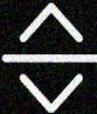




Z1STANT  WORLDS
ARCHANGELS RISE

“So what I said so far doesn’t guarantee anything about the existence of a limit when Newton’s constant is actually infinity but nevertheless, that limit may exist. If that limit exist, the limiting theory is a theory in 11 dimensions. It’ll be a supersymmetric relativistic theory in 11 dimensions, with 11 dimensional supergravity as it’s low energy limit and depending on no dimensionless parameters. Does it exist? I have no idea. All I’m saying is that, While in the past I would bet against it, I shall place no such bet today” – *Edward Witten, 1995*

In a cloud of dust surrounding a massive fusion reactor, there lies a rock we call Home: Earth, in the Solar System. Earth provided humanity with a sanctuary where they could thrive and evolve. Among the billions of humans, there was a man so captivated by the beauty of space that he dedicated himself to mastering every field of science.

Hundreds of years of technological advancement, Humanity had spread across the Solar System, To Nearby Stars.

Within the Lagrange points of Earth's gravitational influence, specifically around L5, there stood the halls of Lagrangian Station 5. In its library, Harrison Wells sat with his professor, Edgar Roussel, discussing artifacts of unknown alien technologies discovered on Venus long ago and potential opportunity to discover more. These technologies had given humanity the key to the stars. The Anti-De-Sitter Drive, a historic invention by Mark Cooper and his team, enabled us to exploit dimensions and reach the stars.

Professor Roussel was an elderly man, old for space travel. He had made his home at the L5 Station, where he had served as a university professor for nearly his entire life. Suddenly, a handheld tablet rang. The professor turned his head to look at the caller's name.

"Hm, Mikail is calling. It's been a long time since he last reached out," the professor remarked as he picked up the tablet and answered the call.

Mikail Deutron, an exobiologist of United LunaTerra and a veteran of the former Earth Defense Fleet, had news to share about a discovery on Planet Nova in the K2-18 system.

"Greetings, Edgar. I have good news. On Nova, we've detected signal frequencies very similar to those emitted by the Venusian ship. I think we have a clue here. We are creating team of Scientists for search of signal source" Edgar scratched his chin and turned to Wells. "It seems the opportunity you were wondering about has shown up by itself."

Wells's attention was entirely on Mikail, who turned his camera towards a mysterious container. Inside was an original piece of sensory technology from the Venusian ship.

"This," Mikail said, "is a sensor from the ship. It suddenly began pointing somewhere, though we're not sure where yet. That's why I'm once again asking for your help in gathering a science team. You're the only wise man I can trust to send the right people."

In the dockyards around Planet Earth, where most of the fleet was located, there was one particular ship: the Astralis-class "Void Voyager." The -class was a new model, an enhancement of the previous Kepler-class ships, equipped with advanced AdS Cyclotrons. The Void Voyager was assigned to the newly forming science team heading to Nova. Harrison Wells followed Edgar to the dockyards of L5 Station to return to Earth.

Edgar patted Wells on the shoulder. "Well, my son, finally your chance to see other stars. You know more than enough about these aliens; I'm sure Mikail will like you."

Wells removed Edgar's hand from his shoulder and held it with both hands. "I'm sure he will." He then turned to the airlock, preparing to don his suit and board the shuttle.

The shuttle was as crowded as ever. Wells found a seat, took a deep breath, and opened his tablet. A new message was waiting for him from the Void Voyager's captain. It was a direct invitation and a confirmation that this mission was real. The meeting point was set for New York City on Earth, where the crew would be introduced and given all necessary instructions.

As the shuttle prepared to transition from deceleration burn to atmospheric reentry burn, Wells received a call from his old friend, Victor of Titan. Victor, though an imbecile in social interactions, was a great soldier and engineer. Wells had a unique talent for communicating with almost anyone. Only Lagrangian

stations and large ships had communicators capable of transmitting messages over large distances at FTL speeds. However, Wells had to wait for the message to fully arrive because the reentry burn caused plasma to block all signals, leaving the message corrupted.

Upon touchdown in New York City, the former HQ of the United Nations, now located on Luna, Wells followed the guide waiting for them outside the landing pad. She was a humble, thin woman in a sleek blue United LunaTerran uniform. As he walked, Wells typed a message back to Victor: "Sorry, your message got corrupted by plasma during the reentry burn. I saw the notification but did not receive it. I am preparing for an instructions seminar on Earth about a new science project." He almost bumped into a light pillar as he pressed send, then turned his attention back to the guide as they approached the building.

Looking around, he looked a little far where what were once oceans were now dried-out deserts with rocks sticking out. The guide asked them to pass through security checks at the entrance, mentioning that she would wait for them inside.

Inside the building, pictures of old Earth, the military forces of United LunaTerra, and Mars adorned the walls. Wells wondered what Mars had to do with this expedition. The guide stopped at a set of large double doors and opened them with a flourish, reminiscent of a wild west saloon. "Please proceed to the seats appointed to you all," she said, making a peculiar hand gesture on her tablet. Everyone's handheld devices buzzed, displaying their assigned seats.

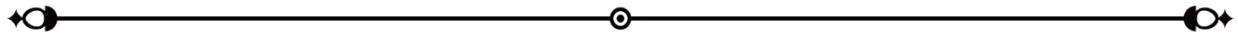
As Wells made his way to his seat, he noticed a man in a Martian Technate uniform standing nearby, likely Mikail's appointed security due to their appearance. Once everyone had gathered, Mikail was left alone on the stage by the Martian Technate representative.

"Welcome, welcome," Mikail began. "I'm Mikail, Lead Exobiologist of United LunaTerra. As you are all aware, we have gathered the best of the best from the young generation of scientists to research an intriguing signal we detected using alien sensory technology. You all will depart on the newly manufactured Astralis-Class ship, the 'Void Voyager,' which will be your temporary home for the duration of this expedition."

Midway through the speech, Wells's handheld buzzed again. This time, it was a notification from Victor: "All I wanted to say is that I'm also part of the expedition as an engineer. We were told the Astralis will get into orbit around Mars and pick

up the other half of the expedition and the necessary industrial supplies. Darte." The message ended with Victor's usual Saturnian slang.

Wells looked up just as the speech concluded. The necessary instructions had been distributed to everyone's tablets in case anyone missed the speech. He wondered how Victor had managed to travel from Titan to Mars so quickly. With this on his mind, he went to gather the items he needed to prepare for boarding.



On the red, dusty planet of Mars—once a dream for human colonization and now home to cities for billions—Victor Dastarian, a soldier of the United LunaTerra Army and a graduate of Technate University on Mars, was appointed to the new expedition toward Nova. Victor would serve dual roles on the Void Voyager: AdS Drive Engineer and Deputy Officer of Engineering Sector Security.

As he made his way to the shuttle docks, Victor was suddenly approached by his lover, Emilia. She playfully tickled his yellow and black MTR uniform before jumping onto his back. Startled, Victor looked around in confusion until he saw Emilia.

"You actually got appointed to the expedition, Victor!" she exclaimed.

Victor, fixing his suit with pride on his face, replied, "Deputy Officer Victor, ma'am," and hugged her in return. "What's even funnier is that Harry is also appointed on this adventure. That nerd is going to be part of the lead exobiologists' survey group."

Their embrace was interrupted by the arrival of a lieutenant. Victor immediately snapped into a soldier's posture, greeting the Lieutenant of Ship Security.

"Shuttle departing in T-minus 2 hours, officer. Finish all necessary business before departure to the L2 shipyard where the Astralis will dock," the lieutenant instructed.

Standing at attention, Victor responded, "Understood, sir." The lieutenant continued toward the ship docks, and Victor resumed preparing for his journey.

"For how long will the expedition be?" Emilia asked before Victor left.

"Not sure, but it'll take at least five days of travel time alone," he replied. As he picked up his tablet, a notification popped up. It was an automatic response from the Martian Technocratic Republic: "Lethal arms and an engineering toolkit will be awaiting you in Room 683. Please proceed through Tunnel 4 to Hallway 6, Floor 6. The keycard has been imported into your handheld tablet."

Rolling his eyes, Victor continued ahead. The shuttles were already prepared for departure, waiting for passengers to board. He passed through the blinding white hallways, flanked by men in yellow and black armor standing rigidly at attention. He wished he had a uniform like that.

He entered the cabin to gather his personal items. The bag felt heavy, as if they had packed the entire Deimos military moon inside it. He looked at Emilia one last time before closing the cabin door. "I'll return as fast as possible. It's just a research program; nothing bad is going to happen."

The romantic moment was interrupted by a loud buzzing in the hallway: "Void Voyager assigned crew, assemble at shuttle number 17 airlock immediately." The militaristic discipline was palpable in every corner of Mars. Growing up under United LunaTerra around Saturn's moon Titan, Victor had always found Martian discipline harsh. Then he thought to himself, "Yeah, that's why Earth lost the Siege of Mars."

The crew, consisting of around 40 soldiers, stood in rows, listening to the lieutenant's commands. Victor stood there, absorbing every word until they were given permission to board the shuttles.

It felt good to be on a shuttle that wasn't as crowded as the public shuttles on the Lagrangian stations. There was room to breathe. Under heavy crackling sounds, the shuttle lifted off and headed towards orbit to maneuver towards the second Lagrangian gravity well.

From orbit he could already see the massive infrastructure of ship constructing Yard, the Astralis mustve be a huge ship to require this kind of structure to Dock at



Standing inside the L2 Dock, Wells watched from the window as the majestic Astralis-Class ship came into view. The massive cyclotron was held in place by strong joints attached to the main corpus, with the engine and AdS drive comprising about 70 percent of the ship's overall structure. Habitat rings aligned along the same axis as the cyclotron added to the ship's grandeur.

Wells noticed the Vice Prime Minister of United LunaTerra engaged in a discussion with Mikail. Though he couldn't hear their conversation, their body language suggested something concerning. In the distance, he saw his professor, Edgar, approaching with a few students he had brought on an excursion.

"This is Harrison Wells, my graduated student," Edgar introduced him to the group. "He will board this massive ship and reach for the mysteries that our farthest star hides."

Wells felt a bit nervous under the attention. He zipped up his stylish United LunaTerra undersuit completely.

Edgar asked, "I heard your engineer friend is also coming."

"He's on Mars," Wells replied. "Once the Astralis departs, we will pick up the rest of the crew and all the needed supplies for Novans and us. I've only been to the outer stars once, and that was to Proxima Centauri. Going this far is kind of nerve-wracking."

Edgar nodded in understanding, offering a reassuring smile. "You'll do fine, Harrison. This is what we've trained for."

The anticipation in the dock was palpable as the final preparations were made for the departure of the Astralis-Class Void Voyager.

The crew began boarding the ship, with the United LunaTerran (ULT) security personnel entering first, followed by the rest of the personnel. The habitat rings could accommodate over 600 crew members, and a fully programmed pilot could replace 25 crew members, reducing the required personnel to just 5. The Void Voyager was truly a state-of-the-art engineering marvel, the kind that others could only dream of.

Wells went straight to his appointed cabin and started placing his items into special lockers designed to prevent them from falling during accelerations and decelerations. Glancing into the hallway, he saw people dispersing to their cabins. Deciding to visit the main bridge, he pulled out his tablet to send a message to Victor. "We boarded already, final checks then we're heading for Mars," he typed. Just as he was about to press send, he bumped into a girl carrying a pile of electronics so high that she couldn't see in front of her.

"I should keep my head up next time, for fuck's sake," he muttered to himself, barely managing a terse apology. He gave her a look that seemed to blame the entire universe for the mishap before moving on.

Looking out the windows, he noticed Mikail still standing outside the docking port, seemingly searching for something or someone. Wells turned around and saw a tattooed man, a rare sight on Earth, but paid him little attention.

"Attention Void Voyager crew, please prepare for Acceleration burn. Departure in T-minus 15 minutes," announced a voice over the intercom, followed by all screens displaying a doomsday-like countdown clock.

Wells quickened his pace to the main bridge, locking eyes with the tattooed man. There was something about him that unsettled Wells.

The ship began its undocking procedure. The huge magnetic clamps holding the ship detached from the corpus, and the maneuvering engines started a slow backward acceleration burn. Gentle vibrations could be felt inside, indicating that the ship was in motion.

