

Lonely Satellite

By C.A. Chicoine

Introduction

When he was a boy, Gray Locke would gaze up at the night sky. It was his time to find solace from the worries of tomorrow. And he would go to a special place to be alone and ponder the wonders of this, and other worlds. It was to a massive boulder just on the outskirts of his family's property, away from the chaos of the city, and the glare of the streetlights. He would be sure to let his mother know where he'd be heading. That way, he'd know that no one would be out searching for him to disturb his solitude. When it was time to come in, all his mother had to do was shine the porch light up towards the sky, just skimming the tree line.

The *Big Rock*, as it was called, had been part of the family tradition for three generations. Each one claiming a memory of their own. To his grandfather, the 'Big Rock' was an island. He'd pretend he was a pirate burying his treasure chest. To his father it was the Moon. He'd pretend to be an astronaut collecting samples of Moon rocks and 'Moon-bugs' to bring back to Earth to study.

One of the unique features this boulder had was an indentation close to its crest. The form of Gray's body fit perfectly in this indentation, as it had for the others. It once served as a hideaway for his grandfather's sea captain. Another time it was a crater, for his father's moon. Now, it was Gray's observatory. And there he sat, in his observatory. Studying the stars on his own little planet.

The immense distance between him, the stars and galaxies astounded him. He would watch, as from a shore, to see if he could catch a glimpse of a passing ship. Perhaps a space freighter on a trade route to some advanced civilization. Or a team of researchers mapping the outer rim of the Milky Way Galaxy. Or maybe the last surviving members of a distant world who managed to escape their annihilation. These kinds of thoughts would go through his mind.

These nightly visits to the *Big Rock* inspired him to learn more about the cosmos. He got books, DVDs, and software on the subject from his parents who welcomed his enthusiasm in the sciences with open arms. His bedroom walls were filled with posters of galaxies, comets, and the such. Over his bed hung a planetary solar system mobile. And on his desk sat a home planetarium which projected the stars and constellations onto his ceiling and walls. A telescope soon followed on his fourteenth birthday.

When that wasn't enough, Gray would create his own worlds and write about them in his journal. He'd create planets so far removed from life here on Earth that humans couldn't settle on them. The idea behind that was so Man would not uproot and endanger the creatures living in his alien worlds. So, for example, he would create planets that had an ammonia atmosphere with hydrogen clouds.

His creatures were perversely different than we humans, too. He'd try to come up with as many ways for his aliens to communicate outside the conventional as he could. From using a sensory-frequency through another dimension, to chemical communications. He imagined ways how they would see and experience their worlds using their senses. Like using electromagnetic radiation as a form of sight. The possibilities were limitless. And he felt it an important quality that each of his creatures should have. This all fascinated Gray.

Gray looked forward to his accompanying collage of sensations he experienced here on Earth. He couldn't imagine stargazing without the sounds of crickets, and the luminescence of the fireflies in the summertime. Or the crackling of the leaves with every step, and the brisk breeze whistling through the branches of trees in Autumn. Or the feel of the snow beneath your boots, and the sounds of neighboring kids getting in their last slide down Prospect Hill in the Winter.

No matter the season, Gray would always take the time to head out to the garden and look up at the stars. Gray would star gaze for as long as he could. On those crystal clear New England evenings when it would turn cold, he'd wear extra layers of sweaters, and bring blankets, and a thermos of hot chocolate. On the hot summer nights, he'd be sure to have lemonade, and bug repellent on hand.

Now, when Gray gazes out at the cosmos, he can do so in comfort. And it doesn't even have to be nighttime. All Gray has to do is look out his window. A decade ago he never in his wildest dreams imagined he'd actually be one of those points of light traveling across the night sky. Granted, he's only in the Sun's orbit, at the L4 point in the Sun-Earth System. However, this would change Gray in ways which he could not have ever imagined.

Year: 2021

Place: Satellite 2, The fourth Lagrange Point in the Sun-Earth System

Main Character: Grayson Shields Locke, born 01/28/1985

[Zip-click-zoom!](#)

"It comes, - the beauty, the free,
The crown of all humanity, -
In silence and alone
To seek the elected one"

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *from ENDYMION*.

“Come, follow me,” I heard her call. This was the first utterance I recognized. The beginning of a message, although not complete. It was as if she were conferring with my soul. And once I could quiet the static in my mind, I could then journey up the path to enlightenment.

Although it is the message that reveals the moral of my story, it is the journey leading up to this phenomenon that I must tell. For, it is the rationale behind this cautionary tale that speaks to the mind, whilst the message speaks to the soul.

I have been living at the fourth Lagrange Point in the Sun-Earth System for the last 7 months. The first 30 days or so have been spent on Satellite 2 fixing the mess left behind here by the last technician. Guess they hire just about anyone these days. The techs with any wit try to get assigned to the Satellite 4 series. They are in a halo orbit around a spacecraft. So, the techs inside can interchange daily with the others on the spacecraft. This satellite has no spacecraft. I am days from the next manned satellite.

The longest time anyone has ever spent in this ‘can’ had been 90 days, up until now. And that was with the first tech, which is who set the standard. They figured if you stayed busy doing your job, and fulfilled your daily health requirements; eating, exercising, sleeping, etc., the time would just fly by like a meteor through Orion’s Belt. However, all the other techs, for one reason or another, left before their 90 days. For better or for worse, looks like I broke the record.

The only communications I have are mostly over the computer, and with the periodic Satellite Runners who stop in for a visit. They bring me food, water, fuel, clothes, groceries, spare parts, special tools, and sometimes special goodies. And remove the trash and solid waste. I’ve become friendly with one of them. His name is Alan Fleming. He checks in on me between shuttles, over the net, to be sure I’m still alive. I tell him all’s normal. Although he’d refute that fact claiming I was never *normal* to begin with. When I start acting *normal*, he’d say, is when he’ll get concerned.

I am in a position where, in order to maintain some sense of sanity, I must *write*. And what better place to start than at the beginning?

[Severed Strings](#)

In the beginning, life and death were very real to me. There was no pretending or denying it. I was born, along with my twin sister Alexandra, at a time when the family was mourning the loss of Grandfather Locke. We were the spark of joy everyone so desperately needed. I have only a vague memory of Alexandra, reinforced by the memories shared with me, and the photographs taken of us. She died of SIDS at 18 months.

I was blessed with loving and nurturing parents. Both were professors at the local university. My father taught sociology, my mother art history. Neither pushed me into either field, but were pleased that I was passionate about astronomy. It started in 1996, when the news arrived that Carl Sagan died. He was an astronomer, astrochemist, and author who popularized the sciences in the late 20th century. My parents were deeply saddened. That night we all sat in the living room and started to watch the television series *Cosmos*, which Sagan co-wrote and presented. Looking back at it now, I cannot imagine a world without Sagan's contributions. "Cosmos" expanded my universe beyond measure. Besides launching my interest in astronomy, Carl Sagan ignited my interest in all the sciences and history. I remember feeling the rush of excitement, unlike I have ever felt since, watching it for the first time that evening.

Although I had an interest in astronomy, the path I chose for a career was computer science. However, an amateur astronomer I will always be.

When I was growing up, some of my fondest memories with my parents were our family vacations. Besides the traditional summer vacation activities like swimming, canoeing, and amusement park rides, we'd take in some museums as well. Visits to the Museum of Science in Boston and their planetarium was always a treat. Also, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., were highlights I'll never forget.

We'd also go to the Berkshires to visit my aunt and uncle. I liked going there because the stars were so brilliant and plentiful. I'd bring my telescope, binoculars, and journal. In my journal I would track of all the planets visible with my telescope, and I'd log the other celestial bodies, like the Pleiades, and M31.

Aunt and Uncle Clarke didn't have any children. But, their neighbor did. Laurie, Bobby, and I would play throughout the day and into the night. We'd play *chase*, ride bicycles, or play croquette. At night we'd tell stories, and roast marshmallows over a campfire. Then we'd get into our sleeping bags and star gaze, and talk until the stars were out of sight.

Soon after my seventeenth birthday my life would suffer another great loss. My parents attended an event at the university. On their way home they were killed in an automobile accident. My world had stopped. For, they would not be there to see any of my accomplishments. They would not see me graduate from college. They would not see me get married. And they would not get to know their grandchildren.

At the funeral, people I had never met had come to help the best they could. For a time I stayed with the Clarke's in the Berkshires. I was left enough money to get me through college, with extra to spare. I at least had the comfort in knowing that I was accepted into the college that we had applied to before the accident.

During the first two years of college, for the holidays, I stayed with the Clarke's. The following year I met Gwyn, my future wife. We spent as much time together as possible. But, between studying and our internships, that didn't allow much. This would prove to

be our fate. We married after graduation in 2009. And divorced by 2019. After the divorce, it seemed a good portion of our “friends” left with her too. I moved out of the conapt, and temporarily moved in with an old friend I knew from my intern days. The divorce itself would be nothing compared to what was to come.

After college I worked some temporary jobs until I was offered a full time position at one of them, Cull D. Sax Technologies, two years into our marriage. I worked in the research department, developing and advancing uses of human-computer interaction for both government and private-sector entities. It paid well and had great benefits. The kind of job you could see yourself moving up in, and retiring from. The retirement package was nothing to sneeze at either.

The company seemed to be doing well. As long as you stay up with the ever-changing technology of the moment, you’ve got a future. After eight years with the company I was promoted to a managerial position. With that, of course, came more responsibilities, more time at work, and less time at home. That is all it took to put an end to our so-called marriage. I’d like to believe that we could have worked things through, had we spent more time together. But, the truth of the matter is, even if we had all the time in the world, I didn’t know what I wanted out of our relationship. But, I did know what I didn’t want.

With the economy in a perpetual flux, the corporate bigwigs decided to downsize and eliminate it’s R&D, and focus instead on the computer software industry. So, they sold the division to the highest bidder, the Barmann Group, a conglomerate based in Europe.

They didn’t waste anytime either. With the arrival of the new regime, they cleaned house, and hired their “buddies” to fill the positions. Since I was new at my position, they probably didn’t find me a threat, and felt they could manipulate me along with the few remaining marionettes in lower management.

The following months ahead were brutal. I apparently offended the wrong guy. I had a clash with one of Reagan’s ass-sucking buddies. Rufus Reagan is one of the new managers. The result? A “final warning” and suspension without pay for insubordination. The incident in question was unfounded as far as I was concerned. My lack of tact didn’t help matters. They managed to manipulate the situation to suite their needs. His mind was made up before he even heard my side of the story. A matter of fact, the “memo” was already typed and ready for me to sign. My days were numbered. It was just a matter of time before they found, or “created” a reason to let me go.

Upon my return back to Barmann, Reagan called me back into his office. He said he would like to follow-up on our last discussion...off the record. He reassured me that he had nothing against me personally. Pointed out the fact that I had been with the company for eight years, and that I know my stuff...the usual line of crap before getting to the point. he told me, in no uncertain terms, that if I don’t play the game like everyone else, that there are others who will.

He then proceeded to tell me that maybe I wasn't cut out for this line of work. I'd be better off as a Consultant. That I'd be tolerable under those conditions. I suggested to him that, if my work does not satisfy him, maybe I should be demoted, and returned to my old job. But, he wouldn't go for it. He reminded me that I don't work for Sax Tech anymore. I work for Barmann. More importantly, I work for him. He then went on to say that I'd never make anything of myself. Not here. That I can't even keep my marriage together. How he found out about Gwyn and I isn't important. But, it told me that he had been researching my background. Reagan went on from there, bringing up incidents from my past, most of which were grossly exaggerated.

Before he was through, I had to interrupt him. I was clearly starting to show signs of agitation. So, before I'd say or do something I may later regret, I told him (sarcastically) that maybe he was right. I wasn't cut out for this line of work. Then, very seriously, I told him that I am too good to work for Barmann, and him. If he wishes to control every movement, and every expression of his employees - like a puppet - then I'll cut the strings. I will give him my two week notice.

Reagan said that there is no need for that. He opened a file that was on his desk, and offered me a pen. He had the paperwork already prepared. He waved the two week notice policy, and paid me the vacation time that I accrued.

There was a security guard at the door who accompanied me to my desk. When I got to my cubicle there were already two men and Reagan's secretary boxing up my belongings. Another security guard stood by to escort me off to the shuttle.

Hark! Ol' Herald Sings!

Leaving the job wasn't as bad as it could have been. After all, eight years of your life working for the same company...well, you sort of grow attached to the place. But, it wasn't the same. Not since Barmann and their *Stormtroopers* invaded. They had already terminated a few colleagues of mine I use to see outside of work. More would soon follow.

However...there was one person, who didn't work for the company, who I miss most of all. Everyday, Herald managed to get a smile out of me. This day would be no different. Herald Farthing drove the shuttle between work and the *Park and Ride* lot. He'd been driving the shuttle for nearly thirty years. A matter of fact, he drove me there to my first interview back when it was Sax Tech. I realize now how fitting it was that he drove me on my last day. Like he was releasing me... casting me back out to the cosmic sea.

Herald helped load the boxes into the baggage compartment. He knew I was no longer employed there. He just wasn't sure who made the first move. I'd like to think it was me, retaining some fiber of integrity. But, I knew damn well that wasn't the case. The decision was already made, with or without my say.

After I found a seat on the shuttle, Herald came out with a wisecrack remark...I cracked a smile. He could tell I was in a somber mood. I didn't feel comfortable talking to him about what had happened. Not with the other passengers around. I remember thinking to myself that this was probably the last time I'd ever see Herald. He picked-up on that, and asked if I'd like to go out for a drink with him after he gets off work. He suggested a spot. We drove the rest of the way with him talking about his wife's pumpkin pie she made for him, in between his commentaries on traffic etiquette, or lack thereof.

When I got home, I stored the boxes in the garage. I didn't feel like dealing with it at that point. What I needed was to wash away the smell of work. So, I went upstairs to shower. Then I headed out to meet Herald at Murphy's Pub. I figured I'd get there a little early to get a good table. Besides, I've never been there.

When he arrived I almost didn't recognize him in his street cloths, and without his hat. We ordered our drinks. Had some small talk. I don't drink much. That first one really loosened me up. I just started to let it all out. I told him that between the divorce and getting behind on some loans I had, that I'll be so far in debt that I'll never get out. The time off from the suspension only added to the mess. Now, I haven't a job. And only two weeks vacation to live off of.

I told him what had happened at work. He asked questions like, was someone there from Human Resources, and a Union Representative? Did I ask specifically to see the policy handbook regarding their claims? I told him HR was there, at the initial meeting. There wasn't a Union. As far as the second meeting... I tried to explain to him how this new regime operates. My days were numbered. Besides, I told him, I definitely would not have been happy working there under those conditions. The guys I worked with, like Dave, they had replaced before me. And others were in job search. It just wouldn't be the same. I'm not a puppet. Herald knew that.

Then he asked me how I felt about it. By then, I had some time to digest what had happened. And the drinks I'm sure helped to unbind the tension inside. I told Herald that it felt like my principles were violated. Like they raped my soul...my being.

Then he proclaimed that perhaps this was some sort of sign. We were interrupted by someone who knew Herald. He asked if he'd like to sit in on a tune. Herald, looked at me, asking if I minded. I said, "No. Go ahead." He'd only be a minute. He got up on stage, conversed with the other musicians, adjusted the microphone, and started to sing the Blues. I was dumbfounded! I can still hear it in my head.

I don't know - I don't know
How come the Sun ain't shine in'

I don't know - I don't know
Just where it's all been hid in'

I don't know - I don't know

Maybe one day I'll find it

I don't know - I don't know
How come the Sun ain't shine in'

There was more, but I was so spell-bound by his harmonica playing that I felt like I was in some other place and time. I shook it off with the applause of the audience. Herald came back to the table, and asked if I liked it. He said it was an old Blues tune he learned many moons ago. He modified the lyrics a bit, he said, for me. Then he went on to tell me that I have more inside me than I allow to let out. "What happened to your dreams?" he asked. I didn't know what to say. He went on and said that now I have an opportunity to do something different with my life. To pursue that dream. And to find my purpose in life.

"Here," he said. He pulled out a newspaper from his coat pocket. It was the classified section of the Globe. He wanted me to look through it right then and there. He saw my hesitation. Then grabbed it back and started scanning it for me. He rattled off a few job titles. Then he said, "Here's one."

I looked at it. Satellite Technician. I told him, "Yeah. If you want me to be bored to tears!" He said I wasn't seeing it. It took a while to sink in. But, I finally got what he was trying to tell me.

The Call

What Herald was saying was that this new job, as routine and mundane as it appeared, was an opportunity for me to know where I've been. And given a chance to recapture the dream. I had been so busy with life, trying to live by the status quo, that I lost who I was becoming. Instead, I was becoming what others wanted, or expected me to be. Putting off my dream became, more or less, a condition of life. Until, one day, the dream had been forgotten. This, combined with the tremendous stress over those last few months with the divorce, and the escapade at work, I had ceased to exist. I was just a drone. Recognizing where I had been...reviewing my past, and putting some questions to the test, would help me to find my true place in this universe... who I was to become.

The Satellite Tech position was a temporary job, with the option to extend, if need be. I knew the work involved. Any second year computer geek could do it. I'd just have to go through the rigorous physical, and mental performance test. And pass the government security clearance. The only actual training I needed to go through was for space flight and space living. I wasn't trained to be an astronaut, or to operate a space ship. I only needed to learn the procedures, maneuvers, and protocols of how to operate the satellite systems, life support, and what to do in case of an emergency. Because of it's isolated location, and that it was a one-man module, this particular assignment had a high turnover rate. With the newer satellites, the technicians were replaced weekly, even daily in

some cases. I also needed to re-learn daily living skills, like how to move about, eat, wash-up, and use the facilities in zero gravity. And, in space, we don't sleep in beds. Otherwise we'd float around. Instead, we use sleeping bags that are attached to the walls of the module.

Anyways...there was much to learn before actually starting the job. At least I got paid for the training. It would get me out of debt. I wasn't spending any money up here. All provisions are provided for. After the first 90 days, all my debt was settled, with some spare change. But, more importantly, I had the space to re-evaluate my life. This was an opportunity, as Herald said, cloaked in a disguise. In a way, it was a summons. A call...an echo from afar, beckoning me. But, it wouldn't be heard until much later.

The next morning, after I'd been out all night with Herald, I remember asking myself what I was getting myself into. I telephoned my friend Dave to see what he knew about these satellite jobs. He now works full-time for the government. At that point in time they were the only ones providing the good paying jobs, if not directly with the government, then contracted with them. Dave didn't have too much information, but said he'd look into it for me.

Louis was having some coffee before heading to work. He works in the health field, as a physical therapist. Louis was kind enough to let me stay at his conapt with him for as long as I needed.

In the meantime, I started re-organizing all the boxes I had stored in the garage. Both from the move, and from work. Man, you don't realize how much stuff you collect until you move. I'm a collector. I save things that have special meaning to me, like letters, and memorabilia from trips. I even had some toys from my childhood, like stuffed animals, Lego sets, a Gameboy, and even my old PlayStation 3. And I saved things I figured I could use for spare parts, like computer towers, amplifiers, flashlights, you name it. And I also had a lot of books, DVDs, and sticks. That day would be spent sorting through all of this kipple, along with trips to the Goodwill, and to the incinerator.

Later that evening, Dave got back to me. He said that the tech job was, more or less, one of those menial jobs for those wanting to work on either the space stations, or the moon bases. Sort of like, 'who's taking the trash out to the curb this week' kind of thing. He said he could send me more specific information, and asked which system and series I was looking into. I told him Satellite 2, the Sun-Earth System. "That's a ways out there," he said, as he searched through the files. He had an amused look on his face. "Sure you don't want to wait for one of the newer series?" he asked. I briefly explained to him my situation. I wasn't sure if I'd actually apply for it. I was looking at all possibilities. With the economy the way it was, there weren't that many options. He agreed. Wished me luck, and said to put his name down for a reference. "It couldn't hurt," he said.

I looked over the folder he sent through the net. It included some photographs of the satellite and of the first technician, William Hallows. It mentions the missions, the computers, and so forth. Seemed as though no one had ever completed their 90 days since

Hallows. I put the folder aside, and was about to scrap together some food, until the vidphone beckoned me once again.

This time it was Herald. He wanted to know if I'd sent in my application. I told him no. That I was having second thoughts about the whole thing. I told him it was probably those drinks talking the other night. Not me.

"Oh, it was you alright," he said, "The you, hidden deep down inside. Right now I'm talking with Gray, the pessimist. The one who denied the child inside you his dream. The one that led you astray...to where you are today. It failed you."

I told him I just didn't think I could go through with it. I was sure there'd be a job opening for me, in the same field I'd been in, soon enough. Besides, I at least have a place to stay until I get one.

"Sure," he said, "you'll go and get yourself another job like the one you had... and end up in a similar situation. Unless, of course, you *play the game*. It's your life. Do what you feel is right."

After we hung up, I continued on to the kitchen. I noticed a box I missed by the door. I picked it up, and opened it up on the table. Inside were my journals and star charts from when I first got into astronomy. Looking through one of my early journals, I found an entry for the *Messier objects*. I created this game... a challenge for myself. First, I located all the constellation in the Northern Hemisphere. Then I located the planets in our solar system. The next challenge, as documented in this journal, was to locate the *Messier objects*, like galaxies, nebula and globular clusters. I remember how the memories came crashing through, reading through them. Like a cosmic wave enveloping me, leaving it's deposits of stardust all over me, each one a memory.

Also in the box was a model of the Voyager 1. Voyager 1 is an interstellar probe that studied the solar system. It also contains a recording of the sounds of earth, along with photographs, for any intelligent life that may come across it over the vastness of space and time. A sort of message in a bottle. I remember being utterly fascinated by that. I remember, I use to pretend to send my own 'probes' into space. Only, mine would be intercepted by alien beings. We'd have peaceful interactions with one another, and become allies, protecting one another from other, not-so-friendly aliens wishing to rave havoc with us.

I remembered. I remember pretending I was in a spaceship, traveling between galaxies, going planet to planet, resolving issues they were having, lending a helping hand, keeping the peace. On one planet I'd help with a natural disaster they had. On another, prevent a war. Whatever news was dominating the real world at the time, the best I understood it, I'd resolve them in my make-believe universe.

And, I remember in high school, for Social Studies, we had to pick news items for homework each week to write about. I made a connection between my *universe of the*

imagination, and my high school assignment. Besides the obvious, I touched on the root cause of some of the issues facing humanity, namely the philosophical, moral and ethical values of society.

I returned the items back into the box. Then I telephoned Herald. I told him that I reconsidered applying for the satellite job.

“What brought it about?” he asked.

“I remembered,” I told him. “I remembered I was onto something back during my early teens. But, since have lost touch with it. I dunno. Maybe it was a sign.”

“I’m glad to hear this.” Herald said. “Be sure to let me know when you hear back from them.”

I told him he’d be the first to know.

“You mustn’t leave without a parting libation,” Herald said with optimism.

[A New Year](#)

After all the interviews and tests, I finally received a letter from D.E.E.P. Enterprises stating that I had been selected for the Satellite Technician position. I’d start my training in February at their Space Systems division in Houston. The launch date was set for April 12th.

I telephoned Herald and told him the news. Somehow, it seemed like he knew I’d get the job. As if he expected no news to the contrary.

He invited me over to his home for New Years Eve. He and his wife were having some friends over. Some of the *cats*, as Herald called them, from Murphy’s would be there.

