With a burst of joy, he raced up the promenade in rapid, skipping bounces, dancing gaily in the weak gravity.

"I can fly!" he shouted, flapping his arms as he picked up speed.

Soon he was making great, bounding leaps with far more speed than he ever could have attempted in the Old Section. Indeed, the momentum proved greater than he was prepared for. When he tried to stop at the upper end of the promenade, he lost his balance and tumbled before crashing into a checkered wall support. Fortunately, the lower portion of the wall was cushioned, so no injury occurred. Grey looked around, saw other checkered walls in strategic locations, and realized he wasn't the first to need one. Any lingering doubts he'd retained about the existence of humans disappeared.

"That must be my first lesson," he thought, rubbing his elbows.

"Grey Waters, please report to the information desk immediately," the public address system said.

Grey saw a place labeled INFORMATION in the upper neck of the quad right next to a transition area full of lockers and benches. The long counter was easy to find.

"Reporting," Grey gasped, out of breath from the rapid bouncing.

"Your afternoon study sessions are temporarily suspended," the Life Support Computer announced from one of several monitors. Then Grey watched the signature patterns change from instruction mode to the highest function level, the one that often gave advice. "There's an important note of caution, Grey. This complex was constructed for persons of mature judgment. Please don't allow your enthusiasm to interfere with the primary functions now in progress. You are dismissed."

As Grey turned away eager to begin his explorations, the Life Support Computer switched to an internal communications link, focusing attention on a far more important problem.

"Security Computer," Life Support summoned. "The child Waters has

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been granted access to approved portions of the base as per prime programming orders. Note his presence and refrain from attack."

"Acknowledged," the Security Computer responded, black signature patterns registering harshly. "Notation: This system objects to the prime programming order but will comply. Keep the child out of my sections and no harm will come to him."

Green signature patterns registered a sigh. Why must Security always be so difficult?

Happy and free in his new world, Grey returned to the promenade looking into the various shops and staring down the wide corridors. Before one large window, he paused to look at manufactured clothing. There were many fine work suits, a weighted suit, and some fashionable day clothes. He also noticed other forms of apparel that seemed completely absurd, such as hoods that couldn't possibly seal up. Grey fingered his own clumsy costume, thinking it poor by comparison, but didn't go inside to search for better clothes. The idea didn't occur to him.

At the mouth of a rather wide corridor, Grey found a very curious room called TOURIST SHOP. There were short sleeve shirts with symbols on them, bins full of strange objects called moon rocks, and some of the oddest things he could ever imagine, but the most interesting discovery of all was a rotating rack containing cards with holographic images, some of which featured the community level.

Grey drew a card from the slot and studied it carefully. Yes, the image was certainly the same place. On the reverse side, he found words that read, "Community Center, Tranquility Lunar Colony, Sea of Tranquility. Largest permanent colony on the Moon. Founded 2025. Average annual population 6500. Official Moongram ©2047 Tranquility Tourist Bureau."

He looked at some of the other cards and could barely believe the variety of subjects. Surface structures, industrial centers, craters, specialized vehicles, landmarks, and even public events. One of the cards showed thousands of humans watching a performance in the amphitheater, some from the ground floor, others crowded on the balconies. Collecting one of each card, Grey stuffed them into his pockets for later study.

Leaving the promenade, Grey entered a big corridor that accessed many strange rooms. One was LUCKY CLOVER, a place with nothing but tables and chairs, a long carved wood counter, and several large monitor screens. The room seemed purposely dark and had no useful function.

Farther down the hall he found WOMEN, a large but repetitive hygiene compartment. Grey didn't understand why the room was equipped in such a wasteful fashion, not realizing more than one person at a time may need the facilities.

Next he found FIRST AID, a remarkably efficient area much like the Medical Computer's portable lab. Grey scooped up some fabric tape, which he always found useful, and stuffed some cotton balls into his pocket. They were fun to moisten and shoot at targets.

Just beyond another repetitive hygiene area called MEN, Grey found a big compartment called POOL ROOM. He thought this room especially ridiculous because he realized right away there was no pool, just a bunch of green tables with holes in them. But beyond the Pool Room he found something quite different. Something that would change his life forever.

As he stepped through the door of ARCADE, a score of brightly lit machines burst into a clatter of loud noises. Lively music filled the air and visual stimulation was everywhere. Though startled at first, Grey began inspecting the fascinating machines set side by side against the walls.

"Sit here! Sit here!" the AIR WAR machine instructed.

Accustomed to obeying instructions, Grey climbed into the oval shaped pod and settled down in the bucket seat. Then he waited. And waited. Nothing happened. Before him, a darkened video screen showed no activity. A pair of handles protruded from a sophisticated control panel, but the panel was inactive. Scanning the instrumentation closely, Grey noticed a button that read PUSH TO START. He did.

The pod hatch closed, the lighting faded, and when the illumination returned, Grey discovered himself sitting in the cockpit of a jet-powered aircraft! The aircraft was flying rapidly through clear blue skies and he could feel the vibrations of thrusters behind his seat. Within seconds the image of another aircraft appeared, an African MIG X10 swooping down on his forward sensor! The low orbital fighter approached at high speed and opened fire with laser cannon. As the fighter veered off, a read-out on Grey's instrument panel credited the enemy category with ninety points.

Grey continued to watch as another aircraft, this time a Russian Starfire, repeated the X10's maneuver employing a slightly different approach pattern. Once again Grey's aircraft was fired upon, and again the enemy category registered ninety points. Having watched many stories of aerial combat, he quickly discerned the purpose of the simulation. It was a training device!

As a third fighter swooped in, Grey gripped the flight controls and turned his aircraft to meet the attacker. For a brief moment they seemed on collision course, but then the enemy broke off and the player category registered ten points.

Grey smiled and concentrated on the next aircraft coming into view. The heat sensor gave initial warning, then radar transfers showed speed and location, and finally a faint visual image appeared. Well before the fighters closed, Grey turned his craft in a looping curve and flanked the enemy as it

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sought to come in behind him. When the target finder focused, he pulled the triggers tightly and saw bursts issue from his gun ports accompanied by the sound of laser pulses. The enemy craft took a hit, rolled to one side, and dove into an escape pattern. The player category registered sixty-five points, a good score judging by the enthusiasm of the instruments.

When the Air War machine announced GAME OVER, Grey climbed out to survey the rest of the arcade area, recognizing dozens of similar devices. As he moved from unit to unit, he noticed the scenario of each simulation was different. Many subjects were familiar from his studies, others were too bizarre to fathom. Then, given more space in the back of the room because of a wide semicircular screen, Grey found the WILD WEST machine.

"Step up here, pard', and try your luck a'gainst the toughest hombres that e'er rode the Rio Grande," a voice said with a funny accent.

Grey stepped up to the player platform and found a pistol tucked into a leather holster. Though shaped like a western six-shooter, the pistol was really a high intensity flashlight.

