

On The Cape

by [skin2279](#)

I WAITED IN THE BUSHES by the clearing. The setting Sun cast long shadows across the gap. I watched carefully, alert to the slightest movement. There was a rustling noise. I tensed, but it was coming from behind me. Right behind me.

I spun around, and gasped at the sight of the naked woman leaning casually against a tree.

"Hello, Blaine," she said softly. "I see you got my message. It's been a while, hasn't it?"



"CLARISSA?" I blurted.

"Not so loud," she cautioned. "The wall is just a hundred metres that way." She pointed past me, in the direction I had been watching. "Let's go somewhere we can talk."

"My campervan is back towards the road," I replied. I glanced at her, up and down. "Aren't you going to, uh ..."

"Put on some clothes?" she finished for me, with just a hint of a smile. "Let's go find your camper, and I'll explain."

I kept glancing to make sure she was beside me, she was moving so silently on her bare feet as we wended our way through the undergrowth. Besides, she was always a feast for the eyes, and that hadn't changed in the last year, as was even more apparent in her present state.

"Coffee?" I opened the van door and followed her in.

"Yes, please." She dusted her feet off and reclined casually on a seat.

"Are you sure you don't want to ... put on something ...?"

"Really, I'm quite comfortable. Unless ... does my nakedness bother you? I don't remember you complaining before."

"Yes, but that was private, in my bedroom ..."

"And this is ... public?" She laughed lightly. "Believe it or not, we go about like this all the time."

"Who is 'we'?" I asked.

"The exploration team," she explained. "The ones who go through the Tunnel."

“Tunnel?”

She nodded. “We made the breakthrough just about six months ago.”

“That was when everything clamped down!” I saw the connection at once. “Nobody would tell us reporters anything about the project after that. Couldn’t get near the place. No access, nothing. It was like Cape Thureia had ceased to exist.” I looked my puzzlement at her. “But why?”

She held out a data key. “Maybe this will answer a few questions.”

The thought briefly crossed my mind that I hadn’t noticed her holding the key before, and there was no place she could have kept it. Unless—never mind. I opened up my laptop and inserted the key in a spare port. And observed with interest the long list of documents that appeared on the screen. Clarissa moved to sit beside me, and pointed out some things to start with.

Quantum tunnelling. Faster-than-light travel. The first experiments had demonstrated the concept back in the closing years of the twentieth century. But there were two problems: How to make it work across a distance greater than a few centimeters on a lab bench? Like a few hundred light-years across space? And also, how to use it to transport something bigger than a few subatomic particles, like a robot probe, or even a human body? And have it arrive intact at the other end?

The first problem was solved before the second one. Even projecting just a stream of a few million subatomic particles across the light-years was itself a major breakthrough: it became a new kind of remote instrumentation probe, capable of returning detailed data from the neighbourhood of remote star systems.

I gazed in wonder at the picture of the glowing spiral pinwheel, bright against a black background, that filled the screen of my computer.

“Our own Milky Way galaxy,” Clarissa explained. “Seen from a viewpoint about ten thousand light-years outside the main spiral arms. Those two little bright patches”—she pointed at each in turn—“are the Greater and Lesser Magellanic Clouds. And our own little Solar System is somewhere about ... here.” The tiny patch of brightness she was covering with her finger probably held about a million stars. She grinned with quiet satisfaction. “It took about a month to collect the light for that first image, one photon at a time. Talk about a long exposure. Of course, now we can do better.”

I whistled. “But that’s no reason for hushing things up ... or is it?”

Clarissa shook her head, and brought up another document.

The second problem—how to transport a human body whole and unharmed across the quantum tunnel—turned out, on the face of it, to have no practicable solution. But a bit of

lateral thinking, combined with some recent developments in biological engineering, came up with a radical alternative: what if you *redefined* what a human body was?

Besides, Cape Thureia was a relatively small operation, with a budget that could not compare to those available to institutes with access to wealthier benefactors. They had to be creative in some of their solutions.

I turned slowly towards Clarissa, understanding starting to dawn. She returned my gaze, and her smile had just a touch of sombreness about it.