Deciding to stay in the bar, Wells sipped tea that tasted like swamp water—unpleasant, but it was all he had. As the ship prepared its maneuver vector, flight attendants instructed everyone to return to their cabins for the upcoming acceleration burn.

Wells rushed to his cabin, three floors above. On his way through the crowded corridors, he encountered the girl from before. He stopped near her to apologize. They gave each other weird look, She blushed slightly and replied, "It's fine, not the first time."

Feeling like an asshole, Wells heard the ship's command to return to the cabins once more. He continued on his way, knowing the ship was about to unleash its full power. A silence fell over the ship, echoing the vast quiet of space, as the engines prepared to fire with all their might. Everyone fastened their seat belts as the seats automatically rotated to align with the ship's movement. These seats were designed to minimize high-G overload effects, an essential feature for all types of spacecraft. Seconds passed in an ear-piercing silence, with only a faint hum audible. Then, suddenly, the engines fired with all their might. The ship began to shake and vibrate intensely.

Wells watched the stages of the flight on the screen in front of him. After fifteen minutes of initial acceleration, everyone could leave their cabins during the gentler acceleration stage. He noted that the estimated flight time to Mars was around five hours. "Well, this is going to take some time," he thought, slightly disappointed. "I thought this thing could fly faster."

As the acceleration steadied, Wells unbuckled his seatbelt and prepared to stretch his legs.

Grabbing his handheld tablet he went out to lounge to sit and read

The Martian side was already prepared. The L2 Mars Station had provided temporary cabins for the crew to wait in. About 4.5 hours later, Victor found himself pacing back and forth, looking up and down in boredom. One of the soldiers approached him.

"Hey, I heard you're also from Titan, right? I'm Vitas, appointed as lead biochemist."

Victor, looking somewhat schizophrenic, turned his head to Vitas. "Laksha Basala, Darte," he muttered in Saturnian slang. "Name's Victor, Deputy Officer. Rare sight to see Titanians on Mars. Where exactly are you from?"

"Huygens City."

"Nice place," Victor acknowledged. They sat together on a bench, looking at the tiny dot that was the Sun, with Deimos and Phobos barely visible.

"Have you ever had a feeling you wanted to speak with dead people?" Vitas asked suddenly.

Victor, confused, replied after a moment of silence, "What... no."

"My dad died fighting for the Cetus Republic. He was against the Solar System's territorial pretensions on Tau Ceti."

"My brother also ran off, flew with others to Vishapakar, in pursuit of an idea—a delusional one, I'd say."

The two men sat in contemplative silence, sharing their stories and finding a strange comfort in each other's company.

Suddenly, they saw a large circular object approaching in the distance. Victor's tablet buzzed with a notification: Astralis was approaching the dockyard.

"Thanks for the company, time to grab my stuff and get on that thing. See you onboard," Victor said, leaving in silence for his cabin. He could feel the ship being secured with magnetic clamps again.

With a sigh, he secured his weapon on his back, slung his bag over his shoulder, adjusted his suit, and proceeded to board with the rest of the crowd.

Wells watched from the window of the habitat ring, rushing to the airlocks to greet Victor. Everyone was now onboard, and all cargo had been secured in the cargo racks. The ship was parked slightly away from the L2 Station, and the Anti-De-Sitter Drives were charging as the ship prepared to enter the 4th Dimension.

Victor's cabin was just in front of Harrison's. Everyone had spread out to their cabins, patiently waiting for Stage 3, the Dimensional Shift jump. Looking back at the Pale Blue Dot, Wells felt a mix of excitement and apprehension as he was about to travel farther than ever before.

The ship's AdS drive began stretching its smaller cyclotrons at the rear, moving the flaps to fixate the particle flow. The main, huge cyclotron began to glow, emitting a light as brilliant as the heavens. Everyone onboard felt the immense vibrations of the ship. As Wells looked out the window, he noticed something extraordinary: the space around Astralis began stretching horizontally. It seemed as if they were moving at light speed instantly. The space stretching accelerated until it became as thin as a string, vibrating incomprehensibly in the 4th dimension—one of the ten dimensions beyond human understanding. The small

cyclotrons behind shot an intense stream of particles, propelling the ship forward towards K2-18b in a curved geometry. In this contracted length, the travel would take only four days.

Wells marveled at the sight, feeling the thrill of venturing into the unknown. The journey had truly begun, and the mysteries of the Novan signal awaited them.



On Luna, the airless, dusty satellite of Earth where the United LunaTerra's headquarters were located, the Minister of Defence walked through bluish-white hallways towards the Prime Minister's office. As she walked, she glanced at the posters lining the walls, each with text describing the history of ULT. One poster read, "United Nations changed their name when HQ was moved to Luna, representing Earth and Moon as one body."

She knocked on the door and waited for permission to enter. The panel above lit up green, indicating she could proceed. "Greetings, Minister. I received your message for me to come," the Prime Minister said as she entered.

"We received a report from internal security that a possible agent of SEA has slipped onboard the new ship. What's it called?" The Prime Minister looked at the table, seeing the ship in all its glory. "Ah yes, Astralis Class Void Voyager."

"SEA? I thought they all died from crop failure," the Minister replied.

"Don't underestimate the Settled Exoplanets Alliance, Minister. These people are incredibly resilient."

"Our navy alone has defeated them numerous times."

"And they've defeated us on exoplanets where our presence was thin." PM replied.

"I fought for many years to remove that old bastard from office to prevent any more unnecessary wars and casualties. Look how well we're doing with Mars now."

"I understand, Minister, but what do you want me to do? Astralis is currently in 4th dimension travel; no message can reach them."

"We can try to send a message to the small group waiting on Nova, but it will arrive almost at the same speed as the ship itself."

“What does the agent want?” the Prime Minister asked. “It’s just a science project.”

The Minister responded, “The alien technology and the state-of-art Astralis. My guess is no one knows what that structure on Nova could indicate, perhaps a new beacon to even greater technologies.”

“Do we have any indication of what the suspect might look like?”

“A tattooed man was noticed on the ship. He's our first suspect due to his resemblance to SEA drugheads.”

“That doesn’t indicate much; we have our own share of drugheads who look similar. I hope the Mars side of security is trained enough to find the potential suspect.” The Prime Minister opened his tablet, staring at something intently, which confused the Defence Minister.

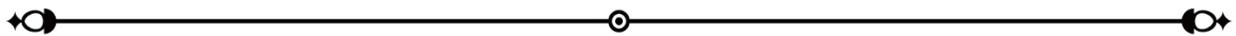
“Sir?” she asked.

The Prime Minister nodded and responded, “Nothing. I was just reading new data from intelligence on SEA, coincidentally. I’ll get back to you when needed. You are free to return to your duties now.”

The Minister walked around the circular table and headed back through the standing guards into the hallway.

Back in her office, She sat down in front of her tablet and began recording a video message

“This message is addressed to Admiral Visaki of Martian Security Administration, Your soldiers on board are required to search for potential SEA agent that was spotted during investigating reports, agent there is with unknown intents, but we both know anything coming from SEA is a threat for us”



Wells was sitting in his cabin, engrossed in something on his tablet, when he heard a knock at the door. It was the girl he had nearly mowed over earlier.

“Hey, I just wanted to apologize for bumping into you while carrying all those briefcases.”

“No, no, no need to apologize. It was my fault for walking like a chess horse.”

“I’m appointed as an exobiologist on this expedition. My name’s Angela, I heard we’ll be in the same group working on that artifact.”

“Haven’t read anything about the groups yet, so perhaps.” She came closer and sat in front of him without an invitation.

“So,” she looked around as if searching for something valuable, “what do we know about this artifact? What use could it be to us?”

“No idea, but the alien sensory device we had suddenly began pointing somewhere, as if indicating there was a structure.” Wells continued reading his tablet, barely paying attention to the woman.

Suddenly, Victor rolled inside. “Wake up, shithead. We’re almost at Nova.”

Wells looked up at the monitor and saw that they were indeed nearly there.

“Thanks for the short talk, but we gotta pack up now,” he said, passive-aggressively indicating for everyone to leave his cabin.

The ship's bridge felt like a megamall, crowded with people yet oddly empty. Everyone was preparing to board the shuttles from the shipyards onboard Astralis. The crew numbered around 150 people, which was a small group for a ship the size of Astralis—like a kindergarten class in a university.

While packing his stuff, Wells felt vibrations and creaking sounds, as if the ship was about to crack apart. He looked out the window and saw space normalizing again; he could see stars outside. Returning to their usual four dimensions, Astralis was already tilted backward for the deceleration burn.

Looking at Victor, who was already packed and ready, Wells asked, “So, how excited are you?”

“Probably less than you, although I gotta admit, new alien technology is intriguing.”

“Perhaps. I’ve waited for this moment my entire life.”

Astralis’s deceleration was so gentle it was barely felt, unlike the acceleration after undocking at L2.

The planet Nova, hostile yet captivating, greeted its visitors with an alien landscape of deserts interspersed with tenacious forests. Long ago, back on Old Earth, K2-18b had been theorized to possess signatures similar to Earth's, suggesting the potential presence of some sort of civilization. The colonists who settled here called themselves the Guards of Nova, forming a religious church around the insect-like humanoids native to the planet. These hive-minded insects lived in nests, never warring over territories and maintaining mutual respect.

Wells stood on Nova's soil, gazing at the pale dot that was the sun. As much as he wished to take off his suit, he knew it would kill him. The wind's faint sound could be heard through the metallic sheets of his flexible suit. He was a bit away from the group he intended to travel with, lost in the alien nature around him, daydreaming about one day fully exploring this world. His meditation was interrupted by Mikail's voice over the radio channel. "Wells, where are you? We are moving out soon." Mikail was inside their gold-colored transport, accompanied by a priest from the Church, as requested.

The shuttle had landed near a site where sensors indicated a stronger presence. Victor was the driver, with Mikail beside him, engrossed in his tablet. Next to Wells sat the girl he kept running into, as if the universe wanted them near each other. The exobiologist and chemist were also in the vehicle.

Local wildlife scurried out of the way as they approached the signal, moving through a strange fog that added to the mystery, especially since no rain was forecasted. In the distance, a large flower-like structure loomed, resembling a lotus on a tall peduncle. The suits reported increasing electromagnetic fields around the flower, prompting Victor to stop the car at a safe distance to avoid disabling the electric vehicle.

They began their journey on foot, with the exobiologist and chemist staying behind to log measurements. Insects observed from a distance as the team approached the peduncle, which was clearly not organic. It was made of a metal similar to that of the ship they had studied. Cracks in the structure due to age allowed the team to slip inside.

The interior was not underground but shrouded in pure darkness, with only a faint white light providing some visibility. Victor drew his weapon, and Wells cautiously approached the computer-like device emitting the light. The hallway was straight and empty, amplifying his anticipation.

"Wells, don't rush, fucks sake" Victor cautioned as Mikail caught up with him.

The glowing device resembled a computer interface with running lines of a strange language similar to what they had studied from the Venusian ship. They examined the facility while Wells and Victor attempted to connect to the computer. Mikail's special science tablet had a wired adapter that matched the ship's technology, a gamble they hoped would pay off.

As they connected the tablet, the interface lit up, displaying symbols and patterns that began to translate into readable data suitable for quantum computer. It still felt as Gibberish, Wells being known to Transistor and Quantum computers language structure, nothing similar was resembling all this

Measurement team at the car contacted the team, warning about weird emitting signals coming out from the upper lotus

“Trace it right now, don’t let it slip without at least finding out where it goes” Mikail shouted scaring Wells that was so focused trying to resemble anything from the gibberish, Victor was trying to dive deeper into the computers structure, being amazed how simple yet complex it all was

The Priest standing outside, was shouting something resembling as Prayer

“Archangels of Nova, Please bless us with your grace”

Wells heard with one of his ears “Archangels huh, that’s an interesting name, and catchy for these aliens”

Victor still looking around while pointing his gun out “Archangels you say”

Mikail was scrubbing everything he could stick his scanner tool inside “Well then Archangels” while trying to scrub a piece of this metal.

