



The immigrant (VIII)

Description

Iâ??m continuing with the challenge of exploring digital themes through fiction. I continue the story here.

Scase was not alone in the tower after all, or perhaps the figure passed through the foyer from elsewhere. Had he heard the lift going down? There was no time for Scase to descend the tower and follow the group. They would be lost amidst the excavations.

The composition of the group and their destination was of minor interest. He was captivated by the possibility of another tower resident. Scase needed to meet this person at least. He would wait for the occupantâ??s return. As night fell he was awoken in his chair by the faint rattle of the lift shaft.

He flung open his apartment door. The display panel couldnâ??t tell him which level the lift was on. But he could summon it. He paced the floor before it arrived to take him to ground level. He walked around the base of the building, fixing his attention on the window of each pod in turn. The air was cool and the cables from the broken crane rattled above him.

He would have to stand back from the structure to get a better view of the pods. There was his own dwelling on the 25th floor. A table light was still on. He moved back further across the concourse. None of the other pods were lit up. Or perhaps their windows were darkened for the night. Why would anyone obscure the evening view?

His own pod stood as a singular beacon to habitation. But its illumination changed shape. He stepped back further. Another light appeared, and a silhouette moved across the pane of the window. But this pod belonged to someone else. His own was in darkness. The lighting controls were automatic.

He counted the levels again, 26 in total, four pod positions at each level. His pod was on floor 25 facing south. The one lit up was on 22 facing East.

He slapped his hand against the lift controls. It would only take him to unoccupied levels, or his own. So floor 22 was out of bounds. He would have to choose his moment to intercept its occupant.

Communication between pods wasn't simple. To pay a visit you must return to the ground level and you needed a passcode to ascend to another.

Nor could he video call his neighbour. There was no directory. Scase returned to his dwelling pod and contemplated other means of communicating. He would call an someone, or something, that might help.

"You are lucky to catch me between appointments." It was Telo, the droid in the club. "How can I assist?"

"Thank you for helping me rescue the drone."

"How do you feel since you restored full cognition?"

"I didn't activate the code."

"You will one day."

"Can a resident get a drone to check up on a neighbour?"

"You said you were the only one living there."

"I've seen a light on."

"You'll need to pay for a drone."

"I'll transfer the credits. I want a video link so I can talk to the occupant through the window."

It was irregular, illegal even, to conduct drone-assisted surveillance. Nor did he want to shock the mysterious occupant of 22E. The person or persons would know about Scase's presence, and would have seen his illuminated pod from the concourse.

Within minutes, Telo's face on his video screen was replaced by Scase's own image, from the back. A drone was hovering outside Scase's window awaiting instructions. Its audio electronics were tuned to transmit and receive through glass.

"Set mood to curious."

"I am not an emot. I'm a v-bot."

"Establish contact with my neighbour in the pod on level 22."

It dropped immediately, only to return.

"There are 4 pods on each level."

"It's on the East side, position 22E," said Scase.

He saw the night sky and the lights of the quarries below flicker on the video monitor. A large view window like his own filled the screen. Some lights were on, but the space was empty. The lights went

off suddenly and he saw a sliver of light break as the door to the lift station opened and closed.

This was a cue. Scase rushed to his own lift station. The lift was waiting for him. It stopped at the ground level.

He stood in the shadows and waited. He heard rapid footsteps, trainers on metal. As the door to the fire escape swung open a figure appeared, breathless. She made for the main door, but the drone seemed to bar the exit.

“I’m staying with a friend,” she uttered as she turned to face her stalker.

“I’m Scase. I just want to talk.”

“You are an evictor?”

“No. I’m on the 25th level. I thought I was the only one living here.”

The drone had followed her down the stairs from the outside of the building. They could see it hovering through the glass of the lobby door. She pointed in its direction.

“I needed a v-bot to make contact,” Scase said. “It worked in a way.”

Telo was monitoring proceedings via the droid as well. It disappeared into the night sky.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Here are some posts from the past. The first is the most relevant to this sotry so far. #240 [What have the arts to do with ethics?](#) #241 [Design hermeneutics revisited](#), #242 [Divided cities](#), #243 [Copy edits](#), #244 [Milking human kindness](#).

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