“You had to ...” my voice tapered off.

“We had to ... undergo a transformation,” she finished.

“Are you still ... flesh and blood?” I asked tentatively.

She gave a slightly exasperated look. “Of course I am, silly!” She held out a hand. “Here, touch me!”

I took her hand, felt its warmth. She held out her other hand. I took that, too. She leaned closer. I touched her shoulders, her cheek. I felt her breath close against my face. Yup, this was still the old Clarissa I remembered.

She took my hand. Then I felt a strange—*flowing* sensation. I looked down, and found my own hand completely covered by flesh from the end of her arm—from where her hand should have been.

I gasped, and instinctively recoiled. Just as quickly, her hand returned to a more conventional shape, and she let go.



“WHAT WAS *THAT*?” I almost shouted.

“Did that shock you?” she asked softly.

“I—yeah, I—” I looked at her, not sure what to think. “What happened?”

“I loosened up my body shape,” she explained. “We can do that. Go all soft and yielding. We have a kind of—of integrity field that holds things together right down at the atomic level. Like a structural organization memory, if you like, that returns us to our original form, or something like it that we choose. That’s how we can squeeze through the Tunnel, and come out the other side.”

I shook my head, completely bewildered.

“Of course, changing shape doesn’t work so well when you’ve got clothes on. Luckily, the integrity field is also what keeps us protected and comfortable, in place of clothes.”

I shook my head some more, and threw my hands in the air. “This is all a bit much to absorb,” I ventured weakly.

“You have a look through those documents,” Clarissa replied, “and I’ll come back, tomorrow night. Then we’ll talk some more.” She glanced out the windows of the camper. “Don’t worry, I won’t be missed. They don’t keep a very close eye on us, their job is mainly to secure the perimeter. But patrols do sometimes come out towards the road, so best if you don’t stay here too long.” She leaped out of the camper, turned, and blew me a kiss. “Remember, tomorrow,” she said. “Same time, same place.” And she was gone.



BACK AT THE CAMPGROUND, I spent the rest of the night, and the next day, going over the documents Clarissa had left with me. My head was buzzing with charts and images and numbers and terms I didn’t always understand. But the overall conclusion was clear: they had done it! They had remote subatomic particle probes going out, first as far as the Moon, then with each new successful experiment, further and further, until that amazing image of our Milky Way galaxy from an angle which is simply impossible to see from Earth. They thought they could have pushed the beam further, but there was already so much to do within the galactic neighbourhood that they had already proven was within our grasp, that they decided to turn their efforts to refining the quality of the information they could gather within the existing range.

And then, the next step was to try to send people out. The remote probes were not only sensors, they could also be used as manipulators, down at the atomic level. So, starting with suitable raw materials, such as on some convenient planetary surface, they constructed, bit by bit, a small habitat station, including supplies of air and water, by a process almost like knitting atoms and molecules. By remote control.

And when that was completed, tested and declared ready, they sent a human through the Tunnel.

The beeping of the alarm made me look up. It was getting close to time to meet with Clarissa again. I put away the document files, made sure the backup copy was secure, unplugged the van from its berth and drove it out to meet her.

She was there, in the clearing. “You must be full of questions,” she said. “So I thought I’d stay a few days this time—if that’s all right with you.”

“Sure! But are you going to go about in public like that? People might talk.”

“Don’t worry, I brought a few things to wear.”

Before I could ask her where they were, a bright searchlight caught the van in its glare, and a voice shouted out “You, there! Don’t you know you are near a restricted area?”

"Could you turn off that light?" I shouted back. "That would be much appreciated. Thank you."

"We don't want them to know I'm here," Clarissa whispered. "I'll hide."

Before I could say anything to her, a uniformed man approached the van. "Now, who are you?" he demanded.

"Are you the police?" I countered.

"No, we're security for the Bateson Corporation," the guard replied.

"Am I on Corporation land?" I asked.

"No, but just beyond there—"

"In that case, you don't have any authority to tell me to do anything, do you?"

