

Excursion

By

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Prologue



On October 19, 1989 NASA launched the Galileo spacecraft to study the violent atmosphere of Jupiter. On December 7 1995 it arrived traveling a distance of 2.5 billion miles. A

detachable probe from the main orbiter was launched and during its decent relayed its precious data back to Earth.

After 14 years of Galileo orbiting around Jupiter, NASA decided to crash it onto its surface. They justified their decision based on the nearby orbiting moons of being contaminated by micro-organisms especially on the ice surface of Europa.

The real reason has been kept top-secret for 120 years, and the orbiter was never crashed into the surface of Jupiter but programmed to fly by the moon of Ganymede, to use its gravity to sling-shot toward Saturn to study its rings. While traveling at 32,400 mph, by some unknown reason, Galileo stopped dead in the middle of space.

In 2124, the first manned flights of three large interplanetary ships was secretly launched. Their names were the *Enterprise*, the *Obama*, and the *Washington*. The *Enterprise* was tasked with retrieving the Galileo spacecraft as the other sister-ships were on standby. The *Obama* was positioned half way to Jupiter, and the

Washington was in a geosynchronous orbit around Mars.

Chapter 1

The Awakening

The ship was cold and dark, emanating a haunting feeling as the sound of the distant rattling of air vents echoed down its empty bays.

The *Com* abruptly came online and initiated with minimal power, the ship's life support and emergency lighting to slowly and systematically illuminate. It was a separate operating computer system that was designed to socially interact with the crew and only follow the orders of the Captain.

The *Enterprise* was two hours from its target as Captain Rosen's sleep-stasis Cryo-chamber blinked red and then to a steady green. The overhead glass cover of the chamber slowly rose. The Captain took a sudden deep breath as her back slightly arched, and then exhaled a vapor trail of cold air that shocked her into quickly opening her eyes. She tried to sit up in the weightlessness as the support straps across her waist hindered her

efforts. She then rubbed her cold face with both hands. “*Com, raise the temperature to 77 degrees,*” she ordered. There was a beep and then a three second steady tone.

“*Sir, the PG’s (Power Generators, Solar-Startup Batteries) are not at full charge,*” vibrated an electronic synthesized voice from all directions.

“How come?” asked the Captain while, with considerable effort, sat up and disconnected two fluid hoses from her implanted connectors just above her right hip. One emptied urine from her bladder during sleep stasis, and the other replenished a nutritious liquid into her upper intestinal tract.

“*There was a ship wide power failure at 1900 hours on May...*”

“Just initiate the heaters for fifteen minutes at the top of each hour,” interrupted the Captain. “That’ll allow the PG’s to recharge.” She then began rubbing her numb legs while wiggling her toes.

“*Yes Sir.*”

“I hate when that thing calls me sir,” she whispered.

“*Would ma’am be appropriate?*” asked the computer startling the Captain.

“That would be fine.”

“*Yes Ma’am.*”

“What is our current position?”

“*We are two hours, ten seconds from the Galileo spacecraft. I initiated a ten second aux-burn at 14:23 hours.*”

“Why?”

“*Forward motion was inept.*”

“Clarify?”

“*Reason...unknown.*” The Captain seemed baffled and then concluded that the ship experienced what had happened to the Galileo spacecraft.

Ten minutes had passed when the Captain finally felt the life return to her legs. She had injected them each with a low-dose muscle enhancing steroid developed by the Russians. She floated to the bridge and buckled herself into her command chair.

“*Com*, open the shields.”

“*Yes Ma’am.*” There was a low pitch sound of metal scraping glass as the metal shields slowly retracted from right to left. The glass was slightly frosted as she stared at a flickering bright light that was a good distance ahead of the ship. Sharon paused in relief knowing what the sparkle was. Then she tried to access the ships overall status on the monitor in front of her but couldn’t. She had hoped there was enough power in the back-up batteries, and then decided to revive the crew per regulations. If she wasn’t capable, the *Com* would take over her duties and revive the next in command. The main computers were down and everything was running on backup batteries. They were constantly powered by the recently opened aft solar array that pointed toward the sun.

The Solar Power Generators were supplied power from the main retractable solar disk which was opened by the *Com* at the rear of the ship. It was elliptical in shape and the size of a football field. Captain Rosen couldn’t pull up flight-logs, previous transmissions from the *Obama* or

delayed transmissions from Houston Control. *I'll have John check it out.* She thought unbuckling herself, and then floating off the bridge. "Time to wake the boys," she whispered to herself. She floated back to the Cryo-bay which was in the middle of the ship. It was heavily reinforced with lead shielding to protect the crew from cosmic rays and possible micro meteor strikes if the main computers had failed to make course corrections. The Captain checked each chamber before opening the one her second in command was occupying. She noticed something she liked and ordered the computer to emergency open chamber number two. She then undressed and floated on top of her second in command. "*Com, close chamber number two for twenty-minutes.*"

"*Yes Ma'am. Is everything okay?*" asked the computer. "*I am detecting you will be enclosed with Commander Jenkins.*"

"Everything is fine," she said quickly while breathing deeply. "I'm using his body heat to get warm." The chamber door slowly closed, and the

computer monitored the Captain's heart rate quickly increase as the glass began to fog.

An hour later, as the entire crew was revived and unable to move, the Captain returned with extra MES (Muscle Enhancing Steroid) injectors.

"Here, these will help," said Captain Rosen. "Give it about ten minutes to start working." She handed one to the entire six-man team including the doctor who was a female in her mid-forties.

"I don't need that," said Tyrone. "I need a cigarette." He felt refreshed almost wanting to go back to sleep as the Captain smiled while handing him an injector. Tyrone looked at her curiously and then grinned, knowing what had happened.

Chapter 2

The Nosh

“Com, what’s the temperature?” asked Doctor Jones as she unbuckled from the chamber.

“*Fifty-eight degrees and rising Sir.*”

“The power generators failed,” said the Captain. “They’re recharging.”

“That’ll feel like a year,” sarcastically said Kyle, the ship’s electrical engineer who was shivering cold. “The sun is pretty far from here.”

“Get something to eat and then report to the bridge,” the Captain ordered everybody. “We have a little over an hour before reaching Galileo and we need to go over the MP’s (Mission Protocols).”

“That thing scares me,” Dave said looking over at the other men. “It was moving 32,000 miles-an-hour and just suddenly stops.”

“I hope it was the *Interstellar Median* that freakishly caused it,” Kyle said injecting his other leg.

“Hydrogen gas including dust particles are usually found outside of the solar system,” blurted John, the ship’s science officer as he floated upside down toward his locker on the ceiling. “I think it was extra-terrestrials.”

“Yeah, me too,” said Dave. “Those big black eyes greys probably raped it for spare parts.”

“Let’s stop speculating,” said Tyrone. “That’s why we’re here—to find out why.” The crew met in the galley and began eating cold rations. There was no power, only enough for emergency lighting.

“I forgot how bad this stuff taste,” said Joe. “Even the water is nasty.” At that moment, Dave threw-up a floating stream of what he had just eaten. The doctor rushed to his side.

“Captain, I need everyone in the med-lab for a bio-checkup as soon as the AGS (Artificial Gravity Section) has been activated.” The doctor winked when she gave Dave some water. “Nobody eats solids until after the check-up,” ordered Dr. Jones before floating out of the galley to her locked medicine storage cabinet. Kyle then

picked up a *Nutri-Pill* food tablet and installed it into his belly-button feeding chamber. The capsule slowly feed nutrients to the body like an unborn baby's umbilical cord. "Yummy...chicken and rice," Kyle said sarcastically.

The AGS is a circular rotating section of the ship that creates a low gravity environment for the living quarters, the emergency medical room, and the science lab. The Captain, after returning to the bridge for the second time, tried to activate the AGS power-level indicators to determine the start-up time, but couldn't.

"Com, start the AGS as soon as the generators are recharged," she ordered.

"I can start the AGS in three hours by decreasing the thermal warm-ups to ten minutes at the top of the hour."

"Proceed."

"Yes Ma'am." The Captain while sitting in the command chair on the bridge flipped the ship-wide intercom switch.

“The ship will be a little chilly until the PG’s recharge, so put on your thermals for at least four hours. The AGS will not be activated until then.”

Kyle, the youngest astronaut in U.S. history listened to the Captain’s announcement and frowned. He was a child genius who graduated MIT at sixteen years old, then recruited by Lockheed to design an internal electrical system using the great inventor, Nikola Tesla’s basic principle of electrical induction. Wires were no longer needed to transport electrical current to circuits and components. Kyle developed the first wireless, electrical frequency transference using a special form of focused signals that were delivered in a spectrum of carrier waves, each powering a specific component. The charge of the frequency wave is directed to certain components that pick up the invisible induced energy. The originating source of the wave starts at the hull and is safely directed inward through all of the

ships bulkheads from bow to stern. Circuits and other components are then powered by energy inducted capacitors that are constantly being recharged by the selected frequency waves.

Kyle's exceptional knowledge of NASA's present and past electrical systems made him a valuable asset to the mission. He was the only person who could retrieve the data recorded by the antique Galileo spacecraft, and determine what stopped it in the middle of space.

"That's just great," shouted Kyle. "I have to take a no-grav piss."

"Are you afraid of being sucked to death?" asked Joe.

"No...I'm afraid of catching an infection."

"The lavatory's *Nosh* (No Gravity urinal Suction Hose) is self-cleaning," said Joe.

"I don't care," Kyle said angrily. "I'm not using that thing. Back in Mars orbit, I saw John reciprocally suction himself off at full volume."

"Using the *Nosh* to jerk off is against regulations," said Joe. "I'll never use that thing again either."

“I’m pissing in a plastic bag,” said Kyle.

Dave finished wiping his mouth with a smile as Joe inserted a *Nutri-Pill* into his navel chamber. He then took a sip of water as the other men stared. “I can’t take *any* pill unless I drink some water.”

“I’m glad I don’t have to take a dump,” said Tyrone. “John probably jerked off in the ASD (Anal Suction Dispenser) too.” Dave left the galley for the restroom after inserting the medicine the doctor gave him and Tyrone followed, floating toward the bridge before everybody else.

Chapter 3

Twenty Four Minutes

Tyrone entered the bridge first as the Captain was redirecting what back-up power the bridge's inducers had for basic functions. He leaned over and kissed the Captain on the neck. "Was I raped?" he asked.

"What are you talking about *Number-One*?"

"I happened to notice stains of love in my chamber."

"Maybe you were having a wet-dream."

"I found this," Tyrone said holding a curly strand of red hair that looked like hers.

"Where did you get that from—off the floor?"

"It was wet and stuck to my gooch."

"What?"

"You know—that area between my balls and butt-hole."

"You were *up* at attention so I didn't want to waste it."

"You could've woke me up."

“I was following procedures.”

“Humping an unconscious man is not following procedures?” The rest of the crew began to enter through the hatch to the bridge.

“Commander, check the induction efficiency of the solar array including the Carbo’s.” (Carbon-Dioxide Filters)

“Yes Ma’am...as soon as power is restored,” said Tyrone, sitting at his station just behind the Captain’s chair. The crew was unaware of the affair they were having.

“I am changing the retrieval protocol...we have a four hour wait until power is restored,” said Captain Rosen. “We won’t know what caused the blackout until then, so we’re still going to complete our mission,” she said then pausing in thought. “Joe and Kyle, I need you to prep the EVA shuttle...we’re retrieving the spacecraft in one hour.” (EVA means Extravehicular Activity, any activity performed by a pressure-suited crew-member.)

“I still have to pee,” said Kyle staring at the Galileo spacecraft out of the bridges frosted windows.

“Come on...son,” said Joe floating toward the exit hatch. “You can pee in your EVA space suit as I upload the mission software into the shuttles computers.”

“Let’s hurry,” shouted Kyle.

