

Watches

By Eleanor Cename

Seventy years had passed since the Great Awakening and all was well, or perhaps all just seemed well. At six thirty in the morning -- as it did every day -- a silvery melody emanated from the slim band on Jeanne's wrist. The music faded as her squinting eyes opened and the fluorescents in the ceiling illuminated her bedroom. A closet containing her clothing, shoes, and jackets, a television, the unmade bed on which she was sprawled, and a small, barren table comprised her room. Outside, the sky was a dark, ruddy grey. Typical.

"Good morning Jeanne," a woman's voice chimed, from the silver band. "I detect that your bedroom is cooler than your current preference; Would you like me to increase the temperature to better suit your needs?"

"Yeah," Jeanne yawned, running her hands through her mussed hair.

"Today's temperature is 17 degrees celsius, with an air quality index of 211. I recommend wearing your black jumpsuit this morning; it will keep you comfortable in today's mild temperatures. Would you like me to recommend shoes and a hairstyle?"

"Mmhmm," Jeanne glanced down at the watch around her wrist.

"I recommend you wear your black slip on shoes and leave your hair down, though consider straightening it."

Now in her bathroom, Jeanne glanced at her reflection. Her dark, wavy hair was slightly frizzy -- not surprising as Jeanne constantly ran her hands through her hair. Jeanne's thin nose added a harshness to her features, though her eyes were the rich color of black coffee and her skin was a warm olive tone. Per her CIS's advice, she dressed herself in her black jumpsuit. Her CIS cultivated clothing choices based on the popular style of the week which Jeanne relied on, for she worked to maintain the most current styles of the time.

“Don’t know what I’d do without you, CIS,” Jeanne smiled absently.

Her CIS or Customized Intelligence System was always with her. The watch around her wrist contained an assistant that told her when to wake up, sleep, what to wear, and provided for her every want and need.

You have three notifications. Would you like me to read them?”

“Sure.”

“Rigel Corporation is opening seven new locations near you for your health, wellness, and convenience, including a Rigel Grocer, Rigel Electronics, Rigel Films, and Rigel Fashion Outlet within the next twenty four hours,” Jeanne’s CIS warbled, following musically with Rigel’s customary slogan, “We know what you need before you know you need it!”

Jeanne had pulled herself out of the warm confines of her bed and slid her feet onto the floors of her room which had also been heated to her preference that morning.

“Your second notification is as follows: you have 8,643 points in your system. Please say ‘accept’ if you wish to view the following advertisement or ‘decline’ if you do not want to earn 30 points in support of Rigel,” her CIS trilled.

Jeanne didn’t really watch ads for the points, something she would never admit, however Jeanne was always anxious for the newest material. Jeanne didn’t want to imagine what people would say if she used something that had been listed in the “Archaic Finds” column on *SuperNovaTech*. There were always those people though -- the ones who were toting around a veritable relic from the past week -- and they were certainly odd. “Accept,” Jeanne mumbled.

“Congratulations, you have earned 30 points for watching the advertisement for Rigel’s RS-Orion and now have 8,673 points in your system!” her CIS sang out. “The RS-Orion is Rigel’s newest model of the Supernova Self-Driving group. These sleek cars have ample room for six passengers and are at the ultra low price of only 2,000 units,” a shot of six smiling adults illuminated the face of her

watch as a car glided across a bridge in Sunken City National Park; an old city that had been partially submerged in the rising ocean, “Hurry this offer ends soon, so get your RS-Orion now before time runs out. We know what you need before you know you need it!”

“To purchase, simply say ‘buy now’.

“Buy now” Jeanne interjected, perched on the counter of her kitchen sipping one of her five different powdered breakfast drinks: Mega Fruit Blast.

“Congratulations, you have made a purchase that valued 2,000 points and you now have 6,673 points in your system. Your RS-Orion will be delivered to your package receptacle at your housing complex in an estimated two point five hours.”

Only 6,673 points left meant that Jeanne had to watch a few ads today. Perhaps she would stop by StarCaf by Rigel, which was the most popular coffee shop chain in her state. Jeanne had recently moved to Andromeda, a rather mundane, though populated state always covered in a thick blanket of smog. Although she couldn’t work her way up to 10,000, she could earn enough to remain satisfied. Jeanne never thought of point totals as so important though she knew she was more lacking in points than many of her friends. As she had long thought herself as a profound being, Jeanne often wondered why the points truly mattered as long as one could buy what they wanted at any given time which was made simple with the advertisements.

“I see you are enjoying your Stardust Breakfast Beverage! Two other people near you are enjoying Rigel’s Mega Fruit Blast flavor too. If you would like to meet people with similar interests say “accept.” If you do not want to meet new people with similar interests, say “decline.”

“Accept,” Jeanne had used *RigelPersonal* before and had made her twenty-seven closest friends using *RigelPersonal*. These people still followed her on her *AdConnect* page and always liked her directpics.

“Congratulations,” her CIS chorused, “Adding two new contacts to your *RigelPersonal* and *AdConnect*. These contacts will help Rigel bring you what you need!”