Herald never ceased to amaze me. It seemed he’d always have a story to share from his past, whether it be about his time in the Services, his jaunt across the country with the band, or the trials and tribulations he went through to earn his wife’s hand in marriage. Yet, he remained modest. You’d never suspect such *qualities* not knowing him. You’d approach the shuttle bus, the door would swing open, and you’d be greeted by the bus driver. You’d scan your pass, then walk on by. If only you’d taken the time, you might have seen a glimmer in his eyes, revealing a hint of his *essence*. But, most likely you’d dismiss this glow to the driver only being courteous...just doing his job.

We became friends rapidly throughout those weeks leading up to my departure. His insight and candor will, forever, remain ingrained in my heart.

We met at Murphy's for a libation one last time, a week before my departure to Houston.

"Here," Herald handed me a gift wrapped in star-glittered paper .

"What's this?" I asked.

"It's a parting gift for you," Herald said. "Oh, but don't open it," he continued. "Wait until you're settled in on your *satellite*, for when you have time to reflect on life and things extraordinary. Okay?"

I didn't realize it then, but later that gift would resurrect the *harmony* missing in my life.

"Now," Herald remarked, "don't be a stranger. Just because you're a million miles away, it doesn't give you an excuse. You'll be on a satellite for Christ's sake. Send a *signal* my way once in a while."

He bid me a safe journey. Then I returned home with a touch of melancholy. That last week would be spent telephoning and visiting family and other friends.

[The Threshold Troll](#)

I trained in Houston, at the Johnson Space Center. It consisted of Weightlessness training, space suit use, Survival training, equipment storage, trash management, and so-forth. Time was set aside for the actual work itself, in between all this, for the specific computer engineering I'm responsible for.

The last day before my departure would be spent mentally preparing myself for the two and a half month trip to Satellite 2. Although I'd be in hibernation, it was still a strenuous ordeal to endure.

At the JSC I was met by the staff and prepped for hibernation. The last thing I remember was the sensation of a cold stream flowing up my spinal column.

When I woke, I was only a couple days journey from my destination. I lay waiting for my mind and body to become acclimatized to the new environment, as the nurses continued monitoring my signs.

After a full recovery, I had my first zero-gravity shave, and body rinse. I attempted to have a meal...in a bag. But, it would be another twelve hours or so before I'd actually have an appetite.

As we got closer to the Sun-Earth L2, the shuttle would rendezvous with a smaller vessel, they referred to as a *scuttle*. This *scuttle* would then transport me to Satellite 2, at the Sun-Earth L4.

I heard the captain yelling profusely in the cockpit. I went to investigate. Captain 'Red' Thorson seemed to be arguing with someone on the radio. He noticed me "float" in.

"Oh, he's here now. Wanna tell'em yourself?" he bellowed at the radio. "Here," he handed me the mic, then turned back to the control panel.

"Who...who is it," I stammered.

"A troll!" he jeered.

"Hello?" I asked into the microphone.

"Now's your last chance," the voice rang.

"Last chance?" I questioned

"Once you board my ship, there's no turning back," the voice warned.

It was the Satellite Runner who'll be *scuttling* me off to the satellite.

"Did you bring your teleporter?" the *troll* asked.

"Teleporter?" I inquired.

Just then, *Red* busted out laughing, along with the rest of the crew, who drifted in with the excitement.

That was my first encounter with Al. He's quite a character. Alan Fleming would prove a loyal friend and confidant. His enthusiasm and optimism were invaluable. But, not before putting me to the test.

I suited up, then boarded the scuttle, as the crew finished transferring my cargo. Being a freighter ship, it only held four passengers. But, since Al was flying alone, I sat up front in the cockpit with him.

"You don't look the *Satellite-Techie* type," observed Alan.

"No," I said. "Guess not."

"Well...you're not one of them planetary economic geologists, or their caliber. You would've gone straight to the space station."

"No...no," I admitted. "I'm only here for the money."

"The last time I heard that," Alan recalled, "was from this tech with a piss-poor attitude. I

was delivering the usual goods. I had a rookie with me...you know, showin' 'em the ropes. And he dropped a box. No big deal, right? Then the tech comes over and starts in on 'em. I start to explain that no harm was done. Then he barks at me!"

Alan laughed, then continued. "So I tell him, 'that's no way to make a friend.' And you know what he says to me?"

"What?" I asked.

"I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to make money," Alan mimicked.

"Well," I admitted, "I am here for a *little* more than that."

Alan gave me this curious look.

"What I mean is," I started to explain. "Although the money is certainly a part of it, it's the ambiance I seek. You see, a friend of mine..."

"Listen *spaceman*," Alan interrupted, "this running back and forth retrieving you *techies* is time consuming, let alone costly. And my supervisor ain't likin' it. It doesn't make 'em look good. And believe me, he likes to look good," Alan grinned. "As long as he keeps the shit off his lips, he's tolerable."

"I have every intention on staying my full 90 days," I declared. "I'm not privy as to what happened to the others, nor why they didn't last. Maybe if you'd tell me what happened... to the others, I'd have a heads up on it."

"No one really knows what happened up here," stated Alan. "At least, if they do, they're not telling me. What I can tell you is this," he continued. "The techs that I drove here were like any other tech I'd met. The first month would, usually, go by without a hitch. But, then I'd get a distress call from either the space station or the satellite itself, depending on my location. By the time I'd get there, well...they weren't the same. No one has lasted their 90 days here."

"How is it then, the first tech...what was his name...Hallows! William Hallows lasted 90 days," I pointed out.

"Hallows," laughs Alan. "He's before my time. But, I heard a lot about *Ol' Will*. The reason he lasted as long as he did was because he used drugs. He would've stayed longer if his *stash* didn't run out. The idiot. He called for a Satellite Runner to make *special delivery*. Needless to say, he was found out."

"How is it they don't know what happened to the others?" I asked.

"I transport 'em to the space station. They ship 'em back to Earth. We don't hear back from 'em. They only tell us what they want us to know," Alan replied.

“Maybe it was the isolation that drove them mad,” I theorized. “If so, that won’t be a problem in my case. That’s why I took this position.”

“You don’t say,” exclaimed Alan.

“As I started to say earlier, a friend of mine encouraged me to apply for this job. After all, any computer geek can do the actual computations involved on the satellite. It’s the location that was appealing. This will give me the opportunity to reflect on life, without the interruptions and distractions I’d have on Earth. Like, work, appointments, running errands, meetings, friends stopping by...”

“Some kind of friend,” chuckled Alan.

“And performing such *menial* tasks like going to the store for *supplies*,” I added.

“Well,” Alan said, “all the power to ya’. Both you and that *satellite* can *reflect* together.”

“It’s more than *reflecting*,” I said. “It’s about finding myself. To rediscover the one inside me, who’d been lying dormant. This is my pursuit of self...my own personal Odyssey!” I proclaimed.

If only you could have seen the expression on Al’s face after telling him about my personal quest of self-discovery. It was priceless.

“Alrighty then,” said Alan. “I’m actually going to look forward to this.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well...instead of dropping off a *normal* tech, I’m dropping off a... how shall I put it?” he jested. “A *Special* tech. Maybe when I pick you up in 90 days, you’ll be normal!” Alan exclaimed.

“I’m glad you’re warming up to me Al,” I said.

If I went back before my 90 days, I’d still be obligated to work for D.E.E.P. Industries at one of their plants, until all the expenses incurred for my training and transportation were paid up. Sort of like being a slave. For those who leave for medical reasons, sane or otherwise, are still under that obligation as well. They have workshops for them.

Alan focused on the controls. We were approaching Satellite 2. It was unmanned, so there was no need to radio ahead. The computers were on standby mode. All of it’s functions were being temporarily handled by techs at the nearby space station, via a space probe in halo orbit around Satellite 2. Alan retrieved it after the computers were back online.

He docked up to the satellite, then checked the gauges. Everything checked out all right. He unlocked the cargo door, then proceeded to hand me a couple of the smaller crates. Grabbing an armful himself, he unlocked the bay doors to the satellite foyer chamber.

“Welcome to your monastery,” said Alan.

Part 1 above

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Part 2 below

Written April 1 - July 10, 2009

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[Always Keep Your Back to the Wall](#)

When Gray Locke would go to sleep, he'd always face the center of the room. It had always been that way, even as a child back on Earth. When he would try to face outward, toward the wall, he found he simply could not get to sleep. He felt that something, or someone, would come from within the deep, dark shadows of his room and... well, he didn't really know for sure what would happen. Quite frankly, he didn't want to find out

either. What he did know was that, what ever "they" were, they would make him see and hear scary things, and cause him to have nightmares. So, what started out as a childhood adaptation to these unfounded fears, gradually turned into a habitual routine in his adulthood.

Sleeping on board Satellite 2 would be no different. Getting accustomed to the new environment took some getting use to. No matter how much training you get on Earth, there is no substitute for actual daily life in zero gravity. The noises heard throughout the satellite were the easiest obstacles for Gray to overcome. Noises from the fans, air filters, and computers were alleviated with ear plugs when he slept. However, it is very disorienting with regards to balance. The vestibular system is severely affected by zero gravity. After the first couple sleepless nights, Gray had to use sleep aids and hypnotic medicines to help him fall asleep. During his third week, he'd gradually decreased his dependence on them. Now, after week seven, he had his first full nights sleep without the aid of any medications.

Come, Follow Me

Softly, she whispered into Gray's ear, "Come, follow me." The warmth of her breath could be felt, but he did not stir. He hung there asleep in his sleeping bag. Gray then felt a sharp clip to his ear, and opened his eyes to find a woman standing before him. He stared, mesmerized by her presence, as he attempted to make sense of this.

"How did you...?" Gray started to ask. He noted that, inside his sleeping bag, he was naked. "If you don't mind," continued Gray, "would you please wait in the other module?"

"After we've come all this way? Yes, I do mind. It's nearly time," she said. "Come, follow me".

Gray was bewildered. "Who is this woman," he asked himself. He could see some familiarity in her eyes. Almost as if..

She interrupted his thoughts by unzipping the sleeping bag. Then she stepped back and held her arms out to Gray, inviting him to her bosom. Gray stretched out of the sleeping bag. But he felt unbalanced. He looked down to the floor and found he was floating. "Of course," he rationalized to himself, "zero gravity." But how is it then, he wondered, this woman standing before him, motionless, has both feet flat on the floor?

When Gray searched her face for some understanding, he was overcome by her warm smile. Her eyes glowed with tenderness, and glittered like a newborn life, beckoning Gray to the harbour of her heart.

However, something was preventing him from reaching her. He tried to push-off the wall with his legs to drift toward her, but the wall was too far. It was as if he was suspended in midair like some lone marionette.

"Please, don't be so scared Grayson," she said. "I will always be here for you. I always have," she continued. "After all, we are one, my brother. When you have sorted this through your mind, and have searched throughout, you'll find me again, within."

Just then, Gray stopped trying to struggle. She approached him, and reached her hand up to caress his face. He closed his eyes, taking in her radiance. Her hand felt cool upon his cheek, like the cool summer breezes off the Cape.

When he opened his eyes, she was not there. He found that he was still inside his sleeping bag. The attachment holding the sleeping bag had loosened, making Gray face the side of the wall of the module, toward one of the air vents. As his eyes cleared, Gray unzipped then stretched out of the sleeping bag. He realized that this all had just been a dream.

Then he whispered, "*Alexandra?*"

[As Days Go By](#)

It seems as though, as the days go by, more profound thoughts consume me than the day before. Things like, "What if we were born backwards?" That is to say, we died first. Now, bare with me as I indulge myself with this philosophical muse for a moment. You may ask, "How would we come into "being" to be dead in the first place?" I'd have to reply with, "I don't know." Perhaps the "Laws of Nature" were somehow altered from our current understanding of them, caused by some other "universe" bumping up against ours. Who knows.

In any case, think about it for a moment. We'd already have this *seed* of knowledge rooted deep within our adult minds. "Well then," you may ask, "how would we already have that knowledge?" Again, I'd reply, "Don't know." Perhaps, as our lungs know how to process the air we breath, and our heart knows when to beat, so too the knowledge and wisdom bequeathed us by the Elders are encoded in our genes. Who knows.

Questions of rationality aside, wouldn't you think we'd appreciate life a little more? Wouldn't we savour the young and tender moments of life a little bit more, whilst having a better understanding of what it's like to be old? And no regrets? We'd be a wiser community. We'd have a better understanding of our limitations. Or would we? I wonder.

And as our life *evolves* (or de-evolves) our societal tendencies to nurture the young over the old would be irrelevant. The elderly wouldn't be neglected and stored away as they are now. And, as we perish into the neonatal whirlpools of life, we wouldn't be saddened

by this *un-birth*. We'd rejoice! We'd celebrate the time that we spent together in a new way, knowing our *un-birthday*. Or would we?

Those are some of the things that have been littering my mind lately. However, the dreams that I've been having these days have been a bit disturbing. It's like, I'm being bombarded with messages, figuratively speaking, and not being able to process them quick enough. Only getting bits and pieces, here and there. So, all you can do is either work them through in your conscious mind, while doing something like exercising, or just forget about them.

I feel a little better after morning exercises, and a sponge-down. Over breakfast I actually turned on the radio. There's an awesome station that transmits to the outer colonies from Earth that plays a blend of electronic, jazz, and new age music. Unfortunately, it was cut short. The solar winds have been unusually active these days. Must have knocked the power grid out.

So... I felt it was about time I had better open the gift that Herald gave me when I was back on Earth. He had asked that I wait until I was settled in up here. I'm as settled in as anyone could be, considering. I opened the package. In it was first a note. It read; "*Gray, please insert the green Waund first. ~ Herald.*" On it was a vid-message from Herald, saying hello and wishing me well. It was so good to see Herald. I didn't realize how much I missed him until I watched the vid.

Also inside were a couple more Waunds, and a harmonica. A note was attached to the harmonica saying there are lessons on how to play it in the blue Waund.

After viewing the video, the table of contents came up. There were a slew of files! Photographs, music, and more vids! So, I decided to play some music and click through some slides. Looks like he spent a whole day just taking pictures for me! Scenes from the pub, the shuttle bus, and even one of the grasshopper atop Faneuil Hall!

And there were some nice shots from the New Years eve party too. It was so good to look through these. And the music is incredible. Almost like a soundtrack playing in the background, emulating with the various photos, enhancing the experience even more. This truly lifted my spirits. A good reminder as to why I came here in the first place. And why I must return.

[A Timely Boon](#)

My morning briefing consisted of the usual dialogue and routine assignments, with the exception of one item. I'll be having a visitor. A Satellite Runner is scheduled to make a run today. I looked at the calendar. And sure enough, as scheduled, delivery of supplies

and routine waste removal. This day, August 9, 2020, marks day 45. The mid-point of my first 90 days of service with D.E.E.P. Enterprises aboard this satellite.

I wonder if it will be Alan? It'll be nice to see anyone at this point. Anyone *real* that is. Of course, I mustn't let anyone know that I've been having these peculiarly vivid dreams. Man... If they found out, they'd consider it a sign of insanity, and deem me unfit to carry out the rest of my mission. They'd pull me out of here for sure, and stick me in one of their *workshops*.

Just then, the vid-phone signaled for my attention. I launched the vid-phone and there, filling the screen, was Alan Fleming's charming face.

"Permission to enter your monastery, *O Merciful One*."

"Alan! I was just thinking about you," I said.

"How them *visions*?" asked Alan.

His query caught me a little off guard. "He knows," I thought to myself. "What tipped them off," I wondered. I searched my mind. "Do I talk in my sleep? Maybe... My transmission to Herald," I considered. "That must be it! But, what exactly did I say? Come on, think! Oh shit!" I conceded, "He must be coming to take me away."

As I was trying to think back at what I had said during that transmission, Alan could read the confusion on my face, as he wore an amused look on his. To my relief, Alan rephrased his question.

"You know...your *reflecting* on life? Your self-loathing, quest for idiocy," grinned Alan.

"A quest for *self-discovery*," I corrected him. "And that would be, my own personal *Odyssey*."

"Yeah. Whatever," Alan muttered.

"No. I haven't," I answered plainly.

"I don't know why you waste your time with this New Age mysticism," Alan said. "Do your 90 days, then get the hell on out of there. Get yourself a *real* job with D.E.E.P. back on Earth. I'm sure they'd accommodate you. You could settle down, have some kids. And when they're older, you can tell them all about me and your space adventures."

"I know what I have to do Alan," I said. "There's no way I could go back now," I continued. "We've... I mean, I've come so far. And I do believe I'm starting to make some headway here. There's no turning back now."

"I was afraid you'd say something like that," he said. "Listen," Alan continued. "I just

wanted to make sure you were...you know.”

“*Normal?*” I interjected.

“I see nothing’s changed,” Alan said. “So... I should be there in about an hour.”

“Thanks for the warning,” I replied. “I’ll be sure to roll out the red carpet for you.”

Then I signed-off before he could reply with another one of his remarks. I finished up with the briefing and took care of some of the quicker items on the list. The other tasks were for later in the shift anyways.

So... I turned on back to the gift box that Herald gave me. And loaded the green Waund, and played some more of the music, as I viewed some more slides.

I was alerted that Alan’s scuttle was approaching. I floated with anticipation while listening to the clanging of him docking up to the satellite. He removed the waste first. Then, he finally he came into the module.

“Good to see you, Alan,” I greeted.

“I bet!” he said. “This the longest you spent without seeing another living soul?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “Admittedly, it went fairly quick, at first. Until the last few days.”

“Why? What happened the last few days,” Alan queried.

“A little lonely, that’s all. Homesick, I guess,” I admitted. “But,” I continued, “I have this gift that a friend of mine gave me. It’s helped a lot.”

Alan looked at the box, then up at the computer screen. He sees that I was looking through some photographs. I showed him some of them, as I played some of the music. But, he wasn’t too interested. Maybe it made him homesick. Or, maybe he had something else on his mind. He did seem preoccupied. Almost, impatient. Like he had to be somewhere.

“Hey, come help me unload some of your supplies,” Alan requested.

“Sure,” I said.

Once we got aboard his *scuttle*, Alan slid the door shut. Then he looked at me with a serious look on his face. I knew there was trouble. I have never seen this side of him before.

“Take this.”

He hands me a device similar to the *Waund*.

“What’s this?” I ask

“It’s a device to use on the system,” Alan said. “It’s used to temporarily block the satellite’s surveillance system. It modifies the video data buffer memory, storing compressed video data generated by the camera, and loops it. The settings will show up in a micro-screen down near the toolbar of your monitor.”

“Okay,” I said wearily. “And, for what purpose...*exactly?*”

“I did some snooping around. Found out some interesting things about *Ol’ Will*.”

“William Hallows? And I thought you didn’t care,” I quipped.

“You got me curious. That’s all,” Alan retorted. “I came across some of his notes by accident,” he continued. “Seems they didn’t know he stored them on such ancient devices as this hard drive. It had orders to be destroyed. Guess it got overlooked.”

Alan shows me the external hard drive. It’ll hookup with the paraphernalia in storage that I took out during the upgrade.

“Is there a lot? Did you read it all?” I asked

“I read enough,” Alan said. “Two pages of this psycho-babble and I’d end up wherever he is. But, I figured it wouldn’t do you any harm,” he added.

“What did it say?” I asked.

“I dunno,” he said, as he handed me a box. “Something about finding *God*.”

Alan slid the door open, then picked up a box. He set the box down inside the cargo module.

“Man!” exclaimed Alan. “I’m famished! What have you got in this joint to eat?”

Now I Know

“Do you hear that? Shhh...listen. That *sound?*” he asked, while he cupped his ear with his hand, as if he were trying hard to hear. “That’s the *sound of God*,” he continued. “To *ordinary* Man it may seem a trivial sound. Nothing to be concerned about. In fact, the conscious mind wouldn’t even pick it out through the myriads of intermittent chaos and oscillating frequencies. There is no source, *per se*. At least not that *we* could possibly

fathom. It's all around us. It passes *through* us. And, if you tune into it's *frequency*, you would tap into a stream of consciousness that allows you to perceive the *words* of God."

Gray couldn't believe what he was watching. He started to question whether Alan was pulling his leg with this. Gray looked at the properties of the file. They could be altered, he supposed. But, to go to such lengths? And, for what purpose? "Messing with my head, Alan?" Gray asked himself. The file was created and modified the same date, April 20, 2009. So, he ran a scan through the hard drive, and performed a few other tests to see if there had been any modifications. He could find none. These were the genuine personal logs left behind by William Hallows. Apparently, the only people to see them were Alan and himself. And Alan hadn't really gone through everything. He probably came as far as Gray had, before verifying it's authenticity.

Gray continued viewing the vid.

"Imagine the content in that flow of information!" exclaimed Hallows. "The knowledge you'd then have at your fingertips. Why...you'd know everything there is to know about anything! In comparison, it makes the Interplanetary Internet seem like *two cups and a string*."

In the vid, Hallows started to simulate *Man and God in conversation* to illustrate his point. Holding two cups and a wire, he was pleading for forgiveness into one cup then, switching cups, forgiving *Man's sins* in the other. Gray fast forwarded ahead.

"And what of those *ancient texts*," proposed Hallows, "of which millions of lives had been sacrificed over, claiming to be the *words of God*? Would God order you to kill men, women and children? Would God punish children for the crimes of their ancestors? Would God condone slavery? No. God wouldn't. But, according to those *ancient texts*, *He* does. And still, to this very day, people are being prosecuted, tortured, raped, and killed over the beliefs these texts represent. And for what? For whom?"

Gray fast forwards the vid.

"The interpretations alone astounds me! When I *merge*, God is quite clear. Within the sound, there is no room for interpretations. It's not restricted by metaphors. The common usage..."

Fast forwards.

"...the very same *God*, mind you, have produced the most horrific devastations in human history! And, the Islamic, Judaism, and Christian religions all believe in the same God! To think of the precious lives and brilliant minds exterminated, *in the name of God*."

Fast forwards.

"Certainly not God! That I can assure you. No-no. *Man*," emphasized Hallows. "*Man* is

the cause of all the evil doings in this world...and to all humanity throughout off-world! Only Man is capable of the most horrific and terrifying deeds.”

Fast forwards.

“And the questions we ask ourselves time and again; “What is the meaning of life?” “Why was I born?” “Why am I here?” “Where will I go when I die?”

“Now this,” Gray thinks to himself, “should be interesting.”

“Do you really want to know? And, if I told you, would you believe me?” asked Hallows. “I don’t believe you would. I know you wouldn’t. I certainly wouldn’t believe it if I were told this by a mere mortal, such as myself, either. That’s how it all got started, you see. This *delusion*...this *fantasy* we aptly call religion. Believing...blind faith. Created to manipulate and control society,” Hallows says, as he strokes his beard, then winks. “Nope, you wouldn’t accept the answers to those questions. You’d say, “Oh, but it couldn’t be.” Then I’d say, “And why not?!”

Hallows takes a moment to compose his thoughts.

“The problem is,” Hallows continues, as he looks directly into the cam, as if he knew you were right there with him, “you have to understand the *question*. We tend to look for answers to fit our desires, rather than to seek out truth. It’ll make us feel good believing we are right.”

Then Hallows became very animated. It reminded Gray of a time he went camping in his youth. He was visiting a nearby campsite. The father of his new camping buddies told a ghost story in much the same manner Hallows was carrying on in the vid.