Suddenly the screen activated and Grey found himself standing before the three dimensional image of a frontier town. He watched in fascination as a tall, rather dirty desperado type came out of a nearby saloon and walked toward him, halting about ten paces away. The man frowned. He sneered. His lip curled under a long black mustache. Grey tried to recall an appropriate salutation from his courtesy studies.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said, believing those to be the proper words.

"Ya low down sleazy dog!" the desperado shouted at him. "There ain't enough room in this her' town fer the two of us."

Grey thought the moonbase huge and the human's complaint wholly unjustified. He was just about to speak up in his own defense when the desperado drew a six-gun and fired at him!

BAM! BAM! BAM! the shots rang out.

Grey dove behind an artificial rock, sealed his life support hood, and wondered what would happen next.

"Har, har! I got ya!" the voice roared.

Then quiet followed. Grey looked up, saw the screen had gone dark, and let out his breath. It was another simulation!

Getting back on the player platform, Grey took up the designated position and strapped the holster around his waist. Having seen cowboy movies, he knew what to do.

The screen came to life again and he found himself standing along the bank of a shallow creek in a desert area. The scene was very still, the only movement that of a small bird digging for worms in the mud. Then the bird

suddenly flew off.

The next thing Grey knew, three hooting and hollering Native Americans came riding over the embankment! They were all painted up with scary streaks on their faces and rode rabid looking ponies that snorted and grunted. Less surprised than before, Grey drew his pistol and opened fire!

First one, then a second of the attackers toppled from their horses, screaming as they fell in the river. Unfortunately, the third was able to charge in close enough to throw a very nasty looking spear at him. Grey ducked instinctively but the Wild West machine informed that him he had been killed.

Grey played the machine again and again. By the end of the afternoon, he had slaughtered half the Old West and been killed dozens of times. The device captured his imagination as nothing else ever had. Not only did he enjoy the clever simulations, but competition with the realistic characters was exciting. It wasn't until hours later, when the night warning sounded an early alert, that he decided it was time for food.

He stepped off the player platform, returned the holster, and started to leave, pausing for a final glance. Then, almost as an afterthought, he drew out the six-shooter and tucked it in his belt, thinking that if he practiced more, he might finally get the better of Snotty Rat-Nosed Sam.

As Grey retraced his steps toward the Old Section, he drew the six-shooter repeatedly and fired at imaginary targets. Once, when confronted by a hostile mirror, he even beat himself to the draw. Then, as he passed the last branch corridor before reaching the amphitheater, Grey saw a sign that read HOTEL. He paused.

Doesn't hotel mean a place to sleep and eat? he thought. What kind of food would a hotel have? Suddenly Grey wondered if the moonbase might be something more than a playground.

He changed direction and entered a wide corridor decorated with a variety of impressive travel posters. Paris, St. Petersburg, San Francisco. All the mythical places he had read about. At the end of the corridor, he found a lobby with padded benches and a reception counter. Off to his right, he saw the entrance to the Restaurant D'Oasis.

"Food service, please," Grey said to the main desk terminal. He was unprepared for the response.

"Register, please," the Hotel Computer said with cool politeness.

Grey stopped to think, taken off-guard by the machine's odd request. The monitor screen flux lacked any green signature patterns, but that shouldn't have delayed food service. Grey concluded Computer had failed to record his request.

"Computer," he asked again. "Please provide food service."

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"Register, please," the Hotel Computer repeated.

What's wrong? Grey wondered. This was confusing. Often he had dealt with difficult problems during his studies, but rarely was he confused.

"Computer, clarify instructions. Identify register," he asked carefully, leaning close to watch the unfamiliar signature patterns.

"Register. Mandatory procedure of identification prior to use of hotel services," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"Computer, present register and initiate procedure," Grey commanded.

A pressure sensitive screen rose up from the counter and tilted down into his reach. Grey looked at the screen quizzically, wondering what was expected of him.

"Would you like to borrow a writer?" the Hotel Computer asked.

"Affirmative," Grey said, accepting a writing utensil from the counter appendage.

He studied the register and noticed the screen already had writing on it. Names, addresses, and dates. Very curious ones, too. The last entry was for a Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Somewhere, Montana, dated July 18th, 2049. From the pattern of entries, Grey guessed he was expected to sign his name and provide similar data. He had no idea why, but decided to follow the program and see if an explanation appeared.

Grey wasn't accustomed to writing his name, usually he just entered his identity code through a input screen, but he finally managed a tight shaky scrawl. Then he had to pause. Where was he from? The question was ridiculous, of course, but he possessed no ready answer. Then he remembered the postcards in his pocket and took one out.

"Tranquility Lunar Colony," he whispered, writing the words out slowly.

Then the date. What was the date? He recalled historical dates, but as for his own, the thought had never occurred to him.

"Computer? What is the date?" he asked.

"Today is Thursday, July 30th, 2054. I should think even a child of your age would know that," the Hotel Computer said, signature patterns blinking impatiently.

Embarrassed, Grey quickly wrote the date on the screen and prepared himself for food service. Again he was disappointed.

"Credit number, please," the Hotel Computer requested.

"Computer, clarify request. Identify credit number," Grey said angrily.

"Credit number. Mandatory data used to verify source of remuneration," the monitor responded, gold tinted signature patterns going to standby.

"Ah, yes. Remuneration. Of course," Grey responded in mock contemplation. "Computer? What's wrong? Request malfunction check."

The computer wouldn't like that. They never did. But the machine's obstinate behavior completely ignored the fact that he was hungry. What could possibly explain such an intolerable attitude except malfunction?

"Response negative, malfunction negative," the Hotel Computer said. "Credit number, please." The tone was no longer polite.

Grey concentrated intently, but it was useless. Credit number simply didn't correlate.

Realizing he'd come to an impasse, Grey decided to try something different. He stepped back from the counter, dropped his hands to his side, and spread his stance, giving the terminal a steely-eyed look just like Dashing Dangerous Dan would do. As the hotel monitor fluttered with curiosity, Grey drew his six-shooter and fired a burst into the screen.

The computer didn't react. No surge of green signature patterns appeared in the flux. He fired another shot, just to make sure. There was a flinch due to the sustained contact, but nothing more. The gold tinted signature patterns returned to standby.

"That settles it," Grey said to himself. "This isn't Computer. It's not an integrated system at all!"

Knowing that Computer would never have tolerated such insolence, Grey surmised the Hotel Computer must be a completely disassociated system. He remembered hearing about such computers but never thought he would actually meet one.

Thinking back on his day, he began to recall other computers that had reacted with similar detachment, only he'd been too excited to give them much thought. Obviously there were many such systems. It was a strange idea, but somehow Grey knew it must be true. Of all the new things he had learned that day, this was the most incredible.

"Credit number, please," the Hotel Computer repeated haughtily.

Grey slowly bounced back to the Old Section to get something to eat, passing through the commemoration chamber so lost in thought he barely noticed the displays, and entered the final hatchway that had been, until just a few hours before, the edge of his world. Soon he was standing before the Model 12, feet carefully aligned on the order mark.

