

The Reservation

By
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Arty opened the bedroom door and walked into the living room. Mike and Michelle were sitting next to each other on the couch. They were holding hands and watching a show on the net. Mike looked up.

"Arty! 'bout time you got up, it's almost 16 hundred you know."

"Yeah, I had to work overtime last night, didn't get home 'till 9." Arty yawned.

Jadin came out of the kitchen with a sandwich, "good, now I doan haf to be tho kiet..." he mumbled, with a mouthful of tuna. He flopped down next to Michelle and she scooted closer to Mike.

Arty sat down in his favorite brown chair next to the couch and flipped open his iQ. He reached over to the small metal rack on the end table and selected the green dice-sized cube and placed it in the receptacle on the end of the iQ. He tapped the Load button on the iQ's screen with his stylus and waited. A few seconds later a soft, female, computer-generated voice stated, "Loaded" Arty could now access the entire cube's contents.

"What are you up to Art?" Michelle asked. She was the only one of his room mates that called him that, she thought it made him feel older.

The soft voice queried, "Update cube databases, content and links?"

Arty pressed the Yes button on front of the iQ and received the voice again.

"Update will complete in approximately 3 point 5 minutes."

"I'm looking for openings." he replied.

Arty was 19 years old and had been living with them for just under a year. He and Jadin shared a room (and Mike and Michelle did of course, they were married) and they all shared the chores. They all seemed to get along well, probably because they were rarely there together, and Arty was usually withdrawn. Arty worked the night shift and Mike and Jadin worked day shifts at a paper mill just outside of town. Michelle worked down at the apartment complex's first floor cafeteria; she was a hostess on the swing shift and today was her day off.

The soft voice again; "Update complete, you may brush-in."

Arty placed his right index finger on the brushpad, a fingerprint sized depression on the back of the iQ. He felt a small, stiff brush scrape over his finger. The soft voice again: "Sequencing."

Arty's iQ was an average model, one that he'd purchased new over a year ago. They were relatively new on the market; the first one's being sold commercially a few years ago.

"How's your iQ working Arty?" Jadin asked. He wasn't much interested in the parrot show on the net.

"Great, I love this thing." Arty said, looking it over. "I can't believe my parents were so against them." Arty was thinking specifically about his father, a direct descendant of the original colonialists and a strict adherent to their tenets.

"I was reading an article about that last week." Jadin said. "It said the first quantum computers were designed back in the early 21st century. There were even a few algorithms developed strictly for use on quantum computers, but nobody had one to run them on. In late 2018 I think it said, the researchers at Los Alamos created the first working Q; a 3-qubit model using photons and some crystal - calcite I think. They slowed the photons way down and then did

something with them. I forget exactly how they did it. Oh, they also said that 3-qubit model took about 400 milliseconds to crack a 2 kilobit encryption key the inventors were using to test it."

"They said that that was what started the digital downfall. How many qubits does your iQ have?"

Arty turned it over, looking for the small print.

"Ah..., 300 I think. And my cubes hold about half an exabyte each. I can get the whole DOI on my green cube. You like how I chose green to hold the DOI?" Arty smirked at Jadin.

Arty had spent most of his childhood amongst white greenhouses and brown hydrohouses, where his family farmed. Rarely had he seen a large open space or a thick green forest. His family's farm consisted of 40 acres of buildings, concrete, farming apparatus and thin walkways connecting everything. He longed for a time when he could travel to an open space somewhere.

"Yeah, we know you're going, when are you going to have enough money?" Jadin replied.

"I think I do now," Arty said, "that's why I'm checking for openings...I hope someone has cancelled."

"Sequencing complete, you are logged in Arty," the soft voice said.

"Finally," Arty said with some sarcasm. He began searching through the cube's contents. The reservation page had recently been updated Arty saw, and he was eager to switch to it when the soft voice said, "You have 17 relatives currently logged on; do you want to start a conversation?"

"Damn it!" Arty muttered under his breath, "I thought I turned that alert off..."