“...as children have the propensity to anthropomorphize their toys, so do adults with what they don’t understand, or accept, about life. So, they created gods and demons, and torture witches, and read their horoscopes. The levels of ignorance is stifling. Such a stubbornly stagnant state to be in. And, while everyone is caught up in the distractions created for them, by them, and with the politics of greed and fear,” Hallows concluded, “we forget the *question*.”

Gray reduced the vid window for a moment to read the names of the other file on the drive. And he wanted, in particular, to view the dates they were recorded. He wanted to create a mental timeline of when Hallows recorded these, to track his state of mind and behaviors through this passage of time. The vid he was currently viewing was created toward the end of his duration on Satellite 2. Probably around Day 70, or so. Apparently, his earlier records were recorded on another device.

“How is it,” you may ask, “I can hear the voice of God?” asks Hallows into the cam.

“Yes, Hallows,” Gray says aloud. “How is it?”

“I certainly wasn’t *seeking* God,” Hallows continued. “I couldn’t have been bothered. I don’t know what is worse, alien abduction claimants or religious fanatics.”

Gray laughs out loud.

“Yes I do,” nods Hallows. “But, I tell you, I was not on any quest for proof of the existence of God. Was I *chosen*? After all, God *sought* me.”

Gray was shaking his head. “Hallows,” Gray said to himself, “you are one pathetic relic. Man, if I get to that point, I hope someone euthanizes me.”

“We are in God!” continued Hallows. “Don’t you see? Man had it all backwards! How arrogant of Man. We are so insignificant compared to our current ideals. This entire universe could be equivalent to a quark from God’s perspective. There is no way of telling, of course. It would be in our best interest to accept the fact that there are truths about this universe that far exceeds our capacity of understanding.”

Hallows begins to appear to lose his train of thought. He wipes his forehead with his naked hand. He looks up, past the cam. Then he turns and starts to remove a panel from the circuit board behind him with a tool he got off camera. He reaches down in it’s innards. Then he pulls out a what looks to be a ring for a finger. He holds it in his hand, and toys with it.

“There are many conclusions that one can come to with this revelation,” Hallows continues. “I’m not sure exactly what to make of all this. It’s too early to tell. Surely someone else must have had this experience. But, how then did it all get so perverted?” He wipes his forehead again, then fumbles the device in his hands some more.

“With the technology we have today,” Hallows continues, “you’d think we’d have a better understanding of these things. The relationship between consciousness and matter, for example, has always been in debate in certain circles. I have this feeling of...”

Hallows stops in mid-sentence. He then inserts the device he’d been fumbling in his hand, into his mouth. He jabs it once into the gum’s of his mouth. Then he stares into the cam.

“Going on a *trip*, Hallows?” Gray says aloud.

Hallows’ eyes grow wide and cold with fear, as his opening mouth elongates his face. His features then distorts with anguish, as tears stream down his face. Drool leaks out his mouth, as a strain of mucous dangles from his nostrils. No effort is made to mask his emotions.

Then, all of a sudden, his face returns to it’s neutral position. Then he starts to smile. Ever bigger and brighter, his face glows with euphoria. We then see tears of joy.

“See?” cried Hallows. “Can you hear it!? Hear the words of God? God has spoken to me...*through* me. Now I know! Now I know.”

The Shocking Truth

Gray glanced through the other folders in Hallows’ drive. There were files containing text documents. At first glance, they appeared to be his personal logs. He must have transferred them there from the L-drive.

Gray clicked on the text document titled, *Read First*. Just then, however, Gray was alerted via his schedule planner. It was time to prepare for today’s assignments. He stored Hallows’ drive back in it’s case, and returned it to the storage module. Then he disabled the surveillance system blocker.

Up to now, the intensive CBSE training he went through hadn’t seemed worth all the time and effort. Now, however, it was paying off. Gray’s to monitor and assure consistency with the frequency bands transmitted from one of *DEEP*’s transmitters on Earth to the UN Space Station, by keeping an eye on the amplitude of the multiple channels. The first signs of a weak reception, he is to toggle over to the stronger, back-up channel. If there is any error, he is to alert the appropriate party immediately.

Gray didn’t know exactly what the transmissions were about. Typically, they were for military communications applications. The frequencies are usually transmitted over the X-band spectrum. Today, however, they were also transmitting via the K-bands, and a new experimental frequency referred to as the *N-band*.

Today’s session wasn’t too long. Slightly over two and a half hours. Forty-five minutes of it were intense, though. But, all operations ran smoothly. A matter of fact, one of the supervisors from headquarters complimented him on a job well done. That’s something that was unheard of at Gray’s previous job with the Barmann Group.

After he closed down operations, he took some time to relax. He had a snack and enjoyed the view looking out the module window. Seeing his reflection, he couldn’t help but think of the facial expressions on Hallows’ face in the vid. Gray found it very disturbing. “So extreme,” he thought to himself. “One minute being horrified, and then the next minute the feeling of ecstasy. No wonder he self-medicated.” Then, Gray recalled Hallows’ hideaway for his stash. Gray disposed his empty beverage, then went to the area where he saw Hallows store his stash.

Gray checked the status of all systems aboard the satellite. All was normal. He then enabled the *ss-blocker*. This time, however, he set it to *Extreme Security*. That was in case he tripped an alarm while accessing this panel, thus alerting headquarters. If they

saw an alarm, and then checked the cams finding nothing wrong, Gray would be found out.

After locating the proper tool, he opened up the panel. He couldn't see anything at first, so he started to reach inside, when all of a sudden he felt a shock of electric current travel from his finger tips, up through his arm to his chest. Instinctively, he jumped back. But, doing so caused him to hit the back of his head against the opposite wall, knocking him unconscious.

The short circuit caused the system to shut down the entire satellite. An emergency light lit the inside the module. All computer systems were now set to sleep mode, and dependent on the back-up power source. And that wouldn't last but only a few hours, giving the technician inside time to evaluate the problem, repair if possible, or to evacuate using the emergency pod. These options, however, were of no use to Gray in his condition. And, under normal circumstances, headquarters would have been alerted to the problem. However, that alarm was overridden by the *ss-blocker*.

Gray started to stir a bit. Then was awakened by a cool touch to his face. He opened his eyes.

"Alexandra?" Gray asked.

"Grayson," she replied. "Come, follow me."

She took hold of his hand and guided Gray toward the door of the module. Then they both flew through to the other side, as if it wasn't solid.

Then, however, instead of their being the darkness of space, there was another room. A very large room. Gray had not been familiar with this part of the satellite. The walls around them were dull grey. As they floated further into this area, he could see a whole line of computer stations. Each one had two men at them. One at the keyboard, the other standing overhead. The stations were separated by a partial partition. Before each station were isolated booths.

Gray observed the computer operators. They would type for a bit, then look up at the large windows of the isolated booths. Then they'd type some more. Sometimes the other man, standing above them, would nod in approval over a command they entered.

As Gray approached the stations, he could see some empty booths to his side. He saw that some had tables, made of a plastic-coated metal. At intervals, there were restraints for neck, arms, and legs. In another booth there was a chair. Made of the same materials, and with the same type of restraints. Some booths were empty, and instead had padded walls, ceilings, and floors.

As he floated up to one station, Gray could see that there was a man in the booth. He was secured to a table, tilted in an upright position. He was laughing hysterically, but there

was no sound. Gray could hear the typing of the keys from the computer operator, and the grunt of approval from the standing man. But, no sound from the booth. The man in the booth was laughing so hard that he was crying, and bodily fluids drenched his gown from top to bottom. Then he began vomiting.

A few more clicks of the keyboard, and the man in the booth stopped laughing. His face became expressionless. Then, after a few more brush strokes of the keys, the same man in the booth began to have that same horrific look on his face as Hallows did in the vid. Only, in this case, the man in the booth then started to scream in horror as he fought the restraints with all his might. Again, no sound.

“This is madness!” exclaimed Gray. His head started pounding.

But, no one heard him. Then Gray turned to Alexandra for some sort of explanation. Smiling, she held her hand out, guiding Gray’s attention to the man at the computer. Gray then approached from behind, the man at the computer. The man abruptly turned and faced Gray, with a large grin. He gasped. Gray couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Wha-,” cried Gray. “How can this be?”

Standing before him was Gray Locke himself.

If Anybody Asks...I’m Dreaming

Overhead a bright, white light flooded over Gray, temporarily blinding him. As quick as the light overpowered his view, someone pushed him into a chair and strapped him in.

“Who are you,” someone demanded. “What is your name?”

“What’s going on here,” groaned Gray.

“You don’t know where you are?” the same voice asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Gray responded.

“I asked you a question,” the man barked. “Can you tell me your name?”

Gray’s eyes started to become accustomed to the brightness of the room. Standing before him, replacing a penlight back into one of the folds of his multi-pocked vest, he could see the outline of the man.

“Alan?” Gray asked.

“Nope. Does the name *Gray Locke* mean anything to you, *SpaceMan*?”

“It is you,” Gray said with relief. “What are you doing here? What happened to the...”

“*Listen*, I don’t know how long you were *out*, but... I’m not suppose to be here. We need to get you up and at ‘em,” Alan said.

Alan released Gray from the chair after seeing he was okay.

“How did you know there was trouble?” asked Gray.

“I was doing a run for Satellite 4 when I noticed your emergency beacon was flashing. Since I didn’t get a distress call from either you or from headquarters I figured something *fucked-up* when you were using the ss-blocker. Looks like I was right.”

Gray started searching for the tool that he used to open the panel with. “It’s got to be floating around here somewhere,” Gray said aloud.

“What?” asked Alan. “Your *brain*? What the fuck were you doing anyways?”

“In the vid I was watching... of Hallows’, I noticed he had a hideaway for his stash. I wanted to investigate it. And I must have caused a short, or messed with the wiring, or something,” Gray said, as he rubbed the back of his head.

Alan was giving Gray a peculiar look. “You wanna fry your brain like Hallows did?” he asked.

“I was curious...is all,” Gray retorted.

Alan looked into the opened panel. “Fuck!” he yelled. “You can see the exposed wires from here! Lucky you didn’t have an electrical fire.”

Gray looked. “Oh,” he acknowledged, still rubbing the back of his head.

“You get this repaired while I scoot on out of here. Once I’m undocked you be sure to disable that ss-block. Think you can handle that?” asked Alan.

“Yes,” replied Gray.

“You all right? I mean... your head. Looks like you got a nasty bump there, *SpaceMan*.”

“I’ll put a pack on it. I’ll be all right,” Gray replied.

“Good. I don’t wanna have to drag your sorry carcass off to the medic. Some of us have *work* to do,” Alan smirked.

“Alan, I...,” Gray started to say.

“Don’t mention it,” Alan interrupted. “Someone’s gotta look out for you. It might as well be me, since no one else in their right mind’s gonna travel through the field of space junk for a visit,” Alan jested. “Oh,” Alan added, “if anybody asks, I wasn’t here.”

As Alan was suiting up and heading out the door, Gray found the tool by one of the air vents. He got the tool belt out and put it on. He locked-out the panel and started replacing the wiring and some of the connectors. He replaced the panel door, then tested the system. “All is in working order,” sighed Gray.

By the time Gray was finished, Alan had undocked and zipped back on route.

Gray made sure everything looked in place before disabling the ss-blocker. All systems were now active.

Gray had a few light chores to do before heading off to bed.

Despite the disturbing images he had when he was out, Gray was exhausted from the days’ events. The meds he took for his headache and swelling would only help to assure his slumber.

Just as he was about to climb into the sleeping bag, he was signaled of an incoming vid call. It was Alan checking in on him.

“Am I interrupting anything?” asked Alan, referring to Gray answering the vidphone naked. “Watcha’ got? One of them alien broads from Alpha Centauri?” jested Alan. “I heard they...”

“I was just heading to bed,” interrupted Gray. “I’m exhausted.”

“Oh,” said Alan. “Well...I was just checking in. Making sure everything’s *normal*.”

“Yes. I took some meds. So, I’ll be sleeping like a baby.”

“Alrighty,” said Alan. “I’ll let you go then. Maybe I’ll talk with you tomorrow.”

“Um mm...thanks Alan,” Gray babbled. “I really appreciate it. I mean...it’s good to know I’ve got a friend out here, you know...being in this lonely satellite...”

“Those meds must be kickin’ in,” Alan interrupted. Go get some sleep, SpaceMan.”

At last, Gray slipped into his sleeping bag in preparation to greet the coming dawn. The moment he closed his eyes he was sound asleep. How long he’d actually been asleep, before a familiar whisper beckoned him from his slumber, he could not tell.

“Come, follow me,” the voice whispered.

“No,” answered Gray. His response took him by surprise. But, felt proud nevertheless, for expressing himself. Even if it was just a dream. And a lucid dream at that. “How else could this phenomena be explained,” he wondered to himself, as he hang there in his sleeping bag.

However, quite to the contrary, Gray was awakened by a sharp clip to the ear by the finger of a figure, whom he’s come to refer to as Alexandra, floating rock steady before him.

“Why must you do that!” Gray questioned irritably.

“How else to get your attention?” she asked.

“Well,” Gray replied. “I’m not *following* you!”

She stood there before him, motionless, biding her time. He too, motionless, held a look of defiance in his eyes, avoiding eye contact with her.

“Grayson,” she smiled.

Gray looked over towards her. Her breasts rose as she breathed, as if she were alive. He could see the outline of her body through her translucent gown. “How is it she can seem so real,” he wondered to himself. He quickly looked up at her face, and into her eyes.

“Come, follow me,” she spoke, in an enchanting tone.

Gray slipped out of his sleeping bag. Alexandra took hold of his hand. Again, together they flew through the door as before, and entered yet another room.

[The Ballroom](#)

Gray felt weary entering the dark room. He didn’t know what to expect. If it was anything like the last room, he wasn’t sure how he’d react, or better yet, what he’d do.

Gray started to wonder if maybe they were on the edge of the abyss, until Alexandra stopped in the middle of this void. Gray’s nervousness gradually intensified. Just then, the room lit up showing it’s grand-scale. The empty room had segments equally spaced on the walls, representing arched ballroom windows from floor to ceiling. The walls themselves were accented with rich tapestries of light.

Gray’s anxiety hadn’t eased any. Then, all of a sudden, a moody and distraught tone sounded about them. He couldn’t make out it’s source. It seemed to surround them.

Almost penetrate through them. It wasn't ear piercing, but certainly unpleasant to the nerves, reinforcing Gray's nervous temperament. This was enough for him to look at Alexandra to let her know that he's had about enough of these adventures. He didn't want to be there. The room seemed to pick up on this, somehow. Then, as more thoughts started creeping into his mind, more tones were introduced into the chaos. "Am I dead?" he worried to himself. "Is this..."

The tones started building, one upon the other, interrupting and convoluting his thoughts, creating a myriad of dissonant chords.

"Listen," Alexandra consoled Gray. She pulled him in close and held him in her arms. This helped Gray to at least temporarily escape from this torment. All of a sudden the sounds in the room started to change ever so slightly, becoming evermore harmonious, and tranquil. This had a very calming effect on Gray. He held her tighter against his body, as the feeling of euphoria coursed through his being. Then the music started to rise in tone, accompanied with an erotic rhythm.

Alexandra pushed Gray away, then slapped him in the face. Gray, shocked by her reaction, placed his hand upon his reddening cheek. The music, once again, changed its tonal patterns to an aggressive, monstrously scheme.

Then, all of a sudden, Alexandra made a funny face, while dancing animatedly like a puppet on a string, counterintuitively to the music. This made Gray laugh. Again, the music changed, becoming jovial-sounding.

Then Alexandra floated up to Gray, and extended her arms out into a dance pose. Gray bowed, then politely placed his right hand below her shoulder blade, and gently held her right hand with his left. And they began dancing gracefully, and ever more elegantly, to a waltz influenced by their harmonious state of mind, within not just any room, but their own ballroom.

They had a grand time dancing and laughing. Only in dreams could there be such bliss. If only there were a way to capture this moment to spread throughout humanity, we'd all be living in peace and harmony. Could ever a thing more powerful than this exist?

[Hallows' Drive](#)

As the weeks rolled by, Gray would continue to spend dreamtime with Alexandra, eventually learning to merge with her at will through meditation. They'd sometimes return to the ballroom to dance and sing. Sometimes, they'd return to their childhood, and re-live the years together as if she hadn't died. A sort of how would it have been if you were there kind of scenario. It was quite an experience for Gray. As a child, he'd sometimes wonder what it would be like to have a sister. But, this time it seemed so real and so indeterminate. She wasn't always opaque either. Sometimes she'd appear *ghost-*

like. And other times she wasn't seen at all, but *felt from within*.

During his conscious hours it was business as usual. Maintaining the satellite didn't prove too much of a challenge for Gray, as was expected. His extracurricular activities did more than make up for that deficiency. Ever since reading the text file *Read First*, Gray spent more and more time going through the materials on Hallows' drive. His claims were extraordinary. The evidence compelling. The conclusions shocking.

William Hallows believed he heard the words of God. He felt this to be the most important finding in the history of mankind. For, this would be the scientific data needed for proof of the existence of God. He'd describe his thoughts and experiences by any means available to him. From the vid cam and writing in his journal, to using his personal hand-held digi-recorder. He eventually copied all the data to this drive that he later wired into a non-essential interface apparatus used as a memory back-up. He was hoping that, if he couldn't get through to broadcast his findings, that maybe it would fall into the right hands some day, when they upgrade the satellite equipment.

Hallows described the events in grave detail. Sometimes sounding cryptic, other times very metaphorical. And sometimes just very *weird*, like something you'd read in a Philip K. Dick novel. You just didn't know what to believe, or what to make of it all. You weren't sure where it was leading you, nor to what ends. And, it wasn't until the very end that it would all come together and finally make sense.

It was around Day 30 that Hallows started documenting his findings. It started out with him sensing a presence. Then, it gradually began to express itself through his emotions, effecting his mood. Then the voices, ever so gradually, started to come into play. At first they came to him in rapid, unrecognizable whisper-like sentences. All this initially happened when he was monitoring the transmissions for one of them the marathon sessions they use to do back then for assignments. He'd use not only the visual read-out, but also listen for the frequency fluctuations over the headphones. Hallows discovered he was sensitive to certain frequencies. Eventually, he didn't need the headphones. Although he did use them again, later on, to gratify his curiosity. For, he started to modify some of the frequencies after he was finished with the day's assignments. He finally got what he wanted. Better reception. He found he was able to tap into the channels. *Channels*, because God (evidently) would have numerous communications that could be heard simultaneously.

There were times when he'd be under, what he described as a, "*Proselytistic Trance with God*", or *PTG*. He would go through intense feelings and emotions in rapid succession. He would go on and on about it at length in his journal describing them. He found that, by modifying certain frequency modulations, his perception of the voices quickened. Then, quite by accident, he discovered that while listening in under the influence of a sleep aid he could detect more levels within the frequencies themselves. This soon would inspire his experimentation with the different meds available to him. His ultimate *PTG* would induce an intense euphoria. It's not known what the concoction consisted of, but the onset was fast and had an hallucinogenic effect. It didn't seem to last too long either.

A half hour at best, from what Gray could gather. This *PTG* was used to induce a meditative state for which to experience the words at a deeper level.

He continued to refine the channels and their frequencies. His note taking continued at a vigorous rate. However, there were hours that Hallows could not account for. He'd lose track of time, and forget what he was doing or even where he was. Then, Hallows would have a hard time determining if he was awake or if he was actually dreaming.

In order to wade through the chaos in his mind, Hallows continued to experiment with the modulators. He had inadvertently tapped into the radio frequencies for the military and classified bands. And what Hallows uncovered had a profound effect on him. It not only reinforced his belief that man created the Gods, but also sustained the fact, as Hallows viewed it, that *Man* is indeed the route of all evil. Hallows determined that what he had received were not the *words of God*, but of *Man* himself. He tapped into the channels from which the UN's subliminal messaging and mind control experiments were being conducted. Through these communications, he could explain all of what he had experienced. Between their experimenting with the different regions of the brain, and gathering brainwave patterns, the UN scientists could duplicate and then manipulate the subjects. This affected Hallows on multiple levels. He was exposed to their experiments in an uncontrolled setting. And consequently this would affect his behavior, mood and perception. Depending on what part of which experiment he exposed himself to at the time, it would sometimes converge his memories with his dreams and daydreams. Fortunately this didn't happen for long before Hallows became aware of what was going on. Hallows claimed that the UN had been experimenting with mind control. That they were conducting auditory hallucination tests, and experimenting with electromagnetic fields to manipulate the nervous system. And, according to Hallows, when they're ready, they'll carry out this technological terror on a global scale. The objective being to control the thoughts, moods and perception of both individuals and groups of people, using satellites.

In one of his reports, Hallows' writes:

"There is one set of experiments the UN refers to as the "Neurological Process Control". The goal of this experiment is to manipulate the control subject(s) with various forms of frequency modulations controlled by computers via a satellite system. The waves contain messages in some instances, and mood alterations in others. This is part of an on-going experiment for mass mind control. Part of their advancement in psycho-technologies, otherwise known as psychotronics.

"They are currently conducting tests on a new type of frequency. They are calling it the Neuro band, or "N-band." The frequency, thus far, has proven effective and reliable in sending frequency bands that can be pulsed, shaped, and also more focused."

As a result of this startling revelation, Hallows purposely change some of the settings when they were doing their experiments, and would make false reports. In personal

protest, he stopped wearing the company uniforms. He would, from then on, be seen stark naked in the vids.

Hallows' job now, as he saw it, was to figure out how to inform the world of what the UN was doing. And, more importantly, what they intend to do with this technology. He knew that it was just a matter of time before they'd discover he found out something about what they were doing, and what he intended to do.

Hallows had never seemed, nor sounded more rational than he had at this point. It seemed as though, after the shock of it all, the truth was heartening. However, his efforts would soon be squelched.

The most disturbing vid that Gray witnessed on Hallows' drive was his very last transmission. You could only hear the audio portion of it for the most part, as Hallows scrambled through the different channels trying to broadcast his findings to those on Earth. He believed he had found a way to intercept and transmit over a few radio and television stations. However, he hadn't fine tuned them well enough in time. For, a satellite runner was on the way to decommission the satellite and take Hallows away.

One thing that Gray had over Hallows was the fact that no one knew that he's learned of this terror in the making. And as far as Alan was concerned, all that's on that drive is *Hallows' finding God*. Gray intended to keep it that way. At least for the time being.

It was all right there on Hallows' drive. Gray couldn't imagine how far the UN had gotten since this documentation. But, that was something Gray would have to find out. With the frequency allocation charts and codes that Hallows provided, it'll make Gray's job much easier.

Gray also recognized some *parallels* between what Hallows experienced, and what Gray has been going through since he's been on Satellite 2. This had Gray deeply concerned. And puts to question his own state of mind.

Fortunately, Gray has time on his side. Time to think things through thoroughly, and to prepare. He intends on carrying out Hallows' mission. And he knows just the method at which to pull this whole thing off with, thanks to Alexandra.

[Harmony For Whom?](#)

"It's only a matter of time before all of humanity is at the mercy of the United Nations," Gray thought to himself. "As if we weren't already." But now there would be no hope for reprieve. Not as long as they'd command absolute control over our thoughts and behaviors. For, there would no longer be any checks and balances in our society. There would be no freedom of speech. We'd simply be echoing their rhetoric in dead sentiment. They'd decide what we'd read, see, hear, feel, and *believe*.

