

## <sup>2</sup>*Cruise With Us!*

### Episode TWO: .....*"May I Be Of Service?"*

it took some effort to un-dog the hatch, but the rusty door opened and I stepped inside. Before me was a brightly lit long narrow passageway. The walls, ceiling and even the deck were painted a pale yellow. There were doors on both sides of the walls spaced about every 75 feet continuing the length of the corridor. I walked past the first few doors, but my curiosity tempted me too much. I stopped and pushed against the panel in front of me. There was a soft click and it swung open.

Inside, stacked as high as the ceiling, were shelves and shelves of electronic parts. I recognized circuit boards of every size and complexity. Monitors piled one on top of the other, keyboards, rolls of color coded wire. Some shelves had compartment drawers. I slid a few of them open. Each had scores of components. LED'S and connectors.

I was startled by a click and whirring metallic sound coming from behind me. I turned quickly and faced the open doorway. "May I be of service, Sir?" The words sounded clipped and tinny and came from a machine like body standing a few feet away. It was a skeletal thing with long articulated arms that almost touched the yellow deck, two leg shapes supported the body, stood on cushioned pads. At the top of the metal body, an ovoid head with two eye-like orbs I assumed were camera lenses. I judged the thing to be at least 7 feet tall, constructed of stainless steel or Titanium. Wiring ran throughout its body and head. The creature was some kind of robot built to perform as a human would, but with extended reach and strength.

More clicks and a buzzing noise came from a kind of "mouth" hole. Once again it croaked in that mono toned voice, "May I be of service, sir?"

"No thank you, I answered, I was just looking around. What are you?"

The metallic voice responded with, "I am Delta 427,.... I am the keeper of the electronic supply room. May I assist you in your search for electronics?"

I noticed a metal tag attached to the thing's arm. Engraved on it was, "Delta 427". I turned to walk away and had gone only a short distance when It occurred to me that this Robot might have answers for me. "Delta 427, what is this vessel?". More clicking sounds, then a pause as if it were forming the response to me from within its memory cells. Then,..."This is the sailing cruise liner *ATTIS*."

Expecting I might glean more information as to how I came to be here, I asked "Where are we bound?"

Delta 427 whirred and clicked for a few seconds before that metallic voice said,

"I am not programmed to answer your question."

Quickly I asked, "Will the other door keepers know?"

The machine again responded with "I am not programmed to answer your question".

Hoping I might find someone in this part of the ship who'd give me what I was looking for, I asked, "Delta 427, what is behind the other doors in this hallway?"

There was a moment of silence, then some whirring noises , the robot "looked " at me and spoke."Each compartment holds supplies needed for this vessel to function efficiently. Each compartment has a Delta waiting to serve you. "

I walked away, disappointed, but anxious to know more.

After leaving the electronics storeroom, all of the doors along the corridor began to open. Stepping out of each entrance and standing at its door, scores of the same kind of "Delta" robots lined the length of the passageway.

As I passed each machine, I asked the same question, "Who are you and what do you do? "

Each in their turn answered in that electric voice that, they were Deltas.

Each had a different number tag on those arm like appendages. Much like the numbered machines I'd seen in the engine room earlier.

I past by Delta 239, Delta 016, and so on. I asked each machine the same question and each answered with their "Delta" number. Each volunteered their compartment's contents or the duties they had. Most of the time I'd take a quick look inside the doorway to make sure what they were telling me was the truth.

I moved past a butcher shop, a laundry, numerous food storage compartments that held fresh or preserved stock. Some of the larger rooms were growing rooms where different kinds of food crops or flowers were being grown. In those areas and in several spaces that were laundry compartments , I found dozens of other robot machines working... Sometimes the room held large groups of those working machines. If I walked among them, they would move away from me. Not in a hurry, but in a slow and deliberate " march". When I moved very close to them, there would be buzzes and clicks that seemed as though they were talking to each other. It was if they were calling out to each other, a warning. If I should ask one of the worker types who they were and what was their job, The Door Keeper Delta would whirr and click for a few seconds then the worker machine would answer. It was always in the same manner, as if they were afraid to say too much with the Keeper standing by. Whatever space they were in, whatever job they were doing, the answers were hushed and always the same "I am Delta slash Zulu, serial number (followed by several numerals." its unique identity. They would say no more no matter what question I asked.

It didn't take long for me to realize that those workers held a lower status than that of the Door Keepers The "slash Zulu" added to their identity must indicate they were a subdivision, task working, Delta.

There was slavery even here in this robotic world !

The dozens of doorways I past by or those at which I stopped , had a Delta assigned as keeper and guardian of the contents of that compartment. Some of the keepers were overseers to the "Slash Zulu" Deltas working there. I saw hundreds of these "Deltas" and Sub Deltas working each at its assigned duty. Some of the machines appeared to be at rest while connected by a cable, to receptacles in the walls of each compartment. I assumed they must be recharging their power supplies. The power requirement must be staggering.

Each doorway I past and at each compartment I stopped to look into, a keeper would be waiting there, or would step out of the doorway as I approached. It was as if there was a communication network somewhere announcing my arrival. Each Keeper would address me with the same salutation. 'May I be of service, Sir?'. They seemed to be showing a deference that gave me to believe I held some importance to them. It was as if they knew me, but couldn't, or wouldn't reveal it.

Every time I asked a question, the answer would be either "May I be of service Sir." or "I am Delta slash Zulu", and number.

More and more I had a feeling they were afraid of me. Or at least held me in awe.

I had been walking that corridor for a very long time and had, finally reached the last of the compartments. Another wall with a single hatch was before me. I knew that I had to go through that doorway and into ... What I had no idea.

For a brief moment, I turned around to take a last look at the corridor. Standing at each compartment doorway, A Delta keeper stood. All of their "heads" turned my way. There was a loud buzzing and clicking sound filling the air. then,... all of them, in a chorus of tinny computer monotone "voices" in sync, spoke "We've been pleased to have been of service to you, Sir".

As soon as that choir of voices ceased, they turned, stepped away and disappeared inside each of those many doors.

As I turned back to the hatchway, I had a strong feeling that I belonged here, asking questions.

Now before me lay that another unknown passage. One I had to make. I would be leaving the corridor of the Deltas, confident of finding an end of the quest of why I was on this ship

I pushed the door open.....

end Two

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