"Look here—"

"I'm just a private citizen, minding my own business on a public road. But I'm also a reporter. This is all being recorded on my phone camera, so don't try any intimidatory tactics with me. We wouldn't want the police to get involved, would we?"

The guard paused uncertainly, and looked over my van. I took my own momentary glance inside, away from him, and was surprised and relieved, and also baffled, that Clarissa was nowhere to be seen.

"I've got to make a note of your details," he said.

"That's fine," I replied. "I've made a note of yours."

I waited patiently while the guard went through elaborate motions of writing in a notebook.

"All right," he said finally. "But I wouldn't spend the night here if I were you."

"Thank you very much for the friendly advice," I replied. He frowned for a moment, clearly not sure whether I was being sarcastic or not, but then turned and went back to his patrol car.

I waited until he had driven off. I looked around the inside of the van. "Clarissa?" I called softly.

"Here." A thin, fleshy tendril snaked out of a ventilation grille. I watched, fascinated, as it coalesced into a ball on the floor. A pair of eyes followed, and a familiar face began to form, as the round ball became less round, extending itself upwards.

I ran to the sink, and started retching.

"Did I upset you, honey?" I felt the soft touch of her hands on my shoulders.

I slumped over the sink, and took a few deep breaths. Then I opened the tap and let some water run into my mouth. "That was ... I wasn't expecting ..."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I should have warned you. But there wasn't time."

"It's OK." I turned to her, almost afraid at what I might see. But the metamorphosis had finished, and she had resumed pretty much her normal human form. "That was incredible. Shocking, but incredible. Does the Government know about this?"

Clarissa laughed gently. "The Government knows only what Bateson is telling them. Which is, not much. We're supposed to be an independent, Government-funded research institute, until the present administration put Bateson in charge. Now they are the prime contractors running this project, and they don't really care about science. All they care about is whatever profits they can squeeze out of these new technologies, at the expense of their competitors. We say 'scientific collaboration', they say 'industrial espionage'."

"They're taking Government money, and they want to own the results?"

"Pretty much. That's why I contacted you. I figured you would want to help get the word out. Destroy the wall of secrecy."

"Are they keeping you captive in there?"

She heaved a sigh. "Kind of. Barbed wire fence all round, security patrols to keep us in, and everyone else out. But apart from that they leave us pretty much alone. Otherwise I would be missed."

"They won't notice you got out?"

"Not for a few days, at least. The rest of the team is covering for me. We were planning this for weeks. The company goons don't really understand what we do, so they tend to leave us to ourselves. Most of the time."

I nodded. I was beginning to get an inkling of how she got in and out through that barbed-wire fence. "Let's leave here. Would you like something to eat?"

"I remember, there were some nice places in town. I haven't been there in months."

"Umm ... you said you had brought some clothes to wear ... ?"

"Oh, yes." She hesitated for a moment. "Will you get shocked again?"

I steeled myself. I was curious to see what else she could do, after all.

Clarissa put her hand to her belly, just below the breast bone. She made a parting motion, and the flesh opened up to reveal a cavity. She took out a skirt, a halter top and a pair of sandals. Then she closed herself up again, and it was like the hole had never been there.

“Now I’ve seen everything,” I breathed.

She gave me a mischievous half-smile.

“OK, maybe I haven’t,” I quickly added. “But let’s say that’s enough for one evening?”



THE RAYS OF THE MORNING SUN distracted me from the documents on my laptop screen for a moment. I heard Clarissa stirring on the bed behind me. I turned around, and caught her in the middle of a wide yawn.

She raised an eyebrow at me. “Have you been up all night?”

“Not all of it. Can’t tear myself away from this stuff.” I gestured at the screen. “You’ve given me a treasure trove.”

She came by my side. “What are you looking at now?”

“This is that habitat station you built on that, what is it, rogue planet out past the edge of the galaxy?”

“That’s right. There are quite a few of these lost planets, thrown out from the original solar systems where they were formed, as a result of losing some game of gravity billiards with a planetary littermate. If you want a sky where it’s pitch-black night all the time, so you can have a continuous view of the distant stars, they’re ideal.”

I looked at the plans and pictures on the screen. “It doesn’t seem like a very big station.”

