

THE INTERRUPTION

Grinding halt.

BY PATRICIA FRONEK

“Let me out... please... let me out.” The fading voice from the ladies’ room behind Colin was becoming less frequent, like a deflating balloon.

“Hey you... psst... get over here. C’mon fella, I can hear you.” Fingers summoned Colin from the gap under the door marked ‘Security Personnel Only’. He slid to the floor and sat, back against the wall.

“What’s going on out there now?” The voice was muffled through the door.

Colin looked around at the decimated airport — perhaps desiccated would be more appropriate. The life had certainly been sucked out of it. Robotic staff made occasional whirring noises as if they were about to spring into action, only to remain frozen mid-task. People tried to sleep despite the din and suffocating heat. In the play area, fathers exchanged I-know-how-you-feel looks as they paced their now irritable children around. At knee height, the children eyeballed one another as they walked past. Their mothers, too lethargic to chat, sat together. Colin’s eyes scanned the perimeter.

“Well, there’s a big guy in the corner at the food dispensary. He keeps trying to open the hatch. Nothing’s coming out until The Network’s back, that’s for sure.”

The Zdevice3 was dead. No money, no food, no ordering, no directions, no communication, no help — in fact no nothing. With all the doors immobilized, everyone was stuck wherever they were when The Network went down. Restless, Colin fiddled with the device in his pocket — nothing.

The big guy in the corner was crying now. Stuffing tissues into his mouth, he chewed slowly as tears of frustration poured down his face. Behind him, people pressed against the viewing pane and talked in hushed tones.

“I think the plane’s still circling,” Colin said. “The Network had better kick in soon or it’ll be bye-bye birdie.” The small craft was in an endless loop circling the airport.

The man behind the door was silent for a moment. “Remember when we had *human* pilots?”

Colin put his head in his hands and let the disembodied voice ramble. He looked over at the tube that ran from the hotels to the

airport. A capsule was blocking the access door — not far enough out to prize the doors open but close enough for the passenger to see and to be seen from the airport lounge. The woman in the capsule had long since stopped signalling for help and was now asleep, face pressed up against the window. Lipstick smeared her cheeks.

“So, you arriving or leaving?”

“Arriving,” said Colin preoccupied. “And you?”

“Waiting for the boss. He’s on that plane. I work for the company that runs The Net-

— defence, the international banking system, stock market... the lot. Impossible to penetrate.”

Colin wasn’t so sure...

A commotion at the viewing pane drew his attention. Whispers turned into gasps. A crowd formed to watch the increasingly drunken movement of the small aircraft.

“What’s going on?”

Colin didn’t answer. The woman trapped in the toilets began to yell again. Colin stood up. The device in his pocket vibrated. Like a single organism, commuters reached for their devices and read the now lit screens.

The Network has now been restored. We apologize for the interruption.

Doors opened. Robotic staff reanimated. Orbital vacuum cleaners were spat from the walls to clean up the detritus that had accumulated while they were out of action. People picked themselves up and returned to their business as though nothing had happened. The food hatch opened. Transfer capsules, one after the other, were ejected from the tube. Dishevelled passengers spewed out, falling over one another. The aircraft regained altitude and prepared for landing — for real this time.

The owner of the voice behind the door, a little worse for wear, stepped out rubbing his bald head and looked around. After a moment, he shrugged and walked

towards the arrivals area. He had no idea who Colin was. Colin was indistinguishable from the rest, simply one of the crowd, and Colin had no desire to make it otherwise. There was one more thing to do. Colin entered a code into his device, picked up his bag and walked slowly out of the airport.

The device vibrated a second time.

Your funds have been received. Transaction complete. Have a nice day!

Colin slowly smiled — the smile of a man who had just come into a lot of money. A very, very rich man. His stiff demeanour gave no hint of his inner excitement. He loved The Network, no longer impenetrable. ■

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work.” The voice under the door chuckled. “Heads will roll over this one!” After a long pause: “My wife is with him.”

Oh brother! Colin really didn’t want to know about this one.

“Hey mate,” he said, “I didn’t mean what I said before about the plane... Anyway, I thought this could never happen?”

“The failure? It shouldn’t! It has to be local.”

“What if it’s not? We’ve been here for hours already?”

“Then we’re in big trouble — they’ll sue the pants off us — lost productivity and all that.”

“What about security? How *secure* are we really?”

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“Everything’ll shut down. Nothing to worry about. The systems are impenetrable

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