"That's nothing!" Jadin yelled out with a smile. I once had thirty-two relatives online.

“That’s it?” Michelle retorted, "With the size of your family, I thought the number would be higher than that!"

Arty pressed the No button and continued on to the reservation page. To his surprise, Arty saw there were two openings available next year, one the first week in May and the other not until December. He noticed that the opening in May was a recent cancellation.

If I go in May, I'll have to get time off of work, he thought, but the views were much better in the spring than in winter. Arty booked a meeting with a DOI reservation agent for 19:00.

"Well?" Michelle asked. She was tired of sitting and got up and was heading to the kitchen.

"There is an opening in May and I made an appointment with a reservation agent at 19 hundred to reserve the spot.

"Wow! Hey that's great!" Everyone replied at once. Arty felt glad to hear them say that. He was excited that he'd finally get to have some space, somewhere that he wouldn't have to look at people all the time and somewhere that didn't have buildings and concrete.

"Hey Arty," Mike asked, turning off the net, "why did your folks hate computers so much??"

"Well, My dad hated them, I'm not sure if my mom did, she never said." Arty began.

""My dad would have these dinner time tirades about how our society was better and how those techies were just sponging off of us."

"Is that because he was a colonialist?" Michelle asked.

"Yeah, and he never liked the tech side of society. I remember one time he told us what started the separation, how the colonialists separated from society and why they became the way they did."

Arty got up and headed for his room - he really wanted to prepare for his appointment later and get some alone-time. Room mates are nice, especially these guys, but you just can't beat being alone, he thought.

"Well??!!" Jadin shouted.

"Wait!" Mike said, aren't you going to finish the story?

Arty sighed, "... fine... I'll tell you."

He sat down again and Michelle came in with a bowl of vegetable soup for herself. She tossed Mike a bag of peanuts.

"Well, at dinner time my pop would get his dinner from my mom - she served him first, then the kids, then herself - and he would occasionally start talking about how the colonialists came to be and how that society formed..."

10 Years Earlier

Arty heard his mother calling the kids to dinner. He was in his closet, behind the box of toys that belonged to his three younger brothers looking at an International Park brochure. His hide-a-way had been secret for two weeks, a secret he was sure wouldn't last much longer. He hated being around his family all the time. Every minute of the day he was surrounded by people. He had 7 brothers and 14 sisters, most of which still lived at home to help with the farm.

The colonialist's society dated back at least a hundred years. Their ranks were tight; they felt very warmly toward each other and apathetically towards everyone else. The collapse of the digital computer-based economy caused a severe economic decline which eventually led to the creation of their society.

"Arty!" his mother yelled, "are you coming?"

Arty clambered out of the closet and down the skinny wood staircase towards the kitchen area.

Their farmhouse was large, but compared to the size of the family, it could hardly handle everyone in the same room for dinner. Arty walked into the kitchen with a sour look on his face.

"Arthur --," his father began, " -- you are to be at the table when you mother calls you; do you understand me?" Arty knew this tone meant business.

"Yes, sir." He replied and found his empty chair.

"Good, then let's eat." His mother said, winking at Arty.

After everyone had eaten a few bites, his father spoke up again.

"Jimmy and Ray are working the liquid in tank 32 tonight and Mark and Todd are driving the loads to Oakland. They have sandwiches with them so they won't be needing dinner tonight mother."

"Yes, dear. Did you see Sarah Jane?" she replied.

"Yes, her and Mark are always together now, hard to keep them apart." She's riding in the truck with him tonight. I expect you may have to be planning another wedding soon."

Arty's mother's face lit up, "do you think Leroy? Do they seem that serious?"

"Well, she keeps talking about how many kids she wants and Mark's face keeps getting red when she mentions it, so, I'd say, yes."

"I'll tell you though, this life could be a lot happier if it weren't for those techies-you do all understand that, am I right?" His father started, speaking now to the rest of the family at the table.