“When you get back, the AGS should be operational,” Tyrone said with a smile. He then turned toward the Captain. “I don’t think we should proceed with the mission without the main computers online.”

“The *main’s* control the power levels of the inducers, and that will take a long time,” said Captain Rosen. “The men should have no problems with retrieving the spacecraft and bringing it back.”

“I know the spacecraft experienced a complete shutdown of its thermal electric generator,” said Tyrone. “We need the ship to be at full power, and do a full spectrum analysis of the spacecraft

including the surrounding area before we bring it in.” The Captain was silent for a second.

“It’s my call...and we *are* proceeding.”

“Yes Ma’am,” said Tyrone. Dave, who listened to the whole conversation, just stared at his blank monitored that normally displayed transmissions from Earth and the other sister-ships. He knew the Captain was wrong in her decision, and did what he was trained to do, follow orders regardless of the command.

“Dave, I need you to help Joe and Kyle quickly get into their suits. I want to be heading back to Mars when those generators are fully charged.”

“Yes Sir,” Dave said unbuckling his straps. “I mean Ma’am.”



Twenty minutes later, the EVA shuttle was launched under its own power. The Captain could not communicate with the shuttle, but only watched as it retrieved the Galileo spacecraft.

Kyle performed his planned spacewalk, and replaced the isotope generator before Galileo was attached to the top of the shuttle's hull. It had to remain there until the AGS was operational.

An hour and ten minutes had passed when the shuttle reattached itself to the *Enterprise* as the Captain announced they would be returning to sleep stasis in two days. "Once the AGS is operational, I'll have *Com* turn us around," announced the Captain over the ship's intercom.

"*Com*...how much longer?"

"*Twenty four minutes and seven seconds.*"

"Thank you...start the AGS rotation when the charge is complete."

"*Yes Ma'am.*"

"Commander Jenkins, I need you to assist John with the grapples. Once Galileo is in the AGS storage bay...notify me."

"*Yes Ma'am.*"

“We will then strap in for a controlled burn home, and then Kyle will work on reactivating its data receiving processors to find some answers. He has twenty four hours after that...then we are taking another nap.”

Chapter 4

What's Wrong

Commander Jenkins floated down toward the shuttle hatch when he heard a scream. It was John's voice as he quickened his flight by grabbing anything that was solid and bolted down. He hurried and began to see blood floating in the distance.

"John!" yelled Tyrone down the long corridor leading to the shuttle hatch. "Where are you?" It was dark as the amber emergency lights suddenly stopped working. He then heard a faint moan coming from the suit-up room.

"I'm in here," a voice said painfully. Tyrone turned the corner and Kyle was floating over John, holding an infrared camera with both hands over his head. He then vigorously slammed the camera downward into John's head, killing him as he floated quickly toward the floor. Joe then grabbed Tyrone from behind and held his arms from moving.

“I’m the Captain now,” shouted Kyle as his eye’s glowed red. Joe was unexplainably much stronger than the average man, and Tyrone knew something had happened to them during the retrieval. Kyle then grabbed a special made space drill to repair solar panels, and floated toward Tyrone. “I’m going to drill some sense into your head.” Tyrone reached down and grabbed Joe by the nuts, squeezing with all his might. He then elbowed him in the stomach and floated out the room, closing the hatch. He traveled as fast as he could, heading for the supply room he knew would lock from the inside. He could hear the two men behind him as Kyle would trigger the drill off and on.

“Come back here Commander,” shouted Joe. “I’m *Number-One* now.” Tyrone reached the supply room and locked the hatch. He then floated to the communication console.

“Captain, Captain!” he shouted holding down the speak-button to the bridge. Kyle’s red eyes seemed to be enhanced by the hatch’s round site-glass.

“*What’s wrong Number-One?*” asked Sharon

“Joe and Kyle have gone completely mad. They killed John and...”

“*What?*”

“Lock yourself on the bridge,” Tyrone said breathing heavily. “I think they’re heading your way.” At that moment, Captain Rosen switched on the intercom system as the AGS and all the ships functions came online.

“Attention Dr. Jones and Dave! Joe and Kyle have been infected with something and killed John Robertson. Something happened to them during the retrieval, and I advise you to lock yourselves in a secure location.”

“Oh...frak!” shouted Dave pulling up his underwear as he floated over the doctor who was completely naked. She nervously grabbed her clothes, and then the hatch to the secondary medical lab suddenly opened.

Tyrone found a long thin replacement cylinder that was packaged for one of the engines fuel transfer lines. *This should crack some skull if those sick bastards get near me.* He thought opening the supply hatch. He looked both ways before exiting. He had told the Captain, he was going to the medical lab and find something to put the crazed men to sleep. Just as he floated down the long bay toward the medical lab, *Com* made a ship wide emergency announcement to abandon ship. Tyrone reached a wall mounted communication console. “Captain what’s wrong?”

“John has rigged the engines to fire a full burn with a twenty second delay for the igniters to kick on.”

“That would blow up half the ship,” said Tyrone.

“I can’t override the start command,” she said worriedly. *“Tyrone, stand bye.”* The Captain then decided what she was trained to do. *“Com, deploy the rescue beacon.* A minute had past.

“The rescue beacon has been deployed,” said the *Com*.

Chapter 5

Seven Minutes

“Com, how long will it take for the *Obama* to reach us?” asked the Captain.

“*There is no Obama.*”

“What...clarify?”

“*According to my computations...we have been in a blackout for two hundred and three years, sixteen days, twenty two minutes.*”

“No...that can’t be,” whispered Sharon. “We should all be dead.”

“*Would you like me to re-establish contact with Houston Control?*”

“Yes Com...if they still exist.”

“*I am picking up an intermittent signal from Uranus.*” Sharon smiled for a second.

“Ignore it and try to link to the *Mars-One* relay satellite, to reach Earth.”

“*Yes Ma’am.*”

Tyrone reached the secondary medical room and stared in horror. Dave and the completely naked Dr. Jones were dead, floating with pools of mingled blood everywhere including all over their lifeless bodies. *I hope Dave finished before her.* He thought. *Because damn...she looks like she did...yuck.* The ship wide intercom then came on. “*Commander Jenkins, meet me in the Cryo-bay in...three minutes.*” He knew that was a lie because it was recorded to take two minutes to reach the middle of the ship, to the stasis chambers and three minutes to reach the shuttle. The ship was going to be destroyed, and the shuttle was their only chance of survival.

Tyrone knew he had to reach the AGS before meeting the Captain at the shuttle. He floated to the conversion chamber that gradually and safely transitioned their bodies from no gravity to gravity.



Tyrone's room was two doors down from the medical lab, and when he reached it, he pulled a secured plastic bottle of Kentucky Whiskey from out of his locker. He placed it in a blue nylon shoulder bag, and then ran to the medical lab, forgetting the cylinder he left on his bed. He filled the bag with supplies he thought they might need, and then ran back toward the conversion chamber. Joe had turned the corner breathing heavily. "You're not leaving this section standing," Joe angrily said while drooling. "If I can't be Captain...nobody can!" Tyrone reached into the bag and pulled out an injection needle.

"Come and get me!" shouted Tyrone. Joe started running toward him like a charging bull with glowing red eyes. Tyrone stood firmly as he dropped the bag while holding the needle like a knife. He then jumped to the side and stabbed Joe

in the back of the head, pushing the plunger in as a sedative was forced into his brain. Joe fell like a log with a smile on his face. Tyrone knew he was dead and picked up the bag as the AGS came to a sudden stop, throwing him against the wall. The Com came across the ship-wide intercom.

“Ten minutes-four seconds to ignition.”

Another voice then announced. *“This is your Captain speaking,”* shouted Kyle from the bridge. *“In ten minutes we will be going home. I am tired of the evil stale air this crew emits with their adulterous sex habits.”*

He doesn't know Joe rigged the engines to blow. Thought Captain Rosen. *I know, he must've heard the Com announce...to abandon ship.* She continued to prepare the shuttle to disengage, with or without Tyrone in order to reach a safe distance. The *Enterprise's* guidance rockets fired as the ship turned its nose toward the sun. Tyrone had floated to the shuttle hatch and knocked hard. The Captain had it locked and when she opened it, she gave him a big hug.



“Where’s the doctor and Dave?”

“They’re both dead.”

“We have seven minutes,” said Sharon. “Strap in...I’m disconnecting in one.” Tyrone jumped into the seat to the right of the Captain as she quickly toggled numerous switches. Then the shuttle disengaged from the *Enterprise* as the sound of metal clasps noisily released. She fired maneuvering thrusters until the shuttle was clear and then the main engines. Tyrone pressed the rear-view camera switch as they could see the *Enterprise’s* bridge. Kyle was waving as the shuttle sped away, watching it shrink in the distance.

“You better hit the LR (Life Raft) beacon,” said Tyrone. “It’s going to take the *Obama* a few months to reach us.” The Captain didn’t want to tell him the bad news as she peered forward with a blank stare.

“What’s in the bag?” she asked. Tyrone reached down, and then placed the bag in his lap. He then pulled out a very old bottle of Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey.

“You risked your life for that?”

“And these,” he said pulling out two of five classic books. “These are priceless when it comes to passing time.”

“Who are the authors?”

“You mean author...Michael K. Jones.”

“Wasn’t he a sci-fi writer in the early twenty-first century?”

“Yeah...he sucked, but I like him.”

“Speaking of centuries...look at the chronometer.”

“Is that correct?” asked Tyrone.

“We’ve been asleep for two-hundred years.”

“There’s no *Obama*?”

“No,” Sharon said solemnly. “This may be our coffin in six months.” Tyrone quickly opened the bottle and took a big gulp. He then passed it to Sharon.

“That’s why the PG’s were dead,” said Tyrone. “They needed to be recharged...and how did the *Com* awaken from its nap if the batteries were drained?”

“I don’t know,” said Sharon.

“The author of these books always said, ‘*Everything happens for a reason.*’”

“That reason is...we’re going to die in space,” stated Sharon.

“Let’s stop talking and conserve air.” The *Enterprise* then exploded in the distance as the monitor lit up in a yellow and white flash. “I think they’re the lucky ones,” said Tyrone hugging his bag.

Chapter 6

The Beginning

Darell sharply looked up in fear between the corn stalks, dropping his apple as a bright sparkle of flashing lights passed over him high in the angled distant sky. He quickly ran as his dog Teddy, a full grown Poodle, playfully followed with his wet tongue happily dangling. His long curly black hair seemed to curl in the opposite direction of the wind as he quickly ran behind Darell, not realizing what was going on above him.

“Hurry Teddy!” he yelled running quickly toward the door steps of his house. The flashes invaded the same sky he loved to gaze into every night just before going to bed. He had never seen a meteor this close, but only read about them in science class. Teddy beat him to the front door as it opened automatically. Darell ran in behind him and then into his room, staring out his window as the meteor seemed to float motionlessly in the

night sky. He was scared and believed five years old was the last year he was going to be alive. Then the thought of not having his birthday party next week really made him upset. “Dad!” he yelled from his bed toward the room door. “Look outside!” He then realized his father was at work.

“What’s wrong Darell?” asked his mother as she entered his room noticing the flashes.

“Look!” She glanced out the window while walking toward him, and then gave him a hug. Roderick, his fifteen year old brother, walked past his room door and snickered.

“It’s just the Hale-Bopp Comet,” she said softly to comfort him. “Captain Aggen wanted to get close enough so our science teams, including your father, could get a good look...to study it.”

“It’s a little too close,” he said holding his mother tight, not taking his eyes off the comet as it slowly passed by the dim solar lights that simulated sun light on the Agri-Farm.

