

The Earthborn



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Fourteen-year-old Welkin Quinn glanced at the bulkhead. The time dial showed that he was five minutes late for his duty shift. The captain would probably have him tossed in the ship's recyclers and inquire as to his tardiness later. He finished tugging on his boots, checked his uniform in the tiny mirror his ensign's quarters barely warranted, and exited at a run. As he dashed along corridors and charged recklessly around corners, he regretted that humans were restricted to sub-light speed; otherwise he could have been at his duty station on the bridge before he even got his boots on. If subatomic particles could do it, why couldn't he? The final elevator ride up three levels was sheer agony. He'd never noticed before how slow these things were! He checked himself in the mirrored surface of the elevator doors. Everything looked okay, but Captain Sobol was notorious for finding fault. Rumor had it that Elder Sobol--as he was known off the bridge--possessed scanning electron microscopes instead of eyes. How else could he spot a speck of lint the size of a chlorine molecule? Welkin slammed to a stop outside the bridge entrance. He quickly polished his brand-new ensign's insignia--since he figured he wouldn't be keeping it for much longer!--tugged his tunic straight, and walked in with the pretended nonchalance of an old spacer ready for anything. The bridge

was a hive of activity. Nevertheless¼ Captain Sobol s

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