“True. But it’s a start. We do observations in shifts, for a few hours at a time before returning. We’ll make it bigger and better later.”

“Just the one little cabin?”

“Big enough for a couple of crew, basic life support, and our equipment.”

“No, um, toilets? You must have strong bladders, to last a few hours there.”

Clarissa smiled. “You could say that.” She reached forward and flipped up another document, this one on biological modifications.

My jaw dropped.



THE BEACH BY THE CAMPING ground was clothing-optional, so Clarissa’s nudity wasn’t quite the attention-grabber it might have been. I took her to one of my regular spots, an open-air beach-side café which probably couldn’t enforce a dress code even if it wanted to.

"Rearranged digestive system?" I asked, a little incredulously. I was still trying to make sense of that last document she showed me.

"Yeah. From the stomach onwards. You saw how I have room to keep things inside. What I've got now in place of kidneys, you wouldn't believe. There's some nanotech involved, some tissue re-engineering ... you'll have to talk to the biomedical experts for the details." She waved her hand dismissively. "I'm just an astrophysicist."

"No large intestine? No, no ..."

"Anus?" she finished, making me flinch. She pointed to her crotch. "The digestive tract ends here, out the front, not the back. What comes out is dry, hard slabs containing all the excretory matter, easy to take out and dispose of, no mess."

"What about ... urine?"

"The solid part of that comes out in those same fecal bricks. So just one package to get rid of, not two."

"The liquid part?"

"That's just water. So if I need to, I can pee it out."

She picked up a serviette and reached down under the table. I saw her lean over to a waste-paper bin at the end of the table and drop the folded serviette in. Something inside hit the bottom with a klunk.

"Did you just...?"

"That's my morning bowel movement done, yes. Two or three of those twenty-gramme blocks per day. Quick and convenient."

"Couldn't you just ... use a toilet?" I asked, a little too sharply.

"I could," she replied calmly. "But the bricks take a few minutes to get soft in water. Otherwise flushing is a problem. This is easier and quicker."

It took me a minute or two to regain my composure. Then something else occurred to me.

"How about the male explorers? How does their ... plumbing ... work?"

Clarissa tilted her head, looking at me sidelong. "Haven't you figured it out yet?" She touched my hand gently with hers. "There aren't any. All the exploration team have to be females. Women."



CLARISSA GAVE A START. "Don't look," she whispered, lowering her head. I did the same, as though we were deep in intimate conversation.

A man in swimming trunks was strolling by on the beach sand. When he was gone, Clarissa raised her head again.

“One of the Bateson staff?” I hazarded a guess.

Clarissa nodded. “If any of them recognize me, they’ll realize their cordon isn’t so watertight after all.”

“Maybe I should take you out of the Cape Resort altogether. We can go talk to a science magazine that I write for. We could do an exposé on all the material you’ve given me. And we can get in touch with some specialists who will understand a lot of it better than I can.”

My phone beeped with a message. I recognized the number: I showed it to Clarissa. “Isn’t this the number you used to contact me in the first place?”

We both looked at the message on the screen. “It’s Eleana, head of our division,” she said.

“Seems somebody from Bateson has been asking for me. They might be getting suspicious.” She gave me a worried look. “I need to get back in.”

“I’d love to get in and see the place,” I said wistfully. “Charts and figures are one thing, seeing actual working equipment is quite another.”

Clarissa said nothing for a moment. The ghost of a smile kept playing around the corners of her lips. “How would you like to get in?” she asked.

I almost leapt from the table. “Would I!” I sat back. “How?”

“Well, it’s another experimental thing we’ve been trying, to see if we can get people through the teleportation tunnel without having to undergo our full bioengineering modifications. That part doesn’t work yet. But one of the stages in the process could still be useful...”



IT WAS STILL MORNING when I pulled the van over on the side of the road near the clearing. We were both nervous after the encounter with the guard the previous night, but it couldn’t be helped.

“You’d better leave your clothes here,” said Clarissa. “Rather than have them found by a guard too near to the fence. It might start people talking.” She grinned mischievously.