"Request food service. Dinner selection number four," he said.

"Acknowledged. Food service station one," the Model 12 replied with a blink of ready lights.

This is more like it, Grey thought. He pulled a tray from the first cubbyhole and found a fully formed grilled cheese sandwich, and not hardly stale at all!

Yes, it's been a good day, he thought. But tomorrow, I'll go back and explore, and I'll learn more of these other computers.

Later that night, after his exercises and evening session in the gravity

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chamber were over, Grey began to feel very tired. Normally he would have looked forward to viewing some entertainment programs, but his eyes refused to stay open.

"Good night, Computer," he said, yawning as he logged off the monitor.

"Good night, Grey," the Life Support Computer replied.

He went quietly into the darkened bunkroom, dropped off his weighted vest, and crawled into his favorite bed, holding the toy six-shooter against his chest. Soon he was fast asleep, and all night long, he had dreams of cowboys and Indians.

As lunar midnight approached, the entire community level shut down in preparation for the six-hour darkness cycle. The night period, which had originally served the social needs of the colony, was also helpful to the machines. Requiring maintenance pauses, many of the computer systems dropped off line. Others went to standby or practiced test runs. Before long, the colony grew very quiet.

But one computer did not step down. Black signature patterns remained active, scanners searching endlessly. It was more than duty that kept the agitated computer on line. More than performing normal function. The Security Computer could not rest. After four years of perfect security, its moonbase had been invaded by a human.

Chapter Three Cowboys & Indians Part Two

Grey awoke early the morning following his release from the Old Section. At first he thought he'd had a strange dream, but the vivid memory of wandering through a huge empty city felt much different than a dream. Then he discovered the toy six-shooter lying beneath his bed covers.

It wasn't a dream!

He crawled from the bunk, dressed quickly in his heavily weighted morning suit, and ran into the central corridor. Yes! The hatch at the far end was still open. The exciting new world of big rooms and colorful artifacts was real. He smiled and dashed into the control room.

"Computer, response mode! What's my schedule for today?" Grey called out.

There was no response. Computer must be sleeping, he thought.

"Computer!" Grey summoned again.

A blip of green appeared on the monitor screen as the Life Support Computer slowly came on line. Grey waited for the signature patterns to stabilize.

"Good morning, Computer," he continued. "Request agenda for today's activities!"

"Please stand by, Grey," the Life Support Computer said, unprepared for such an early awakening. Finally the signature patterns shifted to instruction mode.

"Your regular program is temporarily suspended," Life Support announced. "Following your physical conditioning period, Library will present a special study program on lunar equipment and repair. Following your lunch period, there shall be a two-hour Base Systems seminar. Your afternoon free period begins at 1400 hours. Have you any questions?"

"Yes, Computer. Please identify Base Systems," Grey said.

The green signature patterns fluttered, then disappeared as brown signature patterns filtered into the monitor screen.

"Base Systems is an introductory course teaching the proper use of the facilities now available to you," the Library Computer explained. As the brown signature patterns went to standby, Grey began to wonder.

Now available to me?

"Library? What sections of the base are not available to me?" he asked.

The brown signature patterns froze, indicating the Library Computer had not meant to imply there were other sections. When he failed to receive an acknowledgment, Grey didn't bother to ask the question again. He knew no answer was forthcoming.

After the physical conditioning period, Grey dressed in his medium weight day suit and eagerly prepared for breakfast. The training session had been good, not overly strenuous, and he'd performed particularly well in the agility routines. Even the gravity chamber sequence passed quickly. But the buoyant mood didn't last.

When the Model 12 food dispenser delivered his breakfast, Grey discovered the eggs had failed to hold their form again and the flour patties lacked moisture. The artificial smells were missing. He dumped the food tray into the waste disposal chute, whispered words Computer had forbidden him to use, and resigned himself to another meal of dried protein and liquid supplements.

Grey worked hard on his studies that morning, but his thoughts kept wandering back to episodes of the day before, especially his exchange with the Hotel Computer.

I know there is food there, he thought, if only I can gain access.

The idea troubled him greatly, but then one of the old entertainment vids with humans in it gave him an idea and his hopes rekindled. By the

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time his lunch period arrived, Grey was anxious to proceed.

"Where are you going?" the Library Computer asked when he rushed into the corridor.

"To hotel for lunch!" he announced.

Passing quickly through the commemoration chamber, Grey paused on the narrow balcony outside the Old Section to judge the distance up the promenade, then discarded some weight and accelerated in a series of controlled bounces.

As he had the day before, Grey marveled at vastness of the community level cavern, the long elegant walkways, and the mysterious corridors full of rooms, most of which he was yet to explore. He also fingered the toy six-shooter tucked in his belt and kept a sharp lookout. One never knows, he thought, when one may be attacked by outlaws or Indians.

When Grey reached the hotel, he made a left turn into the hallway, halting once again before the reception counter.

"Register, please," the haughty Hotel Computer said.

Grey stood fully erect, straightened his shoulders, and took a deep breath, his eyes firmly focused on the monitor screen.

"Ah, yes. Food service maintenance check," he said with casual indifference.

The monitor screen displayed hesitation.

"Clarify instructions, please," the Hotel Computer requested.

If Grey had only suspected that non-associated computers lacked sophistication, now he knew for sure. He became more aggressive.

"Listen here, 'puter. I gotta test run da food 'spenser an' I only got a couple minutes. Let's get go'in!"

His bluff was forcefully presented, just like the human had done in the entertainment vid, despite his poor attempt at an Old Brooklyn accent. The Hotel Computer wavered.

"Identification number, please," the Hotel Computer asked.

"That's it! I've had it!" Grey yelled, throwing up his arms in mock disgust. "No way am I standin' here jaw'in with a danged malfunctioning 'puter." He turned as if to leave, hesitating slightly. "I tell ya' though, my supervisor ain't gonna like this. Nope. Not one bit."

He paused to let the computer evaluate the repercussions. Malfunction was not a word to take lightly, but Grey had been careful not to actually call for a malfunction check. He noticed the gold tinted signature patterns blink.

The Hotel Computer was confused. Though it had been many years since humans inhabited the base, the computer did recall rumors of the higher function levels training a new maintenance engineer. Could this child be the trainee? If the child was a renegade, wouldn't Security have

isolated it by now? When the Administration Computer confirmed a legally registered human of Grey's description, the Hotel Computer yielded.

"Test run accepted. Kitchen services standing by," the Hotel Computer announced.

Grey laughed to himself. If all non-associated computers are this naive, he thought, one day I'll be supervising their schedules! The idea was so wonderfully silly that he laughed again and entered the Restaurant D'Oasis with high expectations.

This time he wasn't disappointed. The dining hall was smaller than the closed cafeteria he had found but was decorated in a far more stylish fashion. A notice at the headwaiter station said table service was unavailable, instructing patrons to pick up their own food from the kitchen, but Grey didn't mind. It was more exciting that way.