Wells was sitting silent, under light from Victor’s suit, the data flew he couldn’t catch up until began seeing similar patterns of data that Mikail tablet was showing to be insect’s genetical data

“what the hell” wells mumbled “He began comparing data with the studied about Nova’s life-forms”

“This is not gibberish, this is survey data about local wildlife” Wells began comparing the mathematics from human language to translated symbols which were very resembling to numbers of ours in meaning

“The signal traces its path around 7620 light years from where we are” Wells whispering was interrupted by loud radio chatter

“what the fuck, why so far,” being confused “Does the signal suddenly end somewhere?”

“Seems like it got absorbed somewhere or received”

Mikail alongside Wells continued scrubbing the database that was flowing inside the tablet

“Connect me to Astralis, we need bigger storage than this tablet”

“Understood” the team on Car began disclosing radio antenna and solar panels

“Captain this is Mikail, I request constant connection between this radio antenna and central computer of the ship, we have a flow of data we need to store”

“Team I think we have a two side communication between this structure and something seven thousand lightyears away, with such speeds... how is this physically possible”

“I think I know what you’re talking about” Wells interrupted “Database it communicating with something more centralized, and receives the data I can try to request, its like trying to make HTTP request on old computers” Wells tabbed on his tablet “Simplified way to say this thing is connected through a port to a server and currently accesses a service”

“I’m not a network engineer Wells your simplified is still quantum mechanics for me”

Back at the ship, datascientists were preparing to receive the data, Vitas, was standing guarding the sector when he suddenly was called into security office

In the office there were several officers standing, Vitas came just in time

“Alright gentlemen we have uninvited guest onboard the ship, we intercepted message that was launched in direction of Barnard’s Star”

“Barnard’s star?” thought Vitas to himself “That’s where second military stronghold of SEA is”

“Search everywhere and everything” said the lieutenant, Vitas was feeling more nervous as he understood the mission was becoming something more than just Science project.

Security spent hours searching each Cabin, Each crew member, only discovered unauthorized tablet which was thrown out near engine deck

Victor flashed into their faces “Darte look theres something inside the wall” he pulled out something glowing bright white and suddenly the interface shut down

“NO” Wells shouted “WHAT DID YOU DO”

“a oh” victor leaving speechless “I guess we found out the powersource I guess”

“but the entire facility did not shut down” Mikail replied “must be the computer’s power source”

Mikail and Victor began hauling everything they found back to the Car, the Priest was standing outside together with the insect humanoid

Angela was shouting to Mikail from distance “The Lotus began contracting everytime signal was received”

“The Archangels are rising” the priest said poetically

Wells angrily coming out of the facility “you dumb fuck, the rest of information is probably lost”

“Ay ay ay ay look at the bright side yamal, we found something seven thousand lightyears away, didn’t you say most of these reports were just studies of local flora and fauna?”

“that doesn’t mean you should pull out stuff you don’t know what”

“Could this glowing thing be compatible with out tech as power source” he gave a thinking face and scratched its head

“No idea honestly” Wells looked at his wrist suitscreen, two clocks, one shows local time the other Earth time “We’ve been here for quite a while”

“we should get all of this back to shuttle, the wind’s getting worse with each clock tick”

“Ground Team Astralis speaking” Victor gave a confused why “Why yall always refer to your ship by it’s class, it has a name”

“Earthian habits, thought on mars they refer to their ships like family member” taking a deep breath each step

“Understood” Mikail in distance said, “Time to move out boys”

The items they collected had been well secured on the car, everyone sat at their seats waiting for Wells to sit, he was standing examining the structure again “Something worries me about this lotus” “Perhaps we have to worry on the ship too” Mikail said from behind “Huh? What you mean” Wells with higher pitch replied to which Mikail replied “We have SEA agent somewhere onboard”

Back on the Void Voyager, Vitas led a small group toward the Maintenance block. The tattooed man, whom everyone suspected, had been arrested first, but further interrogation yielded no productive results. In the engineering sector, they found a tablet with a hidden cryptic message. It revealed that the agent had leaked blueprints of Astralis’s engine to unknown parties.

Astralis was never classified as a military vessel; its engine signature was insignificant for the hate-fueled rebels of the Settled Exoplanets Alliance. This left Vitas puzzled. “Why do they need that engine blueprint?” he questioned himself. “Are they planning something where they can’t reach?”

The situation grew more complex as Vitas and his team tried to decode the hidden message. They had to ensure Astralis was secure, but also needed to understand the implications of the leaked blueprints.

Meanwhile, on Nova, Wells, Victor, and Mikail continued their investigation. They had established a continuous data link with Astralis and were now receiving vast amounts of information. The priest and the insect humanoids observed from a distance, chanting their prayers to the Archangels.

Victor and Wells kept an eye on the surroundings, noting the strange electromagnetic fluctuations and the increasing activity of the insect-like creatures. The data they were receiving suggested that the artifact was more than just a survey station; it was part of a much larger network.

Mikail, focused on the data stream, exclaimed, “Okay we know this is Bi-directional transmission, and we’re tapping into a live feed but what are they communicating about”

Wells, analyzing the genetic data, added, “It’s not just survey data about the local flora and fauna. It’s real-time environmental monitoring, possibly even control mechanisms for the planet’s ecosystem. Whoever left this here clearly was studying this ecosystem deeply”

Back on Astralis, the data scientists were working around the clock to process and analyze the incoming information. The captain and his team had been briefed about the possible presence of a spy and the leaked blueprints. Security was tightened, and every crew member was under scrutiny.

“Alright, enough! Get the priest back inside the car. We are returning to the shuttle,” Mikail urgently directed everyone. He was examining the glowing piece of metal he had taken, feeling its peculiar heaviness despite its light weight.

Victor crushed the gas pedal, speeding towards the shuttle. Wells held onto the science equipment as tightly as his suit would allow, making sure not to lose anything. “I hope the captain will use overdrive mode for the AdS drive,” Mikail mentioned.

“The what?” Wells asked, puzzled.

“Overdrive mode. It’s an experimental feature. It might damage the hull, but it makes the particle stream flow as wide as possible by disabling the security measures.”

“Isn’t that risky?” Wells questioned.

“Would you rather be stranded on this hostile planet?” Mikail replied.

“Captain, this is the ground crew. Come in,” Mikail called out, but unsettling silence followed from Astralis.

They reached the shuttle, and Victor drove into the open cargo hold. Wells quickly jumped out to close the cargo hold and prepare the shuttle for departure. He secured the science kit in the lockers located in the cargo hold, while Angela calibrated the magnetic locks for the car, or so they thought she did. The chemist sat in the cargo hold to ensure everything remained secure, while the rest locked themselves in the cabin.

Victor immediately engaged the vertical engines and then accelerated to leave the planet's atmosphere. However, the chemist noticed the car wobbling from left to right—something was wrong. As the shuttle flew faster, the atmospheric burn covered it, cutting off radiocommunications due to the plasma blockade.

The shuttle began maneuvering to orient its trajectory towards the Void Voyager. This sudden change in trajectory caused the car to detach from the ground. The abrupt deceleration sent the car crashing into the front of the cargo hold, crushing the poor chemist who couldn’t report the situation due to the communications blackout.

“What the hell happened back there?” Victor exclaimed in confusion as he accessed the shuttle’s cameras.

Through the camera feed, Victor saw the catastrophic state of the cargo hold. The car was wedged against the shuttle’s frontal wall, debris scattered everywhere. Mikail, realizing the gravity of the situation, urgently tried to establish contact with Astralis again.

“Astralis, come in! We have a critical situation in the cargo hold,” Mikail shouted.

Finally, a response crackled through the comms. “Ground crew, this is Astralis. We read you. What’s your status?”

“We had an incident with the car in the cargo hold during ascent. We need immediate assistance upon docking,” Mikail explained.

“Understood. Prepare for emergency docking procedures. We’ll have medical and engineering teams on standby,” the captain responded.

Victor focused on piloting the shuttle smoothly to minimize further damage. The team braced themselves as they approached Astralis, knowing they had a critical situation to manage once on board.

The Void Voyager, with its giant Cyclotrons, made the rest of the ship seem tiny in comparison. The docking bay opened, waiting for the shuttle to dock. Prepared teams waited outside the airlock for the repressurization process upon docking. The shuttle was barely holding together; it was a miracle the team managed to fly all the way back into orbit.

The dead silence in the docking bay, caused by virtual particles waves canceling each other to create what we call "vacuum," suddenly turned into a buzzing and humming, ear-bleeding place as air began flowing inside, bringing back the 1 atm pressure. The airlock opened, and the team rushed inside immediately. Victor, Mikail, and Harrison decided to use the external exit instead. They jumped off the emergency exit and rushed to the cargo hold. Victor was left speechless by the scene he saw: the entire cargo hold was painted red, with the poor guy crushed into a river of blood.

The car had barely touched important systems, which were constructed deep inside the shuttle cabin's lower sector. The priest stayed at the dropdown point, as the Guards would personally return him to the village. Mikail, connecting to the ship's comms network, tried establishing a call with the captain. After many failed attempts, the captain finally found a minute to respond to Mikail.

“Captain, listen, I know I’m not the one here commanding, but we need to use that overdrive feature. That thing was tested numerous times under my command. You should trust me, please.”

“My respects, Deutron, but it’s a risky decision to make. We understand about the snitch on-board, but all the required information for SEA has been sent. Our security is patrolling and examining the engine sector, maintenance, and engineering sectors. The ship is safe to travel back.”

“Where the fuck is Angela?” Wells interrupted, looking around the hallway outside the docking bay. Urged by the medical bay staff, the ground team proceeded to the medical bay for assessments.

The medical bay was buzzing with activity as the team entered. Doctors and nurses moved quickly, assessing each member of the team for injuries.

Victor, Mikail, and Harrison, after ensuring everyone was being taken care of, turned their attention back to the immediate problem at hand.

“Captain,” Mikail continued, “if we use the overdrive, we can significantly cut down our travel time. Given the urgency of the situation, it’s worth the risk. This is not the first time that we used that thing, I know that you didn’t before”

The captain’s face appeared on the screen in the medical bay, looking weary but resolute. “I understand the urgency, Mikail. We’ll proceed with the necessary precautions. Prepare the crew for potential turbulence.”

Victor and Harrison exchanged a look, knowing this decision could mean the difference between survival and failure. They immediately rushed to their cabins.

“Attention all crew members,” the captain’s voice echoed through the ship. “We are about to engage the AdS drive in overdrive mode. Secure all loose items and brace for potential turbulence.”

The lights flickered throughout the Void Voyager until they entirely faded into darkness. The charging hum of the AdS drive grew louder with each passing second, resonating through the hull. The massive cyclotron began glowing again, its energy building to a crescendo.

On Nova, the insectoids stood in a group, their compound eyes fixed on the sky as a bright dot appeared, growing more intense with each moment. Suddenly, after a loud breeze, it vanished, leaving them in a state of silent awe.

Aboard the Void Voyager, space around the ship began to stretch horizontally once more, thinning until it appeared as strings. The cyclotron, operating without its usual regulation of flaps, released a thick beam that seemed to span across the entire 4th dimension. The ship was propelled forward so fast that everyone felt crushed into their seats.

Wells gripped the armrests of his seat, struggling to remain conscious. His veins bulged across his body, threatening to burst from the immense pressure. He knew he had to endure this for the next 45 hours. The seat beneath him produced a peculiar vibration, a calming counterforce that mitigated some of the intense pressure.

Despite the crushing G-forces, the military crew was trained to handle such extreme conditions. Victor, sitting beside Mikail, clenched his jaw, focusing on his breathing to stay conscious. Mikail's eyes were half-closed, his face contorted in concentration as he monitored the ship's systems through his tablet.

"Hold on, everyone," the captain's voice crackled over the intercom, barely audible over the roaring engines. "We need to maintain this speed to reach our destination in time."

The ship continued to accelerate, the view outside the windows a blur of distorted darkness. Wells tried to focus on anything other than the pain, his mind drifting to the data they had recovered on Nova. The survey data about local wildlife, the mysterious signals, and the connection to something 7620 light-years away. What was the purpose of it all? And what did the SEA hope to achieve with the stolen blueprints?

As the hours dragged on, the vibrations from the seat continued to soothe the intense pressure on Wells' body. He could feel the rhythmic pulse calming his racing heart and easing the strain on his muscles. It was a small comfort in the midst of the overwhelming force.