Darell’s parents, Alixander and Danae Johnson were scientist aboard the spaceship *Excursion*. Alixander worked on the bridge as the ships science officer, and Danae who was a bio-tech horticultural engineer, was in charge of ensuring the crops remained healthy in *Section Three* of the

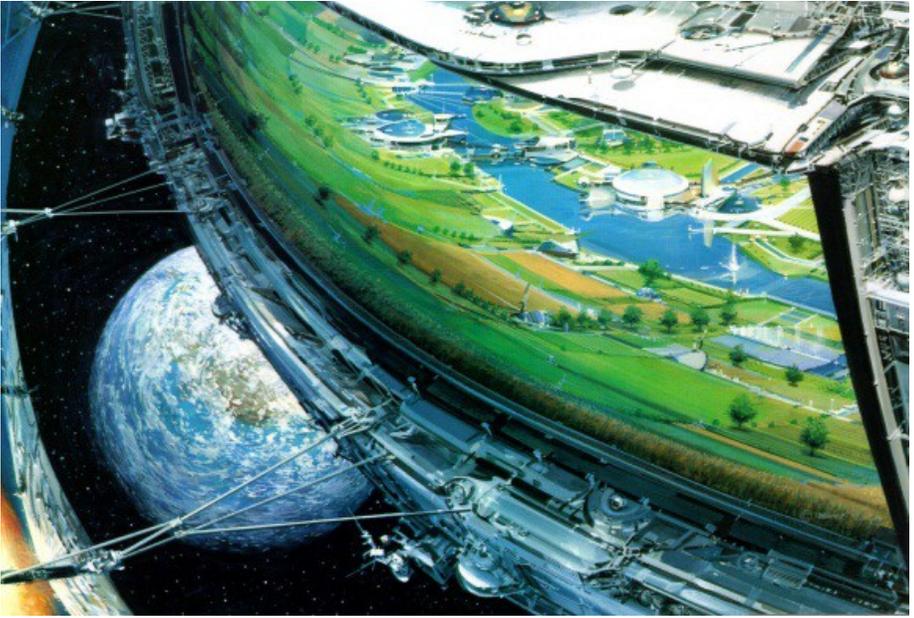
Agri-Farm. They were honored to be chosen on the mission that was going to take about 17 years of their life to complete. They both were young, in their early twenties during the start of the voyage, and Alixander advanced rapidly in rank as the years passed.

The *Excursion* was the most advanced ship of its time. It was designed as a self-sustaining biospheric eco test ship built to slowly travel to Uranus in sixteen years and then return to Earth in five months.



There were three environmental controlled rotating gravity induced sections. The middle main civilian section (Number Two) was like a small country town. It had trees, lakes, and housing including schools for all the children. It had everything that resembled Earth including an underground subway system. It allowed the crew and its families to live almost normal lives. The smallest rotating section (Number One) was located at the forward part of the ship. It was occupied with the bridge, military living quarters, and warehouses for food supplies and spare parts.

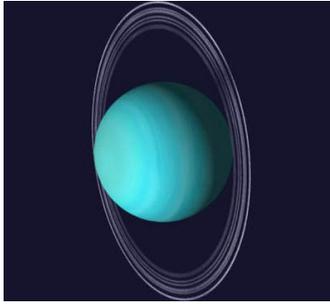
Section Three (The Agri-Farm) in the rear grew a multitude of crops that had a few strategically placed houses only for the farmers, horticultural scientist, and their families.



The *Excursion* was launched from Earth orbit on August 20, 2318, the same date Voyager 2 was launched in 1977. It was an experimental prototype to begin man's first steps to reaching planets outside of the solar system. If successful, a one-way planned flight was scheduled to the Earth like planet of Kepler, which was 600 light years away. It was determined by earlier launched probes that the planet was habitable and may have intelligent life on it. The *Extrusion* was slowly being built to make that journey ten years after the *Excursion* returned.

The ships could hold close to 3000 plus occupants, and at the time of the *Excursion's* bon voyage, the ship's compliment was 1523 people including 200 highly trained military personnel to maintain its extremely technical functions.

The ships ion propulsion engines were powered at one quarter speed only to test the crew as they handled the long 93 million mile journey to Uranus. At full power, using its one-time use *Fusion* engines, it would take less than five months to return back to Earth.



Chapter 7

Last Day of School

The *Excursion* was in deep space as it seemed to never pass the blue, brightly lit ring planet of Uranus.

The civilian habitat in *Section Two* had numerous apartments on each side that had a park with a river flowing between them. Single family homes were further down the river for senior officers and political leaders including City Hall that the governor's office was in. On the opposite side of the rotating section was a school district for children of all ages which included one elementary, a junior high, and high school.

A entertainment pavilion was built two years after their launch thanks to Governor Dat Peterson. It was located at the end of the river that

flowed into a man-made beach the younger kids loved.

Section One was occupied by Captain George Aggen's main bridge which included food and water storage warehouses, maintenance support buildings, and a jail that could hold over a hundred inmates. The other half of the rotating section which was completely enclosed, was used for research and development including a multi-functional manufacturing factory. It also maintained a fully equipped hospital for overnight patients who required invasive surgeries for life threatening illnesses. It was the part of the ship that kept the *Excursion* alive. The factory would process captured meteors and extract, through a lengthy process, oxygen and life sustaining water. It also melted down some of the meteor ore to manufacture spare parts for the civilian section as well as for the ships maintenance repair shops.

The only high school in *Section Two* was Jamal S. William High which was named after the first Captain of the *Excursion* who died two years ago of a stroke caused by low gravity. It was originally named after the ship, and the governor's staff decided in a ship-wide election for the school to be renamed in his honor.

It was the last day of school as Roderick, 15 years old, walked toward the front of the building with his *Auditory-Skull-Amplifier* music enhancer at full volume. He felt he was going to be in charge of the entire school next year because the tenth grade seniors were leaving for OTC (On-the-job-College) which was mandatory to learn a skill that would benefit in the operation of the ship. He had plans on torturing the ninth graders just the way he was.

He walked down the hallway as his music blasted, not hearing the sound of any students walking quickly to reach their first period classes.

“It ain’t like that, because it isn’t crack...and the woman is whack...” Roderick sang loudly as some students stared at him weirdly. At the end of the hall, he saw the red light flash twice, and knew what was about to happen. Suddenly his ASA (Auditory-Skull-Amplifier) that everybody had since birth except the Captain, shut off abruptly. Each student was implanted with a modified amplifier behind their right ear that allowed them to hear course curriculums in their minds just like thoughts. Every morning, the main office ceased all communication devices in the

school except for the morning announcements from the principal. Roderick Anthony was gifted in electronics and constructed a removable jumper-wired chip that bypassed the shutdown process.

He entered his home room class, and it was so quiet, a fart could be heard in the next classroom. The computer generated teacher flashed on the monitor as Roderick sat next to his girlfriend Darlene. She passed him a note as the amplifiers kicked on. "It's going down after school," said Darlene.

"I'm *in* this year," said Roderick opening the note. It was a new route Darlene hacked from the military's mainframe computer. "I have the badge."

"Good...I think we're going to win the pot." Suddenly the teenagers heard two beeps in their head.

"*Quiet...Darlene Matheson and Roderick A. Johnson,*" said the teacher as they both looked up at the monitor.

Mostly all the students had Roderick's electronic bypass chip installed. They could hear the teacher and program the amplifier to listen to whatever they wanted to hear. Darlene's brother was sitting at the back of the classroom, shaking

his leg to the beat of music he was listening to. He was violating the number one rule before getting the chip. Darlene balled up a piece of paper and threw it at him. “What?” he shouted looking at her.

“Darlene...talk to your twin brother,” demanded Roderick. “He’s going to get busted and ruin it for all of us.”

“I will.”

Chapter 8

The Contest

The end of the day had finally arrived as the Captain congratulated the seniors and offered them to join the military side of the ship. The school emptied quickly, and five teams of two each met at Midway Park twenty minutes later. The contest referee was Tom Carter. He was last year's winner who was a tenth grade senior being assigned to IPL (Ion Propulsion Labs).

“Okay gentlemen...you know the rules, no CPA's (Communicator Guidance Apps), and I need one more payment.” Darlene handed him her ID card. Tom placed the card over his communicator, and then punched in fifty credits. “You have to get to the farthest point on the ship and make it back here within one hour. Make sure your ear-cameras are on record or your credits are forfeited.” All the teams seemed anxious to go while checking their equipment. “Synchronize your timers...*now*,” shouted Tom. Each team had pressed the timers on their belt-mounted communicators that counted down from one hour. “Good luck and remember to stay safe.”

The teams then scattered as Roderick and Darlene headed for the main transport that would return them home. They got on and sat next to each other as Roderick looked down at the map.

“Darlene...we have to get to the utility complex behind City Hall. My Dad’s badge has access to almost every maintenance entry hatch below the city.”

“I hope you’re right or this is going to be a short trip.”

“He’s off today and won’t notice its missing.”

The magna-lift train stopped at the government buildings platform and they got off noticing the ceiling cameras were tracking them.

“Hey...the military’s got an eye on us,” Darlene said looking up. “They know the contest is today.”

“We’ll be under the city...away from the cameras.” The two of them then ran into a narrow alley behind city hall, and Roderick followed the plans that lead to the ground hatch. He pulled out his dad’s badge and placed it on the indented hatch access reader. A green light illuminated next to the hatch and then it opened. Darlene looked down the hole that was completely dark. She was scared and Roderick knew why. “Are you coming or not?” asked Roderick stepping down the inside ladder.

“I can’t...it’s too dark,” she said recalling when she was four years old, a scary two day blackout that occurred near Mars.

“If you’re not going...then lead the military police away from this area.”

“They know you opened that hatch,” said Darlene

“Take this badge and open two more,” said Roderick who was half way down. “That’ll throw them off.”

“Good luck Sweetie.” Darlene took the badge and ran out of the alley. Roderick turned on his ASA (Auditory-Skull-Amplifier) music as his ear-mounted camera light illuminated the area in front of him. He then ran for about a hundred yards and realized he was in a sewer line.

This map doesn't say anything about a piss line. He thought suddenly stepping in something soft and warm. “I hope that was sludgy oil and not...,” he whispered. He slowly looked down at his ten year old sneakers and almost cried. His white self-cleaning sneakers were fluorescent blue. He stepped in slimy chemically processed human waste that had no smell, only mixed with urine that flowed to the processing section of the ship. For a second, he almost decided to change his plans and follow the sewer to the other side of the

ship. He then realized he may be swept away by a fast moving blue river and never be heard from again. He reached his exit, and then climbed up a maintenance ladder to the air vents that flowed under the military buildings, one section from the government buildings. *Once I get past the connector rings, I'll float through the no-grav Jefferson tube that'll make me this year's winner.* He thought crawling slowly through a long maze of air vents that interconnected with more than one building. *I'll think of President Jefferson every time I'm in a dark tunnel...like he did when raping his slaves.*

Chapter 9

The Meeting

As Roderick past numerous rooms while crawling in the floor level, wall air-vents, he stopped when he heard a familiar voice. It was Governor Peterson, and he was being pushed into a room by two soldiers. Roderick pulled his ear camera off and aimed it upward through the air vent. "I am not going to allow Captain Aggen to deviate from our course." He was then punched in the stomach.

"The Captain wants your support in order to change our direction," said one soldier. "He said...it will benefit us all."

"He doesn't know that," moaned Governor Peterson, who was bent over in pain.

"We need the support of the people, and the Captain is going to make your life miserable if you don't join with him."

"I'm...never agreeing with his plans." The soldier on the right punched the governor in the chest, and he fell to the floor. He was out of breath and then stopped breathing.

"You killed him."

"I didn't hit him that hard."

"The Captain's going to sentence us to death."

"Let's tell him...we left him standing." The two soldiers quickly ran from the room as Roderick

continued filming. The governor was still alive on the floor, facing the air vent with his eyes closed and both hands up to his chest. He began to silently whisper two words over and over before dying. Roderick believed he said, Digoxin Arrhythmia.