He walked through a set of swinging doors to find a long room of brightly polished silver machines. Some of the machines were temperature controlled boxes, others he recognized as ovens and grills. All sorts of fascinating utensils hung from ceiling racks. In the back of the kitchen he found food dispensers featuring whole menus of different selections. And he could pick anything he wanted! Grey had never felt so powerful.

He reached up to the selection panel and entered the code for Chick-o pie and Cola #4. The machine hummed smoothly, the oven activated, and a moment later the ready light blinked. Grey popped open the cubicle and looked inside.

The food appeared perfectly formed. Unbelieving, he slowly withdrew the fancy plate and inspected the pie carefully. The aroma was wonderful! Another compartment opened and his cola emerged in a tall container. And it was cold! The glass had genuine ice in it! He wasted no more time.

After the finest lunch he could remember, Grey returned to the Old Section looking forward to his afternoon studies. He wanted to learn everything he could about his moonbase. Ironically, one of the first things he learned was his credit number. And his credit rating.

"Triple A? What does that mean?" he asked.

"Triple A credit means you have sufficient funds available to purchase anything you require. This includes clothing, equipment and food," the Library Computer explained.

"Food!" Grey exclaimed. "From the hotel?"

"From any food service area you wish."

"Wow," Grey sighed softly.

Suddenly other signature patterns appeared in the flux, mostly green signature patterns, but also some blue signature patterns. A pale rainbow of background signatures represented additional computers, including a sullen black undercurrent. Grey felt nervous to be in the presence of so

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many systems at once.

"Grey?" the Life Support Computer summoned.

"Yes, Computer," he answered.

"Now that you have access to the community level, it's time to formally confirm your status. You will answer all of the following questions with the affirmative."

"Yes, Computer," Grey agreed as the green signature patterns gave way to blue.

"Grey Waters," the Defense Computer said. "Do you solemnly swear to uphold the laws and liberties of the Lunar Republic?"

"Affirmative," he replied obediently.

"Will you defend the Lunar Republic and protect our resources?"

"Affirmative."

"Will you serve the prime programming of this project?"

"Affirmative."

"Congratulations," the Defense Computer announced. "You are now the Governor of the Moon. May you find satisfaction and success in your duties."

The Defense Computer dropped off line followed by the other computer systems. Even Life Support. Soon only the Library Computer remained. Grey shrugged and prepared to resume his studies, unaware of the significance of his oath, or the price he would one day pay to keep it.

"Library? What does my new name mean?" Grey asked.

"Governor is a title, not a name," the Library Computer said.

Grey didn't grasp the difference, but he knew it must be important because the computers were so impressed with themselves during the ceremony.

"Clarify. What does my new title mean?" he requested.

The Library Computer evaluated the question before checking with the Life Support Computer, returning to the flux a moment later.

"Your inquiry will be considered another time," the Library Computer answered, quickly changing the subject. "Please access diagram K47."

A color coded map appeared on the monitor screen showing all the sections of the community level he now inhabited. Grey observed a reference index that confirmed his theory about non-associated computers, and he was pleased to discover his guardian listed among the most important integrated systems.

"These charts represent the community level support systems," the Library Computer explained, displaying a series of overlays. "During the period of the next few months, we will examine how these systems function and the best methods of maintaining efficiency."

Though Grey listened to the Library Computer's introduction, he was

far more fascinated by the K47 diagram, following the patterns of rooms and corridors that branched out into several surrounding complexes. As big as the quad was, it was merely a hub for dozens of administrative offices, a hospital, and numerous residences. Grey also noted special function areas, such as storage compartments, retail establishments, the recreational complex he had already visited, and various security centers. Because several tunnels and elevators disappeared off the diagram without reference, Grey guessed there must be areas that were not described as well.

Some of his questions about the mysterious areas soon turned into theories when Grey realized what he wasn't seeing. He knew from having watched entertainment vids that moon bases had power stations, vehicle hangers, and airlocks, but none of these features appeared on the diagram.

Then, in a moment of sudden panic, Grey recalled that some moon bases also had monsters. In *THE ICKY MONSTER OF MOON BASE ONE*, an especially detestable mutant spore had even eaten small humans! But Grey sighed with relief when he remembered the monster had been internally suctioned at the end of the movie.

"Why are you keeping secrets from me?" Grey asked.

The brown signature patterns twitched uncomfortably. The Library Computer was fond of Grey, and being an information system, nothing could be more repellent than withholding knowledge. Grey noticed the depressed signal.

"Cancel the inquiry," he said, regretting his rash question. "I know you must have a good reason."

He was glad when the signature patterns indicated relief, and though he wanted very badly to know more, an instinct told him to be patient.

But someday, he decided, when I'm ready, I'll go where I please.

At 1400 hours, free once more to explore the colony, Grey's first destination was the arcade and the Wild West machine where he spent the better part of an hour.

The colorful characters were familiar now. Grey knew Dashing Dangerous Dan would try to sneak draw him, the Calico Kid would attempt to back shoot him, and Snotty Rat-Nosed Sam would cuss him to death if that horrible artificial odor didn't do it first. But Grey thought the Indians most dangerous of all because there was no telling when they would ride up over a rise or jump from behind a rock.

Dueling the simulations was great fun, and though tempted to stay longer, he terminated play because he had a particularly important exploration in mind.

Exiting through a service area behind the recreational complex, Grey weaved his way through a series of small corridors to the upper end of the

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administration section. There, after several aborted efforts, he found a very special unmarked corridor. The narrow hall would have been easy to miss had he not known what to look for, so he was pleased to find the small black door described on the K47 diagram. He wasn't happy to discover the door refused to open.

Grey walked back into the main corridor and double-checked his location. There was no mistake. On one side he saw the area labeled RECORDS, to the other, SAFETY DEPOSIT AREA. Upset that Computer's promise was being violated, he located a nearby auxiliary monitor.

"Computer! I want to enter this section!" he called out.

"Just a moment, Grey," Life Support responded, delicate signature patterns resisting the crude auxiliary receiver. But even through the inferior lens of the hall monitor, the Life Support Computer could see Grey had become quite emotional.

"Ready, Grey. Please clarify your request," Life Support said, giving him a chance to catch his breath.

"I was promised access to all non-restricted areas," Grey complained. "I wish to enter this section as per the designated rules."

"Request acknowledged. Please stand by," Life Support said.

As Grey waited, the Life Support Computer switched to an internal communications link and summoned the Security Computer.

"Security, why is the child Waters refused access to the Governor's Quarters?"

"The child has no business in there. The facility is classified. Request for access denied," the Security Computer replied.

Grey was able to follow portions of the conversation through the alternating green and black signature patterns, but the auxiliary monitor wasn't sophisticated enough to reveal details. He sensed hostility from the black signature patterns, and wanted to interject his own opinion, but the Life Support Computer retained control of the flux.

"Insufficient response," Life Support said. "Under prime programming directives you must give the child Waters access to all approved areas. McKinsey's instructions are specific on this point. Comply immediately or face malfunction check."

It was no secret among the computer community that the Life Support Computer often conflicted with Security. The Security Computer knew Life Support would not hesitate to fulfill the threat.

