

MAUDE'S NEW NEW JOB

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3 January, OJT.

"What ho, pirate!"

It was back to school for TAB2, the very next day after returning from MARS2. No time off for bad behavior. Piro was still moonlighting as a bus driver, pretending nobody knew who he was. He nodded back at the boy, blank as a main sail, and the serpent's mouth yawned, dilating in anticipation as TAB2 scrambled aboard, Piro's smooth facade still flapping in the morning wind even after TAB2 had taken his seat.

"Yissssssss," the door hissed.

And they were off.

School at MARS3 was more of the same drudgery he'd become accustomed to throughout his academic career. Endless scroll backed by slightly newer software running on slightly older computers, both acquired through the usual government gumbo of cost plus goldbricking and standards compliant corruption. Dad had already made sure the company replaced his discarded visor, so the mandatory interface lag of this antiquated equipment resumed annoying him. The beige boxes and clicky mechanical keyboards were friction, the bane of harvesting surplus, which he had thought had been the whole point of the exercise. This e-waste only served to retard the natural process of indoctrination.

The serpent spit him out again at the front gates. Piro collapsed its flaps, flipping the serpent around and kicking up sand in the faces of nearby sand dunes as he slithered off in the opposite direction. TAB2's gloves had already logged him in, so he was trapped waiting for his assignments to download. There was no skipping class, now, without violating the EULA.

New Teacher.

Spiro's mom.