Wells was deep into examining the data they had gathered from the ground interface at the lotus structure. The task of translating the known symbols of the alien language into Galactic Standard English would take time and patience. The Void Voyager had begun its deceleration burn within the brane, preparing to establish a stable orbit around Jupiter.

Enduring the intense pressure for 45 hours had been a harrowing experience. As the ship decelerated, the crushing force finally eased, bringing a palpable sense of relief. The distorted strings of space-time began to resolve back into the familiar fabric of normal space.

“Why is our final destination Jupiter?” Wells asked Victor through the radiocommunications.

“Closer to the Asteroid Belt. The girl needs some care at the Ceres Shipyards,” Victor replied, Wells wasn’t expecting Victor to refer to the ship as ‘girl’.

“Makes sense,” Wells acknowledged. “I’ll take a shuttle to Titan. I need to speak with Edgar after all this.” Saturn and Jupiter were currently in close orbital positions, making the trip feasible.

As the Void Voyager approached Jupiter, the majesty of the gas giant filled their views. The planet's swirling storms and the visible Jovian moons offered a breathtaking sight. The ship entered Jupiter’s sphere of influence, allowing those who wished to depart sooner to take shuttles to nearby stations before the maneuver burn towards the Ceres Company-owned shipyards for repair.

One shuttle had already left the ship clandestinely, its identifiers shut off. It was suspected to be carrying the SEA agent, now fleeing back to the outer stars. The shuttle had vanished before anyone could react, leaving the crew with a sense of unfinished business. Jovian division MTR forces boarded the ship from L1 station to secure the vessel.

Victor and Vitas patrolled the dark hallways of the Void Voyager. The lights flickered back on after the prolonged darkness, revealing the ship’s interior once more.

“What’s cracking?” A jovial MTR soldier from the patrolling Jovian division asked Wells, who was packing his items.

“My back,” Wells half-joked,

Victor, walking alongside Vitas, glanced around the now-illuminated corridor. “We’ve got to ensure everything is in order. We can’t afford any more surprises.”

Wells found a moment to connect with Victor. “I’ll see you after I talk to Edgar. Hopefully, we’ll have more clarity on what we found on Nova.”

Victor nodded. “Stay safe. We’ll be at Earth when you get back.”

As Wells boarded shuttle to Titan, he began ringing to Edgar Roussel, at the same time he he was digging in his bags, he saw and tried to eat lunch he apparently had packed with him, that thing that resembled sandwich before is now flattened cube from the overdrive he raise the cube to try eat at the same time while Professor answers the call “*Shit*”

“Hello Professor, We need to discuss, I’m heading towards Titan are you able to be there?”

“What’s the rush Harrison, Sure I can”

“As Head of Science division you will shortly receive all the reports from the comedy”

“What Comedy?” “The Expedition what else” Edgar nodded alittle from annoyance

“I’ll be there no less in 13 hours, ”

“It’s fine I didn’t sleep enroute back to Solar System”

...

The cloudy satellite of Saturn, Titan, is the closest thing we know resembling Earth in our backyard. The shuttle flew just above Cassini City, heading towards Landing Pad 16. Wells had booked a motel room for the night, and as he disembarked, he was met only by the routine presence of flight control personnel.

The motel room was small but still larger than the cabin on the Void Voyager. Most importantly, it had a proper restroom where Wells could shower and relax. He dropped all his items near the living room and went straight to the comfy bed, where he snoozed until the next solar cycle.

Wells tossed and turned in his sleep, dreaming vividly about the systems he had seen on the interface and the voices he had heard from the lotus communications. The dream felt disturbingly real. He was back in the lotus facility, the strange alien symbols glowing faintly on the interface as he tried to make sense of them. The voices, a cacophony of whispers and shouts, echoed in his mind, growing louder and more insistent.

“Survey data... genetic codes...” he mumbled in his sleep, seeing flashes of the insectoid creatures of Nova and the intricate patterns that made up their DNA. The voices seemed to chant these data points, each word reverberating through his consciousness, something circular shaped, glowing surrounded by galactic disk.

Suddenly, the dream shifted. He was standing before eerie creature, with blank face, no eyes only dark circles, staring deep into his soul examining the human kind, when *that thing* tried to touch Wells, he woke up in cold sweat from buzzing radiochatter coming out somewhere from his suit

Since there wasn’t solar cycles on Titan unless it gets eclipsed by Saturn, rooms had lighting systems to simulate darkness of night for sleep

Heart was beating like neutron star’s gamma jets swipping Earth, Motion Sensors detected excessive movement which made the room light’s turn on to simulate morning, Wells remained in the bed, looking at crystal clear white ceiling with several dirt spots which made him even more uncomfortable, He stood up looking outside the misty orange fog of Titan overlooking the red-dish Methane seas, Titan was huge gas station, Solar system powers were extracting the methane and reforming it into Hydrogen fuel, Titan was enroute to becoming what Earth became, dried out rock with atmosphere, Wells thought were only about that tall creature that wanted to press his body part against him, nothing like that ever happened to him, he barely saw any dreams when sleeping especially this weird

He remembered he had meeting appointed with Professor, he still had 2 hours left

Wells sat at the living room, with a cup of powder coffee stiring it slowly to dissolve

"One thing I miss about E-L5 is the natural coffee imported from Earth," he mused.

Titan boasted the highest number of cafés and restaurants in the Outer Planets region, constantly drawing tourists from the Inner Planets who visited the Gas Giants. Wells glanced at his tablet and saw two missed messages, one from Victor and the other from the Professor. Sipping the brick-tasting coffee, he decided to read Victor's message first.

"You won't believe the dream I had today. It was the scariest thing I've ever seen. Some inhuman creature was staring at me without any eyes—just dark spots where the eyes should have been. Oh, and remember that girl Angela? The one who was with us on Nova? She's the suspected SEA agent. Both the tattooed man and Angela vanished from the solar system once the Void Voyager was at Jupiter."

Wells threw the coffee cup into the sink, disgusted by its taste.

"You too??? I had the exact same dream. I think the high electromagnetic field affected us. And that naïve-looking, fragile girl was the agent all along? That's incredible. She blended in perfectly, and the tattooed man was just a distraction."

Wells scrolled through his tablet, navigating the single centralized social media platform of the Solar System. News outlets were abuzz with the latest discoveries of the Void Voyager, their sensational headlines stirring unnecessary panic about the SEA agent onboard—a typical tactic throughout the history of the galactic wide web.

He glanced at the two clocks on his wall. Since Cassini City was under United LunaTerra governance, the second clock displayed Earth's time, unlike in Huygens City.

"Right, the Professor's message," he reminded himself.

Scrolling through the message board, he pressed on the notification marked with a circled "1."

"I'll be at Chandrayaan Prospect, around 23:30, at the largest café," the message read.

Since Titan was a tidally-locked moon, locals had to use their respective government's clock to orient themselves, which in this case meant Earth's time.

Wells' space suit helmet was still buzzing with unknown radio chatter. He picked up the helmet and turned off the radio communicator for a while. Connecting his tablet to the wrist of his suit, he began putting on the entire suit, leaving the helmet aside for now.

He left the rest of his belongings in the motel room and, holding the helmet in his hand, stomped towards the exit airlock. The administrator sitting by the airlocks was half asleep and visibly tired. Not wanting to disturb her, Wells exited as quietly as possible. He locked his helmet in place before opening the first airlock door, then stepped out once the pressure matched Titan's hazardous environment.

Although Cassini City had public transportation, Wells preferred to ride in a taxi. The vehicles were specifically designed to accommodate Titan's 1.3 m/s² gravity and were spacious enough for people in suits to sit comfortably. Wells was fortunate that the driver wasn't talkative, allowing him to reach Chandrayaan Prospect absorbed in his own thoughts.

Back on Earth, Victor was investigating the SEA agents' plans concerning the Void Voyager. The blueprints they had sent were assumed to be destined for receivers at Barnard's Star. Vishapakar, formerly known as Barnard's Star B, was once a Martian colony, which only heightened the Martian Territories Republic's (MTR) interest.

Victor was compiling his findings to report to the lieutenant, who would then forward them to the Defense Ministry administration.

Adrianna Johnson, the Defense Minister, was on a secure call with the Prime Minister, discussing the potential plans of the SEA agent.

"The intelligence report on SEA has provided more insight into their preparations," Adrianna began. "The possible research they conducted on the engineering of the Astralis-Class Anti-De-Sitter Drive suggests they have a target or objective currently out of their reach."

The Prime Minister sipped his tea, listening intently while simultaneously reading something on his tablet.

"Our intelligence in Cetus reported an anonymous order received by a ship manufacturing company there, The Cetus Docks" She shook her head "Major Company". Adrianna continued. "It's possible they are beginning to build a ship, and the Void Voyager was the final piece they needed."

The Prime Minister, giving a look as if he wasn't paying attention, put his cup down and responded, "I need to arrange a meeting on Ross 128, Dyson Terra, to discuss with the current governor before the upcoming elections. I have a feeling that if it's not Teegarden's Star, their interest might be Ross 128."

Adrianna, with a thinking expression, responded a few seconds later, "Do you think they would plan to sabotage the elections?"

"A very risky move, but knowing how crackhead they are, it's not impossible," the Prime Minister replied.

"A thunder is approaching, and I'm unsure what to expect," Adrianna admitted.

"You're the Defense Minister, Adrianna," the Prime Minister replied firmly. "There must not be a hint of worry in your tone ever again."

"I must leave now, I have personal meetings today, don't forget" Prime Minister closed the established call

Adrianna picked up her tablet, taking a deep breath and headed towards meeting room, Her presence required by the codex.

The Martian Technate President, Domenic Giovanni, an insane militarist, was infuriated upon hearing about the potential involvement of Vishapakar. This news only fueled his anger further. Mars, in collaboration with Ceres Shipyards, was developing a project designed to instill fear across the galaxy: the Juggernaut-Class warship.

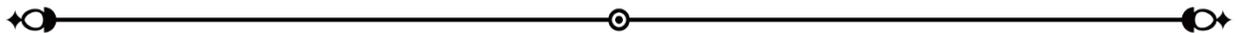
This new leap in military warship development featured an experimental weapon—a railgun capable of launching projectiles with the force equivalent to a nuclear warhead, intended for planetary target strikes. United LunaTerra had repeatedly criticized Mars for this development, oscillating between imposing and lifting sanctions. The pacifist Prime Minister lacked the balls to stop Mars from creating such a ship, hoping instead to ensure that the gun never pointed at Earth.

The Juggernaut-Class was Mars' most secretive project. Compared to the currently operational Njdeh-Class striking ships, the Juggernaut would be triple the size and firepower, representing a significant escalation in Martian military capability.

The Cetus Federal Republic wasn't stepping down their game either. A large mining network established on YZ Ceti was fueling Tau Ceti with the metals and materials required to expand their fleet. Though the Cetus Federal Republic wasn't part of the Settled Exoplanets Alliance, they held Observer status and maintained ambassadorial relationships to ensure collaboration.

Capitol, Tau Ceti F, was a hub of high-tech development, with the slogan “Elegance and Intelligence” reflecting their actions as they rapidly caught up with United LunaTerra in the science sector. The previous president had harbored intense animosity towards the Solar System, cutting all communications. However, he was removed from office long ago, and a younger candidate took his place, slowly but cautiously reestablishing relations with the Solar System.

SEA had a settlement on Tau Ceti E, serving as a base for their operations. The new president frequently debated overturning the previous administration's decisions, including the establishment of the SEA settlement. The SEA criticized the new president heavily for his reluctance to cooperate, branding him a traitor to the traditional values of the Cetus constellation.



Back on Chandrayaan Prospect, Wells walked down the alley, searching for the café. He spotted Edgar waving at him through two layers of windows in a building. With a mechanical buzz, he turned his body and suit towards the entrance airlock. On hazardous environment planets, it was standard to have two airlocks, one for entrance and one for exit.

As the outer lock cycled open, Wells stepped into the repressurization chamber. Once inside the café, he removed his helmet and joined Edgar, who had reserved a table for them. Two bowls of warmed soup awaited them. Wells sat across from Edgar, anticipating a sarcastic joke from the Professor.

“So, as I mentioned before, I got the reports. Nova indeed widened our eyes on this technology,” Edgar began.