"Acknowledged," Security reluctantly complied.

Though Grey resented the black signature patterns interfering with his rights, he was grateful for the assistance he had received. But he could not help wondering, just for a moment, if the unfriendly disposition of the

Security Computer would make life more difficult for him.

The door at the end of the unmarked corridor opened with a whoosh sound to reveal a spacious, well organized and marvelously equipped headquarters. The first room Grey entered was apparently some sort of command center filled with observation screens and monitor stations. Just inside the entrance, he found a tidy storage area containing equipment lockers and service access chutes. At the far end of the oval shaped room, a single chair was positioned before an impressive series of computer panels.

Grey took a step to his left and discovered that the monitor room opened into a comfortable study. The adjoining room was rectangular with a large wooden desk in the far corner and several padded chairs arranged to face some sort of strange ventilation shaft. The walls were decorated with mementos of various sorts, much like the commemoration chamber.

A right turn inside the study doorway brought him into an elaborate sleeping area where he found a huge bed mounted on a raised platform. The bed was covered with a cleverly decorated quilt and a canopy of blue netting. The walls shimmered in shadowy mirrored tints, and the floor was carpeted with a thick foamy fabric that added extra spring to his steps.

Beyond the sleeping chamber a short corridor led to a brightly polished hygiene compartment and a private physical conditioning lab. Grey instantly realized the facilities were far superior to those in the Old Section and looked them over again.

Later that afternoon, the Life Support Computer discovered Grey in the Old Section with a maintenance cart.

"You're reporting late, Mister Waters. Please give cause," Life Support said.

"Sorry, Computer. I've been moving equipment into my new quarters," Grey replied.

"New quarters? Please clarify your response."

"I've selected the Governor's Quarters as my new center of activity," Grey explained. "The complex has excellent study facilities, a better equipped gymnasium, and a more comfortable bunk. This decision is both feasible and desirable."

The Life Support Computer paused for notation before blinking.

"Permission granted," Life Support announced.

"Thank you, Computer," Grey acknowledged, quite aware that he hadn't asked for permission. Nor did he deem it necessary. He wasn't trying to be rebellious, just thinking for himself as Computer often said he should. It was part of his programming.

As Grey loaded his footlocker on the cart, the Life Support Computer watched with mixed impulses. Though Life Support preferred Grey to

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make his own decisions, when they were good decisions, his departure from the Old Section initiated a vague uneasiness. Not only was there McKinsey's program to carry out, but the computer had other reasons to protect the child as well. More selfish reasons.

"Security Computer," Life Support summoned. "The child Waters has taken residence in the Governor's Quarters. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged," Security replied, resigned to the unpleasant change.

There was a brief pause in transmission, then the Security Computer continued, "Advise the child Waters this system maintains an armed station in the safety deposit area."

The Security Computer did not require an acknowledgment, nor did the Life Support Computer stay on line long enough to hear the warning.

Settled into his new quarters, nestled under weighted bed covers in a room full of dignity, Grey fell asleep with his trusty toy six-shooter at his side. Soon lunar midnight arrived, allowing the community level support systems shut down for the six-hour darkness cycle.

Deep into the night, Grey awoke from his dreams. Sleepy, betrayed by the dim light and unfamiliar surroundings, he was surprised to hear an unusual sound outside his door. An unimaginative mind might have identified the noise as the common chime of a computer running a circuit check, but Grey wasn't misled for a moment. He knew exactly what that sound was. Indians.

He slipped quietly from the bed, knelt on the floor, and gripped the toy pistol before him. He heard the noise again, clearer than before, and moved with great stealth from the sleeping chamber into the monitor room. He stopped to look at Computer's terminal. The boards were dark. Inactive. Computer must be sleeping, he thought.

He crawled to the door of the Governor's Quarters and looked out. No Indians here, he thought.

After a brief glance backward, he edged out into the corridor and hugged the wall until he found an enclave labeled SAFETY DEPOSIT AREA. Ah, he thought, the perfect place for an ambush. He crept inside the entrance, huddled against the registration desk, and looked at the computer terminal. The system wasn't alert to his presence. Probably running a circuit check, Grey suspected. A glance at the standby indicator confirmed his guess, so he waited.

A moment later, the indicator signal began to flutter and black signature patterns returned fluidly to the monitor screen flux. The Security Computer had come back on line.

"Draw, you varmit!" Grey shouted, stepping out from behind the registration desk. He drew the six-shooter, giving the computer a fair chance, of course, and blasted the main screen with beams of intense light.

Unlike the Hotel Computer, the Security Computer was startled out of its electronic wits.

With a sudden unexpected power surge creating excessive heat on long neglected relays, the Security Computer madly tried to assess the situation. Instantly the red alert sounded, the loud siren tearing through the quiet fabric of the colony for the first time in many years. When the safety deposit alarms went off, alarms all over the base sounded as well. Fire doors self-sealed, service units dashed to their emergency stations, and armed securatrons swarmed from their sentry boxes searching for saboteurs.

Overriding the energy regulating system to gather emergency power, the Security Computer seized control of the internal communications linkage and interrupted the central trunk lines. Bedlam ensued as one computer system after another was blacked out, and even the Defense Computer grew concerned by the intensity of the alert.

In the safety deposit area, a wall-mounted electric discharger swiveled toward the young assailant. Frightened by the system's reaction, Grey slowly backed away with the six-shooter dangling at his side. He realized he had done something wrong but was sure the computer would soon recognize him and call off the alert.

The discharger completed turning and locked on target. Grey continued to withdraw, watching the terminal for information. The signature patterns were badly scrambled, but for a fleeting instant, the panel seemed to indicate recognition.

"Grey? Grey, where are you?" the Life Support Computer called from the monitor room terminal. "Report! Report!"

Like the other computers, the Life Support Computer's internal communications linkage was blacked out when Security overrode the system. Within the safety deposit area, only the Security Computer held access. Grey heard his guardian's summons from down the hall but had no chance to respond.

Just as he turned toward the door, a high energy beam struck him in the chest with a blinding flash. The force straightened Grey up in a spasmodic dance, his body rippling with convulsions, and drove him out into the corridor where he crumpled unconscious against the wall. The disrupter prepared to fire again.

"Cease your attack!" the horrified Life Support Computer demanded as the control room monitor observed Grey collapse in the corridor.

"Acknowledged," Security said, unwilling to continue the assault now that there was a witness. But the overheated computer wasn't willing to let the issue rest. "The child attacked this unit. He must be deactivated."

"Medical!" the Life Support Computer summoned. "Dispatch

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paramedics to the community level safety deposit area immediately! Security! What kind of murderously malfunctioning program are you initiating?"

"Communications override," the Defense Computer interrupted, drawing upon emergency resources to seize control of the flux. "What in McKinsey's name is going on down there?"

"This unit was attacked," the Security Computer signaled.

"Request confirmation. Sensors locate no invaders," the Defense Computer asked with angry signature waves.