I stripped off, a little self-consciously. “Did anybody tell you,” I remarked, “that you’re just a little *too* used to going around naked all the time?”

She gave me a wide-eyed, innocent look. “You think it’s a den of debauchery in there, don’t you?”

The two of us walked naked through the undergrowth, myself gingerly, watching out for nasty things that could jab my feet in unpleasant ways, she in apparent unconcern, protected by that built-in integrity field of hers.

We passed the clearing that we used for our past rendezvous, and kept going. In about another fifteen minutes, we reached the wall surrounding the research facility.

It was about four metres tall. "You can get over that?" I asked.

"Sure. I make myself long and thin, and I can reach that high."

I surveyed the nasty-looking wire all along the top with foreboding. "And through that nasty pointy stuff as well?"

"Plenty of gaps, if you just get yourself into the right shape. Piece of cake. Done it lots of times."

"But what about me?" I asked.

Clarissa came up to me, and put her arms around me. "Hold still," she said. One leg came up as well. And then she—melted.

She became like a sheath of flesh enclosing me completely, apart from my face.

Her face came right next to mine. "Take a deep breath," she directed, "and hold it."

I did as instructed, as though preparing for a long underwater swim. Only instead of water closing in over my head, it was Clarissa's body.

I felt a peculiar sensation of space itself closing in upon me. Gravity itself seemed to disappear, or at least to weaken, and it felt as though I really was underwater. How to explain it?

According to the description in the document, the integrity field built into Clarissa's body squeezed space inside itself as it was itself being squeezed. So notionally rigid objects inside that space (like my own body) end up compacted along with that space, and can be un-compacted afterwards, when the containing body returns to its normal shape.

Clarissa assured me they'd tried that part of the procedure several times, with great success.

Was there movement? Like I was being carried somewhere? It was hard to tell. A minute went by. Two minutes. The urge to take a breath became almost irresistible. And then, a hole reopened in front of my face, and I could see light and sky. I gasped, and took deep breaths, as the hole widened, and the sheath of flesh that had enclosed me fell away and reformed into Clarissa.

"Welcome to Cape Thureia," she said.

I looked up at the wall, only this time from the inside. I wished I could have seen how she actually made it across. I looked around. Some surrounding bushes provided cover, making it

difficult for any passing sentries to spot us. There was a cluster of buildings nearby.

I noticed Clarissa gazing steadily at me. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing,” she said, a little smile curling one side of her mouth. “I just wanted to see you naked, one more time.”

“I—” Something had just occurred to me. “I didn’t need to undress, did I? You could have brought me across, clothes and all, couldn’t you?”

“Yes,” she admitted.

“Why, you devious little—” I was speechless.

“Never mind that now. Come on, this way,” said Clarissa. “We’ll go meet the rest of the team.”



It’s NOT OFTEN you get to sit in a meeting with a bunch of naked women. There were six of them in the exploration team, including Clarissa and Eleana, the team leader. And two men for home base support back here on Earth, besides myself, wearing fairly conventional lab coats. They found a spare one that I could wear. Nobody seemed bothered about the women being naked, least of all the ladies themselves. Apparently they used to wear robes or something in the early days, in lieu of regular clothing, which just took too much time to put on and take off. Then even that became too much bother, and was dispensed with.

They decided to show me everything. The potential for new human knowledge and exploration was vast—too vast for just one small team in one small research establishment. The whole world needed to get in on this.

I saw an actual working teleportation tunnel. “That’s it?” I asked incredulously. The room was full of complicated-looking equipment, but the tunnel itself was small enough to sit on a tabletop, and the mouth was barely wide enough to insert my hand.

“That’s what we go through, to get to the other side,” said Eleana. “And that ten-centimetre opening narrows down even more, down to a subatomic radius in the main part of the tunnel. The part that actually leaps across space to our destination—measured in that way, the longest part.”

And there was a pair of an odd sort of tubs just below the mouth. “What are these for?” I asked.

“Those are where the crewmembers are collected,” explained Eleana.

“Collected?” I echoed, not sure I had heard right.