Wells sipped a spoonful of soup, pleasantly surprised by its taste. “The compu—” he started, but Edgar interrupted.

“Archangels. I like that name. I will refer to them in the documents for now.”

Wells nodded, then continued. “As I was saying, the computer we found was an interface for a local database. But upon further investigation, we discovered that the Lotus facility was communicating with something at speeds we didn’t think possible.”

Edgar glanced at his tablet. “Something seven thousand light-years away, yes.”

“Forgotten Planet,” Wells half-joked.

“The Scientific Assembly is thrilled with these discoveries. I’m sure we can push the government to approve more expeditions. Oh, also, what about the metals you brought back?”

“I assume it’s a metal specifically created by the Archangels or a new sort of metal that doesn’t naturally form in our neighborhood.” Wells pulled out a tiny clump of shiny white metal from a small suit storage compartment and placed it on the table.

“We can trace down star systems where this metal can form. Our deep space technologies are more than capable now that we have the composition data,” Wells said, setting the soup bowl aside.

“What do you think,” Edgar mused, looking into his soup, “if we demolished that facility to extract as much metal as we can?”

“We might lose our only beacon pointing towards that forgotten planet.”

“We should let the Assembly decide. If our theories about natural metal formation are correct, then we can preserve the remains of the Archangels.”

“And what if that metal is unreachable even with Astralis-Class ships?” Edgar questioned.

“We have a power source from the Lotus Facility that was powering the interface. It produces as much energy as the entire reactor of our Minotaur-Class megaship. Maybe if we could combine it, then we’d have enough thrust to reach. AdS and both cyclotrons only depend on electricity and hydrogen fuel for the thrusters.”

“Once you leave the 1025 light-year mark, our communicators won’t be able to reach you, leaving you on your own,” Edgar warned.

Wells stood up and picked up his helmet. “I’m sure once the risk pays off, we can install transmitters to establish communications. You know more than I do about interstellar travel.”

Leaving the little metal piece with Edgar, Wells wore his helmet and prepared to leave. “Oh, and speaking of the Forgotten Planet, the interface contained a database of other structures. I assume we can build a route towards that unknown structure, just saying for a future expedition.”

“You know, Wells, the tensions with SEA are too high. I’m not sure when I can convince the Scientific Assembly to approve it.”

“Oh, and before you leave, your performance on Nova had pleased the assembly, they decided to grant you higher access and a candidate to the assembly membership, I will entrust upon you the

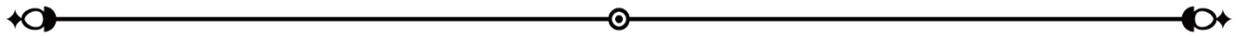
search for this” Edgar raised that piece of metal, reflecting the bits of sunlight that pass through Titan’s fog “Angelic metal”

The airlock closed shut, leaving Edgar almost alone in the café, left with the waiter, thinking for a minute

“Here’s the money” he picks up his helmet and proceeds to leave shortly after

Wells had left the area already back to his motel room, soon departing back to Earth

Edgar stood outside the café for a moment, glazing at the mighty Saturn and it’s rings



In Luna, New Beijing City, Deputy Officer Victor had recently been promoted to Captain, granting him the privilege of ship ownership and the ability to lead his own crew. The Kepler-Class's third model was the ideal choice for those with the means and the necessary license. Multipurpose with a high jump range and decent firepower, the Third Model, preceding the Astralis-Class, was the pride of United LunaTerra.

Victor decided to order a Kepler-Class Mk3 from Ceres Shipyard, requesting specific modifications. The standard models were typically long and designed to carry large crews, but Victor didn't need that. He wanted a shorter version just his team. The Mk3 featured a stylish triangular design, with the ship's casing connected to the main body covered in protective plating by sturdy joints,.

He boarded a booked shuttle to Vesta, heading towards the company's market to place his order. While in transit, he decided to message the people he wanted to assemble on his ship. The first message went to his lover, Emilia, followed by Harrison and Vitas. Although he considered inviting more people, his past experiences of betrayal made him anxious about extending invitations beyond those he trusted most. Victor had only known Vitas for a few weeks, but they shared common interests and felt comfortable around each other, making him a natural choice for the team.

Without a doubt, everyone agreed that having a personal ship for their needs was the best thing someone could own.

Wells, stationed on E-L5 with the rest of the science team, returned to his home cabin and dusted off his favorite coat—a sleek white garment made of polymers designed to withstand hazardous environments. With his recent promotion in the scientific assembly, he now had the authority to participate in the Archangels research.

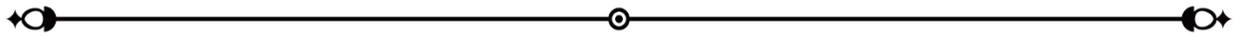
His immediate field of interest was the ‘Forgotten Planet.’ Research on the interface’s glyphs had revealed more than just the Lotus facility, suggesting a possible route to an unknown structure. Clearly, the shared dream wasn’t just a coincidence among the people who had been there. Wells believed the structure was attempting to communicate. The thoughts of the dream creature and the arrival of a new crew ship excited him, as he could now focus his work on the ship.

Wells also believed that the power source they extracted could enable ships to reach more distant worlds than currently possible. His daydreaming while walking down the hallway was interrupted by a message notification from the United Science Association, which was working on the new metals.

“Harrison Wells, we require your attention in laboratory room 29, E-L5.” Anxious, he turned and ran the opposite way to the elevators, mowing down everyone in his path.

Meanwhile, Victor was at Vesta, filling out the tedious paperwork for the purchase of his ship. Given that Kepler-Class ships were popular among Earthians, several variations of the third model were already available for purchase, including the stripped-down version he wanted. Looking at the ship's beauty while completing the documents only fueled his excitement.

The Ceres Shipyards were renowned, considered by many to be the most influential company in the entire solar system, if not the stellar neighborhood, with many colonies still relying on their manufacturing services.



The Prime Minister of United LunaTerra was visiting Ross 128, specifically the planet Dyson Terra.

Juliette Dyson was a prominent engineer on Mark Cooper's team, and her contributions to the Anti-De-Sitter (AdS) drive were immortalized on one of the colonies established by the United Nations during the Genesis era of interstellar travel. Her body is preserved in the National Museum of Aeronautics of United LunaTerra in the Ross 128 system.

Juliette Dyson was a key participant in the colonization of Ross 128. In honor of her significant contributions and following her death, the planet was named Dyson Terra, often referred to as Dyson's Earth.

In a scheduled meeting room, the Prime Minister met with the Governor of the Virgo Autonomous Province. They exchanged information on SEA agents and their plans, ensuring that the upcoming elections in a few months would proceed smoothly.

The Prime Minister had brought his son on the trip. The boy was walking through a park built around the central building, looking at the statue of Juliette Dyson. Despite its high Earth Similarity Index (ESI), Ross 128 b was still a hostile planet for humans without space suits. He noticed several men in space suits that didn't resemble anything he was familiar with; the colors didn't match his father's or his own, as if they were foreigners.

The men didn't draw much attention, and most people thought of them as typical haulers in very worn-out suits. They were examining something, looking towards the governmental shuttle landing pads, perhaps planning something. The boy tried not to draw attention to himself, pretending to be just passing by. One of the men turned towards him, looking in his direction. The boy, immediately frightened, turned away, but the man wasn't looking at him directly. Instead, the men were focused on the building and then proceeded to go somewhere. The boy didn't risk following them, but he was left uncertain about who these men were.

The building was heavily guarded than usual, the visit of United LunaTerra Prime Minister was historical after many years left to just distant communications,

Dyson Terra was an important strategic planet for United LunaTerra. The industry there produced everything from microprocessors, plates, chips, to qubits; it could be said that all technologies were dependent on them. Earth used to send one-third of its fleet to Ross 128 to protect the planet at all costs.

However, after the change in the Prime Minister, the fleet presence had noticeably decreased, leaving the system more vulnerable.

Dyson Terra had two noticeable moons. The second smallest moon had a peculiar flattened egg shape with an atmosphere and bright auroras. The first moon, closer to the main planet, was also slightly flattened. The main military complexes were located on this moon, and the military there still received funding from Earth, which was the system's only hope for feeling secure.

Presidential shuttle was standing safe and secure under the hot sun, kid stood there waiting for his father surrounded by rest of the guards, the schedules meeting had over already and it was time return back to orbit where Air Force One was waiting



Victor finally boarded the ship he had just purchased, a Kepler-class Interstellar Cruiser Mk. 3. Walking down the tight hallways, he looked around the tiny rooms, each designed for a specific purpose. When he entered the reactor room and saw the massive Helium-3 reactor, he was amazed at how much power could be contained in such a space. Thoughts of Archangels' technology filled his mind, and he optimistically joked to himself about sticking that power cell into the ship and flying off to another galaxy.

He proceeded to the ship's bridge, where all the action was. Sitting in the captain's chair, he spun around, eager to boot up the board computer. Flashy images appeared above his head, and a heartwarming message displayed on the main screen: "Welcome back, Captain." Lines of running text and code followed, which only Harrison could probably understand.

"I should call the team. How do I call Harry on this thing?" Victor muttered, navigating through the interface to find the communications relay. The ship was still docked, and all communications were firewalled by the station. He needed to park outside the sphere of influence to make a call.

Unlike the monstrous engine of the Astralis, the Mk3 was very gentle. The magnetic clamps detached from the ship, retracting back to their nests, and the ship gently flew backward from the dock. From the massive windows in front of him, Vesta could barely be seen from such a distance.

"Alright, let's see where the telephone book is," Victor continued to wrestle with the interface to access telecommunications. "Aha!" he exclaimed, eyes widening as he finally found the panel. "Alright, let's call Harry first. I need his help in understanding this computer."

At E-L5's non-gravity sectors, Wells was floating in zero-g, looking out the window at the blinding Sol. Suddenly, he received a call on his tablet. Raising it from his coat pocket, he saw an unknown number with a strange registration code: ULTSN V9T-34L.

"The fuck? A call from a ship?" Wells answered the call cautiously, holding the tablet away from his face. He stood in silence for a moment.

"ALO!" a loud voice boomed from the tablet.

"Victor, is that you?" Wells responded, almost losing the tablet in zero-g.

"Who else? I'm calling from the ship. Where are you? I'm coming to pick up the team. I need you to speak with the computers here—I can't figure shit out."

Wells sent Victor his geolocation through the messenger. After a few hours, the ship finally docked at the Lagrange 5 station. Wells, with his items in tow, rushed to board the ship immediately. Without invitation letter. The airlock cycled, and Victor stood waiting in the hallway.

Both stared at each other in silence until they smacked their hands together as hard as they could, muscles and veins popping out from the force.

"You finally did it," Wells congratulated Victor on his new purchase.

"Aye, Darte, now we finally have our little corner among the worlds."

"Who else is on the crew?" Wells asked about the new roster.

"Me, you, Emilia, and Vitas."

"That guy you were patrolling with?"

"Yeah."

Wells began looking around the engineer dock and machinery. "This place feels empty. We need instruments and shit," he said, wobbling his arm around and pointing at different lockers.

"We could. Since we now have our Chariot, we can go to Dragon Stone. The communists there have the best equipment for lower prices. Maybe I could find my brother there."

"Dragon Stone? You mean Vishapakar?"

"Yeah," Victor confirmed.

"How long has it been?" Wells asked, picking up his tablet and tweaking to ship's systems.

"Not sure. He ran off when I was still a kid, pursuing a dream. Ever since then, we never spoke again," Victor said, donning gloves and preparing to start working on the mechanical sector.

"Oh, and since you speak with the computers, set up everything to be ready to fly. I didn't understand anything. I'm gonna do some tweaking here," Victor said as he headed toward the room.

"No problemo, Darte," Wells replied, using a Saturnian slang term he didn't understand.

Minutes felt like hours as Wells sat in the Captain's chair, tweaking the ship's systems through the command-line interface. Suddenly, Victor's voice crackled through the radio.

"Does this work? Alo!" Victor mumbled.

Switching to the communications app on his tablet, Wells replied, "Yes, stop yelling."

"Emilia and Vitas are going to arrive soon. I told them I'd be docked at E-L5."

"What are you doing down there?" Wells questioned, glancing at the system report on the monitors.

"I want to see what the maximum power this thing can handle."