It isn't hard to fathom their underlying reason for control. *Greed*. For greed's infinitely infectious essence has corrupted man throughout the ages. But, for this oppressive operation to have evolved to this stage, with such stealth, would prove to be a rude awakening to an unsuspecting society.

The UN have managed to organize this operation very well. They've used all methods of deception known to secure their political-military environment. However, their archaic methods have proven inadequate for what they now have in store. Biological psychiatry and brainwashing techniques are no longer practical, and are considered barbaric by modern standards. Besides, it's not cost effective in carrying out such tactics on a global scale. And by conducting their experiments off-world they've managed to isolate themselves from any public knowledge and scrutiny. With future plans to place their *instruments of mind destruction* in orbit under the guise of replacing an obsolete series of satellites, it would hardly give rise to suspicion.

Neuroscience has advanced greatly since the days of psychochemicals and implants. The reality of psychotronics has terrifyingly reached the forefront of governmental mind control tactics. With the advent of their precision frequency bands, they can wreak havoc amongst groups and individuals without a single trace of evidence. We could be programmed to kill one another or even ourselves. To confess to crimes we did not commit. Even make us believe in their *New World Religion*. These advanced neuroscience technologies are not only highly invasive, but supremely covert as well. No one would even know they were under neurological attack. If any suspicions were to arise about their methods of madness, they'd simply diagnose the insurgent with a mental illness, and treat them with FDA approved *toxins*. Fear will always be a factor in the equation for control. Their irrational agenda would undermine our autonomy and self-determination. This hacking of the mind is a genuine threat to all of humanity.

"It's control taken to the extreme," thought Gray. It is in our nature for us to want to feel in control. For example, to have control over territory that provides resources that sustain life. Or the mastery of a skill to win a game of chess, gaining a sense of control. Without it we would not have thrived as a species. However, when the equilibrium of power and control shifts further towards the edge of tyranny, we not only lose our rights. We lose *our-selves*.

"What is their rationale for such a finite operation," Gray wondered. "Global domination?" By understanding their *New World Religion* he might have a better grasp of the rationale behind their irrational acts. However, Gray needs to first decode the *Passages* in their *NWR* bible, so as not to fall under it's hypnotic trance embedded in their audio and visual materials, as Hallows had before his *enlightenment*. Gray has yet to find a plain text version.

"Maybe I'll take Alan's advice," Gray thought to himself. "I'll finish the week out, then return to Earth with my findings." There is no way for Gray to decipher the data there on the satellite. Their computers are not set up for such sophisticated functions. He decided

he would transfer the data from Hallows' drive onto one of the *Waunds* Herald gave him. "The blue one," Gray thought to himself. "They'd never suspect." Then, once he's back on Earth he'd contact Dave. Gray doesn't know who else he could turn to for such matters. With Dave's connection with the military, and his computers, he'd be able to find a way to at least *disable* the system temporarily. That would bide more time to seek out the resources needed to expose their operations. Gray has no idea how soon their operation will commence.

"What if, when I return to Earth, it's too late," Gray questioned. "What kind of safeguard could we develop against this?" The only protection from such wavelengths would be to go underground. A safe haven of sorts. But, how far would that be? And, even then, how many people could we congregate below the surface? This is becoming a complex operation for Gray to handle on his own. That is why it's imperative that he return to Earth as soon as possible with this information.

Gray only has nine more days before his *90-day session* ends. He is awaiting confirmation from headquarters of the exact day of his departure. He wonders if he'll meet the next technician or will they put the satellite in sleep mode. His session had gone by faster than he'd imagined it would. But, he looked forward to returning to Earth. Only, now this was a new beginning for him. A new life. For now, in his mind, he has a *purpose*.

Gray was alerted by the vidphone. He checked the read-out. It was headquarters. "To notify me of my departure date no doubt," Gray said to himself.

"Mr. Locke," the voice rang. It was Walter Hall. He heads the communications division of *DEEP* off-world.

"I'd like to personally thank you for a job well done," Hall said.

"Thank you, sir," Gray responded.

"You've managed to fulfill a quality that more than a dozen of your predecessors couldn't," Hall continued. "*Consistency*. The accuracy and integrity of your work reflects our mission and values here at *DEEP Enterprises*. That's something to be celebrated, Mr. Locke."

Just then Gray felt a sensation in his left ear. It was a distinct high-pitched ringing sound that traveled through to his right ear. He looked about the module, and then returned his attention back to the vid-screen.

Walter Hall looked off screen. He was handed a *Geni-Mind*. He scrolled the screen with a pointer he removed from behind his ear.

"It says here that your health stats are in prime condition. Been doing your daily exercises and taking the cognizant and perception tests I see, Mr. Locke," he said smiling into the

vidphone.

“Yes sir. Never felt better,” he responded.

“Good. Good,” Hall said as he tapped away at his *Geni*, once again.

“We’d like to offer you a new position, Mr. Locke. What do you say about that?”

“Gee,” Gray said with surprise. “I don’t know what to say. I’d...”

“We’d like to renew your contract,” interrupted Hall. “Only, you’d be *supervising* satellite technicians. Managing their assignments, and so forth, from here at *Logos*. Your salary would be, oh... considerably more than what you make now. And you wouldn’t be cramped up all alone in that satellite. You’d be amongst your colleagues. Making new friends! Be one of us.”

“Actually, sir,” said Gray. “I was hoping to return back to Earth. I have...”

“Back to Earth?” interrupted Hall, with a look of disgust. “It’s just, ordinarily anyone would jump at this opportunity! It’s our destiny! To colonize new worlds. The new frontier! Earth is for the...” Hall searched for a word. “*Specials*. It is a cesspool of depravity. In order to evolve and thrive one must leave the nest. This is a rare privilege offered to very few.” Hall looked straight into the vidphone at Gray. His face suddenly expressed a look of pride. “Out of the thousands of applicants, we chose you. We knew you had what it takes to be a part of our team. We knew it then and we know it now. And you just proved it, my boy! You *deserve* better. And I assure you, you will not regret this. *Believe me*. This is something to be celebrated, Mr. Locke,” Hall said with a wide smile of comradery.

“Mr. Hall,” started Gray, “I would be honored and privileged to accept your offer.”

“Great to hear, my boy! Great to hear,” Hall said. “Oh, I almost forgot. There was just one more thing. We’ll be phasing out Satellite 2, and the other manned satellites, and replacing them with the next series of satellites. They’re an upgrade beyond your wildest dreams. And they are easily controlled right here from *Logos*. We decided it just wasn’t cost effective to train new techs at this stage. As a result, we haven’t anyone available to replace you. And, quite frankly, there’s no one quite as good as you. One that I can depend on, anyways. So...what I’m asking of you is... would you mind working another ninety days, or so? Just until we have the new satellites in working order. I’ll be sure and put that raise in for you effective on day one. How does that sound to you, Mr. Locke?”

Gray felt compelled to agree to anything. He didn’t understand what came over him. It was almost as if this were all a dream. He stood there listening as Walter Hall talked away, as time seemed to slow down to a point where everything appeared to be happening in slow motion. Gray was filled with such a sense of elation that he’d agree to do what ever was necessary to fulfill his *90-day session* and to be a part of the team. And

before it was through...

“Mr. Locke,” Hall asked with deep concern. “Are you all right?”

“Yes...yes. I’m fine. I just,” Gray looked at the clock. “I need to eat, sir. That’s all.”

“Of course you do!” Hall exclaimed. “Go eat! You have much to celebrate! I’ll talk with you again real soon.”

As Walter Hall signed-off, Gray noted the ringing in his ears also stopped. “Maybe it was the connection,” Gray rationalized.

He turned and headed for the dining module. As he was selecting his breakfast, something dawned on him.

“What just happened,” Gray asked himself.

He just realized that he had his first *conscious* mind control experience. Additionally, he now realized he had just agreed to another *90-day session*.

“I wouldn’t be able to return to Earth in time,” Gray puzzled in his mind. “They are preparing to mobilize the satellites in three months time. This changes *everything*.”

Gray has to come up with another plan. Everything he had previously worked out in his mind wasn’t without flaws. But, at least it was plausible.

“I’m stranded here,” Gray conceded. “Now destined to become one of *them*. Part of the *team*.”

Gray floated over to his bin and felt around for his harmonica. He opened it's case. Then began to play.

Living In The Abstract

Gray took one last deep breath, then slowly exhaled through his nose. After his breathing exercises, he’d do his visualizations. He found it best to meditate while in his sleeping bag. That way, he wouldn’t drift off and hit up against anything in the module.

And he’d always return to the same place, too. It was to the *Big Rock*, from his childhood home. There he would go. And there he would sit. Sometimes, Alexandra would come up and sit beside him, too.

“How is it you are here?” asked Gray.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” she cracked.

Gray breathed a laugh. Then looked up at the stars. He watched as a nearby satellite passed over head.

“Seriously,” Gray started. “What...”

He looked over to where she was sitting...high up near the top, and saw this little *creature*.

“Alexandra?”

It tilted it’s head, and blinked each eye in succession while staring back at him. Then gave a smile.

“Follow me!” it said, “We have much to celebrate!”

“What? No! Wait!” Gray called to it as it started to turn away.

It stopped and looked back with a sad look on it’s face, wondering what it did wrong. Then hopped down a level closer to Gray, waiting for him to follow.

“Alex, what *are* you?” Gray asked with repulsion.

It started giggling, holding it’s hand over it’s mouth. Then stood up with it’s arms behind it’s back and pivoted back and forth with a cutesy smile, batting it’s eye lashes. This little green creature had a frog-like mouth and nose, and two eyes, each at the end of a short stalk. It’s conical ears stood erect. And it had a round belly with thin arms and legs. And stood no taller than three feet.

“Why can’t you answer that simple question?” Gray asked. “I can see you. I can *feel* you. How do you explain that? Am I losing my mind? Is that it?”

It started giggling again. Then lied down on her stomach, closer to the edge to watch and listen to Gray.

“This part of one of their mind control experiments gone awry?” continued Gray. “Are you someone else *pretending* to be my sister?”

She started laughing again. And it was starting to get out of control, as she rolled over on her back, holding her stomach to keep from bursting with laughter.

“Are you an alien life form, taking the shape of a woman, pretending to be my sister?” he probed.

She then lost all control of her laughter and balance. And rolled right down the Big Rock,

laughing all the way down until she reached the bottom.

“You’re not going to tell me, are you?” he yells down at it.

She breaks out into laughter again. It echoes across the quiet country side and down through the valley.

“Alexandra!” Gray yells with vengeance. “This isn’t funny! Come back up here! Alexandra! *Alexandra!*”

Gray felt a sharp flick to his ear. Then opened his eyes to find himself back in the satellite, with Alexandra hovering before him.

“Where did you go?” demanded Gray.

“Not far, Gray,” Alexandra responded.

“You rolled off the *Big Rock!*” Gray said.

“Gray, you were dreaming,” she said. “You were screaming out my name.”

“Dreaming?” he asked, confused. “Well...how do I know that this too isn’t part of a dream?”

“Because,” Alexandra began to explain, “dreams are in the mind. I’m not.”

“Come,” Alexandra said, unzipping his sleeping bag. “Let me in.” She slipped inside the sleeping bag with him. Then zipped it up.

“Tell me about this dream.”

“It was about you. Well...it wasn’t you *exactly*. But, it was *suppose* to be. I guess.”

“Ooo. That *can* be confusing,” she jested, as she snuggled up close to Gray.

“It was serious though. It started with me asking you what you are?”

“What I am? Well, no wonder! This must have been on your mind. So, tell me. What was I?”

“A laughing lunatic.”

“A laughing lunatic? How nice. Did I have the jester’s cap and bauble?”

“No. But you sure looked hideous! And you just wouldn’t stop laughing. The more serious I became, the louder you laughed,” he said.

“It was your nervousness.”

“Nervousness?”

“Sometimes,” Alexandra started, “when people laugh it’s because they are nervous about something. They don’t feel comfortable talking about a particular topic, for instance.”

“I wasn’t the one laughing,” Gray said.

“It certainly wasn’t me,” She replied. “It was your unconscious mind working out some issues. You’ve obviously been thinking about this. And it has conjured up some deep rooted, unconscious thoughts and fears. What can you tell me about me in the dream? What did I look like?”

“Well, I don’t know what to make of that *Sister-Thing*. Except that it resembled a frog. It wore this same gown too. And it sure did *sound* like you.”

“Well, I promise I won’t laugh at you,” comforted Alexandra as she snuggled up beside Gray.

“So then, what are you? How is it you are here with me now?”

She lay motionless for a moment, listening to his heartbeat. She gave a deep sigh, then repositioned herself so that she could look into his face.

“I am potential. I am the things you wanted to be. The things you couldn’t be,” Alexandra replied, as she combed her fingers through his hair.

“I am essence,” she continued. “I am your heart and soul. Your nature and core. I am your instinct. And, I am the love deep inside you,” she illustrated with her hand upon his chest.

“I am your smile.”

Gray was awestruck by her response.

“Will it always be like this?,” Gray asked. “Like now? As I am talking with you here and now?”

“I will always be here for you. I always have.”

“But,” asserted Gray, “Will it be...”

“My dear brother, you are living in the abstract. I *am* you. Together we are in harmony with *oneself*.”

Dreams are manifestations created by ones' own imagination. They come about as a result of conflict from within. Gray's dream was based on fear and vulnerability. Between his findings on Hallows' drive, and his own mind being manipulated, he wasn't always sure what to believe. And Alexandra's sudden appearance only further put to question his own sanity. He wasn't sure what to make of her presence.

Alexandra exists through Gray as a separate entity. However, they are one and the same. As far as Gray and Alexandra are concerned, they are neither man nor woman. For, between them there is no duality.

“So, getting to know you is actually getting to know *myself*,” asked Gray.

“Something like that,” Alexandra said. “However, the places I led you too? I did not create them. They were there. There were things we encountered that I cannot explain. Except that I was drawn to them, and I followed. Like, I was compelled to.”

“Like that room where they...where *I* was performing mind control experiments on the man in a booth?”

“Yes,” Alexandra said. “I was so scared!”

“And I thought that was a dream. Nightmare really. But, it wasn't. Was it?”

“It was a vision,” Alexandra started to explain. “That is part of the instincts and visualization at work. Haven't quite got it mastered yet. But, give it some more time. And practice. There was a reason why we were there. There is a purpose.”

“A premonition?”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“And the Ballroom?”

“The Ballroom,” she smiled.

“What was it's significance? Or, did that not have one?”

“Oh, it had one, I'm sure,” she replied. “That, my dear brother, we will have to brainstorm over together. But, don't you fret. Give it some time. Things have a way of working out.”

“I don't doubt you, Alex. But, time? That we haven't much of.”

“Gray,” asked Alexandra. “Please hold me.”

Gray embraced his sister warmly.

“Hold me,” she said again.

“I’m right here. I’ve got you,” he said softly.

“*Hold me,*” she whispered.

Gray repositioned himself so that they were facing one another. He reached his hand up and gently guided her chin up from his neck so that he could see her face. They looked into each others eyes. And at that moment an extraordinary illumination suddenly broke upon them.

Looking Through the Eyes of a Child

“Wait,” Gray said aloud.

Gray and Alexandra’s *essence* was no longer of this dimension. The celestial power they generated, as their separate entities began to *merge*, surrounded and filled them with an illuminating radiance. They existed as light within light. It felt familiar to Gray, yet foreign at the same time. He could associate this sensation with an experience he had in the past. He could see it in his mind as clear as if it had happened only yesterday. However, it actually took place thirty-one years ago.

Every summer, Gray and his parents would go to the Berkshires to visit his aunt and uncle. While there, they’d try to be sure to catch a Boston Symphony Orchestra performance at Tanglewood. This was very exciting for Gray because they’d bring his red wagon along with them.

This little red wagon meant the world to Gray in his early childhood. He’d decorate it with stickers and decals strategically placed. He’d take it with him where ever he went. In fact, he’d used it so much that one day the back wheel axle gave way. His father mounted on a new one with a new set of wheels. This made the wagon look *unique*. And Gray thought that was so cool.

Before they’d load the wagon into the Jeep, he’d be sure to give it a good cleaning and polishing for this special occasion. Because, the rest of the year it was used to cart his Tonka trucks and Matchbox cars around, or haul dirt and rocks from the garden. The most fun he’d have with it was riding it down the hill.

This time, however, it would be used to cart the picnic basket, cooler, and blankets for

their day-long extravaganza at Tanglewood. They'd set out their blanket and chairs on the lawn. And they'd be sure to set up early, for they had a special place under a majestic oak tree to re-claim each year.

Besides the people, food, and music, *of course*, there was one other special thing Gray liked to do there. And that was to visit the *hedge maze*. Gray would play *hide-and-seek* with other children who'd also been attracted to this *mystical garden*. He'd usually make a new friend or two there, and later visit each other at their picnic blankets during the intermission.

One year, when he was four, Gray felt it would be about time he'd venture out on his own. They had just gotten back from a restroom visit and were now settling in waiting for the performance to begin. Gray decided to go off on a journey. Nothing in particular attracted his attention. It was all fascinating to him. From the crowds of people, and the smells of food mixed with the scent of citronella, to the trees and shrubs which made for excellent hiding places. However, this was just for the sense of adventure. One step for *boykind*.

He thought maybe he needed a destination. He'd never find any of his new friends, having to weed through the fields of people. "*The hedge maze!*" he exclaimed. He wasn't sure which direction it was in. But, he figured he'd have to reach it at some point. Gray would go forth just a short ways, then return back to his wagon. He'd try again, this time a little further. He'd wander off a few feet at a time, then run right back to see if anyone missed him. With each recession he'd venture out a little further. He found it exhilarating!

However, he'd realized he'd been finding himself always returning. "*Maybe if I leave a mental marker to return to instead, then I'll be that much closer, yet that much farther,*" he thought to himself. And it worked! He felt pretty confident. But, there was some doubt in his mind. He remembered what his father had said to him before they left for Tanglewood. To stay in sight at all times. Gray was starting to feel he had about enough of this adventure. Something deep inside alerted him to *wait*. For, there was something more. Like he instinctively knew that he wasn't truly ready to be off on his own just yet.

It was twilight, and the shrubs and trees around him started taking a new shape. Like they concealed a hidden dimension. Just then, someone grabbed him up from behind and lifted him way up into the sky.

"There it is!" Gray yelled.

"It's time to head back to the tree," Gray's father said, as he carried Gray upon his shoulders. "Hear that bell? That means the performance is about to start."

"But, the maze," cried Gray, pointing in it's direction.

"There'll be another time, my little boy," Gray's father said encouragingly. "How would

you like some of Gram's molasses cookies!"

Gray couldn't resist that. Although he was in view of his parents the whole time, he'd felt he accomplished something. Even if he hadn't reached his destination. It was a first step. His first conscious experience with intuition. That is how Gray felt about the illuminating celestial radiance. Something more needed to be learned before moving forward.

What ever this new cosmic transformation was about, it hadn't scared Gray. He just felt, as in his childhood experience at Tanglewood, that it was missing something. Something inside told him that he wasn't quite ready this transformation just yet.

The illuminating radiance gradually subsided. Together, Gray and Alexandra slept through the night. And they will remember this as a dream within a dream.

Changing Wombs

When Gray awoke, he found Alexandra still in his arms. Their warmth and moistened skin made the sleeping bag feel like a womb. Not that they'd necessarily remember that feeling. But, it was the first image that came to their mind. He gently combed the hair from her face, revealing her morning smile. She embraced him tighter, as a reflection of her stretching. Then she hopped up and pecked the tip of his nose.

"You have a long day ahead of you," she said, somehow knowingly.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Gray acknowledged. "Although, I'd really just like to stay here, like this, all day," he said to himself.

"Me too," Alexandra replied.

"What," asked Gray.

"I'd like to stay in bed all day too," she clarified.

"You heard that?"

"Of course I did!" she replied. "We are becoming one, my dear brother. It started earlier this morning, actually. I could hear you talking in your sleep. The images weren't all that clear. At least I don't remember them being so. I just remember flashes of things. Lots of trees and a great lawn. A red wagon! Was that your wagon, when you were a little boy, Gray?"

"Yes, in fact I did have a red wagon. But, I don't remember dreaming about it."

Gray looked at the clock.

“Crap,” he said. “I’ve got to get going.”

“Go wake up,” she encouraged. “We’ll talk again later.”

“Later? Where are...where do you go when you’re not around?”

“Deep within. *In the back of your mind*,” she replied.

Alexandra unzipped the sleeping bag and slipped out. As Gray slipped out after her, he turned to open it some more to air out. When he turned back around, she had gone. He carried on with his morning freshening up routine.

Gray floated over to the dining module to get a drink. He looked at his inventory. “Alan should be making a run any day now,” Gray thought aloud. He went to look at the schedule on the computer. Just then he was alerted by the vidphone. It was a call from Earth. He didn’t recognize the number at first, only the country and area codes. But, then he saw the name.

“*Phoebe!* Hello,” he greeted.

Gray couldn’t imagine why she’d be calling. For anyone to actually get patched through to him directly usually meant that it was either a family emergency, or some financial matter needing attention. Otherwise, he’d typically get a recorded message or a text. Such real-time communications were just not practical. The lag time could range anywhere between three to twenty minutes. Since Phoebe was not a family member this caught Gray off guard.

“Hello there, *stranger*,” Phoebe responded.

“Wha...uhm...how,” Gray stammered. “Is everything all right?”

Gray hadn’t talked with Phoebe since before the launch back in April. He hadn’t contacted anyone by vidphone other than the crew up there. But, he was sure to send text messages to everyone periodically. It was also part of his nature to delve deep into his work. Once he’s on task there’s no easy way to deter him.

“Yes, Gray. Everything is fine,” she said with a warm smile. Her vibrant brown eyes captivated him. And her face was aglow with such joy that, for the first time, he felt homesick.

“I just wanted to see your face *live*. Not some photograph from five months ago,” continued Phoebe. “And making sure you hadn’t run off with some *Martian bimbo*,” she laughed. “When are you coming home? Your work there should almost be done. Right?”

“Um... There’s been a slight *change of plans*.”

“Gray? Didn’t you...”

“Believe me, I had every *intention* of returning,” Gray interrupted, not giving himself the chance to listen to her inquiry. “But, they *really* need me here right now. It’s *only* until they do the upgrade. I couldn’t very well *refuse* them.”

There was a silence longer than usual as Phoebe stared indignantly into the vidphone at Gray.

“Now could I?” Silence still. “A matter of fact, they gave me a promotion!” Silence. “Isn’t that good news? I’ll be...”

“Promoted you,” interrupted Phoebe, talking over Gray’s pitch. “Well...congratulations. Will you be stationed here in the Commonwealth, or will you be commuting to their headquarters in New York?” He could tell by the look on her face that she knew very well what he’d say. Like she could read his mind. But, she wanted Gray to hear himself say it so that he’d realize what he had done. *As if he hadn’t*. But, he couldn’t very well explain to her over the vidphone that he’d been manipulated into agreeing to stay. For one, he was sure the conversation was being monitored. And second, it would be a hard pill to swallow without her thinking he’d gone mad. “*I won’t have to commute, that’s for sure*,” Gray said to himself.