Three of his sisters said yes and his brother Paul nodded furiously.

Arty just sat there looking at his dinner, not eating. He wanted to get away, to go back to the closet, or somewhere where people weren't, somewhere where he could be alone. Free to think and imagine without interruption, without people and buildings.

"Those damn scientists meddling with quantum physics, they should not have been trying to invent those Qs and damn those that did."

His father was just getting started, he could tell.

"I mean, weren't they thinking when they were doing all that!? Didn't they realize what would happen to the economy if the computers that ran the economy could no longer be trusted? Good Christ, they were idiots, pass the rolls please."

Arty snickered; his dad always did that kind of thing.

"Of course the original Q broke the biggest encryption code of the day. Of course, the stupid, short-sighted government exploited them and OF COURSE, they misused them. There were idiots in the government then too, you know. They tried to use those damn things to spy on other countries, and then they tried to spy on Americans! Can you believe it?!" Small bits of food had started to spray from his father's mouth. He was a large man, though not unhealthy. He would work the farm for 15 hours a day and then eat to bursting – "To keep my strength up" he told his wife.

Arty still wasn't hungry, but he tried to eat a little bit. His father was in a fit and he didn't need him going into the "we grew that food with our own hands and you better eat it!" tirade as well.

"Well," his father continued, "Americans didn't have a choice about what happened next did they? No they didn't."

"Nobody trusting digital business, everyone out of work, it's no wonder the colonialists came together."

"Why didn't they trust digital business?" Claire asked with a saccharin smile looking at Paul. Those two were daddy's pets alright.

"Because dear, when the Q was built, the government used it to crack encryption codes, those are the codes that were used to take the business transaction data, like credit card numbers, and scramble them up so no one could read them when the data was transferred across the internet, or net as we call it."

Even though Claire was 16, he always talked to her like she was 5. Arty thought his dad must be blind or stupid.

Arty's mother looked over at him and smiled. She offered him some more food, and he accepted. He still felt grumpy though.

"So people didn't want to do business over computers anymore?, after they invented the Q?" Claire said in a sappy tone. She already knew the answer; they all had heard this story at least 5 times. Arty thought that Todd was lucky, he got to skip dinner at the table.

"Right sweetie!" his father replied. Arty turned green.

"Now, as I was saying, everyone was out of work because by then, most people depended on computers and 'e-commerce' as they called it. If people aren't buying over the net, then the people depending on those folks are losing jobs."

Arty asked if he could get up, he wanted to go outside and sit by the one elm tree they had in the front yard.

"No son, you were late to dinner, the least - and I mean least - you could do is stay until we are finished."

Arty slumped back down in the chair and dropped his head into his crossed arms on the table. He muttered "I hate this life."

He wanted to cry.

"So how did the colonialists get to be such a large group then?" Michelle asked.

"Yeah," Mike asked, "and didn't the government try to provide for all of those out of work?"

Mike and Michelle were 'techies' as Arty's father used to like to call them, so they had only heard rumors about how the colonialists formed. In Arty's father's mind, techies were those and their descendants that continued to push the computer economy forward after the collapse.

"Well, yes the government did try to help, but the problem was, nobody trusted them anymore. Especially when it came out that they were trying to spy on Americans. Most of those out of work didn't want their government helping them with anything." Arty said.

"The colonialists basically turned into farmers when they realized that the jobs they no longer had, were been pointless anyway. As it turned out many wanted a change, but were unsure of how to accomplish it, they had been searching for something meaningful. When they started farming, they came in at the end of the day and realized that this was it, they were happy." It was hard work but the stress level was low and it they could actually accomplish something each day.

Arty turned towards Michelle. "The soup you're eating, do you know where it came from?"

Michelle looked at him strangely and said "...the cafeteria. I got it to go yesterday as I was leaving work." She started at him hesitantly.

Mike laughed, "I don't think that's what he meant!" and threw a peanut at her head.

"So where did those peanuts come from Mike" Arty continued.

