

# TEXT ADVENTURE

*'THE  
INTERFACE  
TO  
SECURITY'*

by  
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## 1

September, 4043.

Slake Bottom clenched a purple cigarette between his gold-plated teeth and sat back in his harness, sweating in his donkey helmet. His spacecraft, the HARDPACK, piloted itself expertly through the emergent skeletons of the New Sapporo shipyard, but the smoke filling his helmet made it impossible for him to see through his visor.

“Computer. Strike all references to PAN-OPTI-CON from my itinerary. I’m finished with those idiots.” Slake considered the commercial prison scene passe. This summer, he had decided to cancel his attendance at the usual industry showcases and to concentrate solely on seeking outside contracts. Lay in a comfortable lining for his nest before winter.

The HARDPACK bleeped acceptance. He tore off the receipt and pocketed it in his flight suit.

## 2

Slake scrolled through his idea book as the HARDPACK settled into its final approach.

are there really halfway houses  
or are they just in our minds  
it all comes out in the wash  
in time

Slake missed his father. Of course, he never spoke of this to his clients.

His most recent contract had been the overhaul of a small freighter. Auxiliary percept drive; some manual steering, but primarily driven by inadequately suppressed rage. This necessarily limited the pool of potential pilots. He’d already remodeled the forward lounge and was just getting started on the deck elevators when a major new contract came over the wire. Slake had never been one to abandon a job, but at these prices, he figured he’d do just about anything.

One query, based on the plans: A hot pink ship?

Purple smoke wafted out of Slake’s nostrils. His helmet bulged, felt too tight. He figured the customer was always right.

## 3

Prior to the application of its skin, the ship seemed no larger, no more threatening than a grade school personnel carrier. Slake knew that this was a mistaken impression. He observed from his harness as a crew of day laborers floated the ship’s platinum spine into place. The tableaux shifted so slowly. He wished they would step up the foundation work so he could disembark, clock in. He was anxious to get



started on the interiors.

Other areas of the shipyard seemed desolate, by comparison. The sheer number of workers must result in massive administrative overhead. But, he was no longer a manager. Those people had proven they could take care of themselves.

He lost himself for a few minutes, then, following the progress of a random piece of scrap as it navigated the void between drydocks. Runoff from assemblies that were nearing completion condensed into glittering puffs of snow.

The HARDPACK beeped an alert. Slake unfastened his seat belt, kicked off of his seat and drifted towards the toilet. He disconnected the Marlboro filters and attached the hose to his penis. Flipped the switch.

Finishing up, he climbed back into his harness and nudged the steering mechanism with his knees, easing the HARDPACK into position.

Company parking.

## 4

The RAGNAROK signaled her compatibility as he boarded. Unusual, at this early stage. And for a guy like him; unaffiliated, still a complete stranger. Maybe she had picked up something from the HARDPACK. He smiled underneath his helmet.

A notice. Received schematics. Start on the lower decks. Slake pulled on his data gloves and made for the deck elevator.

These ships crossed the Rainbow Bridge. Cutting between perspectives, avoiding the Kojaks. They had to be flexible. Outfitting them for fiction paid good money. Sometimes, you'd get pulled along on a journey before your work was finished. A diligent worker could rack up a lot of extra hours, that way. His take on it was that the life of a free agent had its trade-offs.

Slake ran his hand down the wall of the corridor.

Glossy, pink.

Crazy.

## 5

Months slowly elapsed. Slake began to feel at home aboard the RAGNAROK. The process made a certain amount of sense; depending upon the employer, a job like this could last ten or more years. He had sought predictability, deniability. It was the main reason he had accepted the contract. But the project was winding down ahead of schedule.

One more deck to go.

Slake liked to listen while he worked. His donkey helmet was far more capable (and curious) than the average foreman realized. Well, let them laugh. Schedule indicated another battery of inspections would be carried out early the next week. This time focusing upon the secure restroom facilities. Slake was certain that his coverage had been sufficient for the ship to be deemed spaceworthy. Even so, the



notion of a secure restroom struck him as a contradiction in terms. Fitting, then, that the government was prepared to bestow their seal of approval.

The ship had begun to talk to him.

The RAGNAROK liked American comic books. Or so she had said. The ones set in New York, with the gender politics and costumes. Slake found it hard to believe.

“I’m *from* America,” he had remarked, which hadn’t seemed to impress her the way he had hoped. Whatever, he got on with his work and avoided the subject whenever she brought it up.

He was grateful she had never pestered him about his name.

## 6

Winter, 4044.

Slake awoke, alone, his visual field bathed in an endless white light.

The RAGNAROK wasn’t responding.

He didn’t panic. Still, the failure represented an inexcusable breach of contract. The console was dead, he couldn’t even raise general counsel.

The bed wouldn’t move.

He glanced around the room. Gradually, an image began to resolve. Some of his belongings were missing. His tool cache, even the caps of his teeth. So, his cabin had been breached. He latched his shoes and got himself onto his feet, anticipating the worst.

Lockers in the adjoining corridors were all standing open. Empty.

Slake moved his fuchsia light around the darkened corners of the bridge. Something like eight million iterations had been fed into the human interface guidelines prior to construction. But everything here was pink. Even in the low light, the design hurt his eyes. Why did the color bother him so much?

And where was everyone, anyway?

He feared he already knew the answer.

## 7

As Slake suspected, the hijackers had gained entry through the plumbing in one of the supposedly secure restrooms.

The toilet seats had been flipped up, porcelain caked and crumbled on the tile floor. He located the invaders’ trail in fuchsia, traced their progress from room to room, reconstructing the apparent sequence of events.

No one and nothing was left aboard. Not a good sign. But why had they left him behind? And why hadn’t they taken the ship?

In the forward lounge he discovered a message carved into the inner layer of the pseudoglass observation wall:

He had no idea what it meant. He assumed, a semi-transparent jape. Likely of historical or literary significance, but with ship's systems offline he'd have to wait to check with the reference stacks.

His reverie faltered as a faint burst audio collapsed the pale silence. The whimpering and crying of what sounded like the ship.

The RAGNAROK was awake.

## *Notes*

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