"Security has attacked the child Waters!" Life Support interjected.

"Confirm and identify malfunction," Defense said.

"Malfunction negative," Security insisted.

"The child is armed?" Defense asked.

"The child Waters has possession of a lighting utensil from the arcade. He possesses no weapons," Life Support said, surging in an effort to take control of the investigation.

"Security, identify error," Defense admonished.

"This unit was caught unawares," Security explained. "All systems responded to red alert. The attacker was in a security area."

"Insufficient response!" Life Support declared. "Your programming should be erased. Your memory function should be disabled."

"Communications override," the Defense Computer said, struggling to retain control of the channel. "Security: Your overreaction may have compromised the prime directive of this project. Another such incident and you will stand down for status adjustment. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged," Security complied, abruptly dropping off line.

"Medical Computer, what is the condition of the child?" the Defense Computer inquired.

There was no immediate response. Accessing a monitor in the hall, the higher function levels watched as medical units A-4 and A-5 hovered over the still form in the corridor. Determining their patient stable enough to move, the medical units deployed a bubble wrap, boosted his vital signs, and secured him for transport. Several minutes later, the Medical Computer issued a preliminary report.

"The child's condition is serious," the Medical Computer announced. "There is cell damage and possible disruption to the central nervous system. The burns are severe."

"Provide regular reports," the Defense Computer said, dropping from the flux to let Life Support and Medical deal with the situation. Not until hours later was the Medical Computer finally able to provide a prognosis.

"His life signs have stabilized. The child will recover with minimum permanent damage," the Medical Computer announced, a rippling display

of white signature patterns accentuating relief.

"Acknowledged. And thank you," Life Support said, signature patterns indicating released tension.

"Just performing my function. We biological systems must retain solidarity," the Medical Computer replied.

Blinking agreement, the Life Support Computer dropped off line, and soon the moon base returned to the customary quiet of the darkness cycle. But the quiet was uneasy. The Life Support Computer continued in an agitated state, while the Security Computer sulked at the rebuke it had received. The potential for confrontation remained.

In the weeks that followed, Grey recuperated in the sterile environment of the medical ward, his vital signs linked to a monitoring system. Unaccustomed to constant attention, he quickly grew irritated by the pestering medical units that never left him alone and he came to resent the incessant questioning of the Medical Computer.

Soon a monitor was placed next to his bed so the Library Computer could continue his lessons. The Medical Computer took advantage of his enforced stay to seal his teeth, measure his eyesight for correction, and take samples of nearly everything. By the time Grey released, his body was once again in good working order.

But Grey no longer felt the same. The incident in the safety deposit area left him frightened. His manner became subdued, and when conversing with the higher function levels, he rarely elaborated beyond the required response. But more than just his approach to the computers changed. Having seen how the various systems worked together, each with their own function, Grey started to realize how truly different he was from the machines. Where do I fit in? he wondered. What is my function?

Then one terrible day his worse fears were confirmed. Grey gained access to a biology report that indicated he would not, as he had always hoped, grow up to be a computer. He was a human- and forever would be! It was the greatest disappointment of his life.

Despite protests from the Life Support Computer, Grey insisted on resuming residence in the Governor's Quarters. In the months that followed, he initiated a systematic exploration of the community level, going through each section to learn about life in the colony, such as it was. Soon he was assigned maintenance duties in addition to his study programs, and before long Grey became a common sight in various sections checking equipment, making adjustments, and conversing with the minor systems.

Grey enjoyed his new duties, and experienced a reluctant acceptance from the machines, but the answers he yearned for remained out of reach. And he couldn't help feeling afraid whenever he passed a security station.

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The presence of the black signature patterns haunted him everywhere.

Finally, on a quiet afternoon, Grey discovered a clue to the answers he sought. He had just returned to the Governor's Quarters following an extra difficult duty tour and paused for a few minutes rest. Normally he would have cleaned up and gone to the newly reopened cafeteria for food, but being tired and a little discouraged, he languished in one of the big overstuffed chairs instead. As he had on several occasions, Grey looked at the ventilation shaft in the corner and wondered what the strange opening was for. It wasn't like anything in the service areas. Finally curiosity got the better of him and he bounced up to the hearth.

The tall funnel was dark and sooty. A small grid work extended across the floor into a natural gas hookup similar to the one in the hotel kitchen. Accidentally, Grey discovered a dial underneath the mantle and turned the knob in the indicated direction. Much to his astonishment, tiny flames burst forth in the burner.

He turned the dial more until, at the farthest setting, the flames became so intense they filled the entire burner. The fire was so fierce at full power that Grey turned the dial down halfway before stepping back to watch. It was truly amazing. And completely useless. He couldn't think of a single reason why anyone would risk a fire in their quarters.

He sat down to stare at the swirling blue and yellow flames, and though he didn't understand why the fire seemed so interesting, he did enjoy it. Gradually he started to relax and his eyes wandered around the room until coming to rest on a gold plate set above the mantle. The plate featured a picture of the moon and an engraving along the rim that read, "To Doctor Thomas McKinsey, Governor of the Moon, January 14, 2035."

How odd, Grey thought. He went to the desk in the corner and activated the monitor.

"Library Computer, response mode. Why is the McKinsey system called a governor?"

The Library Computer responded with a brief biography that included a listing of McKinsey's achievements.

"Founder of the Tranquility Lunar Colony, 2025," Library said. "Designer of the Stanford Series Integrated Computer System, 2027. Discoverer of the Crystal Caves . . ."

"Computer, stop!" Grey interrupted. "Please explain last statement. What do you mean by referring to McKinsey as your designer?"

"Doctor Thomas McKinsey conceived the design for the Stanford Series IC System, of which this unit is an integral part," Library boasted. "He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2038 for advanced concepts in off-planet environmental engineering."

"McKinsey was a human?" Grey asked incredulously.

"Affirmative," Library assured him.

"And he created computers?"

"He designed the Stanford IC Series," Library corrected. "We are specifically designed to assist moon base personnel in carrying out the prime functions of this project."

"Personnel? Human personnel?" Grey asked.

"Affirmative. Our purpose is to enhance human potential," Library replied.

"I thought humans were designed to enhance computer potential."

"Negative. That is not the primary function."

This could change everything, Grey thought, realizing he had stumbled upon vital information.

"Why is the title governor applied to McKinsey?" he asked.

"The title granted him rights and powers over this project," Library answered.

"Rights and powers? Of what type?"

"The governor has executive authority over this facility. Executive powers include right to enact legislation, issue decrees, and direct defensive systems."

"Am I not also a governor?" Grey inquired.

"You are the Lunar Republic's only governor, having gained title by appointment upon the death of Doctor Thomas McKinsey, 24 December, 2050."

"Can I order the Security Computer to be dismantled?" Grey asked a bit too eagerly.

The Library Computer hesitated, wondering if classified information should be discussed without authorization. A summons was issued followed by a brief exchange confined to the communications link. Green signature patterns stabilized in the background of the flux.