"I see your point little man, and I have nooooo idea whatsoever." He replied smugly.

"Mike you have got to get out more," Jadin piped in. "About 98% of the food consumed in America is grown by colonialists."

"No kiddin' " Mike said with large eyes staring at Jadin. Michelle threw the peanut back at him.

"It's true," Arty said. "And there are two reasons the colonialist population grew so large. The colonialists became farmers and they needed help on the farm, it is basic supply and demand. The demand was the farm work and they created their own supply by having larger families."

"What's the second reason?" Michelle asked.

"They liked themselves." Arty said looking straight into her eyes.

"This is kind of a secret among the colonialists, but they liked what they had become and wanted to increase their number in the country." Jadin nodded and continued. "Yeah, they believed their ideals were best and wanted them to be the norm....not a part of a capitalistic society. That had failed them as they saw it and they wanted a change."

"Sounds like the Nazi's from a couple hundred years ago," Michelle said.

"Or the Romans." Mike interjected.

"Yeah, sort of, with a twist." Arty replied.

"The colonialists are the reason for continuing double digit population growth," Jadin said,

"America's at 1.2 billion and counting." Arty replied.

Arty looked at his iQ to check the time. He jumped up and ran towards his room.

"I've got to be there in 30 minutes!" he screeched.

"So why does he want to go to Yosemite so bad?" Mike asked Jadin.

"Yosemite is a beautiful open space and you heard him, he hates people." Jadin said. "He'd rather be alone for the rest of his life. He grew up with an awful, oppressive family and he just wants some space."

"I'm not convinced," Michelle said, "I mean I think he just hated his father and brothers and sisters. They seemed to be pretty strict. Although, they did have a big family and that must have been overwhelming."

"Maybe you're right." Jadin opened up, "remember last month at our complex open house? We were all eating barbeque and drinking beer, but Arty was playing with the kids on the playground. I think he really likes kids."

"See you guys later!" Arty exclaimed as he ran out the door.

"Good Luck!, See ya!" They all replied back.

The transport ride to the DOI was long, crowded and hot. Arty started feeling claustrophobic as there was nowhere to sit and people surrounded him on all sides.

"Finger please." A dark woman at the entrance to the Department Of the Interior said in a slight Indian accent.

Arty saw the brushpad on top of the turnstile and sequenced in. He waited for her to speak again.

"I see you have a reservation with an agent for Yosemite in May?" the Indian lady said looking at her display.

"Yes, that's right, I made it earlier today." Arty replied assuredly.

"Just a minute..." the woman replied looking again at her display. "Yes, please proceed to line 29, straight first and then to the left." The brightly dressed woman pointed back behind herself and looked Arty in the eye, waiting for him to see the way.

Arty walked into the DOI building, a massive structure, and headed straight. The ceilings were easily 30 feet high, with large panes of tinted glass placed in neat, orthogonal patterns to let the natural light in. Above him, walkways criss-crossed from side to side, connecting the sides of the building. To the right and left of him he saw lines of people; both short and long. Some lines contained people attending to their families' personal business and others contained people seeing to their vacation plans. He pushed through a large group of people just standing around in the central walkway, muttering as he went, and then turned left to the section of lines labeled '20s'.

The 20s line was in a separate corridor off of the central walkway. He found 29 and got behind a man and his 5 children. The man was talking in a very serious, subdued tone to what appeared to be his pregnant wife.

"I tried to tell the officer that it was an accident, but he would not listen --" the man said looking around suspiciously, afraid he might be overheard.

"But what are we to do now?" his wife pleaded, almost crying.

"Do not worry, I will think of something, I am sure they make arrangements for accidents; they must."

The man talked in a very structured tone with somewhat of an Asian or oriental accent, using no contractions and enunciating each syllable.

Arty looked down at their children. They were all messy. It looked as though the mother and father could not or would not, take care of them all.

The line moved, but not very fast. There were about 10 people in front of Arty. He felt hot and crowded again.