It's probably his heart medicine. He thought placing the recorder back on his ear, and quickly returning to the sewer. Ten minutes later he was crawling through the open hatch in the alley. *I have got to get this recording to my dad.* He thought to himself while walking toward the public transport. He called his girlfriend Darlene when he was on the train heading home. "I have a recording of the military beating up the governor."

"What?"

"They kicked his *asteroids* for not joining with the Captain about a course change."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to tell my dad."

"You can't do that," she said worriedly. "He works on the bridge. He's obligated to tell the Captain of the recording."

"I trust my dad."

"Let's get the others together and we'll decide something," she suggested.

"Okay...have them meet me at the library."

“Which one?” asked Darlene.

“There’s only one.”

“The main...or the one in Mrs. Nelly’s English class?”

“The school is closed...so pick door number two,” he said sarcastically.

“What door is number two?”

Roderick hung up without answering her, and arrived at the library ten minutes later. When he walked in, Darlene and four other teenagers in his class were seated at a secluded round table in the back. All the tables and chairs were electromagnetically connected to metal floors, activated only when gravity was interrupted. “I’m going to show you this now, and then to the others when they arrive.” He pulled his communicator from his belt and pressed the start button for the recording. The boy’s mouths fell open when it ended.

“We’re supposed to go around Uranus and head back to Earth,” Darlene said with a smile.

“The Captain wants to make a course correction, but which way?” asked Jerimiah.

“I believe he wants to proceed to Kepler or maybe Epsilon.”

“I thought this ship was only a test?” asked Bobby. “The *Extrusion’s* being built for that trip.”

The rest of the teenagers that entered the contest had arrived including Jeff and his little brother Bryce, the winners of the pot of credits. They had reached the ship's food supply freezers behind the Agri-Farm section, in the back of the ship. He then replayed the recording again.

“We have to stop him,” Roderick said to all of them. “I was born here, but want to walk on Earth...on real grass.” The guys all agreed, and Roderick asked each of them to find out any information about the Captain, and the operation of the ship. “Darlene, I need you to pull up the schematics of the bridge and the military section including the armory.”

“I hope you’re not planning something crazy?”

“It’s so crazy...it might work.”

“I was afraid you’d say that.” All the teenagers including Darlene, left the library and planned on meeting the next day at the *Low Gravity* diner that was next to the movie theater.

The next morning, the Captain made a ship-wide announcement that Governor Peterson had died of natural causes, and a new election was going to be held after his burial in space.

It was around six in the evening as the simulated sun began to set in the fake sky. All the teens met outside of the diner near the back that lingered

with the smell of cooked ground beef. Roderick was the last to arrive as he was singing a song nobody ever heard.

“What kind of music is that?” asked Jerimiah.

“It’s called Rap—sung at the end of the twentieth century.”

“I thought you were gayishly reciting poetry at a fast pace...*homo*,” Ted said insultingly from the back.

“I found out the Captain suffered a head injury as a young lieutenant at Fort Benning,” said Darlene changing the subject. “He may have brain damage.”

“My mom said the governor was still alive when he was taken to the military hospital,” stated Bryce’s younger brother.

“The Captain’s going to put his own man in office, and then make the course correction,” said Roderick looking at everybody.

“Hey Roddy...what if you’re wrong, and the Captain is right in making the course correction?” asked Bobby.

“My dad works on the bridge,” responded Roderick. “I’ll find out *why* the Captain wants to change our direction. Let’s meet here tomorrow... the same time.”

“I’m starving and those burgers smell good,” Darlene said looking at a poster of one with fries.

“You do know its processed vegetables,” said Roderick. “My mom said it’s the leftover parts of plants we don’t eat.”

“I’m eating that toilet fertilized corn husk... hopefully with cheese and a coke.”

“Which is processed from everybody’s piss.”

“I’m not losing my appetite Tony-macaroni,” Darlene said while walking into the diner as he followed. The others all headed for the transport platform.

Chapter 10

The Plan

Roderick was sitting at the kitchen table with his younger brother Darell who was eating processed cereal. Every morning before work, his dad dropped Darell off at the year-long, combined kindergarten and elementary school in the education sector. Alix walked in from the bedroom as Roderick practiced what to ask.

“Dad...when is the ship reversing course back to Earth?”

“I don’t know Son. The Captain has postponed the planned course correction.”

“Why?” asked Darell, not realizing what he said.

“Yeah...why?” asked Roderick smiling at his little brother.

“He’s waiting for a response from Houston Command. There’s some form of interference and we’ve lost contact.”

“Is that the reason you’re going in on your off day?”

“Yes, I’m modifying our encoders to send a stronger signal to Earth.”

“I don’t mean to be nosey, but do you think the Captain is right in postponing the flight plan?”

“We did receive a weak unknown signal near Jupiter, and I believe he wants to head in that direction.”

“Doesn’t he need the governor’s approval?”

“No...only if we were continuing forward past Uranus.” Darell began to giggle. “He’s authorized to make any course corrections if there are dangers to avoid.”

“I hope you can reach Earth today,” said Roderick. “I want to go to the beach.”

“I thought you liked the water park here—it’s just like the beaches on Earth.”

“It’s not the real thing.”

“I’ll let you know if I make contact...then the Captain will make a decision,” said his dad while leaving with Darell.

“Dad’s going past your anus,” said Darell looking back at Roderick and then giggling.

Roderick knew his dad would not find a connecting signal because the Captain wanted to fire up the *Fusion* engines and proceed on to Kepler. He looked down at his communicator and contacted Darlene while walking into the bathroom.

“Darlene...we are running out of time,” Roderick said urgently. “Has your mom left for work?”

“No.”

“Get her badge and act like she lost it. We have thirty-minutes before it is deactivated.”

“Then what?”

“Meet me at the *Section One* employee transport. We have to get the recording to the intercommunications studio and somehow broadcast it.”

“What if I can’t get her badge?”

“I’m sending a copy of the recording to all the guys. Tell them to send it to their parents.”

“I like that plan better,” said Darlene.

“I believe the Captain is going to take full control of the ship.”

“Can he do that?”

“I don’t think so, because he needed the governor.” Suddenly they felt the whole ship begin to tremble for thirty seconds.

“What was that?” asked Darlene.

“He’s testing part of the *Fusion* engines.”

“Send me the recording,” said Darlene. At that very moment Roderick heard the military police break open Darlene’s front door. “Tony...the others!” she shouted. Roderick heard a commotion as Darlene’s mother screamed in anger, in the background.

Roderick began to send the recording to everybody he knew even his dad. The garage-like main entrance to the Agri-Farm opened, and three soldiers quickly drove toward his house. He was unaware they were on their way to arrest him, and just as he was about to send the recording to his mom, who was in the fields, the soldiers burst open his front door.

Chapter 11

Jail Time

Roderick was escorted by a soldier in *Section One* before being thrown into a fully occupied pre-jail holding cell.

“The ASA implant in your head was monitored and the Captain is displeased,” said the guard. “He’s putting a stop that high school game.”

“What game?” asked Roderick.

“Keep playing stupid...and enjoy your new home.” Roderick was then pushed into a windowless room.

“Hey Tony,” shouted Jerimiah sitting on the floor in the far corner. Darlene helped him off the floor and gave him a kiss.

“You didn’t kiss me when I was pushed in here,” said Bryce.

“I’m not your sister,” replied Darlene. Jerimiah laughed.

“None of your recordings were transmitted,” said Darlene.

“We are all going to die on this tin-can,” said Bobby. “Captain Ahab is a crazy dictator who thinks this ship is his country.”

“I’m not giving up yet and watch what you say,” Roderick said while pointing to the ASA implant behind his right ear. The room then became silent,

and Jerimiah began singing a Christmas song. The others joined in, each loudly singing a different song, knowing they were being monitored.

Two hours later, all the teenagers were released to their parents after they were verbally video scolded by the Captain from the bridge. He said that the contest they conducted was unsafe and a lawful violation, punishable with a mandatory two month jail sentence.

Roderick's dad was the last to arrive. He was standing at the processing desk as Roderick was escorted by a soldier. "Don't say a word until we get home."

"Dad."

"Quiet...that contest is dangerous and foolish." The two of them then exited the building and Roderick was upset, following his dad two paces behind. They got on the transport train, and he sat quietly next to his dad. Alix then reached into his pocket and secretly showed Roderick his recording. He smiled and knew his dad watched the murder of Governor Peterson. "The Captain is concerned about all of the boys and means well. The first officer is a friend of mine and he'll know what to do...especially about this school ritual."

"We were just bored," Roderick said going along with the conversation.

“You’re grounded for a week.” His dad then pulled out a piece of paper and pen. He wrote that the Captain cannot fire up the *Fusion* engines until another governor is elected, and the start-up code is transferred. “Always remember, you must plan to succeed in life...not just do.”

“I understand,” Roderick said giving him a thumb’s up. They reached the house at the Agri-Farm, and Alix after showing the video to his wife, wrote his plans. He explained to her that the Captain wanted to continue forward and not return to Earth.

“Honey, when are the elections?”

“In three days,” she said knowing he knew.

“I heard the governor’s wife is campaigning against Second Lieutenant John Stanford. I’m voting for the lieutenant,” he said nodding his head left to right. He then added the recording to his wife’s communicator, and then downloaded it back into Roderick’s. He then held up a note he wrote, *Give it to your friends, and have them make copies to give to other friends.*

“I’m going to bed,” said Roderick while walking to his room. “Prison life is hell on a body.” He then opened his mirrored dresser drawer, and pulled out a year old magnetic picture of Darlene. He then connected a fully charged battery with

wires to the magnet, and then pulled his right ear forward. He placed the magnet over his metallic auditory implant to mask his position. He then ran out the front door to catch a transport to his friend's favorite hang-out which was the diner.

An hour later, all his friends had the recording and relayed it to everybody they knew. This went on for hours, reaching enough people who started asking questions.

Two days later an announcement was broadcast all over the ship that the recording was a hoax. It showed the governor falling, and then after more video was added, had him getting up and laughing with an embarrassing look on his face.

A week had passed after the space burial of Governor Dat Peterson. Captain Aggen announced on the ship-wide intercom that all non-vital personnel not involved in ship operations had the next day off to vote. Most people seemed to like having the day off, not knowing the election would be rigged for the Captain's Lieutenant Stanford to win.

Roderick was worried about the election and knew he had to do something. He watched the video of the murder, and knew people believed it was a hoax. He stared into the screen and watched the last words the governor tried to speak. *Is it Divine Monastery?* He asked himself continuously rewinding and reading the governor's silent lips, over and over. He sat at his room desk and accessed the ship's on-board library. He typed in the search block, Governor Dat Peterson. All his information was displayed including his acceptance speech just before the *Excursion* was launched. Roderick was still clueless. He decided to ask his dad if he believed the election would be rigged. He walked into his dad's office and activated a special hand-held electro-magnetic amplifier he constructed. "You can talk freely Dad." Alix put his pen down and turned to Roderick.

"What's up?"

"Do you think the Captain can rig the election?"

"I don't think so. This ship was designed to prevent those things from happening."

“Can you find out?”

“I showed the first officer the recording and he is handling everything. He assured me that the ship will be returning to Earth after a new governor is appointed.”

“Tell me you believe him?”

“I do.”

“And did you contact Earth?”

“No I didn’t.” Roderick started walking away and then stopped. “Is it true...once the *Fusion* engines are at full speed they cannot be turned off until the ship reaches its destination?”

“That’s true, Son.”

“I got a bad feeling the Captain has already made up his mind.”

Chapter 12

Redirection

The evening of the election had arrived as the counted votes were displayed on every monitor on the ship. Shirley Peterson was in the lead because the majority of personnel were civilians. It was predicted she would win, and the Captain had called for her to visit his office on the bridge. She was in there for an hour and later, abruptly left for City Hall.

Later that night she had won the election and was sworn in. Her name was then added into the ships main computer that validated the votes to release secret codes to authorize a variety of functions including the starting of the *Fusion* engines.