"What the hell are you planning?"

"That power thing—it might come in handy."

"We're still working on it with the science team. We don't know how compatible it is."

"Does the Lotus facility have more of them?" Victor asked, curious.

"Quite a few, around three or four more, powering the facility."

The airlock suddenly rotated, and the doors opened. Vitas slowly stepped inside the ship.

"Hello?"

"Hello!" Wells shouted through the ship's intercom. Victor arrived shortly after.

"Ay, you're finally here. The habitat cabins are a little farther. Take the elevator to the second floor," Victor said, pointing toward the elevator hallway.

"Motion sensors are working well," Wells announced through the intercom.

"That's good, but lower the volume," Victor replied.

"Where's Emilia?" Victor asked, feeling anxious. "Vit, have you seen a girl on your way here? Blonde hair, yellow eyes?"

"No idea. The station was pretty crowded. It took ages to get from Mars to Earth," Vitas replied, genuinely not knowing.

Victor pulled out his tablet and began ringing in hopes of an answer. Suddenly, a woman entered through the airlock. Victor turned to see a familiar face.

"I'm here!" Emilia called out, and Victor rushed toward the voice.

"Someone passed through the airlock," Wells said through the intercom, even quieter than be-

fore.

Vitas had brought his legally owned lethal arms as an MTR Soldier with him. The ship had armory lockers where he stowed the weapons next to Victor's.

"What's the ship called?" Vitas asked through the radio, addressing both Wells and Victor.

"No idea," Victor replied.

"Graviton," Wells said.

"Why?" Victor asked.

"Why not?" Wells responded.

"I like Graviton," Emilia said, walking through the hallway with heavy bags.

"Sure," Vitas replied.

Wells opened the ship registration configuration on the computer and changed the designation from V9T-34L to Graviton.

Graviton was now registered under the Ceres Shipyards company, which offered a lot more flexibility across the stars and fewer problems with docking permissions outside the Solar System.

"Well, since everyone is here," Victor suggested, "why don't we go to Dragon Stone now?"

"Then stop messing with the reactor before we blow up," Wells replied, then asked, "Okay, who's going to drive?"

"I need to watch after the systems and mechanics from here," Victor replied.

"Don't have the license or experience to do so," Vitas's voice could be heard approaching the bridge.

"Neither do I," Emilia replied.

"Well then," Wells said as he began detaching the ship from the magnetic clamps, "Barnard's, then. To Barnard's."

The gentle engines began maneuvering, preparing the vector toward Barnard's Star. The AdS drive, comparable to the Astralis drive, had its only limitation in reactor size and power production. The charging hum resonated through the entire ship, audible even on the bridge.

"Alright, gentlemen," Wells announced, pressing several configurations and responding to the ship about jump readiness. His eyes shone with excitement as he prepared everyone for the beauty of an AdS jump.

A kid stood outside E-L5, looking with his mother from the window at the Graviton. They watched the bright cyclotrons around the ship stretch space from left to right before vanishing in

a bright flash.

“Five hours till we’re there,” Wells broadcast through the ship.

Wells walked down the hallway, creating a list of items needed for the ship, and checked every locker and corner in the rooms.

...

Victor and Emilia were nowhere to be seen. Two hours had passed since the ship had entered the fifth dimension. Wells was sitting in the Captain's chair, staring into the unexplainable phenomena happening outside the ship. He decided it was time to set up one of the free rooms as his office, where he could remotely work with the Archangels' technology. Holding his tablet, he added even more items to the shopping list, realizing he had left half of his equipment in the Solar System.

Hours passed, feeling like centuries. Suddenly, everyone's tablets began beeping. Wells looked at the monitors above the ship. His tweaks to synchronize the tablets with the ship had been successful.

“We are dropping out at Barnard’s Star. Brace yourselves,” Wells announced through the ship's intercom to the crew.

Glimpses of light were visible from the bridge as space around the ship began to normalize. Suddenly, Victor appeared out of nowhere. Vitas was sitting as the copilot, plotting an autopilot route toward the orbital station “Longmen.”

“Thought you were looking after the ship’s systems,” Wells said without turning around.

“Discussing some business. So, how far are we from their station?” Victor asked Wells.

“We can either dive directly into the city or dock at Longmen and take a shuttle from there,” Wells replied.

“No point docking at Longmen. Shortened Keplers are capable of landing themselves,” Victor said.

“Right,” Wells agreed.

The communistic ideals could be felt even from orbit; the hardworking population of Vishapakar had built a city they dreamt about amid the hostile planet, yet everyone lived in poverty.

“CRS Graviton, welcome to Vishapakar. Your automatic docking request has been accepted. Please proceed to Landing Pad 18,” came the automatic radio message from flight control.

“CRS?” Wells questioned.

“Our ship is belt-registered. CRS stands for Ceres Shipyards,” Victor explained.

“Landing gear deployed,” a voice announced from the ship's system.

“This thing can even speak,” Victor said, surprised.

With a gentle touchdown on Pad 18, they proceeded to pack the essentials and wear their suits. Wells was already prepared, holding his helmet and standing near the airlock. Victor decided to stay with Emilia for now, letting Vitas go with Wells instead.

Under the slam of the airlock, both left into the streets of the capital city. The weather on Vishapakar was a sight to behold: a dust storm with thunder rain, which happened quite often. Wells and Vitas had to hurry before they got stuck outside. Unlike Titan, there wasn't anything outside; they had to find an airlock to enter instead, where everything they needed was located. The bright red flag with a dragon around a yellow star was an obvious indicator of the entrance.

“How do they drive here between city parts? No concrete, asphalt, or anything,” Wells said, disappointed with the quality outside. They could already see thick cloud formations approaching their location.

Victor buzzed something through the radio. Wells pressed the frequency list to tune to the Graviton, after which he could hear Victor's voice: “I'm also coming to the city. I have a person to meet.”

At the airlock, Vitas attached his tablet with the guest visa opened. They stepped inside the repressurization chamber, where they could already see green gardens and human-grown forests inside the domes.

“Gotta admit, this is awesome,” Wells said, changing his mind about the quality. Vitas and Wells passed by the workers, who were like robots, tirelessly working on the city. The hammer hitting the metal could be heard across the entire dome. Exposed wires were hanging near green leaves; one spark and everything would burn down.

“Alright, I shared a copy of the shopping list with you. Let's spread out. I'll go look for science equipment,” Wells said, wearing his coat and heading off. Vitas went searching for a mechanic toolkit.

Dystopian neon lights lit their paths. On every corner, it almost felt like there was a strip club, freely open to visit. Vitas's military training did not permit him to get distracted by half-naked women and flashy lights of the streets.

Wells moved swiftly through the crowded streets, scanning the marketplace for anything related to science equipment. The market was a chaotic blend of vendors shouting their wares, neon signs advertising various goods, and a constant hum of activity.

He approached a vendor selling what looked like advanced electronics and scientific tools. “Do you have any high-precision measurement devices?” Wells asked, trying to be as specific as possible.

The vendor, an older man with a long beard and a heavy accent, nodded. "Yes, we do. Right this way." He led Wells to a side stall filled with various instruments.

Meanwhile, Vitas was navigating through the mechanical district, searching for a toolkit. He found a large warehouse with a sign in neon letters that read, "Mechanics' Haven." He stepped inside, greeted by rows upon rows of tools and machinery parts.

A clerk approached him. "Can I help you find something?"

"I'm looking for a high-quality mechanic toolkit. Something comprehensive," Vitas replied.

"Right over here," the clerk said, leading Vitas to a section with neatly organized toolkits. "These are our best sets, imported from Proxima Centauri." winking while saying imported

Vitas inspected the sets, selecting one that seemed to meet all their needs.

Back in the marketplace Wells managed to secure a good deal, paying with Exocredits automatically exchanged loaded onto his tablet. As he packed up his purchases, He received message from Vitas "Got the tools, shiny"

Victor tried to blend into the crowd as much as possible. Like him, his brother was also an engineer, which significantly narrowed his search. He approached merchants, showing them a picture of his brother, and asking if they recognized him. He did this across all the streets until one stripper, taking a smoke break outside, heard Victor's voice.

"Hey, you Solarian," she called out. Victor, confused, looked around and approached her through the crowd.

"How do you know I'm from Sol?"

"No idiot dresses like that. Look at that shiny suit with Saturn's emblem. I know that guy named Ford. He shows up here sometimes."

"Where is he?"

She rolled her eyes and motioned for him to follow. They went to a darker room, left alone.

"Well, I don't have any reason to tell you anything, unless—"

"No."

She pulled out a knife, aiming for Victor's wrist. Victor reacted instantly, hitting her hand hard enough to make her drop the knife, nearly breaking her arm as he twisted it behind her back.

"Bold of you to threaten a soldier of United LunaTerra," he said, pointing a fully armed high-caliber pistol resembling an old Earth Desert Eagle at her head. "I don't have time for your games."

Where is he, or be gone from my sight."

"See that yellow neon over there?" She pointed. "That's his workshop. He's a known mechanic around here."

Victor holstered his Desert Eagle, tossed a few physical Exocredits as a token of gratitude, and left silently. He approached the yellow sign that read "Ford's Workshop," knocked on the door, and entered the workshop. Inside, he silently approached a man working on a suit.

"I'm sorry, but we are not currently taking new clients," the man said.

"I'm here for a man named Ford Dastarian."

The man slowly stopped working. "Don't know who that is."

"Yes, you do. Look at me."

Ford and Victor locked eyes.

"Is this the dream you pursued? Did you run from your family to an entirely different star system for this?" Victor picked him up by his shirt with the artificial muscles of the suit. He didn't have the strength to hit him, tears streaming down his face. "I can help you escape. I'm building a crew on my new ship, and we could use another scientist and mechanic."

"I'm not sure, Victor. My h—"

"No, it's not your home. Look at this place. Every corner stripper knows you. Is this the dream? We work with alien technology, jump between stars, and are trusted by the highest-ranking officials across Sol. Please, come."

Unable to refuse his brother, whom he hadn't seen in ages, Ford hesitated.

"Trust me, you'll have a workshop ten times fancier than this," Victor said, glancing around the metallic room. "We could use your instruments too. I'm sure the boys bought what was needed, but you know, the more, the better, especially the ones you trust."

Victor glanced at his tablet, seeing a message from Wells.

"I need to pack my stuff first. Are we leaving now?" Ford asked, genuinely feeling conflicted.

Victor opened the message from Wells. "Storm is approaching. Either we go now or get stuck for a few hours."

"We need to go. We don't have time."

"Black Thunder is approaching," Ford mumbled.

Back on Earth, the Deputy Prime Minister of United LunaTerra was holding a crucial meeting with his top advisors. The intelligence reports from Kepler-1649 had raised serious concerns about Novrutara's plans. ULT Intelligence had intercepted communications indicating that Novrutara was constructing something significant, though its purpose remained a mystery.

Adrianna, the Defense Minister, presented her theories to the assembled officials. "We have reason to believe that Novrutara is trying to close the gap in technological advancements between them and Mars. The recent development of the Juggernaut-Class ships by Mars undoubtedly scares them. The anonymous order placed at Cetus Federal Republic's ship manufacturing company only confirms our suspicions. They are up to something big."

The Deputy Prime Minister leaned forward. "We need more concrete information. Speculation won't help us prepare adequately. What are our options?"

Adrianna nodded. "We've already sent in some of our best operatives to gather more intel. Additionally, we're monitoring all communications channels and have increased surveillance on key Novrutara facilities. However, we've been cut off, as they realized we were spying on them."

General Marcus, the head of Martian Technate's military forces and a present guest at the meeting, spoke up. "We should also prepare for the worst-case scenario. If Novrutara is indeed building a new class of warship or weapon, we must ensure our defenses are ready. I recommend increasing patrols around our space borders and conducting readiness drills for our fleet."

The Deputy Prime Minister hesitated. "I'm unsure. If we increase our patrols and defenses right now, it might provoke them to do something even worse."

"Why is SEA playing with fire?" Adrianna thought to herself, taking a sip of bottled water brought from Enceladus' ice.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister himself was at the presidential mansion somewhere in the preserved forests of the China province, dining with his wife and children.

"Dear, you're overworking a lot on Luna," his wife remarked.

"Easy to say when you're not trying to hold pitbulls on a chain from chopping off your head," he replied, his tone weary.