Thirty minutes later, the man and woman in front of him got called to a partitioned area that had two seats for customers and a DOI agent behind a small desk. The couple sat down in the two chairs, their children spilling onto the floor beside them, and began to speak with the agent.

Arty saw the desk next to them open up shortly after they sat down and he walked over and sat down.

"Your name?" the male agent said to him in a cold, dry voice.

Arty replied.

"Yes," the agent said after looking at his display, "what can I tell you about Yosemite International Park in May?"

Arty was cheering up; this was going smoother than he thought it would. There were so many people here, so many crowds that it was unsettling just to be here.

"Well, I think I'd like to make a reservation to visit the park in May, you still have the opening available?"

"Yes, it's still available." The agent replied.

"Well, I'll make the reservation then, ah..." Arty stammered, "Oh, how much is it?" Arty wasn't sure what he wanted to ask, he just wanted to be in the park, the openness, the trails where trees and grass grew, quiet places to think and just be alone, he just wanted the reservation.

"It's \$1500 for the standard four day visit. And there is paperwork to fill out," the agent stated, "please brush-in."

Arty used the brushpad on the desk and waited. He glanced over at the man and his wife and saw that they were quite desperately pleading their case to the agent behind the next desk. The agent seemed to be quite unyielding and not at all impressed with their situation, whatever it was.

"First, you must sign this hold-harmless form," the agent said as he was grabbing additional forms from below the desk.

Arty began to look over the form when the couple next to him rose from their chairs and were escorted by a uniformed individual into a room to Arty's right marked License Revocation. Arty saw that the man was desperate now, he was looking from side to side, holding his children tightly to him. His wife looked to him in complete despair, looking for some kind of way out.

Arty signed the hold harmless form, not wanting to get involved with the couple - or anyone else - for that matter.

The agent handed Arty three more forms, double checked the monitor he was working from and then added a fourth form to the top of the stack.

Arty glanced at the top form,

"What's the Repro License Request Form for?" Arty asked.

The agent pointed to the third line down where it asked for children requested and told Arty,

"Fill in that line, the rest will be input by the Q's."

He began to ask again what he was supposed to do. Did this reservation include slots for children to attend as well? Kids, were great, but he didn't want any kids around on this trip; he wanted to be alone, enjoying the peace and quiet, the solitude.

"I don't want any kids on this trip," he told the agent.

The agent, upset at having to deal with yet another person that did not understand the system, responded, "they want to know how many you want to have, not how many are going on the trip with you. No kids are allowed at Yosemite anyway, they cause too much damage. As it is, you just make the 19 year-old minimum age requirement yourself."

Arty looked with wide eyes at the agent, he felt betrayed somehow; tricked. "I don't want to have any kids," he stammered, "I don't want a family." After living with his family, he was certain he didn't want to live like that. But the fact that he had to mention this to a DOI agent...

Just then he heard a scream and a woman crying out "Noo, NOOOO!" The scream turned into deep, inconsolable sobbing.

The man he saw a few minutes earlier ran out of the room they were in, grabbing at four of his five children and telling them to run. The fifth child was still with her mother in the room, crying, not wanting to leave her side. A man dressed in a doctor's smock ran after the man and his children but then stopped when he saw them rounding the corner of the corridor they were in.

The woman and child continued to sob. The doctor went back to the License Revocation room and slammed the door closed behind him. Arty could still hear sobbing behind the door when he noticed three uniformed men running to towards the main entrance of the DOI.

The agent stared at Arty, waiting, and finally said: "so how many?"

Arty returned to looking at the agent and asked, "So what's going to happen to her?"

The agent looked over at the door and back, "that's the revocation department, you aren't allowed to have more than you're licensed for. She probably had a license for 5 and now she is pregnant again, that's not allowed. You can only have what you're licensed for, it's the law. Period."

The agent waited again, looking at Arty like he would never leave and let him get to his break.

"So how many?" he asked again.