Roderick took his dad's access badge that night, and rode the transport to City Hall. It was his only chance to make sure she saw the last minutes of her husband's life. He went down the same narrow alley behind City Hall, and accessed a locked door. He then ran up a fire escape stairwell that lead to the governor's office, and opened the hallway door. It was full of people celebrating the governor's victory. Roderick ran up to the crowd

and forced his way to Governor Shirley Peterson's office doorway.

"Ma'am!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. The crowd became silent. "This video shows the death of your husband."

"I heard it was a hoax...I saw the real broadcast video of him falling."

"This is the real video." She stood at her desk and then ordered the office cleared out except for Roderick. She watched the recording, and then stared in the distance with a weird look on her face, knowing what her husband was saying.

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention," she said a little worried. "Is this the only copy?"

"Yes."

"We have to make more...has anybody else seen this?"

"No," he lied.

"I am going to make sure the Captain see's this."

"Why...he's the one that killed your husband."

“I love him, and he would’ve never ordered his men to beat up the governor. They acted on their own.”

“Oh...no,” Roderick said disappointingly. He ran out of the office, and then out the building, upset knowing the Captain had won. In his mind and soul, he gave up on his chances of the ship returning to Earth.

He returned to the Agri-Farm house, and his dad was waiting on the front step with his magnetic auditory implant interrupter. “Son, I received a call from the bridge that you were at City Hall.”

“I went to warn her about the Captain.”

“I told you the first officer was handling everything.”

“The Captain’s been *handling* the governor’s wife. She’s going to give him the start-up code.”

“The Captain hasn’t mentioned anything about proceeding on.” At that very moment the forward thrusters kicked on, and the ship began to turn around. “See...we’re heading home, back to Earth.” Roderick smiled as the planet of Uranus was on the other side of the Agri-Farm windows.

The secondary ion engines kicked on, and the ship could be felt accelerating. “Tomorrow, I’ll get more information from the bridge on our trip back.”

“I can’t wait to see the Earth,” Roderick said with a smile.

Chapter 13

Jupiter

They both entered the house with the magnetic interrupter still on as his mom was preparing dinner. “I can’t wait to see the Moon?” said Alix. “Honey, the ship is heading back to Earth.”

“I felt the thrusters,” said Danae as Roderick grabbed plates and forks from the cabinet.

“Mom,” blurted Roderick to get her attention. “I found out the Captain is doing the governor”

“I didn’t know the Captain was gay?”

“I’m talking about Mrs. Peterson.”

“She’s a nice lady...she would never cheat on her husband.”

“That old *bag* took my recording, and said she was giving it to the Captain. She said they were getting married.”

“I heard rumors about that a month ago,” said Alix. “But...I didn’t believe them because the Captain hated all red-heads.” Roderick then realized he only dated the governor’s wife to fulfill his ultimate plan, to get the start code.

“Dad, this ship is not going back to Earth. You did say there was a signal coming from Jupiter?”

“Yes.”

“The Captain is checking it out, maybe to find out information as to why we can’t contact Earth.”

“You’re only speculating Son. I’ll know something definitive tomorrow morning, and in the meantime...only think positive. We are going home.” He deactivated the magnetic interrupter and sat down to eat supper. “I’m starving Honey and it smells good.”

“It’s a vegetable-based meatloaf made with synthetic onions processed from the husk and stalks of corn.”

“Let me guess...we’re having corn bread?” asked Roderick.

“Close...corn-flour biscuits made with soy-milk.”

“They’re my favorite,” said Darell sitting with his chin on the edge of the kitchen table.

“Honey, he hasn’t had any real biscuits made from real flour.”

“And he never will,” blurted Roderick sitting down hard in his chair. Alix gave him a mean glance, and then turned to Darell.

“Son, you can have an extra biscuit tonight.” Darell smiled as his mom placed the steaming tomato sauce covered fake meatloaf on the table.

They all finished dinner and Roderick went straight to his room. He had given up completely and convinced himself that he was going to die on the ship including his future grandkids.

Roderick awakened early with his mom as the assigned farming crews were already in the fields, harvesting potatoes and carrots on the dark side of the Agri-Farm. He greeted her in the kitchen as she was sipping a hot tea. “I sure do miss coffee,” she said as Roderick opened the refrigerator.

“I don’t even know what it smells like,” he said pulling out a pitcher of soy milk.

“When we get back to Earth you’re going to experience a whole lot of good things.”

“We’re not going back to Earth. The Captain is investigating a signal near Jupiter, and then we’re heading into deep space.”

“If so...he can’t fire up those *Fusion* engines unless the governor inputs her start-up code.”

“She’s going to give it to him.”

“I don’t believe he would take us into deep space unless there was a good reason.”

“There is...he’s crazy,” blurted Roderick. Danae left the kitchen a little skeptical, but decided to call Alix at lunch time. Roderick returned to his room with a glass of soy milk and a corn cookie.

Later that day on the bridge, the Captain ordered a long range scan toward Jupiter, toward the unknown signal. Alix had the computers analyze the signal, and when he hit the download switch, he became excited. The computer had determined the signal was being transmitted in an ancient binary code, sending data on a Iridium L1 frequency that hasn’t been used for over three-hundred years.

“Sir, that signal’s coming from the Galileo spacecraft...that was unofficially crashed into Jupiter in 2010.”

“What’s a Galileo spacecraft?”

“It was used to study the atmosphere of Jupiter, and according to the computer’s classified files, the probe had stopped dead in the middle of space, caused by a dark matter gravity well. It was quarantined when a retrieval ship and her crew were lost.”

“We’re changing our course,” shouted Captain Aggen. “Reverse...”

“Sir,” interrupted Alix. “According to the sensors...the probe is not in the quarantine zone. It is drifting toward the asteroid belt.” Alix also noticed a spike in gamma emissions, but kept it to himself.

“We can resupply the iron bays,” said the Captain. “Increase speed to intercept the probe... then we’re mining asteroids.”

“Yes Sir,” shouted his second in command. The ship then lunged forward slightly as its speed increased. “Number-One...take over the bridge. I’m going to do some homework on this *Galileo* spacecraft in my office.”

“Yes Sir.”

The Captain left the bridge, and Alix knew he was going to turn the ship around. *Roderick was right. He isn't planning on returning to Earth.* He thought watching his sensors blink. *It's going to take us a month to reach Jupiter...that'll be more than enough time to hopefully contact Earth.*

Chapter 14

Galileo

One day away from the originating signal, the *Excursion* used its long range imager and spotted

an unknown ship as it slowed its speed. *Captain please report to the bridge.* Announced the ship-wide intercom that was only used in an emergency. The Captain was having dinner at the governor's house when he was interrupted. He later wished he had a auditory amplifier when he reached the bridge, upset for being paged all across the ship.

Alix then zoomed in on the Galileo which was attached to the hull of an old retrieval shuttle. "Is that a...?" asked the Captain not wanting to guess.

"It's an old shuttle from a CTT (Class-Two Titan) ship," explain Alix. "With two life signs on board."

"Are they human?"

"Yes Sir."

"Then let's pick them up."

"Sir, I recommend quarantine," suggested his first officer.

"I agree," said the Captain pausing in thought. "If they're human then the first logical explanation is...they're from that ship's overly sick time period."

Alix then thought of Einstein's time-dilation theory; that traveling faster than the speed light would result in time speeding up. *They could've entered a black-hole caused by the dark matter.* He thought.

A day later, the Titan shuttle was picked up by one of the *Excursion's* asteroid mining ships. It had four large grappling arms for grabbing and maneuvering large asteroid boulders into its holding bay. It was the size of an eighteen wheel truck container that only stored specific asteroids for abstracting water and air. Three others, mined needed minerals for everything else that required to be melted down and molded.

The Titan shuttle was placed in a no gravity bay and secured as Sharon and Tyrone were met by two medical teams fully dressed in germ-radioactive-free bio-suits. Tyrone exited the entry hatch first, helped by a medical assist with an air-powered thruster pack. "Sir, stay calm," said the assistant. "We are here to help you."

"I'm just glad you're human," said Tyrone. He was then escorted to a open round ceiling hatch

tunnel, that had ladder handles. Sharon was then helped by a female assistant as the hatch of the shuttle was closed and sealed with a foam resin that hardened on contact.

The Galileo spacecraft was removed by a mechanical engineering team, and then the CTT Shuttle was set adrift near Jupiter's farthest moon, Ganymede.

A day later, the *Excursion* reached the edge of the Van Allen belt, and began extracting small asteroids that were full of needed minerals.

Alix carefully examined the Galileo spacecraft, and after its memory was downloaded into the ship's computer, he removed its amplifying transmitter to hopefully relay a signal through the *Excursion's* long range sensors. He was then going to use Mars's weather satellite to reach Earth via Houston Command.

Before Alix's shift ended after hiding the transmitter, he visited the castaways who were still in quarantine. He entered a conjoining room and pressed the speaker button, glancing at Sharon on the other side of a viewing glass.

“Captain Rosen,” he said loudly to get her attention. “I’m Commander Johnson, the ships science officer.” She slowly sat up in her bed.

“Why am I so tired?” she asked groggily.

“You are suffering from gamma-radiation poisoning...and you’re not use to our artificial gravity.”

“You’re not kidding,” she said rubbing her neck. “I feel heavy.” She then looked up at Alix. “I noticed our ships chronometers indicated we were two hundred years into the future...this ship proves that, but how?”

“While you were in sleep stasis, your ship was hit by a unforeseeable gamma-burst caused by a distant star exploding.

“The *Com* did say we had a power loss.”

“That gamma burst while you were in sleep-stasis, glitch locked your computer, and another burst two-hundred years later, rebooted it.”

“We thought it was still 2124, and completed our mission. Then my retrieval team went mad and killed three members of my crew.”

“The shuttle was not reinforced enough to protect them from the gamma radiation.”

“Our sensors weren’t working when they retrieved the Galileo spacecraft.” *Tyrone was right.* She thought.

“What happened to the *Enterprise*?” asked Alix.

“Joe, who piloted the retrieval shuttle, rigged the engines to explode.”

“What is this ship?” asked Sharon. “Or should I ask...why?”

“It is the year 2334, and you are aboard the biospheric test ship, the *Excursion*. It’s a prototype, and one day her sister ship will leave this solar system.” Alix then paused, thinking whether or not to tell them, they might not be returning to Earth. “That area of space the Galileo probe was in...has been in quarantine since your ship was considered lost. There was a dark matter spike that formed and produced a gravitational anomaly.”

“Is that what caused the Galileo to stop dead in space?”

“Yes...and contributed in the illness of your shipmates.”

“I can’t believe we’ve been asleep for two-hundred years.”

“Once you’ve been cleared by our doctors, you’ll meet the Captain.”

“I do have a few questions for him.”

“If you need anything...let your medical assistant know.”

“I want to have access to your historical files and hopefully find out what happened to my family?”

“I will arrange that...after you’re released.”



Chapter 15

No Contact

A week later, after the *Excursion* had given up on finding debris of the *Enterprise*, Alix returned to the bridge as First Officer Donovan was entering a calculated flight path into the navigation computers. The ship had increased its speed, and almost reached Saturn when Alix walked up to his station and pulled up the new coordinates.

“Sir, why are we *not* returning to Earth?” Alix asked the first officer. “I thought the search for the *Enterprise* wreckage was cancelled?”

“I’ve been ordered by the Captain to enter these coordinates and standby for further instructions.”

“This ship was not built for a one way trip. It’s called the *Excursion* for a reason.”

“You are not to question the Captain’s orders.” Alix then walked to the Captain’s office and waved his hand over the notification bell.

“*Come in,*” said Captain Aggen over a wall speaker. Alix walked in up to his desk and stood at attention.

“Sir, why are we not returning to Earth?”