"Want a whiskey? Brought from Haumea Brewery."

"They make whiskey on Haumea now? Isn't that a little far?"

"An excuse to charge five times the price. The water extracted from the ice there gives it a unique taste, along with grains grown on Titan."

Rubbing his eyes, barely able to stay awake, the Prime Minister muttered, "I hope the Deputy

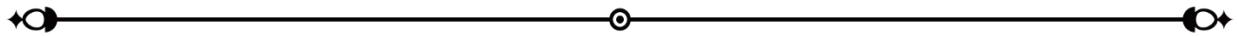
won't cause anything unnecessary,” yawning widely before he could finish the sentence.

“You need sleep, Anders,” his wife said, hugging him from behind. Both gazed into the lush green forests that had been preserved in the now-provincial China.

“Mars is patiently waiting for SEA to make first step, to unleash the pitbulls from chain, they want the systems back”

Back in the meeting room, the Deputy Prime Minister took a deep breath. "We need to tread carefully. Let's increase our surveillance subtly and focus on gathering more intel. Prepare for defense but avoid overtly aggressive actions for now."

Adrianna and General Marcus exchanged glances and nodded. The stakes were high.



Victor and Ford were hastily packing all the instruments and items from the workshop on Dragon Stone. The black storm clouds were ominously visible through the Dome's windows, and they needed to rush back to Graviton before the weather became too dangerous to fly. Wells and Vitas had already boarded the ship, organizing the newly acquired instruments in their respective lockers and rooms.

Victor and Ford dashed through the crowded, narrow streets lined with merchants. There was a queue at the airlock, with people eager to leave the city before the storm hit. Over the radio, they could hear Wells' voice crackling through the static, “Where the hell are you lost?” Barely audible through the radio noise, they managed to slip through with a group of people entering the pressurization chamber. They quickly donned their helmets before the airlock closed. They still had a considerable distance to cover from the city dome to the landing pads, and the sand blowing around only added to the challenge.

Wells had already heated up the engines, charging the AdS drive, hoping that Victor and Ford would return soon. The wind was picking up, and the sky grew darker by the minute.

"Come on, Ford We're almost there!" Victor shouted over the roaring wind.

They sprinted across the sand, the grains stinging their skin despite their protective gear. The storm was almost upon them, and visibility was rapidly decreasing. The Graviton's lights were a beacon through the swirling dust, guiding them toward their destination.

As they approached the landing pads, the ground trembled with the force of the approaching storm. The ship's engines and AdS were a reassuring hum, cutting through the chaos around them. They reached the airlock just as a particularly strong gust of wind nearly knocked them off their feet.

Vitas shouted something from the ship's entrance, pulling them aboard.

The airlock closed behind them, and the ship's hallway pressurized. Victor and Ford quickly se-

cured themselves as Wells took the controls, lifting off just as the first bolts of lightning struck the ground. The ship shuddered as it broke through the turbulent atmosphere

Wells guided the Graviton out of the storm's reach, the black clouds receding behind them. The AdS drives, calibrated back at Sol, were at full capacity. Wells slammed the throttle, engaging the dimensional shift. It felt like escaping hell, and they finally had some relief. Vitas and Wells began scrolling through the systems, noticing a dangerous amount of sand stuck inside the engines.

"We need to clean out the piled-up sand in the engines," Wells said. "But for now, we need to sleep. It's technically the night cycle. We'll reach Sol on autopilot when we wake up." The ship's lights dimmed to almost complete darkness, with only the weird vibrating shadows visible outside the windows.

Victor guided the new crew member to his room and then disappeared into the shared room with Emilia. The dark, tight hallways were illuminated by ground light panels, revealing only slight details. Fresh air poured through the air recyclers, and system panels provided a faint glow. Ford floated through the corridor, unable to sleep. Humans who weren't planet-bound anymore had to follow a "cycle" regime, a constant, independent clock.

He floated into the lounge, enveloped in pure darkness, as if a guitar melody played in his head. Following the light from the windows, he found a seat and picked up a sealed cup of powdered coffee that Wells had forgotten. All it needed was hot water. He sat at the table, looking outside the window at the unexplainable NS5 brane, wondering how much he had missed since moving to Vishapakar.

"How could the aliens come up with this math?" he mused. "A brane above and below our brane, where open string ends, and loops evolve in tiny, collapsed dimensions that we can't directly observe."

The ship hummed softly as it navigated through the dimensional shift, leaving Ford to his thoughts and the endless mysteries of the universe.

...

Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. These planets, part of our Solar System, hold a significant place in every human's heart. They are the celestial bodies that have protected, shaped, and defined what we call our home. Earth gave us a place to be born, while Venus and Mars were early incubators of life before Earth became the cradle of humanity. Jupiter, with its immense gravity curving spacetime, attracts asteroids that might otherwise harm Earth. Saturn, a shining ringed jewel in our night sky, assists Jupiter in clearing the system of dangerous asteroids. Uranus and Neptune have expanded our knowledge and understanding of planetary formation and early planetary appearances.

Then there are the dwarf planets, tiny bodies that share their orbits with others. Pluto, once considered the ninth planet, was reclassified as a dwarf planet because its orbit is shared with Eris, Haumea, and beyond them, Sedna, Makemake, Gonggong, Quaoar, and Orcus. Despite being

overlooked as dwarf planets, they are no less fascinating than the larger planets. One particularly intriguing dwarf planet is Haumea, with its egg-shaped form, rings, and two moons, Hi'iaka and Namaka. Quaoar, also egg-shaped, has one moon and peculiar rings, challenging our understanding of their formation around the host body's Roche limit.

Belted to the sleeping bed, Wells, being lost in his dreams again, saw the tall, no eyed creature, it again tried touch Harrison just for him to wake up immediately after, this time calm

The Graviton stationed itself in orbit around Haumea, guided by the autopilot. After the complete night cycle, the programmed clock began to slowly turn on the lights room by room. Wells was the first to awaken, floating through the still dim hallways. He headed straight for a cup of coffee to wake himself up. The ship was still in sleep mode, and artificial gravity wasn't active while the ship was relative stationary, making Wells wobble his hands around, trying to find something to hold on to.

Suddenly, the lights in the lounge turned on, burning his eyes. As he squinted against the brightness, Vitas appeared, floating by in a slow rotation. "Good morning, Harry," Vitas mumbled, still half asleep. Wells ignored him, focusing on the now-visible items he needed to make his damn coffee.

Finally able to see clearly, Wells grabbed a cup and the powdered coffee, starting the brewing process. The familiar aroma soon filled the lounge, providing a small comfort in the otherwise disorienting zero-gravity environment. Wells floated to a nearby seat, securing himself as he sipped the hot beverage. He looked at the black screen of his floating tablet, lost in thought, until Victor's voice came through the ship intercom.

"Me and Ford are leaving for an EVA to clean the engines. I've already disabled all power from the engine room," Victor announced, ensuring the ship was safely paralyzed from any accidental powering of the engines.

Wells stared at the black tablet in silence, then decided to check his missed messages. The first one that caught his eye was from the United Science Association (USA). Ignoring the others, he opened it.

"Dear Harrison Wells, Your theories have been proven at E-L5 laboratory about Archangels' 'Lotus' Facility and structures leading towards the 'Forgotten Planet' by you..."

Wells didn't finish reading the message. He already knew the professor had influenced this breakthrough. There was no way the strict, by-the-book organization would actually use those names, considering their idiotic naming rules.

Meanwhile, Victor and Ford had already left the ship, using magnetic boots to avoid floating away.

"Oh damn, I haven't been on an EVA in a really long time," Ford said, standing on the ship's belly and looking at the egg-shaped, ringed Haumea, barely reflecting any light, with its two tiny moons, Hi'iaka and Namaka.

“Come on, we’ve got a problem to fix,” Victor shouted through the radio.

Ford was carrying all the instruments needed for EVA maintenance, essential when no stations were available. Flying to Triton Station was an option, but the piled-up sand posed too high a risk for that journey. The ship’s triangle-aligned engines all had large, openable panels specifically designed for maintenance. Using a special key that Ford had brought, they opened the panel to more easily access the inner workings of the engine.

Victor and Ford worked diligently, removing the accumulated sand from the engines, their years long experience in engineering played big role in this. The task was meticulous but necessary to ensure the Graviton remained operational. As they worked, the vast expanse of space around them served as a stark reminder of both the beauty and danger of space.

“Engine one clear,” Ford reported, his voice steady over the radio.

“Wells,” Victor accidentally shouted into the radio. After a few seconds of silence, a reply arrived, “Yes?”

“Connect my tablet back to the ship systems,” Victor requested. From the ship’s bridge, Wells connected the physical address of Victor’s tablet back to the board computer. Their system used something akin to the old MAC address protocols of ancient computers. Victor checked his wrist-attached tablet to ensure Engine One was reporting all green lights. Ford had already proceeded to open the second engine’s maintenance panel.

Wells, seated in the captain’s chair, monitored the screens. Minutes of silence passed until the automatic flight control of the Solar System left a message: “CRS Graviton, Welcome back to Solar System territory.”

“Cool,” Wells said with an emotionless face.

Vitas was sitting in the lounge, both he and Wells watching Haumea’s moons orbiting the planet through the windows. They observed the celestial dance in silent meditation, a rare moment of calmness. Their tranquility was interrupted when Victor asked Wells to restore the engines’ power supply from the engine room,

Wells floated through the hallways to the ship’s lowest deck where the engines were located. The airlock hissed open, and Ford and Victor returned from open space back onboard the ship. Emilia was standing at the airlock, she used her experience as medical student to quickly examine both guys after EVA run, “Firing the engines, brace yourselves” Wells announced. He pulled several rock-hard levers, and the engines began to hum audibly. As part of standard procedure, the engines fired for half a second as a test to ensure they were operational.

“All systems are green,” Victor reported, checking his tablet.

Wells continued reading the message from the United Science Association (USA):

“We conducted compatibility experiments on the power plant brought from Nova. We are happy to announce that we can create special ports capable of boosting our reactors' power production. This will greatly decrease travel times through the 4th dimension and our jump capabilities, nearly doubling them. “We have preparing a mission with the Astralis-Class for the retrieval of the remaining four power plants. We are also honored to offer your new crew ship, the Graviton, the second compatibility port installation. Proceed to Neptune Orbital Station We will wait for you at 15:00”

Excited, Wells shared the news with the crew. “Guys, I got a message from the USA with great news, especially for you, Victor. The power plant you took from the settlement is compatible with our reactors. Teams have already developed a compatibility port and are offering the honor of installing it first on the Graviton.

“The outcome was never really in doubt,” Victor said with a French accent, a visible smile cherishing the news. “You know what to do, Harry. Engage back to Earth.”

Wells corrected him, “Victor, the appointed place is on Neptune.”

“Yes, yes, to Neptune, I mean!” Victor said, pointing somewhere.

Neptune was close enough to reach the United LunaTerra military docks. Wells engaged the engines, which gently fired at 75% of their full capacity. The ship’s interior structure ensured the acceleration created artificial gravity, providing a smooth transition with a little over 10.2 m/s².

Emilia would jump hug Victor from behind, sharing the happiness about the news with Victor

...

The cyan haze of Neptune's atmosphere was already visible from the ship. Uranus and Neptune shared a similar atmospheric composition, giving them both their distinct blue hues.

Suddenly, a stern voice crackled through the ship’s communications system: “CRS Graviton, you are trespassing in a restricted military area of United LunaTerra. Leave immediately.”

Wells quickly responded, “Flight Control, this is Harrison Wells speaking, Member of the Scientific Assembly. We have authorization from Mikail Deutron to proceed to the station. Sending it now.”

He swiftly transmitted the authorization codes. Moments later, the voice on the other end replied, “Authorization received. You are cleared to proceed to the station. Welcome to the United LunaTerra military docks, CRS Graviton.”

Victor and Ford watched from the viewport as the massive structures of the military docks came into view, towering against the backdrop of Neptune’s serene blue.

“Look at that,” Ford said, awe evident in his voice. “Never thought I’d see such place up close.”

The Graviton smoothly docked at the station. As they secured the ship, the magnetic docking clamps engaged, securing the ship in a position.