“I’ll be stationed off-world. I’ll have my own office... right at headquarters. *Logos*. Off-world. Nearby the Triple-Helix Colony. The *future* Triple-Helix Colony,” Gray spacioously said. There were a few more moments of tense silence that seemed to linger like a heavy cloud of sulfuric acid droplets descending upon him, as he anticipated a response from her. “I’ll have a new life here, Phoebe. Make new friends.”

“Oh,” she said, as tears welled up in her eyes.

“Listen,” Gray began. “Maybe you could move off-world too! I’ll cover the costs. I understand the living cond...”

“It’ll be too late,” she abruptly interrupted.

“Too late,” asked Gray, as he shook his head to clear his mind. “Too late for what?”

Gray just couldn’t imagine what was going through her mind. She could come live with him off-world. By the time she’d arrive, he’d be all done on the satellite and working in headquarters at Logos. They could get married, as they had discussed before he left for his training. The lag between their communications was agonizingly unbearable.

“Too late for *us*,” she said angrily.

“What do you *mean*?” Gray exasperated as he propelled off balance.

He hadn't felt such frustration like this in a long time. It was like the *Reptilian complex* was overriding his rationality. But he did his best to keep his cool.

“Gray, I can't...I've got to go,” Phoebe said, trying to hold back the tears. “Good luck with your new job. And your new life.”

The screen went static.

“Phoebe, I..”

The transmission had disconnected. He hadn't a clue what that was all about. Although they had only met that New Years Eve at Herald's, the connection between them, up to this point, was ever so strong. Unlike he's ever felt before. But, he'd never seen this side of her before. He didn't understand why she wouldn't at least discuss moving off-world.

“What did she mean by it'll be too late,” Gray asked himself.

This was very distressing for him. After he and his wife separated, he was very reluctant to get involved with anyone else. He didn't want to go through the pain again. And he certainly didn't want to hurt anyone either. He'd been on a number of dates, but never really hit it off with any of them. Until Phoebe, that is. But, it's times like these, when a couple can't effectively communicate, that stirs up those painful emotions and remind him of their resulting repercussions.

Living out there, on Satellite 2, has given Gray some solace. Despite his recent findings, his life had been relatively peaceful. Tranquil even. Loneliness had settled in on him on occasion, of course. But, he hadn't time to really evaluate and compare between living a life of solitude and living in another relationship.

He'd sometimes look back at the relationships he'd had over the years. And he'd resolve to carry on, being grateful that he had those moments with them. He's had three serious relationships, not including this one with Phoebe. And each one of them he had loved beyond measure. Gray whole heatedly believes that, if you truly love someone, you never stop loving them. That belief was not always appreciated by the subsequent girlfriend. He'd try to explain that, the love that is felt is of *that space and time*. Not now. That is the only way you ever could love someone. Loving *now*. But, with the passage of time, comes the empirical end. If a long enough gap of time separates two people, they will inevitably grow apart. He didn't want to see that happen between him and Phoebe.

“Relationships can be so complicated,” Gray concluded. “But, do they have to be?”

He just couldn't tell at this point. He hadn't felt such stress with Phoebe until now. He just couldn't figure out what was going through her mind.

Gray drifted over to his bin. Searched for his harmonica. He found that this helped him to work things through in his mind. It reveals and sorts through the chaos presented through the vortex of his mind. He found himself playing the piece that he and Alexandra would dance to in the Ballroom.

“Nice melody you’ve composed there, Gray.”

“Oh! Alexandra,” Gray glanced over his shoulder, startled. “Recognize it? It’s the song we danced to in the Ballroom.”

“Yes, my dear brother,” replied Alexandra. “Very well.”

She hugged him from behind. Then floated directly before him, with a wide smile on her face, and eyes gleaming with deep anticipation.”

“What?” asked Gray, with a puzzled look on his face.

“When were you going to call Phoebe back?”

“Phoebe?” asked Gray, with surprise. “How do you know...Oh, never mind. Why should I call her back? She’s the one who disconnected. She’s obviously upset at me. That is certainly not the time to call anyone back and expect to have a rational conversation.”

“For you, maybe,” Alexandra replied. “But, not for everyone. Not everybody’s like you, Gray. She obviously has something very important to share with you.”

“Yes! But, she wouldn’t say! I asked her if everything was okay.”

“Yes,” interrupted Alexandra. “You asked Phoebe if everything was all right. And she answered you.”

“Well!? What was I *suppose* to ask?”

“The right question.”

“Alex, if you’re trying to confuse me, you’re doing a top rate job!”

“Gray. You really don’t understand women. Do you?”

“I’m not *insensitive*. Am I suppose to be a mind reader? Hanging up was not very rational.”

“It’s not always easy to be rational when you’re carrying a child.”

“Carrying a chi...What are you talking about? How would you...”

“Gray, Phoebe is carrying your daughter. That’s probably what she was going to tell you. But, after hearing that you’d extended your stay here, she probably didn’t know how to handle it. Now that she’s had a few moments to digest this little *change of plan*, now’s the time for you to call her back. Show her that you care about her and her feelings. Call her.”

“And tell her what?” asked Gray. “She won’t be able to come here. Not when she’s pregnant. And I certainly can’t return to Earth. They wouldn’t let me. This really complicates matters, doesn’t it?”

The rocket thrust alone could damage the fetus were a pregnant woman be sent into space from Earth. And children under the age of four are not recommended either. For, they need gravity to grow strong bones and muscles and develop their sense of balance.

“Gray, I’m sure she realizes this. But, you know what?” Alexandra said, as she put her arm around her brother. “This isn’t a decision for you to necessarily make on your own. You really should discuss this with her. And make a decision together. I’m sure she’s reached the same conclusion you just did. The next step is for you to talk with her about it.”

Gray stashed his harmonica in his pocket. Then floated over to the vidphone. He managed to get approval to re-connect with Phoebe.

“Phoebe,” Gray started, taking a deep breath. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. I don’t know what got into me. The decision to stay came...”

“Gray, I’m pregnant,” Phoebe interrupted. Her eyes and nose were reddened from crying.

“I know,” Gray responded.

“You know? Ha-how do you...”

“I’ll...I’ll...I’ll explain another time,” Gray interrupted, anticipating her question. “What we need to discuss is where to go from here.”

“I’m not sure,” Phoebe said. “I was hoping that you’d be coming back in a couple months. I wanted to tell you about our baby.” Tears started to stream down her already dampened cheeks. “I wanted you to look forward to seeing us when you got back. You know? And not shock you first thing as I introduce your son or daughter...”

“Daughter,” Gray interjected. “Oh, did you not want to know?”

“What? How did you know we are having a baby girl,” she asked, wide-eyed.

“I’ll...”

“I know...you’ll explain later. I suppose you have a name picked out too?”

“Actually... Yes! I do.”

There was a silence for a few moments.

“Well!? Are you going to tell me? Or has “Baby Girl” Locke got to wait for her daddy to come home?”

“Alexandra,” Gray replied.

“Alexandra? Who’s that? One of your ex-girlfriends,” Phoebe jested.

“No. She’s my sister.”

“Your sister? I didn’t know you had a sister.”

“I do. I don’t. I mean, I did. She died when she was an infant. But, I still feel a strong bond with her. *Especially recently*,” he half mumbled to himself.

“Alexandra. I like that name, Gray. Sounds so...*auspicious*,” Phoebe said. “So, you’re okay with this then? I mean...”

Just then Phoebe had a strange look on her face. She pointed off camera to alert Gray of some space debris floating nearby. By the time the image reached Gray it was already overhead.

“Looks like your satellite is starting to fall apart, Gray,” she laughed.

“Oh, it’s my harmonica. It was in my pocket. Herald gave it to me.”

Gray gave it a blow up through the scale.

“Fitting,” Phoebe said. “I can see you out there... all by yourself in your little satellite, playing your harmonica to keep loneliness at bay.”

“It’s helps, believe it or not.”

“Are you becoming a budding musician now? Writing any songs?”

“Me? No! I could never write anything, let alone read music,” Gray responded.

“What do you mean? You’re good at math aren’t you?”

“Math? What’s math got to do with music,” asked Gray.

Gray could recall the theory that listening to classical music by composers like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart helps students study and focus better on their homework. However, he couldn't imagine how that would apply to math as a subject. Phoebe is a math teacher at a charter school that integrates both the arts and technology in with the core subjects. And the math and music connection was no stranger to her.

"They have a lot in common! For example, in class this year we'll be exploring the relationship between numbers and the AM/FM frequencies on the radio dial. They'll learn about Pythagoras, and how striking the string of an instrument produces a musical pitch. And that each note has a corresponding frequency. You know, studying the relationship between whole number multiples and the fundamentals of frequency. Weren't you taught this in school," asked Phoebe.

"I guess. I don't remember," replied Gray, as he stroked his razor-stubbed chin.

Gray's mind started racing as he was listening to Phoebe's explanation. It started to make sense to him, in relation to the frequencies he's been monitoring on the satellite, and that song that's been dwelling in the Ballroom of his mind. He abruptly turned to where Alexandra had been lingering. But, she was gone.

"Gray?" asked Phoebe. "Is there something wrong? Did I lose you there for a sec? You know, you're more than welcome to join us in class. As long as you don't mind a bunch of 8th grade schoolgirls goggling over you."

"No...no," he replied. "I just...I remembered something that's all."

"Shouldn't we be discussing something," Phoebe said, pointing toward her belly.

"Hungry?" asked Gray. "Oh! Yeah. The baby!"

"Alexandra," she corrected.

"Where?" Gray turned and looked behind.

"Here silly," Phoebe laughed.

"Oh! Yes! Alexandra. *Our* Alexandra," Gray corrected himself. "Well...we *did* have this certain discussion before I left for training. But, that was before I ...augh...before the change of plan. Now, under the circumstances, maybe it's time to bring it up again...I mean, well, should we get married? That is..."

"Are you proposing to me, Mr. Locke?"

With one hand on his heart, and the other reaching out to Phoebe, Gray proposed.

"Miss Phoebe Elizabeth Stowe, will you be my wife?"

“Mr. Grayson Shields Locke, yes! I would be honored to be your wife.”

They blew each other kisses, and then hugged themselves.

“The next big questions, my darling, are *how* and *when*?”

“I’ll ask my supervisor. Maybe there’s a clause somewhere in the contract that will allow me return home! But, I wouldn’t put it past them to have addressed such circumstances already. In their favor, of course,” Gray said glumly. “But, even if not, I’ll work something out. I’ll do everything I can to be with you again.”

“I have faith in you, my darling. Oh! Have you a middle name picked out for her as well?”

Gray thought to himself.

“Harmony.”

“Alexandra Harmony Locke. That’s got a nice ring to it,” commented Phoebe.

“How far along, I mean...when is she due,” asked Gray

“Ready for this? New Years!” Phoebe said.

“Incredible!” Gray exclaimed. “The very day we met.”

“Must be a sign,” Phoebe smiled.

“Can I see?” asked Gray.

Phoebe backed up to reveal her very round belly to the vidphone. She then lifted her blouse, showing her tummy.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better. The morning sickness has gone away, thankfully. You didn’t miss anything there.”

“I wish I could be there with you,” Gray said, with a saddened tone. “This just isn’t right.”

“We’ll just have to make the best of it,” she said.

“Things have a way of working out,” Gray said, encouragingly. “I’ll get back to you soon about all this. About what I can arrange. Okay?”

"Okay," she replied, as the tears welled in her eyes, once again. But, this time they were tears of joy.

"I love you, my Phoebe."

"I love you, my darling," Phoebe said.

[Hero On the Third Tomorrow](#)

His mission to Du'mek was cut short by an urgent call from the planet Zilch, in the Andromeda Galaxy, M31. He immediately changed his coordinates to the Corzoian star system and programmed *Mox's* velocity to FTL2. Zip-click-zoom! And he was off!

It wasn't uncommon for *Hero* to be called upon by his allies at any given time. But it was uncommon to receive a distress call from the planet Zilch. Being a relatively peaceful solar system, situated on the outskirts of this spiral galaxy, it didn't seem a likely target for a hostile occupation. Judging by the content of the message, it sounded like the villainous *Gambitocs* are expanding their territory. And that meant that either they seized control of a nearby star system, or there was some competition moving in.

Hero consulted the *Encyclopedia Galactica* for any new entries on the *Gambitocs*. It still had their home base listed on Thepheid in the Alpha Strategos system, at the inner ring of M31. He noted that, according to their Agrarian Calendar, they had just entered their Magnaniorah period. This could be their way of extending their generosity to neighboring star systems. Only their systems are light years apart. The *Gambitocs* invasion posed a threat to the Zilchian way of life. It was *Hero's* job to become an interpreter and mediator between these two worlds.

Was their presence intended to be a gesture of goodwill? Or was this one of their tactics to take over this peaceful star system? *Hero* will zoom to the call with his hi-tech spaceship *Mox*! Restoring harmony between the worlds!

Growing up in the '90s, there were many superheroes for a child to choose from.

Although Gray was fascinated by a good number of them, he chose to create his own superhero. He chose to combine the traits of the *Lone Ranger* and *Superman*. Although they were not among the most popular superheroes at the time, Gray liked them because his father grew up with them. And they'd watch the old television shows together on Saturday mornings. The Lone Ranger would wander the countryside and bring justice to a lawless land out in the wild west, whilst Superman fought for social justice and against tyranny in Metropolis.

Gray's intergalactic superhero was simply named *Hero*. He lived aboard a spaceship called *Mox*, named after Gray's favorite soft drink, *Moxie*. The word *moxie* means *the ability to face difficulty with spirit and courage*, which Gray found very fitting. He'd build *Mox* using Lego bricks, improving upon it's design each time with various shields and devices.

Hero's strengths were his intellect and use of technology. He'd refer to his *Encyclopedia Galactica* to help research such matters as the history of a civilization or the kind of weaponry favored by a particular army. *Hero* would also carry a laser gun. However, he'd only use it to stun the villain. And, he'd have a closet full of special spacesuits designed to tolerate the harsh environments of the many worlds he'd visit. With each adventure, *Hero* would continue to build alliances between the different star systems, planets, and their inhabitants. Restoring harmony between the worlds!

What *Hero* had done for Gray was not only allow him to create a character that he could call his own, but it would also help to develop his own morals. And it would sharpen his problem-solving skills too. Because, the key in combating the chaos of evil was using intelligence and tact.

By learning about the villain and their way of life you'd not only discover their weakness, but also the rationale behind their actions.

With this methodology, a better understanding between the two conflicting civilizations could be reached, and a compromise most likely. However, this wasn't always the case when Gray would play with his friends. Sometimes they'd insist on global domination and would destroy anything that stood in their path. That was more exciting to them than cooperating and compromising. Fortunately that was all just make believe.

During Gray's freshman year of high school, in social studies class, he was given an assignment. He was to pick a news event each week and write a *compare and contrast* essay about it. He'd select a headline, then compare the reports to other sources reporting on the same story or subject. Usually the reports would each have their own perspectives on a story, and would project their own ideological bias and opinions into it's content. *Sensationalizing* the events hit a nerve with Gray too. Opinions and emotions are better suited for the editorial page, he thought. Not in reporting the news. He wanted the facts, not the commentary. Gray couldn't wait for the end of that trimester for the assignment to be over.

For his very last essay he would resurrect *Hero* from his wanderlust. Gray would write his paper as usual. But then he'd ask himself, "What would *Hero* do?" And he tacked his response at the end of his report. The teachers at his school would always encourage their students to be creative and to express themselves. Gray had incorporated a story with an assignment once before, for science class. He wrote a paper on *potential and kinetic energy*. He had to demonstrate the transformation between potential and kinetic energy in simple mechanical systems. He wrote a narrative story to go along with it he called "*My Uncle's Clock Room*." He'd describe the operation using the weights of the Grandfather clock and the springs of a mantel clock along with their gears and pendulums, with his uncle as the lead character tending the clocks. The teacher thought it very clever.

When the social studies teacher received Gray's last news essay, he called Gray over to his desk.

"What have you done here, lad?" the teacher asked with a look of surprise on his face.

"What's the matter, Mr. Estes?" Gray asked sheepishly.

"Where did you get this?"

"From the Boston Glo..."

"No! No," Mr. Estes interrupted. "This *Hero* business? This *solution*?"

This particular news item that Gray chose was about a proposal that was brought up at a city council meeting to create a park downtown in a vacant lot. Some citizens spoke before the council voicing their ideas of what should be done with that space. Apparently it was sparked by letters to the editor of a local newspaper a couple of weeks ago. This sparked some debate, and many more letter writers. One letter recommended this be brought before the city council. A meeting was held with the residents and businesses of that district. It got a lot of attention from the media. Newspapers, radio and three television networks were there. Despite the feedback, no consensus could be made. The funding was big on the agenda too. Another meeting had to be scheduled for a later date.

Here is where *Hero* comes to the rescue! After hearing the different views and ideas, *Hero* devised a plan. Using his Encyclopedia Galactica, he found some computer programs that could help organize and provide an outline for funding for the park. Mr. Estes was particularly fond of the idea he had for the fund raising. As described in Gray's story, after setting the funding goal and deadline, *Hero* hit the road to raise money for the park. Businesses and people would pledge money, however funds wouldn't be collected until the campaign reaches its goal. Some residents felt a little ambivalent when it came to asking for money from them. Because, they didn't want their money to go to some other project if all the funds couldn't be raised for their park. Someone is more likely to contribute if they know that the money will be exclusively for this park. If the goal could not be met, no money was collected. His story had a happy ending with the funds being raised in record time. *Hero* collected the funds and distributed them accordingly.

“It’s what *Hero* would do,” said Gray, with a great big smile.

These two events would prove to make a great impact on Gray’s life. For, this is what led him to apply for the technician job on the satellite. As the years passed by, however, Gray would stray further away from these ideals. That freshman year at high school would be his last visit with *Hero*. Gray would partake in the rituals of modern life. Gradually contributing to the chaos that was once at bay. It wasn’t until that day, when he was rummaging through that box containing his old journals, star charts, and Voyager 1 model, that he realized that he had lost something. That, through no fault of anyone or anything, he lost that inner child. His true self. He only needed to be reminded.

Gray is at the point of no return. He looks to the future with hope and dignity. Gray isn’t looking to become Hero. However, those traits that he borrowed from the Lone Ranger and Superman have been ingrained in him. Hero had become Gray. He may not be able to save the world. He may not even be able to change the world. But, he can make a difference. He will do all that he can to secure a safe and harmonious world for his daughter, Alexandra Harmony Locke, to live in. That is where he knows he can make a difference.

[Of All Possible Worlds](#)

Gray poured his heart and soul into a letter that he’d hope would pardon him from his contract with *DEEP Enterprises*. In it he informed Walter Hall about his new set of circumstances. He wrote about Phoebe and their wanting to get married. And about his child she’s carrying. And he even offered to take leave without pay, if necessary. And that he’d sign on a third term to make up for transportation costs, if they’d have him. However, a week had passed and he hadn’t yet heard back from him.

In the meantime, Gray tested and compared some of the frequency patterns that Hallows had figured out. He found that a fair number of them were still useful. However, there were some that had changed, as was expected. Gray just had to fill in the blanks.

This day, being Day 90 - *September 23, 2020* - would be a day for moving forward. Alan Fleming was scheduled for supply delivery and waste removal. Gray greeted Alan, and volunteered to help unload the supplies. When they entered Alan’s *scuttle*, he closed the door behind them so that he could speak to Alan out of range of the surveillance cameras. He had rehearsed what he had to tell Alan, to make it quick and brief.

“Alan, I need you to find out exactly when they’re placing the new satellites into orbit,” Gray said. “Can you do that without raising any suspicion?”

“No problem,” Alan replied. “What, you think it’ll be soon?”

“It’ll be within three months, I suspect.”

Alan looked away for a moment, searching his mind.

“What,” asked Gray.

“That’s what the meeting must be about,” said Alan. “We have training scheduled next week. That usually only happens when someone’s gotten seriously hurt. Or if there’s a major project coming up. Since no one’s been hurt recently, this must be it.”

“It’s got to be soon then.”

“I’ll let you know for sure.”

“Yes,” Gray said. “But, we must speak in code.”

“Being just a little paranoid, aren’t you *SpaceMan*?”

“For the month you’ll tell me something...anything, using military time. So, twelve-hundred hours is December. Get it?”

“*Yes sir!*”

“And for the day, ask me when the baby’s due, guessing the month. So...if it’s the twenty-third, you’ll say... what...”

“What?” asked Alan.

“What?”

“No. What *baby*?”

“I’ll tell you later,” said Gray. “If it’s the twenty-third, you’ll guess...”

“February? March?” Alan mocked.

“Good, let’s go.”

They re-entered the satellite with a handful of boxes. As Gray organized the storage module, Alan took care of the waste. Then they retired to the lounge area to catch up on the recent events.

“You don’t say,” Alan marveled. “Breedin’ it in a *test-tube*?”

“No,” Gray chided.

“*Sorry*,” he said with a shrug.

“Her name is Phoebe. We met...”

Just then a call came over the vidphone.

“Mr. Locke,” Walter Hall greeted. “So sorry I couldn’t get back to you sooner. Been very busy. And I wanted to congratulate you in person. Hello there, Mr. Fleming.”

“Mr. Hall.”

“You have an envelope for Mr. Locke?”

“I don’t recall,” Alan said. He pulled out his hand-held tracker to look it up.

“Oh, it’s probably under my name.” Hall referred to his *Geni*. He scrolled down, then read out the P.O. Number.

“Yes, sir. It’s right here. I’ll go retrieve it.”

“Very good,” Hall said as he watched Alan leave the module. “Mr. Locke, we have much to celebrate! I have good news for you.”

Gray could feel the same sensation in his ears as the last time he spoke with Hall. He couldn’t fight it. He didn’t want to make his pains too obvious. He couldn’t risk them suspecting he knew of their subliminal messaging and mind control on him.

“What’s that Mr. Hall?”

“Please, call me Walter. You’ve moved up the scale!”

“Very well then. Walter it is.”

“In your message to me you mentioned that you’ll be a father! Congratulations!”

“Thank you.”

“You also mentioned,” he continued, referring to his *Geni*, “that you’d like to get married to the mother. Preferably before the birth.”

“Yes, sir. Very much so.”

“Absolutely understandable, my boy.”
Alan returned with the envelope.

“Mr. Fleming. If you would,” Hall gestured for Alan to hand the envelope to Gray.

Gray opened the envelope. He was expecting to find some release forms, in keeping with the flow of the conversation. However, they turned out to be similar forms to the ones he signed when first hired. A contract. Only this time it had a different job title, a higher pay rate, and where he'll be assigned. However, Gray was more than willing to sign them. In the back of his mind he was eager to hear when he'll be released to marry Phoebe. Things were feeling good to him right now. He was glad that Alan was present to share this moment with him.

"Now, Mr. Fleming, if you'd sign as witness, accordingly. And, of course, this is all being recorded as well. For documentation purposes."

Alan searched through the sheets of documents. Gray helped to locate the pages to help move this along.

"Very good," acknowledged Hall. "Now, back to what I was saying about your wedding."

"Wedding?" asked Alan.

"Didn't Gray tell you? He's getting married! Gray, did you have a particular date picked out?"

"Well...no," Gray said. "We hadn't discussed it. Actually Walter, I wasn't sure you'd let me return to Earth to..."

"*Return to Earth?*" interrupted Hall. "I didn't say anything about you returning to Earth. You signed the contract, Gray. You won't be returning to Earth anytime soon. You will..."