“I haven’t informed anyone of the current situation except my first officer. Have a seat.” Alix, with a curious look, sat in the chair across from the Captain’s desk. “I know you can’t reach anyone on Earth...and there’s a reason. When we left Mar’s orbit, I received a one-on-one secure message from Houston Command. They informed me that the ozone layer over the North Pole had destabilized again and began receding at an alarming rate. Countries all over the world had to move underground, and those that didn’t, I was told would die three years later from solar radiation. We were ordered not to return because the Earth’s food supply was limited...and it was only a matter of time when all life would cease to exist.”

“How long has it been since you received that message?”

“It was eight years ago. I had hoped a solution was found on Earth that’s why our speed to Uranus was slowed.”

“Before we pass Saturn...can I try to contact Houston Command one more time? I know the

recent gamma burst is interfering with our instruments.”

“You have one day...then I’m informing the entire ship as to why we can’t return.”

“Yes Sir.” Alix left his office and then stopped. *The Captain’s lying.* He thought realizing why he needed the governor’s command code to initiate the *Fusion* engines. What he didn’t understand was why he was humping the governor’s wife. *She’s a red-head not to mention, old with the skin of an extinct rhino.* He thought, knowing time was his enemy as he walked quickly to retrieve the Galileo transmitter.

He worked all through the night rigging the transmitter to interface with the ships long-range communication emitters that were interlocked with his console on the bridge. He then sent a team of spacewalking mechanics to install microwave conductors to the ships elongated antennas located at the back of the ship. It would produce a stronger frequency pulse that was linked to the inception dishes that pointed toward Earth. It took the mechanics four and a half hours

to complete the modifications. In that time period, Alix made his own modifications on the bridge.

It was five in the morning, Earth time when he initiated the first transmissions to Houston Command. There was nothing, not even a beep. He held his ear-piece closer to his ear and then re-transmitted the same signal over and over. There was a brief point in his efforts that he considered the Captain to be right. He looked up at the ceiling clocks and knew he had about three hours before the Captain made his ship-wide announcement.

That same night, Roderick viewed the recording over and over, trying to read the lips of Governor Peterson before he died. “Dorithy Appleton,” he whispered mimicking the movements of the governor’s lips. *I wonder if her name is the command code to stop the Fusion engines?* Roderick then wondered if the governor was also having an affair, calling out his mistress’s name before dying. He signed onto his room computer,

and requested any information about Governor Peterson and his wife. He read that before he was governor, he lived in a small town in Narvon Pennsylvania that grew and harvested apples. The governor hated apples because that's all he ate growing up. *I hate them too.* Thought Roderick as he continued his research. There were numerous pictures of the home Governor Peterson grew up in including some dating as far back as 2012. Roderick noticed the governor, when he was a boy, had a swing attached between two trees in the back yard. *That looks like fun.* In a later picture, he then noticed the same trees had a hammock attached them with the governor posing in a cap and gown. He was celebrating his college graduation at a home cookout. There are no women in none of these pictures. *He probably was a closet homo, that's why his wife was screwing the Captain.* He thought, then he began reminiscing about the video again. "Dabner Adleson," he said to himself. *I better check the names of all of his staff members.* He thought mainly the men. He then, for about an hour,

screened all the governor's campaigns he held on Earth. His staff had no names that came close to Dorothy or Dabner. "I give up Governor Peterson," he whispered toward the monitor. "We are going to planet Kepler...at least my grandkids, seven generations from now."

Chapter 16

Proof

Eight o'clock had arrived and the Captain, from his office, initiated the ship-wide *Attention Please* intercom. "Two days ago, we rescued two crew men from a CTT (Class Two Titan) shuttle belonging to the first interplanetary transport, *The Enterprise*. This ship was lost two-hundred years ago, and the crew survived frozen in sleep stasis. They are the last people alive from Earth. I

received a communication eight years ago from Houston Command instructing me to not return and continue to the planet Kepler, which is 600 light years away. The Earth has lost its ozone completely and no life can exist on its surface. All I ask of you...is to continue the good work you are all doing, and we will survive including our children and their children. When the *Fusion* engines come online...it will give us a little jolt, but then it will be smooth sailing from then on. I've asked all maintenance personnel to prepare for initial start-up tomorrow at 0700 hours. May God guide us securely on our long journey?"

"I'm outta-here," whisper Alix, giving up on contacting Houston Command. He left the bridge and decided to check on Tyrone before going back to the Agri-Farm. He reached quarantine and Tyrone was doing pushups as his monitor blasted historical music from the 1990's. "Mr. Jenkins," Alix shouted over the room intercom. Tyrone turned down the noise and waved. "My son loves the music from that time period."

"It was called Rap."

“I understand you want to be a farmer?”

“I need some space. I was in that shuttle for five months, not to mention the *Enterprise* before that.”

“I assure you...the civilian section has plenty of room. It also has a lake with fish.”

“I was shocked at the size of this ship when you pulled up next to us. Hey, when can I see Sharon?”

“You have one more night and then you’ll be released. Right now...she’s undergoing test to determine the health of the baby.”

“What baby?”

“Yours.”

“I’m going to be a dad...how?”

“If you don’t know the answer to that question, then you’re not the father.”

“I meant how long has she been pregnant? She doesn’t have a big stomach.”

“Gestation in no gravity has affected the baby’s growth. She’s four months pregnant.” Tyrone paused in thought and then became excited.

“I can’t wait to get him back to Earth. We’re going to live in South Carolina and...”

“I’m sorry Mr. Jenkins,” Alix interrupted. “We *are* not going back to Earth.”

“Why?”

“According to the Captain, it was destroyed by the loss of its ozone.”

“Has he shown you proof?”

“No.”

“Then he better find some.”

“I believe him because all communications from Earth have ceased.”

“If the Earth’s ozone is gone then its magnetic shield along with solar radiation would disrupt communications. And don’t you have a base on the Moon?”

“Our first moon base was abandoned when solar radiation caused all the personnel to develop a rare brain cancer that later resulted in a painful death.” Alix paused in thought thinking about the first faked moon landings, and then what Commander Jenkins had said. He thought that if the Moon was between the sun and the earth, it

would act as a filter blocking the sun and restoring some communications. “Mr. Jenkins I have an idea and will keep you posted.” Alix quickly left quarantine, and returned to the bridge, to his work station. He then entered into the *Logistical-Fact-Finding* computer that indicated the next solar eclipse on Earth was predicted to happen in thirty four years. He knew that most of the planets were in alignment, and hoped the moon was too. The screen indicated a partial lunar eclipse had past two weeks ago. The computer calculated his inputs to the precise location for a signal to bounce off the earth, then to the moon, and then back to the earth increasing the transmission in the same stream. Without authorization, he imputed the coordinates to focus the ships antennas to send a connecting frequency pulse when the Moon was in position. He hoped to pick up any delayed messages to the *Excursion*, or communicate with Houston Command directly.

Now I have to delay the Fusion startup. He thought. *If this doesn't work I'm going to live in*

the brig for a long time. “With a strong right arm and hairy palm,” he whispered with a smile.

Chapter 17

The Code

It was five in the morning and Roderick was lying in his bed wide awake. He was awakened to the noise his mother made every morning as she got up to go and test some crops. *Two more hours to*

go. He thought watching his ceiling fan slowly rotate. Alix then knocked on his door. "Son, I need you to watch Darell today. I'm going to work, to check for any transmissions from Earth."

"Okay."

Alix left the farm house, and when he arrived on the bridge. The night crew was preparing the ship to transition to fusion inducted propulsion. It used multiple particle accelerators that collided stable atoms, producing lower quarks of proton energy, and then focused that energy through three multi-faceted nacelles that resembled the geometrical pattern of a honey comb beehive. It was the latest and most efficient design in the nuclear fusion of deuterium atoms that produced hydrogen isotopes (Tritium). The energy produced by the *Excursion's* fusion reactors maintained about a lifetime supply of propulsion that would increase its speed exponentially.

Alix check his monitors and realized the repetitive signal he sent wasn't strong enough to reach Earth. *It's that damn gamma radiation.* He thought while trying to boost the signal. It was

6:28 a.m. when the Captain entered the bridge with Mrs. Peterson. She was needed to enter the code that would initiate the countdown for the *Fusion* engines to engage.

“Number-One...are we ready to commence the count-down?”

“Yes Sir...your code and the governor’s is needed at the engineer’s station.” They both walked over to the computer console and the Captain entered his code first. He stepped back as Mrs. Peterson smiled at him. She then entered her code she received after being sworn in as governor.

“Sir, the countdown has commenced at t-minus thirty minutes.”

“This is an historic day...for all of us,” said Captain Aggen to the entire bridge. “We are tasked with preserving the human race and cannot fail.” He then left for his office as the governor followed. Alix quickly left the bridge to use the restroom.

Ten minutes later, Captain Sharon Rosen and her First Officer Tyrone Jenkins were escorted into the Captain's office that was on the bridge.

“Have a seat,” said the Captain. Tyrone waited for Sharon to sit first. *This office smells like sex.* Sharon thought while looking up at Tyrone. He knew exactly what she was thinking. “As you know...we are not returning to Earth. I have been tasked with keeping this ship operational until I am replaced. I know you have many questions and I can't answer them all.”

“I have one,” Tyrone said abruptly. “Who told you the Earth was dead?”

“I was briefed by Houston Command eight years ago.”

“Can I see the transmissions?” asked Sharon. The Captain typed on his keyboard, and then turned his desk screen toward them. It displayed an encrypted video message from the President, and then the commanding officer of Houston Command.

“This is a command override Apha-12-32. Operation Exodus is in effect...and you are not to

return to Mars orbit or Earth. We are experiencing a global crisis that has stopped all construction of the Extrusion. The Earth's ozone is depleting at an alarming rate. We are making preparations to move underground. It is only the beginning of the end. Food supplies will run out in two, maybe three years."

The transmission faded as Tyrone couldn't believe the satellite images of the visible hole in the atmosphere.

"You are tasked with keeping the human race alive. We are sending you the command codes for the Heliron-Two probe. It will reach Kepler one hundred years before you and transmit its data about surface conditions."

"A hundred years?" shouted Tyrone.

"It will take this ship *six hundred years* to reach Kepler," said the Captain. "That's if the *Excursion* doesn't deviate from its course."

"That wouldn't matter," said Tyrone. "We are grateful you rescued us, and we will do our part."

“I need an officer to oversee our science and development teams?” the Captain asked Sharon. “Do you want the job?”

“I don’t have the time,” she said looking down at her stomach. “We’re having a baby.”

“Congratulations,” said the Captain. “How about you?”

“I want to help on the farms,” said Tyrone.

“I’ll see to it that you two have a place to stay... after you’re married.” Sharon looked at Tyrone and smiled. “By the powers vested in me under Regulation 102, Sub-section 4, you are now married. You may kiss the pregnant bride.” Tyrone leaned over and kissed Sharon. They smiled as the Captain stood up. “We have seventeen minutes till engine start—follow me.” They all left the office to the bridge, and the Captain ordered Alix to escort Sharon and Tyrone off the bridge. When they exited the bridge and turned the corner, Alix abruptly stopped walking.

Chapter 18

Mutiny

“I need your help?” Alix asked urgently. “I need you to relay this ship’s com-signal off of your shuttle that’s adrift, and relay it to Earth. The same gamma radiation that reactivated the *Enterprise* is interfering with my transmissions, not allowing it to reach Earth. I hope you have the authorization power-up code to activate the shuttle’s antenna?”

“I do,” said Sharon.

“This is my last chance to contact Houston Command’s orbiting relay satellite...and hopefully pick up a two-way broadcast, or at least a final transmission. This will justify why we’re never going back.”

“What do you mean...never going back?”

“The *Fusion* engines cannot be stopped when they are at full speed. They run on a dynamic system that involves the manipulation of protons using deuterons, gravity, and magnetism. The field it generates, bombards high concentrations of radioactive protons which produce a form of quark-fusion energy that is inconceivable. And once the reaction is started, the ship must maintain

a straight heading as it reaches speeds we have never experienced.”

