Visit the exciting Web site for kids at www.cool2read.com
and the Mars Diaries Web site at www.marsdiaries.com

You can contact Sigmund Brouwer through his Web site at
www.coolreading.com

Designed by Ron Kaufmann

Edited by Ramona Cramer Tucker

ISBN 0-8423-5634-7, mass paper

Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04 03 02
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER 1

Tidal wave!

Not water. But blood. Whooshing down a narrow pipeline.

I knew the rush of blood was out there only because I could hear it surge ahead with each heartbeat—a sound like a distant drum. But I couldn't see anything because I was inside a shiny steel transporter pod, half the size of a pea, carried along by the powerful flow of blood.

Well, actually, it wasn't *me* inside the pod but the miniature robot I controlled through virtual reality. But it *felt* like I was inside the pod. Since my brain waves were connected to the robot, I saw and heard what the robot saw and heard. In turn, the robot responded to my brain waves and moved the way my own body would move.

The robot itself was an incredible piece of machinery. It was a second-generation ant-bot, about one-tenth the size of the original mini-robots. And those first ones were smaller than an ant!

Yet even with being that tiny, there wasn't much room for the robot's arms and legs to move inside the absolute darkness of the pod. There certainly was nothing to see

inside. All I could do was wait and listen to the blood outside as the transporter pod moved through the major arteries of the president of the United States of America.

I could picture what was happening, however.

My own human body was strapped motionless in place, just outside the operating room. Signals from my brain were sent to a transmitter, which in turn sent them via X ray to the computer chips of the tiny robot.

Inside the operating room, the president sat calmly in a chair, hooked to heartbeat monitors, waiting for the transporter pod to reach the pacemaker in her heart. Something had caused it to slow down, and the doctors didn't know what. Checking it by robot was much easier on her than having a major operation that would open her chest cavity and keep her in the hospital for weeks.

Just a few minutes earlier, a doctor had injected the tiny pod into an artery in her hip. A beeping locator signal let the doctor know of its progress. As my robot waited, the doctor guided the pod through the president's arteries with a powerful magnet. The inside of the pod was lined with a thin rubber coating so the electrical forces generated by the magnet wouldn't disturb the intricate wiring of the robot. But the X-ray signals could still get through the rubber, and that allowed me to stay in contact with the doctor.

"Tyce," the doctor said, "you're moving toward the lungs now. I'm sorry it's taking so long, but I made a wrong turn at the kidneys. After all, this is the first time something like this has ever been tried."

Although I couldn't see anything, I imagined the walls of the arteries stretching and throbbing with each beat of the heart. I imagined glowing red saucer-shaped platelets swarming just outside my pod.

"Tyce," the doctor continued, "are you ready? I mean,

really ready? We're talking about a human life at stake. And this human happens to be the president of the most powerful country in the world. If she dies, a lot of other people will suffer."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'm ready."

The doctor had explained it to me earlier. When the pod reached the right place near the president's heart, he would trigger the pod to release some tiny spikes that would secure it to the blood vessel. Then the pod would open, and my robot would seek its target—the pacemaker of the president of the United States.

I'd spent hours going over the model of a pacemaker, studying computer-generated images to give me an understanding of how it would appear to my tiny robot.

"I'm ready," I confirmed. "As soon as the pod opens."

It took the doctor another 30 seconds. "Get ready," he warned.

"Ready," I repeated.

And blood rushed in as the pod cracked open.

Immediately my robot began to sway with the movement of the blood. The president's heartbeat had fallen to 30 beats per minute. One every two seconds. A hard tidal wave rushed over me; then it became relatively calm and I floated in an ebb of blood.

A beat every two seconds. Slower than if she'd been asleep. Her heart wasn't pumping enough blood, and her body desperately needed oxygen. Already some of her major organs had begun to shut down.

My robot was tethered to the inside of the transporter pod by a microscopic strand of titanium. The next heartbeat would pump blood that would shoot me forward until I reached the end of it, like a dog running to the end of its leash.

A light attached to the robot's right arm showed a red glow of blood around it. But if the doctor had placed the pod correctly, the next heartbeat would take me right into the pacemaker and . . .

The robot shot forward as blood gushed again through the artery. Then it stopped hard. I'd hit the pacemaker!

Now my tiny light bounced off the shininess of the pacemaker's plastic. It would have to be enough.

The light showed a small seam. I grabbed it and held on. I needed to be secure before the next heartbeat washed a new wave of blood over me.

The wave came. It tugged at my robot body.

I held.

I climbed farther for another second.

I held. Waited for another rush of blood. Then climbed.

Again and again. Until finally I reached a tiny opening that led into the pacemaker.

I waited for another heartbeat to pass before moving inside.

Once inside, I needed to find a wire that, although nearly invisible to human eyes, would look like a thick rope to a robot this size. The wire sent an electrical current to the pacemaker controls from its power source. It was insulated, so I didn't have to worry about putting my robot in risk of shock, which could also shock my own brain. It was this wire that doctors suspected was loose or frayed, causing the slower heartbeat.

My robot hand finally found the wire. It was so big in comparison that I could barely wrap the robot fingers around it. I grabbed and held tight.

That was my mistake.

I should have been holding something else.

The next wave of blood shifted my robot body.

I forgot to let go of the wire.

It held me briefly, then snapped loose as blood tugged at my robot body. For a moment my robot body swayed. Then it stopped, suspended in blood.

And I realized what had happened.

I'd disconnected the wire that, until then, had just been frayed or loose. All heartbeats of the pacemaker stopped.

"Tyce!" the doctor shouted. "Tyce! What's going on in there? The president is screaming with pain. She has—!" He stopped for a second, then shouted louder. "Tyce! She's collapsed. We can't get a heartbeat on these monitors! Tyce! Tyce Sanders! Do something in there!"