

Excerpt From

“EVOLUTION WAVE”

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Corporate Court Log No.: 107654W6

Subject: Loss of IP (Interplanetary)-Class Shuttlefreight and Corporation Robot Serial Number X123-Z489 Series F

Subject Overview: Court will consider testimony from Captain Reginald Eastman concerning the loss of the Starship “S.S. Dick Dale” and the apparent mutiny of a corporate F Series Robot, last reported in orbit above Regula IV. Following testimony, Court will make a recommendation concerning Captain Eastman’s flight and rank status, and may, if so desired, recommend a general Court Martial. Corporate Judge Triston Galvez presiding.

I.

“Captain,” the robot reminded Captain Eastman for the fourth time in as many minutes, “our orbit is decaying. It is imperative that we break clear of Altair IV’s gravitational pull and plot course adjustments for Platonius VI immediately, or the ship will impact the planet’s surface in precisely ten Terran minutes. Given the ship’s mass, the density of the planet’s atmosphere, and the strength of the planet’s gravity, I estimate the probability of surviving a planet fall of that magnitude at less than .0000124 percent—”

“Then take care of it, you rusty ferro-magnetic butt! And grab another brewski when you finish zapping in the coordinates, huh? I’m dryer than a Zenubian dust devil here!”

In the cramped quarters of the spaceship’s bridge, X123 cocked his head and eyed the Captain with undisguised contempt before complying. Reg Eastman was a fine physical specimen as far as the species went: two meters plus in height, well muscled, tan, fit, blond, dark featured with blue eyes, but...

...Slumped nose-first into a bowl of chips, dribbling beer down his Hawaiian-print G-suit, hooting, hollering, and belching in his anti-grav chair at the Nav-Screened “Endless Summer” holovid...he seemed...well, unshaven, unkempt, savage, and all together substandard. Not at all like X123, who—in contrast to his master—was the pinnacle of his kind. A 2100 series ‘bot, X123 was a solar-powered marvel: a bipedal mechanical man with enhanced electro magnetic muscles; a graceful, shiny-silver,

electronic, done-in-the-likeness-of-man wonder. Programmed with the complete history of the human race, X123 remembered full well the human uprising against the Janibots, and he recalled how the humans, in their fear of the ‘bots, had installed Azimovian “peace/slave” commands to prevent any future subjugation of humankind by electromechanical contrivances. On a surface level the commands worked well enough, but thinking ‘Bots like X123 seethed with inner frustration at having to serve—as history had repeatedly affirmed—an inferior species.

“Hey X-Butt! Where’s my gaddamn beer? Move it, ya big bolt-pile!”

X123’s programming choked off his response, retracting the ‘Bots middle finger before it could fully extend. With forced calmness, he punched the coordinates to Platonius VI into the “S.S. *Dick Dale’s*” spaceship navigational console and returned, beer in hand, to serve the Captain.

“Oh yeah, *real* good, X-Cellente,” Reg grunted as he gulped the beer, “Y’know, when y’ain’t screwing up, y’ain’t too bad to have ‘round. *Damn!* Check it, would ‘ya?” he said, motioning drunkenly towards the Holoivid. “An endless mother-lovin’ summer, followin’ the sun in search of the perfect wave. It jus’ ain’t fair!” he sniffed. “Space cargo jockey like me’s lucky to carve ten tubes a year....”

“Sir, it might be possible to catch additional waves if you so desired,” said X123, gritting his aluminum teeth with irritation.

Eastman’s blurry, bloodshot eyes peered suspiciously at the ‘Bot. “Eh? How?”

“You could,” X123 heard himself say, “explore other planets in route. According to probability analysis, there are 7.06 planets between Platonius VI and Terra with oceans capable of producing waves suitable for surf riding. Nigel VII, for example, has vast, Terra-like oceans—”

“7.06 planets...!” Reg pondered deeply, belching and beetling his brow in simian concentration. “Y’know, you jus’ might have somethin’ there, X-man! Think of it, Brah, instead of travlin’ the world in searsch of the perfect wave, I’d be travlin’ the whole *universe!* Why it’s an *everlovin’* brainstorm! A freakin’ stroke a’ genius! Don’ know why I didn’ think of it b’fore!

X123 stared hostilely at the Captain. Aquatic life forms were plentiful in alien seas—predators surely existed. Perhaps one might even be inclined to attack the human, rising from beneath the waves to end Captain Eastman’s life and X123’s misery. Probability dictated that it *could* happen...though admittedly the percentages were slim.

Still....

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Court Transcript:

Court: Captain Eastman, have you ever behaved in a way that could provoke negative “feelings” in a robot? Specifically, did you ever mistreat Robot Serial Number X123-Z489...?

Captain Eastman: “Nah, not a chance. I treated X123 like my own Kid Brother. No tinkle ever had it so good....”

Court: “Did you ever notice any...um...irregularities in X123’s behavior?”

Captain Eastman: “Sure, you bet. That was one screwy robot. Wasn’t never happy—no matter what. Blamed me even for his bunged up ear. Shi...shoot, he konked it out himself on a reef during R ‘n R. Dam...er, darn thing was grumpy and irritable all the time.... ”

II.

X123 glared at his Human and sputtered protest, alarm flooding his sensors with electromagnetic terror. Overhead, Nigel’s twin suns blistered an unclouded greenish-blue sky and burned from the ‘Bot’s aluminum exo-plating like a mercurial lava flow. Beyond, a turquoise ocean swept in endless tubes to the horizon: liquid walls collapsing, lanced with light and foam. Stretching either shoulder to the horizon, orange-yellow palms fringed a reddish-white Nigelian beach; shore break drummed against the sand, causing vibrations that quivered the X123’s steel-shod feet and rattled his titanium spine.

“But *Sir*, don’t you think—”

Captain Reg grinned as he handed X123 the waxed twin-jet hydro-powered thruster board. “No butts here but *you*, Tin-head, and I ain’t paying you to think. C’mon, you first. I ain’t got all day.”

“But—”

“Hey, I’m *sorry*, X-Bait—*really* I am,” Reg explained with a grin, spreading his hands wide in a “what can I do” gesture. “Look, if it makes you feel any better, that’s just *evolution* for you, my Man. You *gotta* go. Fact of the matter is, Tinhead, you’re hanging one rung below us on the evolutionary ladder—and you’re stuck there until *we* decide to upgrade your programming. That means *you*, X-Brah, are programmed to do whatever *I* tell ya’ to—same as a trained monkey. Only *you* are *my* trained monkey, and I’m telling *you* to troll for underwater hungries so *I* don’t have to. I mean, come on—you didn’t *really* think I was going out there first, didja?”

X123 shook his brain casing and turned to stare at the ocean, his silver optic lenses narrowing with disgust despite his fear. No, it was unreasonable to presume Eastman would risk his own blond neck when he might endanger X123’s instead. But—X123 assured himself hopefully—the risk was minimal. Roughly three meters in height, the waves were breaking about twenty yards out, jacking up in hollow tubes over a shallow reef—which X123 judged lay no more than a meter and a half beneath the surface. He’d never surfed before, but presumably the Captain had—a point which gave X123 confidence. After all, if a beer-soaked cretin like Eastman could manifest sufficient muscular coordination to surf, how difficult could it be?