"But, *sir*," interrupted Gray, "she can't travel in her condition."

"I was going to suggest the wedding ceremony be performed via the *Interstellar Internet*."

"Wha..."

"Just think! You'd make history! You'd be the first couple to get married in this way! I'm sure there will be countless more to follow. So, why don't you discuss the date with..." Hall referred to his Geni. "*Phoebe*. Women like to get involved with these kinds of things. Then get back to me."

"But sir, when will I ..."

Just then Hall was paged by his beeper. He referred to his *Geni* once again.

"Oops! I've go to take this one, Gray."

“But...”

“Call your bride! You have much to celebrate!”

Hall disconnected.

“Congratulations, *SpaceMan*,” Alan quipped.

“What for,” Gray said gloomily.

“Don’t take it so hard,” Alan consoled. “You’ll see her again.”

“Yeah. When? In five or six *years*?”

“I imagine they’ll let you go after you do your 90 Days.”

“It’ll be too late.”

“*Too late*?” Alan asked. “You’re the one who signed the fuckin’ papers! You were like a teenager in a porn shop!”

Gray quickly changed the topic. He pretended to cheer up. But, deep down inside he was in another world. He wasn’t sure how Phoebe was going to take the news. Then he remembered her saying that *they’ll make the best of it*.

Name That Tune

“Name that tune!”

“What?”

“Can you name this tune in three notes?”

Gray pulled out his harmonica and played the first three notes of a song.

“Well, it *sounds* like our song from the Ballroom.”

“Very good,” Gray replied. “Can you *name* it?”

“I...I don’t know, Gray. I haven’t a clue. I’ve never heard it before. Have you?”

“No. I haven’t either. But, I believe this song is important. Now *this*.”

He played three different notes on his harmonica.

“I’m not sure...”

“I’ll add a couple more.”

This time he played five notes.

“It sort of sounds like the same song. Am I right?”

“When I was talking with Phoebe last week she mentioned music and frequencies. And that got me thinking. I’ve been studying the patterns of frequencies that Hallows decoded. And I compared them to the frequency patterns they stopped using. And you know what I found?”

“What?”

“*Nothing!* Nothing, until I associated the frequencies with “tones”. That last bit I played for you? That was one of Hallows. It’s not the same as the song from the Ballroom. But, it’s a variation of it. Now, listen to *this*.”

He played a song. It was very dark and eerie sounding.

“Not very pleasant sounding,” Alexandra commented.

“That is one of the frequency patterns they did use. All of them are like that. They all contain varying degrees of dissonance.”

The idea of up-converting and down-converting frequencies is used all the time in communications. Gray converted the GHz of the microwave frequencies used by the satellites to Hz of a sound wave used in music. A Gigahertz is a billion Hertz. So 26.5 GHz is one billion times more than 26.5 Hz (which would sound like a low bass note). All you have to do is divide the microwave frequencies by a billion to get the equivalent sound frequencies. Then transpose up. One octave higher is twice that frequency; one octave lower is half that frequency. For example, middle C, or C4 is equal to 261.63 Hz. So, chromatically transpose the patterns, and you have your song. And in doing so, Gray will be able to fill in the missing links.

With this formula he could modify their signals ever so slightly. This could potentially give him more time to figure out the next move to stop their madness. Once he’s stationed at *Logos* he’ll have opportunities to do permanent damage, and possibly build an alliance. *Anything’s possible*.

Gray was alerted to the vid-phone. It was Alan with his hands shielding his eyes.

“Alan?” asked Gray.

“Are ya’ decent? I know it’s kind of late.”

Alan was cracking a joke about the time Gray answered the vid-phone naked.

“Yes. *Smart-ass*,” he replied under his breath.

They carried on about their day. Small talk. Gray was waiting for Alan to come out with the dates when they’ll be launching the new satellites.

“I’ll be able to sleep in tomorrow morning. Training isn’t until ten hundred hours.”

That was the code for October. “*That soon*,” Gray thought to himself. They carried on with more small talk. Then Alan started talking about the new satellites. It was not a secret since Gray was directly involved with the process. Alan mentioned that they were attaching the new satellites to the older ones. They’d remove the non-essential units of the original satellite and use that for storage. Apparently they’ll be deploying pods from each satellite to act as a relay. Then they’d return back to their respective satellite. The living space will be for the maintenance crew. Gray started talking about fatherhood.

“So, when’s that kid of yours due? February?”

That was code for two. October 2nd. “*They aren’t wasting any time*,” Gray thought.

“Close,” said Gray. “January. But, you can never be so sure. It may be earlier. At least that’s what Phoebe tells me.”

“Phoebe? Who’s that? The lab assistant?” jested Alan.

“Some of us have work to do in the morning,” Gray retorted.

“Yeah. I hear ya’. Goodnight *SpaceMan*.”

Alan signed off.

“Well. There it is,” Gray said aloud.

“No. Not much time at all, Gray,” Alexandra said.

“Just four days away. I’m sure they’ll want to test it soon after. But, it’ll probably be on a controlled target. Small scale,” Gray said.

“Let’s get some sleep, Gray. My turn to share a song with *you*.”

After Gray secured the satellite, and prepared for bed, he slipped inside his sleeping bag next to his sister. And she sang him a lullaby.

“See if you remember this,” she said. And she sang softly a sweet lullaby their mother once sang to them.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!

Then the traveler in the dark
Thanks you for your tiny spark;
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!

In the dark blue sky you keep,
While you thro' my window peep,
And you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!*

* "The Star" by Jane Taylor

[Then There Was You](#)

“*There*,” Gray said aloud, as he added a final touch to the sculpture.

Gray created a replica of *Satellite 2* from obsolete computer components such as cables, fans, drives, chips, connectors, you name it. When Alan made his last run, Gray asked if

he could bring a crate of old computers that were going to be trashed, and plenty of wire and cables. Anything that he could fit and fasten together using wire and glue. It brought back fond memories of the days when he worked on school projects, or built spaceships from his *Lego* blocks.

The sculpture was his wedding gift to Phoebe. Certainly not your ordinary wedding present. But creative in more ways than one. It's primary purpose was to smuggle a message to her. For, hidden amongst the paraphernalia was Herald's yellow *Waund*. And on that *Waund* was a vid of Gray briefly explaining to Phoebe that he has an opportunity to make an impact on the future of humanity. And also that he would most likely have to sign-on another 90-days, in addition to the one he just started. He knew that this wouldn't go over very well. Especially under the circumstances. He wouldn't be there for the birth of their child. But, morally, he had no choice. However, he would live to regret this precious time. He'd miss hearing her first cry. Seeing her eyes open to the light of the world for the first time. And feeling the strength of her grip as she grasps his finger. These, and many other firsts, will be denied him. These precious moments cannot be replaced. But neither can humanity.

Gray wasn't sure how to word it so that he wouldn't come across to her as insane. And he also didn't want to give her the impression that he was trying to avoid his responsibilities, or her. But he had to make that part of the vid brief. When he recorded the vid he was sure to take precautions not to reveal too much. During the first hour and a half of the vid he would reminisce about the day they met.

"I remember feeling a little nervous at first. But once Herald and his wife Gloria greeted me, I felt right at home," Gray started. "Herald introduced me to a couple of his colleagues. Fellow shuttle drivers. One of them, Ed White, I remembered from when he'd fill in for Herald on his days off. He was a hoot," Gray smiled.

"Then there was you," Gray continued. "And to think that I almost didn't go to the New Years Eve party. The previous year...heck! I was asleep before midnight! It was just another day as far as I was concerned. Then there was you. And from that very moment I laid my eyes on you I was smitten. We were inseparable the rest of the night and into the next morning. Oh, we wandered at first. Mingled amongst the crowd as though our meeting was like any other, only to catch each other staring from across the room at each other. That last instance, it was as if we were the only ones there. I don't know how long it was before the tides of space and time pulled us in. But, before I knew it you were within reach. Remember that?" Gray asked, as if she were right there with him.

"How could you ever forget such a feeling? Such a phenomenon? And then we just..." he paused, searching for the words to describe his recollection. "...*at the same*, reached out to touch. To see if this was real. I can still feel the smoothness of your eye brows, the tenderness of your cheek. I arranged a strand of hair behind your ear. Then traced around the edge of your earring to your softly rounded jawline that led my touch to your chin, then your lips. Then we kissed and embraced each other. I...I..." Gray's eyes started to well up with tears, his chin quivered. Then he turned away from the vid-cam, then back again.

“I can remember feeling our heart’s beating,” he continued. “They were so loud. So intense. I can still smell the fragrance of your breath, strengthened by the taste of your kiss. What I wouldn’t do to be with you right now.”

Gray looked over at the time. He then activated the *ss-blocker*. He set it at *Distortion*. This simulated electrical interference, which wasn’t uncommon. Then he stared intensely at the vid-cam as he delivered the intended message to Phoebe.

“Phoebe. What I have to tell you is very important. I’ll have to make this very brief. I have uncovered some sinister operations involving these satellites. I am in a unique position. I believe I can at least disrupt the system long enough to return to Earth and start preparations for the phase. As a result, I’ll have to sign on for one more session. You’ll have to trust me on this. You wouldn’t want this any other way if you knew the scope of this. Don’t tell anyone of this. And when I mention the extending my services another 90-Days to you, act surprised. I haven’t spoken to you about this yet. I’m going to switch back now to my regular message.”

Gray switched the *ss-blocker* off. Then continued his reminiscing. He recorded for over two and a half hours. Then he uploaded some jpegs to it. Then he added the *Waund* to the sculpture and boxed it up. He’ll send it out tomorrow when Alan returns with the new satellite. Phoebe should receive the gift by mid-December. He’ll be sure to call her around that time and tell her about the *Waund*.

After all that reminiscing, he felt the need to call her. Besides, they’ll need to decide on a wedding date. That is, if she’ll go through with it. She may not like the idea and suggest they wait so they can have a traditional wedding.

“I was just thinking about you,” said Phoebe.

“Must be on the same wavelength,” said Gray.

There was a few moments of silence as the transmission made it’s long journey through the telecommunications relay, telecom orbiter, and network of regional internets.

“Well! Have you any good news to share?” she asked.

“I spoke with...” he started, but then changed his mind mid-sentence. “How are you feeling, darling?”

“I’m feeling just fine, Gray. You weren’t able to get the time off, were you?”

“No. But, he offered an alternative. Kind of revolutionary.”

“What? *Speed up time*?” she asked sarcastically.

“Get married over the *Interplanetary Internet*. It’d be a first! We’d be trend setters!”

Phoebe just sat there staring at him, expressionless, fidgeting with a trinket in her hand.

“Phoebe? I know. It’s not what you want. It’s certainly not what I had in mind. It’s just...it’s what I was offered. But, we can wait until I return to Earth. We’ll have a traditional...”

“Alright,” she replied.

“*Pardon me?*”

“We’ll make interplanetary history,” she said with a smile.

They decided on October 18th for the day. She’ll contact their families and friends. Herald and Gloria will have everyone over their house, since they have plenty of space. And they thought it only fitting since it was there that they met.

T.I.P.S.

“*Well?*” Gray asked.

Alexandra continued reading in silence.

“I can’t read your mind, you know,” he persisted.

“I’m very well aware of that, Gray,” she replied.

“Well then, would you please read the *Passages* so I can hear them?”

“I don’t see how it would do you any good.”

“What do you mean?” asked Gray with astonishment. “Just read it to me! I’ll be the judge of whether or not it’ll do me any good.”

“It appears to be an amalgamation of every major religion. Claiming to be the one true religion. With the power of subliminal messaging, it’ll be the enlightenment of the 21st Century.”

“I was hoping that it may help to understand their logic,” Gray said. “The ethics they plan to impose.”

“What is written are the universal ethics. You want specifics? Typically, it’s the denominations that dictate those kinds of things. Looks like they eliminated that step,” Alexandra said. “That’s where their mind controlling tricks come in. This is just one of

their tools. And a very effective one at that.”

The *New World Scriptures* opens with an invocation. It’s designed to invoke their subliminal messaging by giving thanks and affirming the almighty influence of the *Messenger of Truth*. Then there’s a prologue, stating that there is only one path to God. That all past religions were only pieces of the cosmic puzzle, not quite showing the Big Picture. Until now.

“It’s quite a read,” said Alexandra. “But, hardly of any use other than knowing it’s one of their tools for controlling the masses.”

The *UN* managed to cover their ground with this weapon of moral destruction, by insuring that all major modern religions have been invalidated. They created connections linking them to this one and only true path. When reading this bible, people will experience hearing what they think is the voice of God. God speaking directly to them. They will also start seeing apparitions. This is reinforced by not only the audio and video subliminal messaging, but also by their tactical word phrasing and rhyming scheme. The potential for reinforcement is endless. From television programming and commercials, to billboard advertisements. It’ll be everywhere.

Gray decided not to challenge Alexandra. He would trust her judgment on this.

There were no assignments for Gray today. Alan would be arriving with an electrician to attach the new satellite. He’d put the satellite in sleep mode, and place space probes in halo orbit for communications.

As soon as they arrived they got straight to work. Alan came aboard and locked-out the computer module. Outside, the technician attached an adaptor and then the new satellite. After their long and laborious efforts, they both came aboard the satellite.

“Hi, I’m Bryon Traske,” he introduced himself.

Introductions went around. Small talk was made while they ate their lunch together. There was a personality clash between Alan and Bryon. Alan tackled his lunch as he did his work, diligently and focused. He was very eager to get back to work. And that wasn’t like Alan. Gray could sense a slight tension in the air. Bryon just shrugged it off. He talked with Gray mostly. He could tolerate his peculiarities. Alan and Bryon both returned to work. This time they worked inside, ripping through walls, and tunneling wire and cable through to the adjoining module.

After the day’s tasks were completed, and the daily exercising, and supper, it was time for sleep. Gray slept in his usual spot. Alan slept in his scuttle. And Bryon chose to sleep in the computer module. “That way I can say I worked in my sleep,” he jested.

It should have been a peaceful night. Everyone had worked themselves to the point of exhaustion. However, there would be a disturbance. Gray was woken by a loud crashing

sound. Then yelling and screaming came from the other module. He got up to find Bryon flailing his arms about, thrusting his body against the walls and cabinets of the module.

“Bryon! What the hell are you doing,” Gray yelled.

Bryon yelled back unintelligibly. Then he stopped frozen, floating, staring wild-eyed straight at Gray.

“What are you doing,” Gray asked him again, calmly.

“Putting it back!” he yelled.

“Putting wha...”

“Where ever she came from,” he responded sharply.

“Who?” asked Gray.

“What?” Bryon asked, shaking his head as if to clear the cobwebs. “What’s goin’ on?”

Apparently, Bryon was having a nightmare. And he got out of his sleeping bag acting out the dream. Now, being awake, he was just as confused as Gray. He apologized saying it must be because he was sleeping in a new environment. He started telling him about a time when he went camping. He woke up in the middle of the night and scared the whole campground with his screaming. “Good thing it was a sturdy tent,” Bryon smiled. “It won’t happen again,” he assured.

They went back to their sleeping bags, and back to sleep. Until shortly thereafter, Gray heard a whimpering. He tried to ignore it. But, it became annoyingly persistent. He got back out of his sleeping bag, and floated over to where the noise was. He turned the light on low. It was coming from Bryon’s module. He saw Bryon’s sleeping bag shivering and shaking. It sounded like he was crying. “*Masturbating maybe,*” Gray asked himself. “*How awkward.*” Just then Bryon yelled the most loudest scream Gray had ever heard. And then he started struggling inside the bag as if he were fighting someone inside there with him. Or fighting to get out. Gray couldn’t tell. He just hoped the straps would hold the sleeping bag in place. He zipped over to page Alan in his scuttle.

“Alan! Alan! Come quick!”

Alan came dashing in, expecting to find some sort of life or death situation.

“What’s wrong!?”

“It’s Bryon. I don’t know what to do!”

They both stared wide-eyed at the violently swinging sleeping bag, resembling an

amoeba on speed. Alan started laughing.

“Alan!” Gray snorted. “This isn’t funny! He woke up not more than twenty or thirty minutes ago, thrashing about, sleep walking.”

“Sleep floating you mean,” Alan corrected.

“Whatever. Do something!”

Alan grabbed hold of the sleeping bag. It looked as if he were giving it a bear hug. Now the sleeping bag looked like a worm on a fish hook.

“No! Keep them away!” Bryon's muffled voice yelled.

Then Gray came over and partially unzipped the bag. Bryon had a horrified look on his wet face, soaked by his sweat, tears, and saliva.

“What’s the matter Bry?” Gray asked.

“Please, keep them away. Just keep them away,” he pleaded.

“Wha...”

“It’s happened again,” interrupted Alan.

“What’s happened again,” asked Gray.

“And it’ll only get worse.”

“What are you talking about?”

“This is how the others were when I picked ‘em up.”

Alan was referring to the other technicians that had worked here before Gray. This is how they were acting which ended their *90-Days* prematurely. However, it wasn’t always this quick. Usually it’s a couple weeks. Alan told Gray to hold the bag still so he could get the kit from his scuttle. When he returned, then injected Bryon with something. Then returned back to his scuttle to go back to sleep. Bryon settled. He just hung there, drooling. Then, after a few more minutes, he closed his eyes.

Gray returned to his sleeping bag.

“What’s all the excitement,” asked Alexandra.

“You didn't have anything to do with all that by chance,” asked Gray.

"What ever for," she asked.

"I didn't think so. I don't know. Just doesn't make sense."

"Let's get some sleep," Alexandra invited.

In the morning a medic and a replacement came aboard for Bryon. He was starting to become conscious by then. But, still pretty out of it, and slightly delusional talking about seeing ghosts.

"What the hell was that, dude? Dja hear that?" asked Bryon.

"Hear what, Bry?" asked Gray.

"That was crazy, man. Friggin' voices," Bryan said. "And last night?" he continued. "Probably like four or five anomalies there, dude."

"I think the only anomalies there are the ones in your head," Alan quipped.

"There's friggin' ghosts, or something in here, man!"

"What did they look like," Gray asked.

"Don't humor the boy," Alan said.

The medic took Bryon away. The tension seemed to be lifted.

"What the fuck," Alan commented aloud.

"What now," Gray asked.

"Got to pick up after him, that's all."

"Here, I'll help."

Usually the electricians replace all there tools to the crib or tool box after their shift. They are responsible for them. Any tool unaccountable for comes straight out of their pay. Alan and Gray gathered up the tools and locked them up for Bryon, so the new electrician, Jay, could take over. He didn't mind helping out. But certainly doesn't like picking up after others.

After storing the tools aboard the medic's ship, Alan turned to Jay and said, "Be sure you pick-up after yourself. Otherwise, the tools are mine."

Alan went back to his scuttle. Jay looked over at Gray. Gray shrugged his shoulders and floated to the other module.

Jay was an intelligent man. Not that Bryon wasn't. But, Bryon seemed to be lacking something. Jay searched for Bryon's notes to find out what he did and didn't do. He found a few scraps of notes here and there. But, not enough to know where exactly he left off. He'd complain under his breath. He also wasn't too impressed with Bryon's work either. He insisted that he and Alan go back out to the exterior to double check the work. This of course didn't please Alan any.

When they finished the inspection, they came back inside and checked the interior work that had been done. Jay was interested in Bryon's comments about ghosts. They got to talking about the other techs that had worked there in the past, and how they didn't last long. Almost as if the satellite were *haunted*. They both looked at Gray and, at the same time, made a "woo-oo-oooh" sound, mocking the paranormal activity.

"Have you seen any ghosts wandering the modules, Gray?" asked Alan.

"No," he replied.

"Oh, wait!" Alan recalled. "How about that time I phoned you?" Turning to Jay. "He was stark naked when he answered the vidphone. I bet he was having sex with one of them ghosts!"

"Ghosts?" asked Gray, stressing the *s*. "Nope! Just one," he said. Although after thinking about it, it was a perverted notion referring to Alexandra. However, they wouldn't know that. Just then he felt a sharp clip to his left ear. Startled, Gray quickly turned, expecting to see her behind him.

"What's the matter," asked Alan. "She slap you? No more nasty for you!"

Alan and Jay started laughing hysterically. Gray, holding his ear, looked around for sight of Alexandra. "It was just a joke," he said to Alexandra, in his mind.

"You don't actually *believe* in ghosts, do you," Gray asked.

"How can you not?" asked Jay. "I'm a member of *The Interplanetary Paranormal Society*. And I must say, I've come across some wild evidence that you'd find hard to refute."

Alan cocked his head and looked at Gray, giving the impression that maybe he's starting to lose his mind too. Then Jay busted out laughing.

"There must be a logical explanation why this happens," Jay said. Looking at Alan, "You say it happened to everyone except the first techie and Gray?"

"That's right," he replied. "Maybe *they* gave the ghosts what they wanted," he laughed.

"Let me see something," Jay said, as he reached for one of his bags. He pulled out a

meter. “This is an *EMF* meter. It senses electromagnetic radiation. Some people have a hypersensitivity to electrical fields. Symptoms can vary.”

He turned the meter on and started walking around the modules. He’d raise and lower it, hold it up to different parts of the module. As he did so, series of beeps and clicks would sound at varying degrees.

“You’ve got some serious *EMF*’s here, my friend,” Jay said aloud. “And this hasn’t affected you in any way?” he asked Gray.

“I think it has,” voiced Alan. “He’s been acting *normal* the past two days.” Facing Jay, “You should have seen him the first day...”

“I can’t say that it’s negatively affected me,” Gray interrupted. I’ve been feeling just fine.”

“Well, this is something I can isolate. At least it won’t affect anyone staying here on a short-term basis. This’ll be unmanned anyways. But, just thinking about any maintenance crew who may spend a day or two out here. We can’t have them losing their minds over night like this. It’s hard to believe this has been going on as long as it had,” Jay said.

Jay finished up his tasks. And was now ready to go live. The pods were shut-down, and all communications switched back to satellite 2. Jay ran some more tests. Then tested communications with *Logos*.

“Communications should be noticeably quicker than before. Better picture quality too,” Jay said to Gray.

“With Earth too,” asked Gray.

“Yup! Once they’ve completed the overhaul on the other systems.”

That was good news to Gray. Less lag time. Making for a good wedding reception.

Gray said goodbye to Jay. Then to Alan. But, before Alan left, he asked Gray to come inside the scuttle.

“I’ve got something for you,” Alan said, as he handed Gray a box.

“What’s this?”

“A present!”

“I was hoping you’d be able to be here, Alan. I sent you an invitation.”

“Oh, it’s not a wedding present,” Alan said. “It’s for your *ghost friend*. I figured maybe

you could get one more night...”

Gray punched Alan's arm.

Alan closed the door.

“They plan on doing the first test run on October 5th.”

“They aren’t wasting any time, are they?”

“It’s probably targeted on a control subject,” Alan said. “What are they doing? Do you know? Some sort of defensive weapon?”

Gray didn’t know how to answer that.

“Yeah. Something like that.”

Gray opened the door.

“Thanks. See you on the 18th then?”

“Yup! Unless you get cold feet! Have a better one, *SpaceMan*.”

Messenger One (SOF)

Today they are testing the new satellites. Gray never thought he’d live to see this day, the dawn of a new Fall. The beginning of the end.

Gray’s ears were ringing ever since powering up the new computers this morning.

“Alexandra?”

She appeared before him, although translucent.

“Yes, my darling brother?”

Gray smirked.