“I’m a *monkey*...simplify that for me?” asked Tyrone.

“When the fusion reaction stops, our deuterium chambers become brittle when cooled and cannot be reused. That’s when we float all the way to Kepler.”

“Are you talking about those tanks outside of the ship that are the size of Manhattan Island?” asked Sharon.

“Yes.”

“So you’re saying...once the fuse is lit, you can’t stop this ship to make repairs,” stated Tyrone.

“That is...kind of correct.”

“Can the engines be stopped after they’re started?” asked Sharon.

“They can be stopped...only before one hour has passed,” said Alix. “But, I want to be heading toward Earth after the second start-up.”

“I need a long-range frequency transmitter?” said Sharon. Alix guided them to the main

computer processing room. He then remotely accessed his controls to his monitor on the bridge.

“Okay, input your power-up codes, and I’m going to delay the start of the engines...I hope.” Alix returned to his station on the bridge as the Captain sat at his command chair.

“Helm...are the long range C.A. (Collision Avoidance) sensors in the green?”

“Yes Sir.” The Captain watched the countdown clock and then hit the ship-wide intercom.

“This is Captain Aggen...we are five minutes from initiating our *Fusion* engines. Brace yourselves for a little jolt.”

Alix sat at his console and typed quickly on his keyboard, manually closing a heating valve that lowered the temperature on one of the deuterium chambers start-up igniter modules. This caused the countdown to stop as the numbers on the view screen blinked red. The Captain hit a switch on his chair communicator.

“Engine room...what’s the problem?”

“We don’t know exactly, but we think a false command in the computer software may have activated a valve.”

“Let me know how, when, and where that command emanated from.”

“*Yes sir.*” Alix knew he was running out of time as the signal from Captain Rosen’s shuttle indicated it had powered up. He then sent the encoded transmission to the shuttle and hoped it relayed to Earth. A minute later the engine room contacted the Captain. “*Sir, the command came from the bridge’s main computer.*”

“Commander Johnson, find out how that command was sent?”

“Yes Sir,” said Alix as he leaned into his console, and continued to monitor the signal he sent to Earth. The countdown then resumed as the main screen indicated two minutes to starting the *Fusion* engines.

At that same moment, Roderick was eating breakfast when Darell ran past the kitchen table, and then grabbed an apple out of the fruit basket.

“Put that back,” ordered Roderick. “You just ate breakfast.”

“No!” yelled Darell as he ran into his room with his dog Teddy and slammed the door. At that moment Roderick had an epiphany. His mind began racing with thoughts about Darell’s apple, almost scaring him. He ran into his father’s room and grabbed his extra belt communicator. Then he pulled out his recording of the murdered governor, and played it back as he walked into his room. *Thank you little brother.* He thought unscrewing the back cover of his father’s communicator. He hooked two wires to the CPU (Central Processing Unit) circuit and downloaded the frequency that connected to his dad’s *Auditory-Skull-Amplifier*. *This better work?* He thought taking the encoded numbers, and with his desk computer, dialed directly to his dad’s skull amplifier. He knew it was dangerous, reading about how tapping into skull amplifiers caused instant brain damage that

resulted in a total heart failure, but he had to quickly reach his dad with the important information. There was a beep and Roderick then heard his father's connection link up.

"Who's there?" asked Alix. Roderick exhaled in relief knowing he didn't kill him.

"Dad, it's me...listen carefully. The governor on the recording was saying...double apple tree. I just figured it out. It has to be the abort code for the Fusion drive. You have to trust me...his name is Dat Peterson. I read he was born in his back yard near two apple trees. I saw them in old pictures. His name is double apple tree."

Alix without hesitating, with forty seconds till engine start, entered his code to access the start and abort screen. The first officer noticed on his monitor that Alix had entered that screen.

"Why are you in there?" he yelled looking back. Alix quickly typed in the abort code, *Double Apple Tree*, and hit enter. The main computer then announced over the bridge, that the countdown was aborted. He exhaled in relief as everybody on

the bridge turned and looked in his direction, some standing.

“You better have a good explanation,” shouted the Captain as he hit the, *security to the bridge*, alert button.

Chapter 19

Contact

“Sir...I believe we need to confirm that all life on Earth is gone before we leave this solar system. People want to be certain that we shouldn't go back.”

“You have committed a serious crime,” stated First Officer Donovan. “The fusion-igniters cannot be restarted until a two day reset and post-inspection is done.” Two security officers entered the bridge, and the Captain stood to his feet and pointed.

“Arrest Commander Johnson.” At that moment a static voice came across his console. Alix leaned in and cleared up the transmission, then increased the volume.

“Delayed...Trans...From...H-Com...Priority-One.” The message repeated twice and then continued. *“Excursion, abort Operation Exodus.”*

There was a pause. *“Abort code authorization Beta...Twelve...Charlie.”*

“When was that message sent?” urgently asked the Captain. Alix then typed on his keyboard.

“Sir, a year ago...according to the data stream.”

“This is Operations Director Mike Conners. We don’t know what happened Excursion, but two years ago, several dormant volcanoes all over the world exploded simultaneously covering the entire globe with a thin ash cloud. It has acted as a bandage over the deteriorating ozone... somehow restoring it. Many believe it was an act of God. No seismic tremors were reported before the eruptions, and it is still a mystery. Hold your position for further instruction.”

Alix leaned into his monitor and hit three buttons. “This transmission was sent last month.”

“Excursion, this is Houston Command respond. Abort code...Beta-Twelve-Charlie is still in effect.

Retransmit number 4: It’s a little cold over the southern hemisphere, but things are almost back to normal. Seventy-four percent of the ozone has been restored, and you are authorized to return home, effective immediately.”

“Yahoo!” yelled Roderick over Alix’s amplifier.

“Thanks Son,” Alix said while Sharon and Tyrone walked onto the bridge.

“Helm...turn us around,” ordered the Captain. “And schedule the post-inspections.”

“Yes Sir,” said First Officer Donovan. Tyrone then smiled as the ship slowly began to turn.

“Sharon, we are going home,” said Tyrone hugging her shoulder.

“Security, arrest Commander Johnson,” ordered the Captain. “You have three days in the brig to think about your single minded insubordination.”

“*Dad, we’ll visit, and...and don’t drop the soap,*” said Roderick over the amplifier with a giggly that followed.

Three days later when the *Fusion* engines were running at full speed toward Earth, Alix was finally being released from the brig. He signed his release form and was greeted by his wife, Roderick, and Darell who ran to him with open arms. “How does it feel to be a convict?” Danae asked with a smile.

“I didn’t hate it...as much as those two soldiers who killed the governor. They have a five year sentence, and still claim they were only following orders from the Captain.”

“Did they proposition you?” asked Roderick.

“Convicts are not like the prisoners of the past Son...you have *got* to stop reading about that barbaric time period in American history.”

They all began to leave when they noticed Sharon and Tyrone walking into the main door of the military jail. “We just wanted to thank you personally for getting this ship to sail in the right direction,” Sharon said with a smile.

“It wasn’t just me,” said Alix. “It was all of us including Roderick...who figured out the abort code.”

They all walked out of the building, and were greeted by a crowd of students from the high school. They began to cheer and wave, some holding thank-you signs that bounced in the air. Alix was surprised, even noticing in the crowd, a few parents and some of the crew members from the bridge. “Did you do this?” he asked looking at his wife.

“No, it was her,” she said pointing at Darlene, who ran up to Roderick, and gave him a kiss and a hug.

“We are all going home...back to Earth because of you,” said Darlene.

“It was your map that coincidentally put me in the right place...at the right time to record the governor.”

“Or was it God who guided all of us?” she asked.

“I’m starting to believe so,” said Roderick.

The End.



Epilogue

Four months had past, and Sharon had her baby two days before the *Excursion* came into view of Earth's lonely moon. Tyrone knew from the beginning that he was having a son based on his distant Mumbai Indian heritage. Before being internationally banned in the mid twenty-first century, his great-grandfather was one of the last men to be genetically altered to only having male offspring. He produced only X and Y chromosomes in each cell of his body that produced only male embryos after conception.

Roderick constantly stared at the beauty of the Moon's glow from the Agri-Farm's reflective-sun-windows as they got closer to Earth each day. His

brother Darell was afraid to return after hearing that numerous volcanoes had erupted.

One day before reaching Earth, Roderick met Darlene at the water park. They sat next to each other on a towel, on the artificial sanded beach that generated fake waves. “Darlene, in a week... we might be sitting on a real beach.”

“I want to walk in snow,” she said only seeing it on film. “Thank you for getting us back.”

“I believe God got us home,” said Roderick. “Just think...he might have deliberately stopped the Galileo probe in space 300 years ago knowing Tyrone and Sharon would pick it up 100 years later in their shuttle. Then the *Excursion* sets the shuttle adrift at the right point in space, so my dad could relay a signal to Earth...that miraculously healed itself.”

“People still believe it was only a coincidence,” said Darlene.

“I’m not supposed to tell anyone this, but my father said...during the post-inspection, a fusion pressure tube in one of the deuterium containment chambers was cracked. If the engines were

started...the ship would've exploded into a million, bright as the sun, pieces.”

“I believe God is watching over all of us...in the past, present, and future,” said Darlene as she stared toward the splashing chlorinated waves.

“I don't believe anymore—I know,” said Roderick lying on his back with his hands behind his head, glaring up into the fake sunny sky. “I wonder if a person is supposed to die to keep him from accidentally killing another person...maybe a boy, that one day grows up to become President.” He paused in thought. “And later, he prevents another country from going to war that would've resulted in the deaths of thousands of people?”

“Do you remember that old saying,” asked Darlene. “The needs of the many...outweigh the needs of the one.”

“I believe the governor was supposed to die...to save us all,” said Roderick sitting up on his elbows.

“I want an ice cream cone,” said Darlene, thinking about the one she saw during the debarkation films about Earth.

“The diner has ice cream.”

“I want one made from real cow’s milk.”

“I think the cows on Earth are all dead.”

“I’ll milk a goat if I have too.”

“If you do...that goat’s going to smile.”

The End.

And the start of a new beginning!

Short story *Freedom* starts on the next page.

Freedom

by

Michael K. Jones

Freedom

In the early 1980's, society slowly transitioned into the computer age, relinquishing the need of paper to store information. There was a flaw in his creation as a simple internal counter prematurely held the world hostage near the end of the twentieth century. A reset to zero after the year 1999 was determined would crash computers central processing units (CPU) enabling them useless. These same computers controlled many aspects of our lives; electric power plants, pumps that supplied water to our homes, bank processing of numbers used in conjunction with people's money, the list is almost endless. The government scared the public into preparing for the disaster which was called Y2K. Some people panic, fearing the end of the world as we know it, was going to occur at the stroke of midnight. Accept in this story, in a different parallel universe, Y2K never came.

In the early morning hours of January 25, 1995 the country of Norway launched an American

made missile carrying a satellite to study the effects of the Aurora Borealis known as the Northern Lights. Major countries including Russia were notified of the launch. The message never reached proper channels in the Russian military, and a full scale launch of its nuclear arsenal was released. The American President had no other choice but to respond with a full retaliatory strike. The end of the world was decided by a glitch in Russia's linguistic translation computers.

Just as the United States launched its missiles, NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) while monitoring the Russian missiles trajectory, detected a vertically focused heat signature emanating from a location in the Bermuda triangle. It was a beam of white energy and when it reached the upper atmosphere, it encircled the entire world with a blue and red glow. People were frightened as the moon was pulsating red in illumination, as if it was on fire.