She resolved to add them to her directchat as well. Jeanne always wanted to rush through her morning notifications. A stripe of her electric pink beverage her upper lip as Jeanne swallowed the last of her breakfast, “Thanks CIS.”

“Finally, Rigel would like to remind you that the annual Citizen Support Season is today, so remember to support Rigel’s mission to bring you what you need by making the payment of no less than 15,000 points. Remember to help us give you the Rigel life. We know what you need before you know you need it!”

A sharp inhalation. Her eyelids slammed shut as a role of nausea racked through her body. She had forgotten about Citizen Support Season.

“I have detected a shift in your vital signs. Is there something dissatisfactory in your environment or are you experiencing a medical emergency?” Jeanne’s CIS, said as brightly as ever.

“No... I’m fine.”

Citizen Support Season was not technically obligatory, though everyone knew what happened to those few who did not supply their payment. Well that wasn’t right either because no one *really* knew. Anyone older than eighteen simply disappeared, though when the aspiring gossip vloggers began asking questions, a brief obituary was posted on the neighborhood’s Rigel Corporation *AdConnect* page. A few sentences about how they died from a hereditary disease of which they were offered treatment but refused because that kind of person was always so liable to refuse something Rigel offered and that thereby it should be supposed that they were Rigel dissentients. They therefore died by choice because an honest and moral corporation such as Rigel that has so much power in the community would never force anything upon its people.

Jeanne had turned eighteen the previous month though had forgotten about Citizen Support Season. Marching swiftly back to her bedroom she flipped on her television and sat gingerly at the foot of her bed as if it was not her own. “Um” her voice quivering, “could you show me any running ads.”

“My apologies Jeanne, but your point count is not currently sufficient to use your television, as you must have upwards of 7,000 points to operate it. You may however view any running advertisements on your CIS watch.”

“Show me any running ads,” Jeanne’s voice now quivered with drops of hysteria pooling in the recesses of her thoughts.

“The following advertisement is brought to you by *RigelDocs* and will add 50 points to your system. Please say ‘accept’ if you wish to view the following advertisement or ‘decline’ if you do not want to earn 50 points in support of Rigel,” the watch now emanated a sickly glow as the CIS chirped on.

“Accept. ACCEPT!”

As she stared at the watch face, an advertisement for a drug called the Star Supplement by Rigel claimed to “calm your nerves so you get the best out of your very own Rigel life.” An advertisement for a new color changing watch band followed. Clip after clip. Product after product. After what felt like days passed and the sky darkened to a sickly sepia tint, Jeanne found herself glassy eyed and hot with nerves.

“Congratulations, your point total is now 9,268! You have not made any purchases based on these advertisements, so we are asking you to complete a brief survey to help us improve our advertising system to better suit your interests.”

“No! Please. Uh... I’m fine!”

“Jeanne, you may not acquire further points if y--” the silvery sound of Jeanne’s CIS was silenced by the chiming of Jeanne’s doorbell sounding from her television and watch.

Instinctively her mind turned to her car. In retrospect, she regretted buying the car, but maybe she deserved something nice after her day's tribulations.

As she reached her front door, an prickle grabbed at her shoulders and ran its fingers down her spine: something was amiss. Her doorbell did not sound when she had anything delivered to her package receptacle. That meant someone was out there. Just on the other side of her door. "Hey CIS, uh ...show me my front door."

The face of her watch brightened with the view from her door. Outside, two security bots stood rigidly outside the ash colored door to her apartment. "I... is something wrong?" Jeanne frantically whispered to her CIS.

"I am sorry. That question is beyond my capabilities at the moment," the voice spilling from the watch was cold and twanged with a robotic timbre. Jeanne knew she had only one choice, for ignoring them would be crossing the line: she would answer her door.

With a soft swish her door popped open as her CIS sensed her proximity to the entrance. The two bots spoke in unison with the same voice as her CIS.

"Hello Miss Jeanne. We have noticed some unusual activity reported from your CIS regarding your current point status, advertisement viewing, and lack of donations during Citizen Support Season. Because you have made no donations and are not responsive to advertisements, Rigel is investigating your loyalty to the company. Please come with us."

"Please," her voice was tainted by a stuttering whine, "Just... just made a mistake." Tears were welling in Jeanne's eyes as her heart spasmed with a fear unlike anything she had ever experienced. This wasn't supposed to happen. This wasn't what Rigel does. Not this. Her feet clicked on the cold ground outside as she felt herself walking from her door. Her arms were locked in the lifeless grasp of the security bots. She was just leaving her apartment. Just leaving her apartment. This was something should not be tied such heightened dread as she felt in that moment.

At that moment, an outsider would have seen a woman leaving her apartment complex with two security bots as she entered the in the back of a security bot Protection Unit Vessel. To Jeanne however, everything she thought she knew about the ones who saved the world was shattered. Seventy years had passed since the Great Awakening and all was well and still, most everything seemed well.