Arty looked down at the form and then back at the agent, "I have to decide now? I mean, I don't think I want a family, but... I mean... I'm not sure." He remembered his mom and the good times they had. He thought he might be a better dad than his own. He thought of his family; it was good, but it had also been very bad too.

The agent, worried about Arty's reservations, was getting frustrated, "Listen, if you want to make this reservation, you have to have a repro license, that's the way it is. What do you want to do? I'm due for a break..."

Arty thought of not filling out the form, and leaving, but then he would not have a reservation, not have a way to escape, he would not be able to get away. Did he really want kids? He really didn't like having so many family members, families were such a pain to deal with, but that little girl, the fifth child, she had so much love for her mother, she would not leave, no matter what, and the father trying to get his children to safety...Arty could feel his pain.

"How many can I put down, can I just make up a number?" Arty finally said.

"What religion are you?" the clerk asked.

"What has that got to do with it!?" Arty was really feeling hot now.

"If you're Catholic or certain other religions, you're allowed more, religious freedom is still a constitutional right you know. And frankly, given your age and since it doesn't look like you have a spouse yet, the maximum number you're allowed is even lower. Typically couples come in and fill out repro forms once they've discussed what size family they'd like."

Arty already felt hot and he was already uncomfortable telling the agent about his family, he was not about to discuss his religious beliefs with him. This was religious freedom? Being required to divulge what you believed in to take a vacation? Maybe his father was right; there are idiots in the government.

"Nevermind." Arty finally said with a deep sigh, and wrote '0' in the children requested slot.

He filled out the other forms as well. He still heard crying in the other room and thought about asking the agent about it again. But he was too hot and he wanted to get out.

The agent entered some data into the Q and then printed Arty a repro license and handed it to him. "Remember, don't go over your licensed amount," the employee said with a sarcastic smile as he got up to go on break.

Arty glared at the agent and took his reservation paperwork. He walked towards the entrance of the building, depressed, hot and mad. The fact that he had a reservation to visit Yosemite brightened him a bit, but he had just made a decision that affected the rest of his life...his stomach turned.

As he walked out of the building, he saw the man and his four children. The three uniformed men were looking at his repro license. "You only have a license for four!" one of the uniformed men exclaimed with a smirk, tapping the license with the back of his fingers. As Arty walked past, a

uniformed man pulled the father, his face pointed at the ground, back into the building. The other men escorted the children back inside as well.

The brightly dressed lady at the entrance gave the father a dirty look, as if she was mad at him for disturbing her routine.

Early May, the following year

Jadin had helped Arty get all the equipment he would need for his trip. They had it packed and re-checked a week ago.

"Did you remember your reservation slip?" Jadin asked as Arty was walking out of the apartment.

"Yep, I've got it in my pack, inside pocket. And yes, I have my iQ, I'll take as many pictures as it can hold!"

Arty was excited to be leaving; he had waited for this for so long. Mike and Michelle were there, though they had moved into a slightly bigger place two months ago, just after Michelle had the baby. They decided they were Catholics because Michelle wanted a lot of kids.

Mike said, "Well, take it easy little man and don't worry about crowds now. You're going to the perfect solitude of Yosemite."

Michelle scolded Mike, "Stop, that's corny. Arty, have a great time, and I hope you find what you're looking for."

"Thanks Mike, Michelle, I'll see you guys when I get back. See ya Jadin!" Arty started towards the transport stop.

Arty arrived at the DOI departure station a bit late; the bus was leaving in 5 minutes. He climbed aboard the transport and saw that the seats were packed; he walked towards the back and spotted an open seat next to a young woman.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked her.

"No, it's not. Have a seat." she said in a sincere voice, smiling. Her eyes were blue and bright and Arty liked them a lot.

"So what are you looking for in Yosemite?" she began. Her face was radiant, and Arty felt himself blushing a little.

Arty smiled and thought for a moment. "It's a long story, but we have a long ride ahead of us don't we..."

She smiled again, getting comfortable in her seat.