Mikail and Edgar stood outside the airlock, welcoming the crew of Graviton to the station. Wells, clad in his favorite coat, approached Mikail, while Victor and Emilia headed straight to the lounge. Meanwhile, Vitas and Ford were examining the military base they had been given permission to inspect.

"Tell me if you see anything interesting," Victor said over the radio.

"So, what's the plan?" Wells asked Edgar and Mikail. The professor pulled out a tablet, displaying blueprint images of the port being installed on the ship.

"Our study was correct at E-L5," Mikail said.

"More than correct," Edgar added, gesturing with his finger. "When the time comes, we will spread through the Ancient Route from the database." He swiped on his tablet, revealing another picture. "This is a network of facilities we extracted from the gathered information. The Lotus was in constant communication with all these facilities, and most importantly, whatever lies at the end of the route. Your studies were correct!"

"Okay, hold on," Wells interrupted returning to primary question. "So you're using us as lab rats on the new reactor?"

"Well, notice how we said second honor," Edgar grumbled.

"Who is first?" Wells asked.

"Void Voyager, which departed again to Nova. They are already there."

"What... when did they depart?" Wells asked, shocked.

"Like three hours ago."

Wells, shoving his hands through his hair, exclaimed, "Excuse me, when? They reached Nova in three hours? Wait, wait, hold on. So you're telling me the travel distance between Sol and K2-18 shrank from four days to three hours?"

"That's what I'm saying!" Edgar replied with higher tone, with genuine smile across entire face

A group of specialists could be seen working on the Graviton's machinery, both inside and outside. Compared to the massive reactors of humankind, these Archangels' power plants seemed the size of an average laptop. Yet, the combined power they generated surpassed anything humanity could produce.

"How did they achieve that? I didn't look deeply into their power generation methods," Mikail mused.

"They harness power from fusion using superpartners of particles," Edgar explained. "Since their mass is higher, it means more energy."

"There's so much to learn from them," Mikail said thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, Vitas and Ford were examining the ships docked at the military base, Falcon-Class, Phoenix-Class, Eagle-Class. Of course, they were being watched by armed men stationed at the facility.

"You're a Martian?" one of the armed men, presumably addressing Vitas, asked from behind.

"Yes?" Vitas replied, feeling uncomfortable.

"Hm, I remember fighting side by side with Martians against the Cetus Republic."

"What are you implying?" Vitas questioned.

"Nothing. We rarely have any guests here. It's uncivilized, just standing like a rock here," the soldier replied.

Vitas grimaced but appreciated the soldier's attempt at a welcome. Ford, on the other hand, was like a child experiencing space for the first time, having wasted his life on Barnard's Star as a blacksmith, missing out on the beauty of the cosmos.

Victor and Emilia dining in the lounge couldn't be called a date, especially in a military facility around Neptune. They wished to discuss something important in private. The only other person visible was the cook, reading something in the kitchen. Their intimate moment was interrupted by armed men approaching them.

"Captain Victor, we need your signature to confirm the installation of the experimental gear," one of the men said, handing Victor a special tablet.

Clearing his throat, Victor asked, "My crewmate is currently overseeing the process and understands it better. Do I need to sign this?"

"Aren't you the captain of the Graviton?"

"Well, yes," Victor admitted, grimacing as he began reading the tiny text.

Meanwhile, Wells, Mikail, and Edgar were sitting and watching the process from the windows surrounding the airlocks. Three greatest minds of their generation, or so they thought they are. The installation was nearing completion, and they entered the ship once almost all the engineers had left the Graviton. The reactor room wasn't far from the main airlock, and they could already see the yellowish-white glow from the room's open door.

"How did you come up with this in such a short time, like what, three weeks?" Wells asked.

"When state funds go toward progress rather than wars, anything is possible," Edgar responded.

Tuning in the communicators from the maintenance panel in the reactor room, Wells broadcasted the news about the installation's completion to the crew members. Vitas and Ford, already nearby, were the first to return to the ship.

Wells turned back to Mikail and Edgar. "So, what now?"

"To infinity and beyond, my friend," Edgar smiled. "The situation with SEA is pretty tense, but I'm sure we can push that expedition sooner... I hope."

Victor and Emilia approached, their smiles brighter than the ship's heating engines.

"Gentlemen, we have an announcement," Victor said, patting Wells on the shoulder.

"I'll be there soon," Wells nodded.

"I'm sure the scientific assembly will come up with something significant now that a new era of distant world exploration is starting. Perhaps we can directly answer whether Kepler-438 is suitable for humans, unlike Nova," Edgar mused.

Shaking hands with Edgar and Mikail, Wells turned, fixing his coat as he proceeded through the airlock and onboard the Graviton. In the lounge, Victor was waiting for him to share the announcement.

Wells undressed his coat and swung it onto his shoulders, leaning against wall next to him

"So, I gathered you here. As a crew of ... Our ship, The Graviton as you named it, Long said short, Me and Emilia want to bind out hearts together"

"So get married" Vitas added

"Correct" Victor confirmed

"When is the wedding" Ford with smile for his brother

"Approximetly in 2 days"

"Well" Wells came in "I see this as a good excuse to return from our word back to Earth and prepare"

"It's not gonna be anything huge" Victor disagreed "Just, I thought just with you guys" Victor's past anxiety haunts him

"You're the captain" Wells shrugged and proceeded to the bridge

Vitas approached Ford, curious about Victor's anxiety. "Why is he like that? Like, scared to know more people? We've only known each other for a month since the Astralis expedition, and

we've already been through a lot together, outside of the crew's joint mission."

The Graviton undocked, orbited the planet, and fired its thrusters to leave Neptune's sphere of influence. Using a gravity assist from Uranus, it aimed to reach Earth faster.

"Any other details given about future possible missions?" Victor asked, joining Wells as he configured the ship's systems from the command-line interface on the bridge.

"Well, we might be part of a five-ship expedition that will follow different routes, As we installed the power plant of Archangels. There's more routes, apparently," Wells replied.

"Isn't it easier to send one or two ships, which is less risky?" Victor questioned.

"To propose a change, it must go through the entire assembly for voting, which takes more time than us reaching the galactic center," Wells said with a sigh.

"Speaking of which, the ship feels incredibly comfortable with the new power plant installed. According to calculations, we can reach the galactic center in a week," Wells said.

"No shit," Victor stared at the monitor in disbelief.

Ford looked to Vitas "During his military service, he got close to several guys in his roster, they were friends, until during Siege of Cetus they backstabbed him and left alone against angered horde of colonists"

With each passing second, Neptune grew dimmer and dimmer, eventually becoming indistinguishable from the background stars. Ford, Victor, Emilia, and Vitas were in the lounge, chatting. Wells was passing by to the lockers to make a cup of coffee, taking advantage of the artificial gravity.

"Ay, Darte," Ford chanted.

"Oh my god, not him using those words too," Wells grumbled to himself. "Aha?" he responded aloud.

"We're goin to walk and drink in the Norwegian province. You comin?" Ford asked.

"No thanks, I don't like drinking. I'll be at E-L5 later on," Wells replied.

"Want us to bring cigars?" Victor added.

"Wouldn't mind," Wells said with a nod.

...

The Graviton was approaching its appointed landing pad in the Caucasian province, nestled among the preserved unified wineries of the Georgian and Armenian districts. The green plains were notably adorned with tall mountains, a miracle considering the forest fires and dying soil

that had plagued Earth. Yet, some parts of the planet managed to survive. United LunaTerra had rebuilt some cities to be eco-friendly, blending in with nature and trying to cope with the damages humanity caused. It was finally possible to breathe deeply without masks or space suits. The rest of the crew went to explore the town's shops and wineries.

Wells stayed on the ship, in his lab room, planning with the rest of the assembly, working on the Archangels. The new expanded horizons, thanks to the reactor update, gave Wells a lot to think about regarding space exploration. As he looked through newsletters on centralized social media, the name 'Settled Exoplanets Alliance' (SEA) was everywhere.

"Thoughts about SEA arming don't leave you, huh?" a mysterious voice said, causing Wells to freeze.

He slowly turned his head, fearing what he might see, but there was nothing there.

"Have you ever thought why suddenly everyone who was in that Lotus facility sees the same dreams?" The voice now came from in front of him. Wells immediately turned his head in that direction.

"Maybe it's trying to speak with you," the voice continued, now coming from the couch in the room.

Wells rubbed his eyes, hoping it was just too much coffee. Through the geometric patterns from rubbing his eyes, he saw a man sitting on the couch. The man's face resembled his father's, who had died in an accident on planet Argelander's Star Gamma Wells looked for something sharp to arm himself with, while keeping his eyes on the mysterious figure.

"There's no point in trying to throw anything at me. I don't exist," the man said.

"How are you speaking with me?" Wells asked in fear.

"It's all in your head, Wells," the man replied, standing up.

"Are you related in any way to the creatures from the dreams?" Wells asked, his voice trembling.

"Perhaps," the man raised an eyebrow, taking a long pause. "I associate with them."

"I'm just a computer, programmed to study species in what you call the galaxy, the Silver River... I think," the figure said.

Wells stood in deep shock, unable to move.

"Have you ever questioned why you suddenly had a headache while working on our interface? The sudden increase in what you call electromagnetic interference or field? I can't quite understand your mind. I should admit, this civilization has surpassed all our expectations—well, the ones we had before we all... vanished."

Wells closed his eyes for a long pause. When he opened them, the man was still there.

Meanwhile, walking down the streets of the town, Vitas noticed an electric billboard announcement. It was for an interplanetary race from Earth to Mars. The Ceres Shipyard's new development in luxurious racing ships would compete with the Cetus Republic's luxurious vehicles. Both the Solar System and Cetus Constellation viewed this race as the first concrete step towards normalizing relations.

"Guys, look! The Solar Race is in just two days!" Vitas exclaimed.

"That's cool," Ford added. "We can hit the race after the ceremony."

"Also true," Victor agreed.

As they approached the central park of the town, Victor and Emilia noticeably began distancing themselves from the rest. Vitas grabbed Ford by the hand and headed in the other direction.

"Let's go grab some bottles," Vitas suggested.

Back on the ship, a female voice buzzed through Wells' head. "Or perhaps this look will make you feel more comfortable." Turning slowly in the direction of the voice, he saw a woman in a black dress with a white bob haircut.

"I'm still studying your thoughts, the... uh... human brain, as you call it," she said.

Wells, still trying to comprehend the situation, asked, "Why are you doing this?"

"It's my purpose," she replied. "To understand and analyze species of our galaxy. You intrigue us, especially now that we've reconnected with your home planet."

"Why me?"

"You appear to be the one with the most helpful knowledge. My creators are gone, I have nowhere to go. I'm also dying."

"So you seek help?" Wells, feeling calmer, asked.

"Perha—" she started, then suddenly vanished in the blink of an eye.

"Who you talking to?" came a voice from the hallway. Vitas and Ford entered, holding four bottles of wine. They saw Wells gripping a crowbar and leaning on a lab table.

"I need to speak with Victor one day, something important," Wells said, putting the crowbar back in its holder. He looked at the boys holding wine bottles. "Why do you need so much wine?"

"Oh my god, Wells, it's a wedding soon. Come on, man," Vitas said, handing one bottle to Wells.

The hallway suddenly became empty again, leaving Wells standing there with a bottle in his hand.

“Not going to tell them?” the voice whispered again.

“Tell them that I see aliens in my head? I'd be sent off to a psychiatric hospital immediately,” Wells muttered.

“Let this be our secret then,” the woman’s voice shushed him. “The facility you call Lotus communicates with those whom the system deems important.”

Wells was still processing everything that happened in a moment of clock’s tick

“How do I refer to you?” Wells asked.

“Lotus. I like it,” she replied and disappeared as if nothing had happened.

Looking at the bottle, Wells headed into the lounge to place it with the other three. Glancing out the window, he saw an apple tree. The rest of the crew wouldn’t be back soon, so he decided to lie under the tree for a moment. Hearing the birds sing was something most exoplanets could only dream of, and the soft grass waved gently in the wind. The relatively young apple tree seemed to have been seeded here by someone.

Wells sat under the tree's shade, admiring the green beauty of Earth. As if Isaac Newton, lying under an apple tree before discovering the fundamental laws of universal gravitation. As the calm wind rustled the leaves, Wells began to drift off to sleep.