“Are your ears ringing?”

She pulled Gray near and held him. She held him close as if she were holding on for dear life.

“I didn't mean to frighten you.”

“Shh,” she said. “How about now?”

“It's...” He shook his head. “It stopped!”

Alexandra gently released him, then stepped back.

“Oh. It came back again,” he groaned.

“Don't worry,” she said. “It'll be gone soon.”

“You do hear it then?”

“Not exactly. Not like you do anyway,” she said. “But, I'm aware of it.”

The vidphone rang. It was a call from *Logos*.

“Mr. Locke,” the visage on the screen said. “We are sending you instructions to follow regarding special operation *Messenger One*. You will not be following regular procedure. I repeat. You will not be following regular protocol. Please be sure and review all the material. If you have any questions, there is a *FAQ* section to refer to. If your question, or questions, have still not been answered to your satisfaction you may contact me, but only after reviewing the *FAQ* section of your guide. Do you understand, Mr. Locke?”

“Gosh, I think so,” he said mockingly.

“Very well, then. Good day, sir,” he signed off.

Gray carried on with his morning routine. Then he read through the materials for the day's first test run of the new satellite system. Great strides had been taken by the powers to be to coordinate this grand operation.

There was a lot at stake for middle management too. For some, their positions depended on the success of this mission. With this test there were no ways to manipulate the data to make it look like it worked. There were specific criteria that needed to be met. The results were analyzed for verification by different departments. Each one looking out for themselves. This would maintain its integrity while ensuring the effectiveness of this and future operations.

The hour had come. Gray had three new screens to view the rest of the team. Two of the screens were split into eighths. The other into quarters. He could toggle over to other techs if needed. There were countless professionals at hand to problem solve any possible glitches in the system, from engineers to doctors. Gray didn't know anything about the test site, or subject or subjects. He just needed to follow the procedure outlined in the instruction file, and monitor things on his end. Commands were made and followed. The test had begun.

Everything went according to plan. Now they were waiting for the tests to come in. Most were eating their lunch and chatting amongst themselves. Gray grabbed a bite and waited for the results in the dining module. There was always the possibility that they'd make some modifications and try again.

"Standby," a voice announced over the network. "Please standby."

A few moments later Walter Hall's face filled the screen.

"There is much to be celebrated," started Hall. "I am pleased to announce that operation Messenger One was a complete success."

Cheering could be heard in the background.

"My fellow colleagues. This is the beginning of a new era! This has been years in the planning. And we've come a long way. This was the first step with many more to follow. I commend you all on your efforts. I thank you. *DEEP* thanks you. And most importantly, the future generations of *Mankind* thanks you."

He signed-off. Then other managers and supervisors were personally thanking their departments for their efforts. Then Gray got a call. It was Hall.

"Walter," Gray answered.

"Gray, a job well done! And I've got some news for you."

"Yes?"

"Due to the success of this operation, and the sound information recorded from the satellites, I hereby inform you that your services are no longer required on *Satellite 2*. You will now be stationed here on *Logos*. A shuttle will be sent to pick you up next week, on October 12th."

"That is great news!"

"Yes, my boy! I look forward to meeting you in the flesh. Your new living quarters await your arrival. There is much to be celebrated!"

Hall signed-off. Gray just floated around with a great big grin on his face. He was trying to picture his new life aboard the infamous *Logos*.

"Yes," Gray said to himself. "This is the beginning of a new era, indeed."

There's a Quietness Within, Which Has to be Known and Held

It was evening and Gray was feeling hopeful about the future. He wasn't sure if it was real or a subliminal suggestion. And he didn't care, because it didn't really matter. Life is beautiful. His mind was full, and he felt like he was floating like a God in His Heaven.

"Come, follow me," she whispered.

Together, Alexandra and Gray drifted to the Ballroom for one last dance. The music, like the moment, felt surreal. They danced and they danced and they danced. Smiles lit up their faces, as tears glistened in their eyes. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily. Life is but a dream.

"Wouldn't you like to feel this way for the rest of your life, Gray?"

He didn't have to answer. Gray continued dancing not saying a word, but absorbing her every word and inhaling her every breath.

"There's a quietness here, Gray," she said. "It is here. Within. But, this you already know."

The music stopped. Still in dance pose, they drifted motionless until they reached the center of the room.

"Hold me," Alexandra said.

Gray held her close, and squeezed her tight. A funny little noise that came from within her made him smile. He released his hug, then looked into her eyes. As before, an extraordinary illumination suddenly broke upon them. Their essence was no longer of this dimension. The celestial power they generated, as their separate entities began to merge, surrounded and filled them with an illuminating radiance. They existed as light within light. This was the place. This was the time. Duality seized to exist and all illusory separation collapsed back into one.

June 21, 1986

Alexandra and Grayson Locke were a unique pair. They were very affectionate towards one another. And they were easily entertained, which helped with their frequent road trips. Alexandra has her mother's olive green eyes, light complexion, and red hair. Grayson had his father's hazel eyes and brown hair.

At a year and a half old, Alexandra and Grayson could walk on their own very well. You could tell Alexandra was going to be a dancer when she grew up. For, she would tiptoe about, and dance whenever there was music playing. Grayson looked to be a runner. He'd fall a lot. But then get right back up and keep on running. He'd run around the dining room table and out into the patio, and back again.

They were quite the talkers too. They developed their own language. They'd make noises and babble to one another as if they were from a foreign land. Alexandra would learn to build quite an English vocabulary. Grayson, on the other hand, liked to mimic noises. He'd mimic the teapot whistle, their cat, dogs in the neighborhood, and even the fire truck siren.

Alexandra liked to color and finger paint. Grayson liked to build with blocks. They were inseparable at times. They'd have to be in the same room, even though they'd be playing alone. No matter what, Alexandra had to know Grayson was there, and what he was doing. It seemed Grayson knew this too. For, he'd run to the next room and wait for Alexandra to follow. Then he'd go right back to the room they started in. She'd sometimes get frustrated because she'd have to pick up what she was playing with and set it up all over again.

Yesterday, however, she was introduced to a new item. A mesh pop-up laundry basket. It was supposed to be for her socks, which kept getting lost. But, she found a better use for it. She'd just toss her supplies into the basket and keep them in that.

When they did play together they got along as well as any brother and sister toddler would. They'd certainly have their moments of not wanting to share. But, they'd also have moments where they'd make each other laugh hysterically. Sometimes all it took was a noise coming from Grayson's mouth, or a facial expression of Alexandra's.

Recently they started to integrate their two passions during playtime. Alexandra introduced her art work to Grayson. She placed her pastel-colored art down next to one of his block constructions. Grayson proceeded to build other structures around it. Was this a painting in a museum? Maybe the interior of their home? It's anyone's guess.

Yesterday they spent their time indoors. It had been a rainy day. So, with their aunt they went to the mall, then later to an indoor playground called "*Huggy Bear's*". It had been a full day for Alexandra and Grayson. On their way home they ran into a brief thunder storm around three o'clock, and had to pull over at a rest stop. Grayson was already asleep by then. Alexandra was tired but hadn't yet fallen asleep. So, Mrs. Locke and her sister sang her a few songs that had to do about rain.

By the time they got home it had stopped raining. They were changed and cleaned up. They'd play quietly in the living room while Mrs. Locke prepared supper. Mr. Locke came home shortly afterward. He changed his cloths. Then played with Alex and Gray. He helped set the table, and prepare the salad. This family time was a very important part of the day for them. It is at this point where mama, papa, and children, all of whom were

off doing other things apart from one another, came together again. This time is what helps bond the family together. They share their day together, and relax and enjoy each other's company.

After supper they'd play a game together. Gray would play a game with his father one night, as Alex would play a game with her mother. Then they'd switch the next night. This assured quality one-on-one time for both of them. Then they'd take a bath. Read a book. Then it was off to sleep.

By nightfall the skies had cleared and it had gotten chilly outside. This made for good sleeping weather. The past few nights had been the first nights that Alexandra and Grayson had slept throughout the night. Mrs. Locke had to get use to this welcome change. This night she hadn't been able to fall asleep. So, she read until she felt sleepy.

She'd make one last check on Grayson and Alexandra before heading to bed. After seeing they were both sleeping soundly, she too went to sleep.

This Saturday morning she over slept. She looked at the clock and thought it strange she hadn't been woken by their noises in the crib. They'd often be found talking baby talk to each other. She rolled over and kissed her husband, and gently nudged him.

She got up and checked in on the children. Alexandra had her arm around her brother's arm, holding his hand. When Mrs. Locke went to pick Alexandra up, Gray too was being pulled up with his sister. This woke Grayson. She promptly placed them back down. She knew there was something wrong. The room began to spin, as her knees became weak. She was shaking as she gently tried to pry Alexandra from Grayson's arm. Gray started screaming. Mrs. Locke was doing her best to maintain her composure, as tears streaked down her face, and was quietly whimpering.

She yelled for their father. After picking up Gray she telephoned 9-1-1. She knew it was far too late to save her. She firmly held onto Gray, pivoting back and forth, sobbing into his pajamas. Mr. Locke was pacing the house, watching for the ambulance. The life was drained out of his face, as tears raced down his distorted face.

When the *EMS* paramedics arrived, they realized resuscitation would invariably be futile since rigor mortise had already set in.

Arrangements were made for a memorial for Alexandra. She would not be forgotten. At supper time they'd talk about her. Her pictures remained on the walls, and on the counters, and on the mantel.

It was not an easy transition for Grayson to sleep by himself. Before now they'd been sharing the same crib. So, the Locke's bought Grayson his first bed. They'd take turns lying down with him at bedtime until he fell asleep. It helped to fill the void of loneliness. But, to Gray there would always be something missing. He just wasn't sure what that was.

Gray would grow up knowing he had a sister. Most of his actual memories of her would fade. But, they'd be reinforced through the stories shared with him by his parents and relatives, and by the many photographs and videos of them together.

Tethered Principles

It was hard to believe that I was finally leaving *Satellite 2*. To think that, when I was back on Earth, I was just going to do my *90-Days* then return with my debt settled and a new frame of mind. How things have changed.

Alan Fleming arrived. We loaded up the *scuttle* and then we were off to Logos.

"Well, this is a first," Alan commented.

"What's that?"

"You're the first *techie* that actually made it their *90-Days* without losing their mind. You made it, *SpaceMan!*"

"What!?" I screamed, staring wild-eyed at him. "Oh Al, you *must* turn back," I pleaded. "We forgot the *Others!* I can't leave them all alone!" I cried.

Alan gave me this worried look.

"Spoke too soon," he murmured with a gulp.

"Don't you see! Those *anomalies!* I've given them the best *sex* a mere mortal ever could," I laughed. The look on his face was priceless.

"I should've known," Alan said.

As Logos came into view it was like a scene out of a sci-fi movie. It was made up of two space stations connected by a tether, that spun around their common center of mass. This helped create the microgravity environment in the space station. When we landed I was greeted by a porter who, once he stored my luggage on a dolly, led me to my room.

Maneuvering in microgravity took some getting use to. You'd think I'd had a few drinks during the flight. After wandering through the *corridors of doors*, we finally reached mine. The room wasn't much to brag about. It was just that. A *room*. It had all the *essentials*. The porter showed me the basics. Where the vidphone was. Storage shelves. The hide-away sleeping bag, and what have you. Then he headed out. First thing I did was call Phoebe.

“Guess where I am?”

“Well, I know where you’re *not*,” she replied.

“I’m onboard *Logos*! Isn’t that exciting,” I asked.

“Thrilling, dear. Does this mean you’ll be coming home any sooner?”

“No. It just means I’m not cooped up alone in a satellite.”

The conversation picked-up after I told her to expect a package tomorrow. That was her birthday. After I hung up from her, I called Herald. I wanted to thank him for all that he’s doing for us. He and his wife are helping with some of the arrangements for our wedding reception on Earth.

He sounded so excited, almost as if *he* was the one getting married. I also wanted him to order a gift and flowers for me for Phoebe’s birthday. I wired him the money.

My stomach was trying to tell me something. I looked at the schedule on my *Geni*. It was dinner time. Just as I was about to leave to head to the cafeteria, I was *buzzed*. Buzzed by what, I hadn’t a clue. I looked about the room. It *buzzed* again. I looked at the vidphone. There was a red light flashing on the consol. I pressed the button bellow the light. The vidphone screen came on. A man’s face was peering at me. He was looking into the cam as if he were looking through a keyhole.

“Hello?” I asked.

“Gray Locke,” the character asked.

“Yes. That’s me. What can I do for you?”

“Hi. I’m Bob Lockenwitz. I’ve come to introduce you to everyone, over dinner.”

“Oh, great! I was just heading down there. Where shall I meet you?”

“Umm...I’m right outside your door,” he laughed.

“Oh.”

I clicked the vidphone screen off. Then opened the door. We shook hands, and headed down to the cafeteria. He was a nice enough fellow. Slightly taller than me. Blonde hair, blue eyes, and a goatee. He proved to have a sense of humor. He had a very confident attitude, and gave me the impression that he was not intimidated by anyone.

He gave me the run-down of the space station, the routine and the *after-hours* life. After dinner he said they usually go to the *Severed Tether’s*. It’s a pub and gameroom. They

usually have a few drinks and shoot pool.

“Pool?” I asked.

“Oh, you’ll have to see it to believe it.”

Bob introduced me to the others. Who I’d actually be working with was anyone’s guess. I asked if Walter Hall would be joining us for dinner.

“Kiddin’ me?” one of the guys said.

“He lives on his own *island*,” another one piped in.

“Actually,” Bob started, “he invested in an *asteroid colony* with a few of the other upper management. He doesn’t live there yet. But, he has his meals delivered to his *conapt*.”

Being secluded in a satellite for four months can really do a number on you. Granted, I didn’t have a dull moment. But, walking in the cafeteria and seeing all these people was a shock to my system. And seeing women too was quite a jolt. I didn’t talk much. Mostly listened and answered the typical questions like “where you from” and “where did you go to college”.

After dinner we all headed over to the *Severed Tether*. We sat at a table and ordered our drinks. A couple of the guys were waiting for someone.

“Married?” one of them asked.

“Not yet,” I replied. “Getting married next week, actually.”

“Congratulations!” the other guy said, shaking my hand.

“Now’s your last chance for making the *two-backed monster* before it’s off to the dungeon with it!” jested another.

“No, no. I don’t think so.”

“So then, where is she,” asked Bob, looking around the pub for my fiancée.

I explained that we’d be getting married over the *Interplanetary Internet*. “Making history,” I told them. I didn’t bother to mention our baby just yet. I didn’t want them to think that that was solely the reason why we were doing it. Spending the last three hours with my *new associates* proved that there aren’t too many secrets around here. Everybody seems to know *everybody’s* business, for better or for worse.

Life in this pub almost seemed like a pub on Earth, with the exception of the weightlessness. People drank, danced, flirted, played arcade games, and what have you. It had been a long day for me and I could hear my sleeping bag unzipping with anticipation.

So, I called it a night, and said goodbye to my new *comrades*.

There was a message waiting for me when I returned. It was from Hall's secretary. He wanted me to stop by his office in the morning for my orientation at eight AM, "prompt," he said. I wasn't sure if that was his *anal-sounding* secretary's interpretation, or Hall himself. In either case, I'd make it there... in time.

I then called Phoebe to wish her a happy birthday. She loved the flowers and gift. Herald also threw in a pie too. She'd been craving *Boston cream pie* these days.

I slept pretty well considering the change of environment, what with the new sounds and flashing lights. I ended up wearing one of those *sleeping masks*. That takes some getting use to as well. I did my morning exercises in my room. I didn't feel like socializing this early in the morning, otherwise I would have gone down to the gym. I popped a caffeine pill, cleaned up, then headed to the cafeteria.

It *stored* a different crowd of people than last night. I didn't see Bob, or any of the other guys from last night. A resident I recognized from last night came over and introduced herself. Her name is *Jo*. Joanne Larkin. She was a youthful and spirited gal, with short platinum blonde hair and blue eyes. She works in *Human Resources*. She said she recognized me from my profile I.D. photo. She processed my paperwork when I was promoted and transferred. She'd been here a year and a half.

"You must miss Earth, no?" I asked her.

"Of course. But, at the same time I am fortunate and *very* happy to be here. I've seen and experienced things here that I never would have otherwise. We must *encourage* people to immigrate off-world once the *Triple-Helix Space Colony* is ready. It is for the good of *Mankind*, for the survival of our species," she replied with conviction.

"You're married then," I asked, with the assumption she'd want to actively participate in the propagation of the human species.

"No, Mr. Locke. Not yet anyways," she replied. "But I understand *you* will be. Congratulations! You'll be making history."

"That's what they're tell me," I said.

I later found out that she's Hall's mistress. Jo works in the same area as Hall's office and offered to escort me.

"Gray! How was your first night?" Hall greeted.

"Sure beats living in a satellite."

"I understand Mr. Lockenwitz introduced you around?"

“Yes.”

“He’ll be here shortly to show you to your workstation, and to help with your orientation. I asked you to...oh, please sit down,” Hall offered.

Ever since walking into his office I could sense a strange sensation. It was the subliminal feed and, *I sensed*, some sort of frequency disturbance. Ever since *merging* with Alexandra, it seemed I’ve become *immune* to these mind control methods. That’s the only way I could explain it. But, I had to *fake it* the best I could. If I gave them any clues of not being affected by this *control*, I’d be suspect. And be subject to tests, made a guinea pig, for their research. Then my whole purpose for being here would be pointless. I’d have to *play the game*. However, this wasn’t about saving face. It was about saving the human race.

“I wanted to ask you what your plans are for the future,” Hall began. “I realize you just got here. But, surely you must have some sort of idea? Intentions?”

“My intentions,” I reiterated. “I see myself working for *DEEP Enterprises* for a great number of years to come, Walter. Once my daughter is of the legal age and weight for space flight, I plan on having them immigrate off-world. The *Triple-Helix* should be ready by then, don't you think?”

“Yes, Gray. I'd say so. This is good to hear. Because, I have special plans for you, my boy. Yes. Big plans indeed,” Hall said. He was scrolling down his *Geni*.

“I took it upon myself to arrange a nice setting for your wedding ceremony. We have a *Temple* here with a *Ceremony Hall*. We modified it by adding a communications center. It has two large screens to see guests from afar, and cameras to broadcast the ceremony,” Hall said.

“That’s very kind of you. Thank you so much.”

“And, I reserved the day for our *Messengers* to conduct the ceremony. Both here and on Earth. You’ll just have to let me know which *Temple* your bride will be at,” Hall added.

“Umm...*Messengers*?” I asked.

“*Messenger*,” Hall said. “The *Messengers of Truth*. You’ll be married in the eyes of *God*, will you not?”

“I...I guess.”

“Well...under the sanctions of the *United Nations*, and with their most generous contributions to our immigration efforts off-world, it is only common courtesy to conduct this *historic* moment with their approved wedding rites.”

On the computer back in my room I noticed *shortcuts* and *bookmarks* to the *Temple* websites, and a copy of their “*New World Scriptures*.” It reminded me of my hotel room stays back on Earth. However, this was taken very seriously here.

“In case you hadn’t known,” Hall continued, “everyone will be converting to our religion. Actually, it’s not being referred to as converting. It’s more like an *Awakening*. An *Enlightenment*, if you will.”

Their *New World Religion* movement explains how all the religions of the world were only *pieces of the puzzle*. By combining them with their newly acquired *Enlightenment*, they claim to have revealed the one true *God*. And through their *Messengers of Truth* they will *reveal the words of God* to the *Common Man*.

“When I talk to Phoebe tonight, I’ll find out which *Temple* she belongs to,” I said.

“Very good,” Hall said, scrolling his *Geni* once again.

“Your years at Cull D. Sax Technologies were impressive, Gray. Your work ethics and dedication were well documented. Moved you up in the ranks I see,” Hall noted.

“Yes,” I said. “But, then there was a management change towards the end. They didn’t see my work performance the way you do, sir.”

“With such transitions as that, a new company taking over, it’s to be expected. A forced *exodus* created to place *their own* in key positions is common practice. Besides, they don’t know a good man when they see one,” Hall smiled. “Do you remember Lawrence Robinson?”

“Larry? Of course. He was one of the first they let go,” I said.

“He’s here too. A result of another one of their *poor managerial decisions*. He’s been here two months now. Started out like you too, as a satellite technician. He was stationed at the *Earth-Moon System*. Anyways, you’ll be seeing him around.”

A buzzer sounded. Hall looked at his monitor, then clicked a tab.

“Mr. Lockenwitz, please show Gray to his new work station.”

“Yes, sir.”

“So, Gray,” he continued, “if you should need anything, or have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Alright?”

“Yes, Walter. And thanks again for all your help.”

We shook hands, and he patted me on the back as I exited the room.

Bob lead the way down the hall. We walked by *Human Resources*. I tried to peak through the patterned windows to see if I could see Jo, without success.

“You got a little on your chin,” Bob pointed out.

“Oh, what?” I asked while wiping my chin, falling right into one of his *crude* jests. He was, of course, referring to Hall and I conferring on a first name basis.

We finally arrived at my workstation. It was a room full of partitioned cubicles. My station was in the next to last row, on the end. The others haven’t arrived yet. Bob switched the computer on while explaining the set-up. He connected onto the *intranet*. The webcam came on. A man could be seen on the screen in a cubicle identical to mine.

“*Salmon-man*,” Bob called. “This here is Gray. He’ll be your new relief.”

Solomon Grashaw was located on the other end of *Logos*. I would be taking over for *Sol* this shift, and the next. Bob gave me the run-down of how things should operate during the shift. There were notes to read and vids to watch. I would be monitoring the operations of satellite 2, as well as a number of other *unmanned* satellites dispersed throughout the solar system.

Bob stuck around and introduced me to the other *techs* as soon as they came in. In the cubicle next to me was Cliff Scrivener. He’s worked here a little over three years now. And the guy behind me was Ignacio Canché. He’d been working here for five years. There were others, of course. Michael Goodell, Roger Hartman, and Jonathan Sato. But, getting to know everyone was going to take time. Time that I couldn't squander. I had to remind myself that I was there with a mission. I had to make friends, yes. But, those friends had to be in *influential places* crucial in crippling this satellite system.

After my shift, Bob came over and invited me to join him and the others for a workout at the spa and then dinner. There I met some more of Bob’s buddies. Learning names was not one of my talents. But, I did my best to make a point of it. And to learn their job titles.

Afterwards we all headed over to the *Severed Tether*.

“Here,” Bob said, as he handed me a gift-wrapped box.

“What’s this,” I asked.

“A housewarming gift,” one of the others blurted.

“Open it!” Bob said. “Trust me. You’ll need it.”

Today would only be the *taste of things to come* from Robert Lockenwitz. For, he would prove to be an endless source of *tomfoolery*. I opened the gift to find a pair of *knee pads*. Again, this goes back to the conversation with Hall this morning. Everyone got a good laugh out of it, including myself. Guess that was my *initiation* into their *tribe*. That help set the tone for the rest of the night. Good food, good cheers, and some healthy competition in the arcade. A good time was had by all.

I stayed out later than the previous night. But, I wasn't sure how many more of these *late nights* I could handle. I returned to my room. Checked my messages. One message. Phoebe called to chat. It was too late to call her back now. With this *non-stop* life-style I was adapting to, I'd have to make a point to *schedule* her in.