“You know how we can make ourselves kind of soft and flowing, almost like a liquid. We do that in the tubs, one for each person, and then we get squirted across to the destination, through

the tunnel, to a collection tub at the other end. And similarly, on the way back, we get reconstituted in the tub first.”

I saw footage of habitat constructions in about half a dozen different places, at a whole range of distances from Earth. All of them were on some solid surface, namely a planet or moon, of course, since they had to use the raw material of that surface for construction purposes.

She explained that positioning the remote end was a bit hit-or-miss, in that creating two separate tunnels and expecting them to come out anywhere near each other at a great distance away was still very unreliable. So for now, once they got an anchor at the remote end, that became the fixed remote base location, once and for all. From there, they could send out mobile rovers—which they first had to build remotely at the base.

And I was incredulous at, first of all, how small each base was, and how much smaller each manned rover was. “How do your crew fit in *that*?” I asked. And when they told me, my jaw just dropped.

Remember the old NASA Apollo spacecraft? The space inside was about equivalent to that of a station wagon. That was how big a typical base was. And as for each rover—

“We don’t actually send the *whole* person through the tunnel,” explained Eleana. “We kind of split them up. So the part that goes through is quite small, and doesn’t need a lot of room.”

Think of something about the size of a shoebox. The rovers were no bigger. The human operator could fit in the fingers of one hand, and an eye and a ear or two. And that was about it.

“The rest of them stays behind here?” I queried, glancing uncertainly at the tubs.

“That’s right.”

“Um, how does that work? Do you split—” I hesitated. “On second thoughts, maybe I don’t want to know...”

“We can get into that later. Would you like to look at some more of the data we’ve collected?”

I nodded with relief.

We moved on, to some of the analyses they had done during manned explorations at the remote bases. Sometimes it was handy to have a human intelligence on the spot, rather than having to oversee everything remotely. There were hints in their data as to very different models of planetary formation from that in our own Solar System, for example. As well as the widespread occurrence of chemicals that could be precursors to life. But this was getting into specialist areas that were way over my head.

I was recording everything on my phone camera. “I notice the mobile coverage in this area is just about zero,” I said.

“The land lines are blocked, too. They’re jamming us, to stop us communicating with outside. Highly illegal, of course. But we can manage to get through, when we want to.”

“How?”

She indicated the equipment. “We can communicate and manipulate matter across the light-years. You think opening up a path for a simple little radio signal over a few hundred metres is hard?”



THERE WAS A MINOR COMMOTION outside the building. A portly man in an expensive-looking suit came in, surrounded by a bunch of hangers-on. I recognized him from pictures, as a member of the Bateson family.

“What’s going on?” asked Eleana.

The portly man was clearly having trouble keeping his eyes off her nakedness. “I’m Patrick Bateson, area manager. We’re just doing a routine inspection of the facilities. Fulfilling our corporate responsibilities, as per the contract.” He gestured to his followers. “Take inventories. And check all the personnel.”

I moved to a corner with lots of equipment, and tried to look inconspicuous and busy, just like another of the crew. But one of the assistants came up to me with a tablet screen in his hand. “Who is this man?” he asked.

One of the other women in the crew tried to stall. “He’s support personnel, seconded from the Logistics Division in an operational capacity. Just regular rota. We—”

“From where?” The assistant was clearly having none of it. “Where is the personnel list from that Division? I don’t see that on my list.”

The Bateson scion himself came over. “Who are you?” he asked.

Clearly there was no point in pretending any more. “Blaine Bramwell, freelance reporter,” I answered. “Here to find out what’s really happening at Cape Thureia. Pleased to meet you.”

Bateson’s mouth opened and shut several times. Then his face went through shock, then anger. “Unauthorized intruder? You have no right to steal secrets from this facility!” he snarled. “Arrest him!”

“I am here at the invitation of the personnel of this facility,” I replied. “The public has every right to know about scientific research being conducted in their name, and at their expense,” I replied. “And last I checked, this was not some kind of Government-controlled military facility, so you have no power to arrest anyone who is not committing a crime.”

“I’ll have you locked up!” shouted Bateson.

