

## A.T.M.

By Jason P. Henry

For a moment, he stood back and admired the contraption with cautious wonder. The idea seemed simple enough and was nothing new at all. In fact, the technology had been around for years and it seemed everyone had, at some point in their lives, used it. Most of the world's population relied on its capabilities daily. However, for him, it was a monumental first. It was no less than a giant leap of faith towards the trust of modern mechanical sophistication. His mother was always preaching to him about getting his life organized and prioritized. "The world is changing," she would say, "and sometimes, to survive, you need to change with it."

Nested into the external wall of the local Credit Union, its simple, red metal casing framed a small monitor that flickered shades of blue. Below the view screen was a simple keypad for entering data. To the right of the keyboard was the narrow slit of the card reader. With those, and the other various slots, it looked like any other of its kind. To most it was common-place, but not for him. Technology was amazing; he could not imagine how it felt to be the first person, the first ever, to risk using the A.T.M.

What was it like, he wondered, to put everything on the line, not knowing if advancement such as this was even safe to use? The benefits of its capabilities were obvious, but the risks were not quite as apparent. How could every possible outcome be calculated and accounted for? There was no way in hell. How many lives had been threatened, even ruined, by society's need to simplify? It seems that a world hell-bent on building things bigger, faster, stronger and smarter was simply derailing itself on a one-way track towards Armageddon. The end of the world would not arrive on a meteor, a tsunami or a world war: It would be dealt by the hand of convenience.

Still, he didn't have a choice. With no other means available on a Sunday morning, he was left without options: He had to use it. His family, his friends, and almost everyone else he knew used them all the time. Everyone told him, constantly, to get current and quit being such a caveman. His aversion to technology was an understatement: Even the simplest devices terrified him. Hell, he was more than willing to admit that, on many occasions, he jumped out of his skin when the toaster popped up. He knew, though, that he could not let his parents down.

After what felt like eons of internal debate and chastising, he slowly approached the A.T.M. and removed his card from his pocket. The plastic card in his hand was decorated with the holographic image

of some fat, orange, bulging eyed cartoon cat. Hold the card one way and the cat was smiling, move it slightly and the cat stuck his tongue out at you. Simple it was, but amusing enough to ease a little apprehension. Still, he reminded himself that somewhere inside this wallet-sized shingle of processed resin, adorned with a smart-ass feline, was an electronic signature; a key to his entire life.

“Don’t let me down you little, lasagna eating freak,” he uttered. “You don’t see me through this and I’m trading your ass in for the floppy-eared, puppy card.”

Warily, he placed the card in the slot and watched as it was swallowed by the gluttonous metal beast. The monitor came to life reading, ‘Welcome Dan Walters.’, and offered him a few crucial choices. Dan touched the screen next to his desired transaction type and the digital display requested his pass code. He keyed in his secret password and waited for the authorization. After a few impatient, agonizing moments the chunk of scrap iron beeped at him and said, ‘Access Granted’. The screen then prompted him to enter the specifics of his transaction, which he did.

“Almost done.” he thought to himself, exasperated.

Decades seemed to come and go before the A.T.M. finally began to make a soft whirring noise, not much different than the hum of a pissed off bumble bee. The screen read ‘Processing’ and began a strobe-like flash. The blinking lights became more and more rapid in succession and even the red frame seemed to take on an ominous glow. Then with one final burst of brilliant light, the monitor read ‘Transaction Approved’. Dan’s heart raced and he thought his knees were going to buckle. He put his hands out in front of him just in time to count his fingers as they disappeared, one stubby, chewed down nail at a time. He reached the number eight, only his thumbs remained, and he screamed!

“I changed my mind... Cancel transaction!” , but it was too late. The light of the screen stayed lit and then there was one more, blinding flash of light before everything went black.

He opened his eyes cautiously and stared at the machine in front of him. It was newer and cleaner than the one he had left in Denver. ‘Transaction complete. Thank you for using Automatrix. Have a great day.’ Dan Walters shook his head with disbelief and, as much as he hated to admit it, a slight tinge of excitement. “There has to be an easier way to travel,” he thought. “These Automated Teleportation Modules could cause coronary.”

With that, the machine in front of him ejected his card for him to grab. He took his card and looked at the superimposed cat on the front that seemed to wink at him in the sunlight. He gave the fancy, neon purple box in front of him one last look, put his card back into his pocket and then turned to see his hometown for the first time since 2013. “25 years is a long time.” he thought to himself.

The smell of the ocean invaded his nose. The taste of the saltwater fell off the breeze and onto his tongue. In the distance, he could see the revolving, UFO shape of the Space Needle. Underneath the disc, he saw a beam of light tracing the 2.5 mile stretch to solid ground. In that beam, he saw tiny specks moving either up or down. The things people would endure for a five-star meal amused him. "Hell of an elevator. Wouldn't want someone above me losing their lunch, that's for damn sure!"

Truth-be-told, Seattle hadn't really changed much since the renovations of 2021. That was the year the voter's chose the northwest city to be the Model City for Futurism. The next decade was spent transforming the city that gave birth to 'grunge', to the 'Technological Gateway to the Universe'.

His reminiscing was interrupted by a woman's voice. He saw an elderly lady, followed by a balding man on a hover chair, scooting toward him faster than her legs wanted to allow. He ran to her and placed an arm around her before she lost balance. "Danny?! Danny, is it you?!"

"Yeah, Mom, I'm home."

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