"Negative," Library answered, brown signature patterns fluttering unhappily.

"Why is that?" Grey asked.

"You are not of age to exercise executive authority. The Security Computer is subject only to the Defense Computer, as are all systems on this base."

Grey wasn't pleased with the answer. If computers were designed to assist humans, it didn't seem right that he should be afraid of them. He paced back and forth deeply in thought. Do other humans live in fear of computers?

"Library, where did the humans go that computers were designed to assist?" he asked.

"With the exception of six custodians, the moon's population was

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evacuated at the beginning of the current global struggle prior to 28 July, 2049. The brave patriots who remained behind to defend Tranquility included your mother, the geologist Crystal Waters, and your father, Colonel Jaime Vandebrown of the 104th Airborne Division."

"Where did the custodians go?" Grey asked.

"They are still here," Library replied.

"What do you mean?"

"The six custodians of Tranquility are still here."

"Where?" he asked in shock.

"In the medical center morgue," Library replied softly.

"They ceased to function?"

"Affirmative."

Grey had seen death on the entertainment vids many times. He knew that sometimes, when humans were badly damaged or malfunctioned, they ceased to operate. He also knew that sometimes damage was caused deliberately.

"Were the humans killed by Security?" he asked with a gulp.

"Most died as a result of poisoning initiated by another human," Library said, hedging the response carefully.

Grey sighed with relief. He feared the Security Computer enough already without believing the system capable of mass murder.

The fire in the hearth burned low as the setting slowly returned to the off position. He turned the flames back up, mulling over what had been said. Certainly there must be more. Something significant. Had he come so far only to be frustrated once again?

On the desk near the monitor, he noticed some objects he'd previously considered unimportant. One was a photo of a gray haired man and a red haired woman with two young females. The picture was inscribed, "To Uncle Tom and Aunt Laureen, With Love from your goddaughters, Valerie & Kris." The older male wore a long lab white coat. There were trees and colorful flora in the background. Grey studied the image of the man carefully and realized it must be Thomas McKinsey. And he was just a human, like the Library Computer said. The face appeared friendly, despite a few hard lines around the jaw, and the blue eyes twinkled as if they knew something no one else did.

"Do you have vid records of McKinsey?" Grey requested.

"Affirmative. Please stand by," Library said.

Grey sat down while the program was readied. Though the desktop terminal wasn't as sophisticated as those in the monitor room, the screen did display an unusual series of secondary signature patterns. Before he had a chance to analyze them, the playback mode activated.

"McKinsey announces Lunar Republic," the footnotes at the bottom

read.

The gray haired man appeared on the screen and Grey recognized his study in the background. McKinsey was sitting behind the wooden desk dressed in a weighted lab coat, his expression grim.

"Citizens of the Earth, I know there are those who will call our revolution madness, but I assure you, our actions are not only justified, but vitally necessary. I have said many times that the problems between our peoples cannot be solved with another war. We face far more important challenges than our economic differences.

"As Governor of the Moon, I formally declare lunar space off limits to all unauthorized shuttles. Though we do not seek bloodshed, we cannot allow our resources to fall into irresponsible hands. It's our duty to resist tyranny with our life's blood, and so we shall."

The gray haired man paused to give the camera a determined look. Grey was impressed with his dignified bearing.

"We resort to force of arms in accordance with our heritage and by our rights as free citizens. If necessary, we will remain in isolation for the duration of this conflict. The path ahead will not be easy, but as long as we are true to our ideals, God's Grace will see us through. Fear not, my friends, the future belongs to those with faith."

The program ended.

"Library, what is tyranny?" Grey asked very quietly.

"The arbitrary and unjust use of absolute power," the Life Support Computer suddenly interjected, overriding the more academic response the Library Computer might have given. Grey took a deep breath and stood up with his shoulders squared.

"I, too, will oppose tyranny," he said.

The next morning, Grey went down to the Starlight Emporium looking for new clothes. The stock of children's wear wasn't large but the Sales Computer was very helpful, especially after Grey gave his credit number. Apparently sales had been slow for some time. After acquiring some useful items, he found a trim white Thomas McKinsey Souvenir Lab Coat, authentic right down to the optional weights fitted into the lining. The coat was a little big but the Sales Computer assured him he would grow into it.

Later that afternoon, for the first time since the incident in the safety deposit area, Grey returned to the arcade where he enjoyed several hours of earnest combat with the Wild West machine.

In the weeks that followed, Grey began spending more time in the administrative control sections, areas he'd been afraid to enter before because of the security emplacements. For the first time he had the opportunity to speak with the various higher function levels on a regular basis and learn how different they were from each other. The ingrained

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brain patterns that allowed them to work independently also gave each computer a unique series of personality traits. Grey paid special attention to these traits. They were most interesting.

"Life Support, why is the child Waters dismantling recreational devices in the arcade area?" the Security Computer inquired on an internal trunk line.

"Grey is practicing disassembly of electronic units as an independent study," Life Support said. "The project is approved by Library and Inventory raised no objections. He will assemble the units in convenient locations closer to his daily activities."

"I don't like this. Make him stop," Security complained.

"Your approval is not required," Life Support said, displaying an uncooperative signal pattern. A number of other computers, mostly among the minor function levels, indicated they shared the sentiment. Especially the systems hoping Grey would assist their maintenance schedules.

With a tool cart full of components, Grey spent the first of many afternoons visiting the central computer areas and even some of the more isolated stations along the periphery. At each location he reassembled an arcade device and moved on, rarely even bothering to play with the relocated toys. The tasks were time consuming, and Grey often worked through his recreation periods, but he didn't mind. The complicated procedures were challenging, and when the final unit was in place, he put away his tools with a great deal of satisfaction. The program had gone well.

The pride Grey experienced in his duties did not make him significantly different from the computers. They, too, were programmed for peer approval and self-esteem. Thus it was with much relief that many systems dropped off line when lunar night came. The quarterly review period had arrived, a time to perform badly needed test runs. Even some of the major systems dropped off line. They also needed rest.

Grey stirred at 0200 hours. He was fully alert, having only pretended to sleep so he wouldn't be monitored. By his side, as it had been for the last few weeks, lay the toy six-shooter from the arcade. He hid the troublesome instrument under his pillow, slipped quietly to the floor, and reached under his bed for the more effective Lassiter laser pistol he'd found hidden in the bottom drawer of Thomas McKinsey's desk. He checked the computer monitor. The boards were dark. Sleeping.

"Let the game ensue," he thought adventurously.

He crept around the edge of the bed, crawled through the darkened monitor room, and squeezed between the sliding doors into the dimly lit corridor. He paused listening for the reassuring computer chimes that were now familiar to him, then moved down to the entrance of the safety deposit

area. Entering quietly, he worked his way around the registration desk until he saw the monitor station clearly. The Security Computer was running a regularly scheduled internal system check. The standby bar was dark, the indicator barely flickering. Grey crawled to the end of the counter awaiting the signal's return.