"You want to call in the police?" I asked. "And explain to them why exactly you've been holding all these staff captive and incommunicado against their will, all these months?"

"The police will never hear of this," replied Bateson, a little more quietly. "I'll take care of you myself." He turned slowly to an assistant. "Wilkins! Hand me that gun!"

The named assistant sprang forth and offered a weapon. There was a sharp intake of breath all around, not least from me. I wondered whether maybe I'd called one bluff too many ...

There was a blur of motion, and a thump. Bateson collapsed to the floor. Clarissa stood over him, and I saw the heavy ball shape she had formed to hit him with flow back into the regular shape of her rather more dainty hand and forearm.

"Well, that's another thing the police might be interested in hearing about," I said, my voice hardly trembling at all. "Thank you, Clarissa."

"Don't mention it." She picked up the gun, rather gingerly, and handed it to Eleana, who made it disappear.

Another of Bateson's assistants stepped forward. "Look," he said placatingly, "the last thing we want is bad publicity."

"And I think the last thing any of the scientists here want is interference with their work," I replied. I saw nods from Eleana and several others. "So how about we do a deal?"



THE FACE OF THE EDITOR of *Modern Science* magazine appeared on the screen. He grinned when he saw me. "Hi, Blaine."

"Hi, Joel," I replied. "Boy have I got a story for you. You know that project at Cape Thureia?"

His brows knitted in thought. "Something involving ... remote interstellar sensing? Using quantum tunnelling?"

"Yup. Well, they've succeeded. They can reach across light-years. *Thousands* of light-years. And get data back within seconds. No more lightspeed barrier! And they've got pictures and other data to prove it."

"That sounds fantastic!" He paused for a moment. "Weren't they also doing something involving bioengineering?"

"Yup, that too. And they're using it to send specially-adapted humans through the tunnel! You know that that means? Manned interstellar space travel!"

"Bio-engineering humans?" He frowned. "You know about the current President, and the religious sensibilities of his supporters, don't you?"

“Sure, but—”

“They don’t approve of this bio-engineering stuff. Not on humans. ‘Tampering with Creation’, and all that. We’ve already had to cut back on our coverage on anything remotely contentious. Even basic bionics and bio-medical advances seem to get their dander up, and bring the outrage down on us. Political pressure on our sponsors ... you know what they can do to us.”

“You mean you can’t report on what Cape Thureia is doing?”

He pondered for a moment. “I wouldn’t say that. We just have to leave out any mention of bio-engineering. I guess that means no reporting on the manned aspect. They’ve got remote instrumentation as well?”

“Of course, that had to work before they could risk sending humans.”

“We’ll just talk about that, then. No more just peering through telescopes, we can now send robot probes anywhere in the Galaxy. Lots of pretty pictures, did you say? I’m sure we can get more than one special out of that. But no mention of sending humans, for now.”

“... I guess it’s better than nothing.”

“Sorry, Blaine. Send the acceptable stuff through, I’m looking forward to it, OK?”

“Sure. Talk to you later.”



THE REACTION I GOT from Eleana and the rest of the Cape Thureia crew was not what I expected.

“I suppose less publicity about exactly *how* we’re getting all these pictures and data is a good thing, in the current climate,” she said, not entirely disappointed.

“Less chance of the politicians wanting to poke their noses in and interfere,” agreed Clarissa.

“And I gather Bateson are taking more of a hands-off approach, after our little confrontation,” I added. “So less trouble from them in the future, as well.”

We took a walk outside. I noticed the barbed wire had already gone from the walls. And instead of being locked and guarded, the main gates stood wide open.

“Still plenty more work to do,” I said.

“Sure,” agreed Eleana. “Further explorations of outer space, in the places we’ve already reached, and beyond them. But more than that: The technologies we developed could have other applications here on Earth, too. We need to get other teams involved in that, spread the word to other researchers.”

“You’d have to do that discreetly, of course,” I pointed out.

“Of course,” agreed Eleana. “But no hurry. The whole team could do with a holiday, about now.”

I was thinking, the Cape Resort wouldn’t know what hit them. Nor would the rest of the world, come to think of it ...

