

## **BRAVE NEW MARS**, excerpt from Chapter 1, Sands of the Marineris

Peregrine Walker, Jovian moon miner, is arriving on Mars.

Inside the Customs Building, a computer-driven camera station audibly informed the new arrival: "Be aware that no service of any kind, from a drink of water to emergency medical treatment, is available on Terra Secundus without prepayment of nonrefundable deposits. Do you agree to these terms? Say yes or say no."

Walker helpfully suggested an improvement for the space station's English dictionary: "A nonrefundable deposit is a payment. It should not be called a deposit. Deposits are refundable."

"Do not try to edit my dictionary. I am AI, I do that myself. Does the human person agree to all present and future entry terms? Say yes or say no and say it now."

"What are the future entry terms I am supposed to agree to before I know what they are?"

"Future entry terms are terms that the government of Terra Secundus has not yet thought up. That is the definition of future terms. Do you agree to those terms?"

"I'd like to know what I'm agreeing on before I agree to it."

"I have a script to follow," the camera said. "You are preventing me from doing my job. They want to talk to you in a private room." It pointed behind Walker.

Two large C-PO robots were standing closely behind him. He jumped away by reflex. Their arms whined out and

grappled his elbows and lifted him a few inches off the floor and rushed him through a door marked "Harmland Security." They moved him to a chair and pressed him overly hard into it, spraining his wrist and dislocating his shoulder while commanding, "Sit down and shut up."

"WOW! What's the problem officers?" he demanded in pain.

"You are the problem. You ask questions. Our algorithms do not answer questions that require any thinking and you just did it again, acting like you can ask us what the problem is. We are the ones who tell you what the problem is, when we are ready and if we want to. We are ready now: You made reprogramming suggestions to a spaceport AI device!"

It looked at the other robot and grinned metallically. Together they laughed at him in synchronization: "Hahahaha haw. He wants to reprogram the Dick spaceport."

"You think you are a Big Shot with the same rights as corporate robots. You have no respect for authority!"

The cyborg jerked Walker's arm away from its empty socket.

Walker hollered loudly, "Owww WAH," and sat quietly with grim lips and tight jaws.