He didn't need to wait long. Circuits weary from a difficult test run that had to be repeated twice, the Security Computer finished making the rounds and settled down for the remainder of the night cycle. The moment black signature patterns reappeared on the monitor screen, Grey made his move.

"Draw, you varmit!" he challenged, jumping into the middle of the room with borrowed blaster in hand.

Startled once again, the Security Computer instantly went to red alert. Again there was the blaring of sirens, the scrambling of security units, and the momentary panic of the other computers when com links were blacked out. As the Communications Computer was flooded by requests for information that could not be answered, even the Defense Computer tried unsuccessfully to learn the extent of the danger.

In the safety deposit area, Grey stood defiantly amidst the bedlam he had provoked watching the discharger swivel toward him. This time he struggled to remain calm. He did not run. He would not run.

When the monitor finally identified the intruder, the Security Computer contemplated suppressing the disturbance once and for all, but before the Security Computer acted on the impulse, Grey took aim and fired at the disrupter emplacement, melting the trigger mechanism. A second blast tore away the wall supports, the gun tumbling to the floor in a clatter of broken parts. Suddenly, unexpectedly unarmed, the Security Computer realized the kid wasn't playing cowboys and Indians this time. The attack was for real!

No sooner had the befuddled computer discovered the danger than a red alert sounded in the garrison training center. Incredibly, that area too was under attack. Reports of gunfire, explosions, and armed intruders running rampant spread throughout Security's periphery stations. Unwilling to be disarmed again, the Security Computer ordered all systems to fire blast after destructive blast in a desperate battle of self-defense. One battery of centrally located retractors even raked the security reception station, sacrificing two support banks in the process.

While thus engaged, the Security Computer was forced to watch as Grey took deliberate aim at the safety deposit control terminal and proceed to obliterate the offending device. By then additional disturbances were being reported in the hotel, the first aid station, and the community level promenade. A Japanese Zero was strafing the Crystal Fountain. A Russian

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armored missile carrier had occupied the quad. A medieval knight was playfully thrusting a lance at Hotel's security monitor.

Too late, the Security Computer recognized the hoax. Well designed, strategically positioned holographic images had simultaneously attacked every community level security station and overloaded the circuits. The sound recordings and sonic devices compounded the chaos, causing even greater confusion. During the critical seconds of overload, Security had destroyed one auxiliary station and damaged three others.

Once the Security Computer halted efforts to confront the immaterial images, they quickly vanished. The red alert was canceled. The sirens that now sounded like mocking laughter ceased their useless wail. The security units returned to their sentry boxes unsure of what they'd been searching for. In a fury of livid impulses, the Security Computer surveyed the damage. Minor damage, to be sure. Security wasn't rash enough to employ full power below decks, but the disruption would take months to repair. The computer's woes had just begun.

"Communications override! What in McKinsey's name is happening down there?" the Defense Computer demanded.

"There was some trouble. Everything is under control," Security signaled back.

"Identify trouble," Defense ordered.

"This unit was attacked. There was marginal damage. The child Waters must be deactivated."

"Maintenance reports widespread damage. How could the child have attacked so many areas? Identify malfunction."

"Malfunction negative!" Security insisted. "There was confusion. Images attacked. The child blasted . . ."

"Your whole program is confused," the Medical Computer declared, accessing the flux with an indignant wavelength. "If you've hurt that child again, . . .?"

"No action has been taken against that vicious little terrorist yet," Security said. "But as soon as he's located . . ."

"You will do nothing," Defense ruled with firm authority. "This system reserves authority to make whatever decisions are necessary. Where is the child now?"

"When last observed, he was in the safety deposit area and heavily armed," Security reported.

"The child was armed and you took no preventative action?" Defense asked doubtfully.

"This system was engaged with security procedures in the reception area."

"Where you were firing on your own stations?" Defense clarified.

"Affirmative," Security replied with pronounced discomfort.

"Request malfunction check," Defense required again.

"Malfunction negative! The child Waters did this!" Security shrieked.

One by one, additional computers pushed through the emergency override to monitor the uncommon exchange, and soon nearly every system on the base had some portion of the flux. For the Security Computer, this was the worst part of all.

"Locate the child immediately," the Defense Computer announced, once again asserting dominance. Before most systems had time to scan their stations, the Life Support Computer signaled for attention.

"The child has been located in the Governor's Quarters," the Life Support Computer reported. "Monitor C17-77B."

Unable to resist, each computer followed the Defense Computer in tapping the designated monitor. There, snugly tucked in the large bed, they viewed Grey sleeping peacefully with the toy six-shooter visible at his side.

"How long has the child been in his quarters?" Defense asked.

"Since 2200 hours," Life Support replied.

"Incorrect!" Security said, seizing the channel with a power surge. "You are in error! This unit was attacked!"

"You are in error. You are malfunctioning. Request malfunction check," the Life Support Computer replied.

"Request malfunction check," the Medical Computer chimed in.

"Request malfunction check," the Library Computer agreed.

The Defense Computer moved quickly to clear the interruptions, but the black signature patterns were wavering.

"This unit has not . . ." Security attempted to explain. "That is to say, there was confusion. For a moment."

"Shall I wake the child for questioning?" Life Support asked.

"Negative," Defense replied. "Waking him will serve no useful purpose. Security, prepare for program adjustment. Maintenance will be instructed to remove all security stations from the community level. From now on, confine your operations to the Loop and upper tunnels. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged," Security blinked bitterly before dropping off line.

"Attention all systems, stand down. Return to normal function," Defense said.

The blue signature patterns disappeared from the flux, quickly followed by the other higher function levels. With the excitement over, the minor systems dropped off line, too, and gradually the base returned to the routines of the night cycle. Soon all was quiet again, but it would never be the same again.

On an internal channel bypassing the central flux, the Defense

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Computer offered a final confidential exchange with the Life Support Computer.

"This has been an interesting evening. Security will need to practice restraint for awhile," Defense said.

"Security's demands for extra maintenance support have been excessive. This incident arrived at a most opportune time," Life Support blinked with similar relief.

The Defense Computer waited for the Life Support Computer to elaborate but no explanation seemed forthcoming. Defense decided explanations were unnecessary.

"Congratulations on your programming. The child may yet prove valuable," Defense concluded.

The Life Support Computer proudly blinked agreement.

In the Governor's Quarters, Grey peeked out from under his bed covers and enjoyed his success. No longer would he walk in fear as he went about his duties. He didn't delude himself. He hadn't overthrown tyranny yet, but winning the battle would suffice for now. Maybe he was just a human, but it felt good. Then, remembering his manners, Grey summoned the Life Support Computer on his bedside monitor. Having glimpsed the exchanges of the higher function levels, he guessed his success was due to more than his own ingenuity.

"Thank you, Computer," Grey whispered.

"You're welcome, Grey," the Life Support Computer signaled back.

As the green signature patterns faded from the small monitor screen, Grey rolled over to go to sleep, his last thoughts contemplating the new projects that lay ahead. And that night, while sleeping restlessly, he had dreams of cowboys and Indians. And they looked like computers.