The Russian war-heads entering over all major cities in the United States fell harmlessly except one, which killed an evil escaped convict who

caused a deadly hit-and-run accident on the George Washington Bridge in New York. Seven minutes later the U.S. missiles did the same, crashing to the ground all over Russia. Two minutes after that, thousands of white flashing balls of light the size of basketballs, flew into the air from the same area in the Bermuda Triangle. They encircled the entire Earth in a geometrical pattern, and began emanating an EMP (Electro Magnetic Pulse) in waves, temporarily disabling all satellites in orbit and forcing planes to land. An hour later the pulses became one continuous cycle focusing downward to the surface stopping everything that ran on electricity. The world was forced back into the eighteenth century in less than two hours after it was almost destroyed.

The President was given the all clear to leave the fallout shelter deep under the White House. It was completely dark as his Chief of Staff briefed him as to what happened prior to the blackout.

One secret service man who took the point, guided the President, his family, and key members of his cabinet up the dark stairway with a pocket cigarette lighter. “Sir, NORAD indicated the source emanated about fifty miles southwest of the Bermuda islands.”

“What caused the blackout?” asked the President as they continued walking up the endless stairway.

“Several orbs from that same location in the Triangle, took up geometrical positions in a low Earth orbit. We think it’s a high frequency EMP burst that’s constantly bombarding the surface. Nothing electrical is working.”

“When we reach my office,” ordered the President. “I want some form of communication established. Then I’m implementing Executive Order 11490 which includes NASA’s top scientist. I want a solution found quickly.”

“Yes Sir.”

Five years had passed and a solution was never found. The world was working powerless once again, and chaos fell upon cities and small towns.

Food shortages were everywhere because of no transportation and inoperative equipment, mainly refrigerators that preserved perishable foods. Plowing was done by animals once again and only on small fields.

Washington DC was in ruins as the city was abandoned and the government dissolved. The people of America believed the world would have been better off if the bombs had exploded.

The scenario determined by the military after a nuclear war had come true except for no radiation and destruction. Man was predicted to live savagely, killing and raping, acquiring property by force, and even committing cannibalism that resulted from starvation. Darwin's theory had somewhat come true about how only the strong would survive. He didn't predict it with the interference of aliens that eliminated all forms of electricity.

England had maintained order throughout most of the country since it was small, and prior to the incident, not allowed its citizens to acquire guns. The British military had planned and maintained a

multitude of food warehouses. They learned from the famine of World War II that people cannot productively work when hungry. This enabled them to ration, and create a workforce of farmers to feed the public, restarting an old way of life that was before electricity.

The United States government hadn't given up on the country. Their top scientists were ordered to a secret underground base in Utah. They developed a way to block the EMP pulse, and create a new form of electrical transference through a thin metallic crystal the size of human hair.

In 1998 a secret underground base had seventy percent of its electrical power restored, running off special concealed solar-heating-panels that produced electricity from steam. The sun's rays, over the passage of time, heated water to produce steam that generated a turbine. The new form of wiring took a year to manufacture, and was installed throughout key sections of the base, mainly in the production science labs.

The scientist knew the orbs in orbit were supplied powered from the same area in the Bermuda Triangle. What they didn't know was who or what was controlling them.

Pilots Kyle Jameson and Joe Madison were trapped at the base when the EMP first hit. They were to fly the FBI to New York, to contain a mutant form of canines that lived and bred in a sealed section of an old subway line.

Both men were sitting in a temporary well lit cafeteria set up on level five. The main cafeteria on level two was too close to the surface. All electrical equipment on levels one and two didn't work. The science labs located on levels five and six all focused on finding a way to stop the pulse.

"I am tired of eating cold MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat). My butt can't take it anymore," Joe said almost angry.

"Tomorrow night we're having a hot meal," said Kyle. "I heard it's only for one night a week."

"If they let me build a fire...I could probably down this crap."

“Joe, you do know a lot of people are starving in this country?”

“I know...I shouldn't be complaining.”

“I heard a mission is being planned if the special package arrives.”

“Let me guess?” asked Joe. “It's coming in by mule.”

“Horse, I think.”

“That could take months.”

“It's coming in from Salt Lake City.”

“What is it?”

“One of the Russian warheads.”

“We're in Utah, and a nuclear warhead is being muled in from Salt Lake City,” stated Joe. “We are then going to horseback ride it to Florida. Catch a sail boat...and then drop it on whatever is controlling the orbiting orbs.”

“I only know...that the warhead is going to be operational after we rewire it.”

“I bet you the commander has decided to leave this world in a blaze of glory...and take us all with him,” Joe said simulating with his hands an explosion.

“The scientist, know something we don’t.”

“I do know...they don’t speak Russian,” said Joe. “They may blow our butts up anyway.”

“I would ask General Peterson what’s going on, but he’s pretty busy trying to coordinate a plan with the scientist on how to deliver the warhead. He did say it might be aliens that knocked out the missiles.”

“I think it’s the lost city of Atlantis,” said Joe. “Scientist believed an earthquake long ago caused the city to sink away from the coast of Spain.”

“Are you saying the lost city of Atlantis’s primary language is Spanish?” asked Kyle.

“I don’t know...but I do know people have been disappearing off their ships for years in the Bermuda Triangle. They may need people to repopulate. Their energy source which is more powerful than any of ours has made them sterile.”

“If what you say is true...I’ll shave my head,” said Kyle. “And you better brush-up on your Spanish.”

“We’re pilots in a world with no airplanes,” said Joe as they walked toward the briefing room. “And why do they want us and a nurse?”

“I don’t know Joe, but that nurse Sharon is gorgeous.”

“I hope we’re going to repopulate this base starting with her.”

“They would squeeze your nuts in a vise before letting you procreate the old fashion way.”

“I was getting my hopes up and as usual...you crush them.”

“I think we’re going to be given glider lessons,” said Kyle.

“If they can get the lights on...then they can have an operational airplane,” said Joe.

The two men entered the briefing room as Nurse Rosen was sitting on the right side wall across from the meeting table. Two minutes later General Peterson quickly walked in. “Room attention!” shouted his next in command as the room of eleven pilots quickly stood to their feet.

“Have a seat...gentlemen. Today we’re at a turning point in this five year crisis that has

crippled our country. We are one step closer to *freedom*. We have determined the exact location of the signal that powers the orbiting orbs. According to our scientist, they have developed a lead based compound that blocks the high frequency EMP pulse. It is mixed with the same radar absorbing material used on the B-2 Bomber. This new material is being adhered to a modified hypersonic aircraft we were testing before this crisis started.” Kyle raised his hand as the general continued speaking, walking around to the front of the briefing table. “The Russian warhead has been here for two weeks. We have successfully rewired it, and plan on stopping that signal.” The men were surprised not knowing the bomb had already arrived. The general then stopped in front of a nonfunctional view screen. “What’s your question Major Jameson?”

“I’m assuming a cockpit is being added to the unmanned craft?”

“We *are* not taking any chances. We could send it remotely with preprogrammed coordinates, but need a live pilot in case anything goes wrong.”

“When is the mission?” asked Joe.

“After Nurse Sharon Rosen gives each of you a preliminary physical, volunteers will be asked first.” Joe leaned in toward Kyle.

“I hope she’s checking for testicle cancer or even a hernia because I’m going to cough with a smile.”

“You’re a pervert,” said Kyle.

After the physical, which was to only check pulmonary strength, Nurse Rosen only failed one pilot. It was Joe Madison, and he was unaware he had developed an undetectable mild bronchial infection in his left lung from the lack of filtered air before the power was restored. Kyle volunteered and was accepted for the mission after hearing Joe was cut.

The next day he was given instructions on how to operate the manual release of the bomb and land at an alternate landing strip in the Bahamas, if he was unable to make it to the Bermuda islands.

A week had past, and he was one day away from taking off from Utah. His flight course target was

Latitude 28.613459, Longitude 72.509766 with an orbital inclination of 28.97°, and a seven minute window to reach above the stratosphere before detonation. This meant he had to manually release the bomb at five thousand feet and then go vertical. Kyle promised to meet Joe in the cafeteria around dinner time, the day before the mission.

“Why did you volunteer for this mission?” asked Joe.

“I want to be remembered as the man who restored civilization back to the human race.”

“You do know...you may be glowing like your fame, literally.”

“It’s a small price to pay,” said Kyle.

“Your shriveled nut sack won’t think the same when that radiation eats your testicles away.”

“I plan on being an astronaut when that bomb goes off...far away from any danger.”



The next day Kyle, after putting on a red space-suit, strapped into the windowless hypersonic aircraft. A rewired Vietnam era F-4 Phantom cockpit was installed with a flat-screen monitor powered by newly made lead incased lithium batteries. “Mr. Jameson, the ram jet has no moving parts and the *Orb-sorption* material will protect your instruments from the EMP,” stated the lead scientist. His assistant then handed Kyle a pilot’s map of the Caribbean.

“You have to follow these coordinates at the right altitude. If you lose your altimeter, abort the mission and try to make it back here.”

“What if I lose *all* my instruments?”

“Then your ejection seat won’t work. You’ll have to reach a safe altitude and bail out like the pilots did in World War II.”

“Can I back out of this mission?” asked Kyle who was handed a helmet. “My odds of survival are shrinking.”

“Good luck, Major Jameson. The world is counting on you.” The hatch was then lowered as he hit the power-up switch. *I hope this thing doesn’t break my back?* He thought watching the countdown on the lower right corner of the monitor. He braced himself even though they told him the engines wouldn’t kick on until he reached 300 miles an hour. He knew that the aircraft would be accelerated by a steam catapult like the aircraft carriers, except much faster. The hypersonic aircraft vibrated as zero on the countdown was reached, and then it accelerated so fast, Kyle couldn’t open his eyes. The aircraft shot through the launch hole like a fired cannon, quickly exiting the side of a nearby mountain. He almost blacked out as he saw the sky and clouds quickly rush toward his screen. It was dawn as he

could see the twinkle of two orbs in high orbit. The ram jet engines vibrated the whole ship as his speed increased to Mach 12. He leveled off just before reaching space using the thin atmosphere above him as shielding from the EMP. His target was approaching quickly as he pointed the nose downward and killed the engines. He had to reserve enough fuel to make it above the atmosphere after releasing the bomb.

Kyle checked his instruments and made the necessary corrections to glide in, on target. After passing through the clouds as the sun was still rising, he followed the mission procedures according to the scientist. He began to roll the bomb door handle counter-clock wise and it was jammed. The heat from the extreme speed along with the special coating fused one corner of the bomb bay door like a weld. Kyle tried to unjam it, but knew he was running out of time. He realized it was a one way trip and armed the bomb. He then maintained his heading directly at the coordinates given to him. At that moment he recalled a prayer his Baptist grandmother told him

when he was a kid even though his dad raised him as a Mormon. He repeated it over and over as the craft began to speed up as he pointed the nose at a downward incline. He knew the shape of the hypersonic aircraft would slice into the water upon impact.

Then the aircraft slammed into the ocean, jerking him forward violently. It then continued at a forward motion, descending deeper into the dark depths of the sea. He closed his eyes, repeating his grandmother's prayer, waiting for the below sea-level activated bomb to end his life. There was nothing, and he knew he had failed his mission. He toggled the arming switch off and on, hoping the bomb would explode. He looked into the view screen as a light was increasing in size. The screen then flashed as intertwined geometrical symbols appeared at first. He had seen them before and whispered one word, "Sefirot." Which meant divine energy. Then as the craft descended further, he saw something wonderful. It was a tree floating completely still in the middle of the deep ocean. Not an ordinary tree, but one that was glowing

red. He believed for a moment that he was hallucinating as the pressure of the ocean became greater. “It’s the *Tree of Life*,” he whispered. It was glowing and pulsating, seemingly on fire. Kyle felt a calm all across his body that was followed with a feeling of joy. He knew it wasn’t aliens that stopped the bombs from exploding, but God giving man a second chance. He began to laugh with a happiness that filled his heart and then he was transported, he believed maybe transformed. He was in a tunnel of light floating happily toward freedom...to the other side.

The End.

This book is dedicated in his memory.



Roderick Anthony Burton
1987 – 2009