I put the *housewarming gift* in my storage shelf. Their humor is addicting. I found *myself* cracking a few crude jokes. Although it was just a joke, I didn't want to lead them to believe I was *brown-nosing* Hall. It went against my nature. Against my principles. But, considering what was at stake, those *knee-pads* may just come in handy.

Virtual Morality

It was just a few short days before the wedding. Hard to believe. It's incredible that things ran as smoothly as they did. Years of preparation wouldn't have made it any grander.

Herald and Gloria had been a tremendous help with organizing and hosting the reception for all our friends and family back on Earth. And Walter took care of the arrangements here on Logos, and with the *Messengers of Truth* at both *Temples*.

The only last minute change was with Phoebe's family. They had made tentative arrangements with their church and pastor. They knew that I was raised a Humanist, and were waiting on mine and Phoebe's decision. How to break it to her that we'd be getting married in a *Temple*, of a religion that neither of us believed in, was a challenge at first. What would our friends and family think? Of course, once the *UN* starts showering their *spiritual waves* upon the Earth, no one would even think twice about all this. But, how to go about convincing Phoebe in the first place was the trick. I couldn't very well tell her that it's part of my game plan strategy.

"Hey! They're gonna send radio waves to Earth to control your minds! But, don't worry! I'm going to try and stop them! Trust me! Just go with it for now!" Nope. Ain't gonna work. With their surveillance system they'd intersect my message in a heartbeat, and lock me up... or worse.

The only way to gain Phoebe's cooperation with this was if I...

"Hello?" I asked into the vidphone. It was Bob.

“What’cha doin’?”

“Nothing. I mean, I’m just working out some last minute details for the wedding.”

“Didn’t see you in the caf. Wanna join us at the *Severed Tether* later,” he asked.

“No. Not tonight. I really need to tie up a few loose ends, and call Phoebe.”

“Miss the little woman? I understand. Well then, see you tomorrow.”

I’d head down to the cafeteria to grab a bite later. I had too much on my mind to be concerned about eating. I had an idea. I called Walter.

“Gray! What can I do for you?”

“I think I may have a little *resistance*, sir.”

“How so?”

“It’s Phoebe. You see, she was raised a *Christian*, and I’m not sure how she’s going to...”

“Now, now,” Hall interrupted. “Once you tell her about our *New World Scriptures*, she’ll be *Enlightened*, Gray! When will you talk with her again?”

“Tonight. As soon as I’m off the vidphone with you,” I replied.

“Tell you what,” he started. “You open up those *Scriptures* on your desktop and read to her, in Chapter 4, *Message 3 - Passage 1*. That’s about *Family*, Gray. I guarantee you that when you read her that, she will see the *light*. Will you do that for me Gray?”

“Yes, sir. I will”

“Good. Now, you let me know if I can be of any further help to you. Okay?”

I waited a few moments before calling Phoebe, as I cued up the *Scriptures*.

“Hello darling,” I started.

“Hello sweetheart.”

Just then I could sense the *subliminal messaging* and *frequency disturbances* being piped through the line. I truly hated to do this. But, it was the only way. I knew that if I let Hall know there would be any resistance whatsoever with us using their *Temple*, he’d be sure to help *persuade* her to make the right decision.

I read the *Passage* aloud to her that Hall recommended. Then I told her about getting

married in the *Temple*. Despite having experienced this method of mind control myself, in the back of my mind I was hoping that somehow she would resist it's influence. But, she fell right in with it. If only you could have seen her face. Describing it as being *Enlightened* wouldn't do it justice. To see first hand how easily this worked, well... saying it was horrifying would be putting it mildly.

Phoebe selected the Temple nearest her, on Earth. They were being constructed all over the country, like drug stores on every street corner. After a lengthy conversation about *God and the Temple*, I contacted the Temple here and gave them the details needed to coordinate their efforts. This whole ordeal had become like a business transaction. I was using it to *play the game*. To not cause any waves in the organization. They were using it as a publicity stunt. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't be going through with this. I would have done my *90-Days* and had been back on Earth. We'd have gotten married *outside* somewhere, by a Humanist Celebrant. But, all this I sacrificed. For, how could I have lived with myself knowing that this technical terror was about to be unleashed upon the world? And I, being the only one able and willing to do something, didn't do anything to prevent it from happening. This would be the everlasting battle in my mind.

Before I knew it, October 18th had finally arrived. History would be made. For, this was our wedding day. Herald was my best man. And Gloria was Phoebe's maid of honor. When she was growing up, Gloria was one of her daycare teachers. Once she was old enough to go to school they had lost touch.

But then, one day they ran into each other on the street. Phoebe was a freshman in high school at that time. And they stayed in touch and become close friends ever since.

I entered the Temple and met with the *Messenger*. A friendly enough preacher, in a sanctimonious kind of way. I had already read their wedding rites back in my room, but we went over them together just the same. He was sure to point out the cameras too. It was almost like a movie set. "*All this just for me,*" I asked.

They do this for all the wedding ceremonies he told me. It's a gift we'll treasure for the rest of our years together he said. I was under the impression that they just installed them. I asked him how many weddings have been performed here. He wasn't sure and moved on to remind me to keep the cameras in mind when I *turn*, to obtain the best angle. And he kept telling me to stop slouching and to stand erect. "*Not good for the posture,*" he said, lining me up in position for a camera shot.

The screens they had installed displayed people life-sized. It was amazing. Never seen anything like it. A matter of fact, it was hard to believe unless you'd seen it yourself. Which a lot of folks did apparently. Unbeknownst to us, this whole ceremony would be broadcasted live over the internet. And, of course, would be available 24/7 thereafter.

They mixed in their subliminal messaging and so forth, within the layers of the feed. This had become *Mission Messenger Two*. This *test* covered the whole of North America. Of

course, with all the hype in the *US* and *Canada*, the whole rest of the world wanted in on all the action too. The actual Temples were not disclosed at the time, so as to not disrupt the ceremony. And our names were withheld too. A matter of fact, they did such a good job withholding the details from the public, at first, that even Phoebe didn't know that it was us in the center of this *world event*. How they pulled that off, I didn't want to know. Of course, I didn't know at the time either. Being isolated from the rest of humanity, they'd let you know what they want you to know. Needless to say, after all was said and done, we became instant celebrities. The *poster-couple* for a *new religion*, coming soon to *plague* a town near you.

It was great seeing all our friends and family together in one spot though. My aunts and uncles, friends from college, even Gwyn was there. And all would be exposed to this madness. At least they were all happy. And *Enlightened*.

Our honeymoon would have to wait. The *virtual-reality package* just didn't appeal to us. Well, it didn't appeal to *her*, anyways. Our focus, she said, should be on me returning home. She hadn't yet received the wedding present I sent her. She wouldn't receive that until the middle of December. And it wouldn't be until then when she'd come to understand why I was suddenly being so "*gung-ho*" about working there. Subliminal messages sure had its advantages. It's what kept our marriage together at the time. I just couldn't bear to lose her. And if resorting to their insane methods is what I had to do, so be it.

I'd just kept imagining in my mind that I'd be there soon, holding her in my arms. And that she would come to know the truth. She would know of the sacrifices I made. She would love me no less for what I had to do, and still for what more there was yet to come.

[Heaven & Hell](#)

The publicity and marketing of the wedding launched my once low profile up to a level of fame and celebrity status over night. It was like I had entered another dimension, or the *Twilight Zone*. The benefit to all of this was that it would help me gain access to what I needed to take down this operation.

Phoebe, too, had become an over night sensation. She'd been invited to come on television shows for interviews, and to benefit parties. The whole ten-yards. She'd received gifts, flowers, and cards from people she never even met. It was overwhelming to say the least.

My workout this morning in the gym turned into a fiasco. It seemed my mouth was getting just as much a workout as my body, answering questions. People wanted to know how it felt to be involved in such a historic event. Like I had a choice. Breakfast was no different either. I was lucky I had time to swallow a pouch of orange juice. Thank

goodness for caffeine pills. When I got to work you'd think it would have stopped. No such luck. Even Sol stayed over his shift to chat with me. I did manage to at least talk a little business with him.

"The frequencies," Sol asked.

"Yes," I replied. "Were there any modifications from the last test? Any special *DSP* or *FFT* settings? The sequences..."

"Yeah, yeah. For the most part," he interrupted. "No major changes. At least at my end. Don't worry, you didn't miss a thing."

He noticed the look of concern on my face.

"Do you know something I don't know," he asked. "These were just communication waves, right? Like, with your wedding. There was very little lagging. The images looked crystal clear to me. Do you think I missed something," he questioned as he referred back to his notes from that day.

I assured him that he did a marvelous job. I told him I just wanted to know if there was something new that I needed to know. I obviously wouldn't be able to get anything useful from him, or from any of my co-workers. Even with the ones that had been there the longest. You'd think if they didn't know anything *legitimately* that maybe their *curiosity* would have gotten the best of them. No such luck. Something wasn't right about all this. I'd have to go above them.

During my breaks, and at lunch, I'd continue to try to *network*. Seek out those who would know something. Or maybe even those possibly suspicious of the activities around there. I managed to get some names and their departments. But, between their questions, and me trying to maintain a sense of cool answering the same questions over and over again, I was wiped. I made one last *public* visit. And it was to the *Severed Tether*. I weaved through the crowds of greetings and handshakes to find Bob and the gang. All drinks were on the house in mine and Phoebe's honor. With very little in my stomach, I was starting to feel the effects of the third drink. I was looking around at all the people. Those I had eye contact with politely smiled and nodded. There were people dancing, holding one another, laughing, groping. It was making me feel lonely. I was missing Phoebe more than you could imagine. I finished another drink. I was searching the waitress out when I saw *her*. It was Jo. I hadn't seen her in here before. And from the looks of it no one else had either. If eyes had hands.

"Well, congratulations, SpaceMan!"

"Alan! So glad you could make it," I said.

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world. I'm sorry I couldn't stick around afterwards. It was a busy day."

Alan already knew the others. He ordered a drink and chatted with Bob and I.

“There’s the star!”

“Jo,” I said, as I stood up.

I introduced everyone to her. We had small talk. And more, “How does it feel” queries. I had enough of the spotlight for one day. My eyelids were starting to close to the point that I could no longer fight it. I needed to *hang* in the bag. I needed a piece of mind. Jo was heading out, and asked if I’d care to join her. She could tell I was exhausted and figured I was being too polite to walk out on my own.

“How come this is the first night I’d seen you at the *Severed Head*,” I asked her.

“The *Severed Tether*,” she corrected, as she giggled. “That’s really not my kind of place. I just came down to see you and to congratulate you.”

“That’s very kind of you,” I said. “You must forgive me. I’m awfully tired. And I’m afraid the drinks have gotten to my head. Maybe it should be *severed*,” I laughed, with an embarrassingly high pitch. “You don’t drink?”

“I do, occasionally. When I do it’s at *Grant’s Tavern*,” she replied.

“There’s another pub? *Grant’s Tomb*?”

“Yes. *No!* You’re confusing me,” she laughed. “Don’t you know about *Grant’s Tavern*? No one gave you the *grand tour*?”

I shook my head no.

“All right then, Gray. I wouldn’t be doing my job if I didn’t give you the *grand tour* of our spectacular facilities.”

“Oh, but it’s much too late. I…”

“I didn’t mean now, Gray. I meant tomorrow. After work. We’ll have dinner in the *refectory*, give you a tour, then end with a drink at *Grant’s Tavern*. How does that sound to you?”

“Sounds like a plan!”

“Good then! I’ll meet you right here at 5:30.”

We were in the foyer that connects the corridor which led to my room and the other corridors branching off to other parts of the space station. We bid each other a goodnight,

then headed off to our respective quarters. The sleeping bag was a sight for *tired* eyes . The next morning would prove to be the same as the morning before. Only a few new faces. The work day was uneventful as well. People's questions started getting more bizarre. Guess they must be running out of things they *need* to know. They'd ask me about my childhood, what I did for hobbies, about my favorite sports teams. Even about god. I had to draw the line somewhere. Fortunately, their questions would still be coming at me in groves. So, I could be selective and *skill* my way around them.

After work I cleaned up. Then I headed out to meet Jo down in the corridor. We boarded our *uni-trolley's* and glided down to the *pod station*. From there we'd board a *pod* to take us to *Alpha*, the other space station. The pod soared us up the tether. It was a twenty minute ride. We had small talk. She'd fill me in on the history of Logos. It was like a *Disney World tour*. Then there was the awkward silence. I couldn't help but notice how she'd look over at me.

There were a few times I caught her staring, then she'd quickly look away, thinking I wouldn't notice. I didn't know what to think or what to say. So, I remained silent the rest of the journey. During the last few moments she closed her eyes. She had a pleasant smile on her face, like she was dreaming of...whatever beautiful women dream about while being transported in a pod.

This is where I needed to be. In *Alpha*. Where all the power is. If only I could get on the *inside*. I couldn't imagine my celebrity status would be the same here as it had been back at *Beta*. There seemed to be a lot more traffic here too. Everyone's off to the cafeteria. Or rather the *refectory*. To make navigating easier, Jo recommended we use the *bi-trolley*. They made them for up to three individuals. She stood up front holding the inner handle, as I stood behind holding the outer handle. She navigated and weaved through the pixels of people. The fragrance of her hair was intoxicating.

Besides the people, there was a structural, and decor difference between the two stations as well. There was an elegance here, unlike *Beta*. The architecture was accented with gold and brass decorations, and bronze statues. It was another world. *Beta* was bland and characterless. All black, grey, and white. But, compared to the satellite, it was a paradise. *Alpha*, on the other hand, was like a heaven.

We glided over the scenic route. There were virtual waterfalls, and even some virtual exotic creatures flying overhead and crawling about. She showed me where Parson's lives, he's the president of operations. And where Hall and his wife live. She pointed out a few other names of people, but I was too distracted to hear them. We headed down to the refectory for dinner. It was a combination of self-service like our cafeteria was, and full-service restaurant. Needless to say, the food was equally extravagant. We sat in the restaurant part.

As we were seated to our table, other patrons would nod as we passed by their tables. A few time we were stopped to congratulate me on my wedding. Apparently I made an impression amongst the elite after all. The waiter came over and we ordered our drinks.

Walter and his wife soon came into the dining room. He saw us and insisted we join him at his table.

“Getting a taste of how the other half live,” asked Hall.

“Giving him the grand tour,” answered Jo.

“Well, he’ll know it soon enough. Right, my boy? Here,” Hall raised his *Zero-G glass* to give a toast. “To Gray. May he be an inspiration to us all.”

Hall was, of course, referring to me being the unofficial spokesman for their *New World Religion*. They used not only our wedding ceremony vid, but our photos as well in their advertisements and infomercials promoting their *New Religion*.

Over dinner, Hall hinted that there were rumors in the mill about me. “Moving up,” he said. He encouraged me to continue doing what I’ve been doing. “*Mingle*” with everyone I run into. “*Mingle*,” Jo giggled. Of course, I was *mingling* to extract information. To seek out those whom I could trust, to build an alliance against their *tyranny*.

He wanted me to *mingle* to promote their *new religion*. He said I created a *need*. “People need to stay connected. Both on and off-world,” Hall said. They have a slew of *Intergalactic Ceremonies* they could broadcast. From weddings, and family reunions to other initiation rites, memorials and funerals. They are continuing to improve their satellite technologies and install more satellites and telecommunication relays, telecom orbiters, and new networks of regional internets to handle the anticipated increase of traffic. They were pursuing this aggressively with a target set for the first of the year, (2021). Limited to members of the *New World Religion*, of course.

After a delightful dinner, Jo and I adjourned to *Grant’s Tavern*. There we had a couple drinks and *mingled*. I was just as popular amongst the elite as I was with the common man. Only, there at *Alpha*, they’d ask theoretical questions in ways similar to those in an academic setting. And they seemed to understand where I was coming from, especially in regards to how the plight of humanity centers around the relationship between man and god. This was a subject that was never brought up by my friends back at the *Severed Tether*. We didn’t dwell on the subject for too long before Jo moved the *tour* along, as if she had a schedule to keep.

We finally got to one last group of people. It was *Grant* himself. Grant Parsons, the director of this operation. The *P* of *DEEP Enterprises*. He was very gracious. His *otherworldly* manner was contradictory to the oppressive ambitions of their missions. The countless drinks I’d consumed by this point made me feel brave enough to question Parsons about what he envisions for the future of Mankind. But, before we could really get *deep* into the subject, and to the core of what he represents, Jo interrupted as only she could and pardoned us. She could tell I had enough of the *spotlight* for one evening. We exited out the back of the tavern to avoid another hour’s worth of farewells. We trolleyed on by her room.

“This is my stop,” she said.

We stood there a few seconds, in silence.

“Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee? Might be a good idea before heading out on the pod,” she suggested.

“You have a coffee maker in your room?”

Jo grinned, then opened her door.

“Right this way.”

She led me into her room, or rather, *conapt*. It didn't have that typical *space station* look. But then nothing did there in *Alpha*. I sat down at her kitchen bar as she prepared the coffee.

“So, Jo,” I started, as I sipped the first cup. “I appreciate what you did back there.”

“What do you mean?”

“With Parsons. Getting us out of there before I'd make a fool of myself. It was obvious the drinks had a little effect on my chatter.”

“I understand, Gray. This has all been overwhelming for you. What, with all the attention you've been getting, and the constant bombardment of questions,” she said as she moved over to the stool beside me. She put her arm around me and stroked my hair with her other hand. “The transition from living all alone in that little satellite to moving here must have been a tremendous adjustment for you.”

I don't know what I was doing there. It felt comfortable. And the coffee tasted great. But, you couldn't imagine the thoughts that soared through my sobering mind that night. Was this evening all planned out - the dinner with Hall? Was this some sort of *test*? Am I their new game piece? Was I being exploited? What was expected of me? What was Jo's role in all this? What did she want from me?

Anyone who'd say they weren't the least bit attracted to Jo would either have to be gay or insane. And even then I wouldn't believe them. I loved Phoebe. Of that there was no doubt. But, nearly seven months without any... Well, maybe I was insane.

Maybe this was their way of welcoming me into their society. Everyone gets a ride on the *Jo-cart*. I didn't know. And I didn't want to know. But, what I did know was that I needed a cold shower and a comfy king-size bed, with cloud soft goose down pillows. But, Heaven would have to wait. For now, I'd have to settle for a sponge-down and a sleeping bag, in Hell.

Easy Street

I woke half past a dream, with my mind still wandering. It was only 3 AM. I reached for a bottle of H2O, remaining in my sleeping bag. I could still see the faces of the passersby. The dreams I had swiftly disappeared. I could only recall some of the feelings expressed on their faces. Some of pride, joy, gratitude, empathy, euphoria, desire, hope, affection, and awe. I delved further into the stream of their lucid gleams, lifting their masks to reveal yet another. I sensed their guilt, nervousness, tension, apprehension, and loneliness. This was my mind sorting through the chaos no doubt. With the ringing in my ears, and my running nose, I gave up and went back to sleep. However, 7 AM came fast.

I slithered out of my sleeping bag, soaked from perspiration. I knew I had to do my routine exercises, but didn't feel up to dealing with people in my face this morning. Instead, I'd do some stretches and calisthenics in my room. Then I had a relieving sponge bath. I was feeling much better and rejuvenated after that.

I headed down to the cafeteria for breakfast. *Mingling* didn't take any effort. I was like a magnate. For kicks I sat right in the middle of the cafeteria. This illustrated my point very well. All the outer tables were completely empty. I was, in fact, the center of attention. It's not that everyone wanted to necessarily talk to me, than to just be near me. They wanted to listen to what I had to say. Be in my *presence*. It just didn't make any sense to me. But, I knew it had to end sooner or later. Everything does.

As I returned my tray to the dispenser, I was being paged. I withdrew the *Geni* from my belt and read the text message. It was Hall. He wanted me to report to his office first thing. He said that my shift would be covered in my absence.

On my way to his office I ran into Jo.

"Good morning, Gray," she greeted. "How are you this morning?"

"I'm feeling dynamo this morning!"

"*Dynamo*," she giggled. "You meeting with Walt...I mean Mr. Hall?"

"Yep. He just paged me. Hope I'm not in any trouble. You don't think it is about what I said to Mr. Parsons last night, do you?"

"You didn't say anything wrong. A matter of fact, everything you said last night couldn't have been said any better," she said. "You go in their with confidence, Gray. Head up! Don't keep him waiting!" Jo hopped up and kissed me on the cheek, and rubbed my back.

I entered his office. His receptionist looked up at me. He seemed delighted to see me, contrary to our previous encounters. He announced me to Hall and told me to head on in.

“Gray! Thanks for coming in,” Hall greeted, shaking my hand.

“No problem Walter. To what pleasure do I owe this meeting,” I asked with confidence.

“After our dinner together last night,” Hall started, “I ran into Grant. Mr. Parsons. And he was very impressed with you. A matter of fact, he called a special meeting this morning with upper management, and so forth. And he came up with a proposal. Because of your high profile, Gray, you are in an advantageous position. As a result, Mr. Parsons developed a new position for you. Training Coordinator.”

I remember thinking to myself, “You don’t need to be using your subliminal messaging to convince me.”

“Now, what this entails,” Hall continued, “is compensation and employee development, planning, coordinating and conducting employee training, and identifying weak links.”

“Weak links,” I asked.

“Yes, Gray. Identify any interpersonal issues within the different departments. You know, sensing if there are any problems with our team members. We mustn’t have any conflict amongst our colleagues. It would be counter productive to our *common goals*,” Hall said.

“So, you’d have access to all departments.”

Could they have made my job any easier?

“But, don’t worry. You’ll have a team working for you. You just gather the information, attend the meetings, and give the data to your team. Once they’ve processed the information, you’ll present it to the department heads. Sort of like an ambassador of sorts. Okay?”

I was in a supervisory position at my last job. But, that was only of my department. This position was way out of my league. What qualified me for such a position, I wondered.

“Also,” Hall continued, “be sure and introduce the *Scriptures* in with your conversations and presentations. To help you with that, I set up meetings for you to meet with a *Messenger* to go over the *Scriptures* together, and which of the common *Passages* to refer to.”

What I had in fact become was the ambassador for their *new religion*, their well crafted collage of world religions mixed with their mind control tactics. And to what ends? To infiltrate groups and other governments, suppress free thought, gain access to anything they desired with little to no resistance.

I couldn’t have been placed in a better position, however. As Alexandra once

said, “*Things have a way of working out.*” This new position also meant a new move. I now had my own conapt in the *Alpha* space station. I didn’t share the executive wing, but I sure wasn’t going to complain. Actually, I was on the wing that housed the *Messengers of Truth*. The *Temple* for this station was right down the end of the corridor.

My new office and team was in the Human Resources department. My team consisted of four individuals. They were friendly enough. Very professional. But, I didn’t feel any connection with any of them. At least not at first. They all had their specialties. Bruce Metis is a business consultant with a masters in IT in a previous life. Eric Prendergast is into organizing teams, improving productivity, process facilitation, creative problem solving, strategy planning. He has a Masters Degrees in both Education and Business. Maxine Butler holds a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology and a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology. Her area of expertise is in Workplace Psychology, which examines the behavior of people in organizations. She’d apply business psychology to the workplace, linking personal competence to organizational competence. Kiefer Shaw’s areas of expertise include human resource and management evaluation, designing salary and incentive compensation programs, developing training instructional materials and designing human resource systems that enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency. He holds multiple BA and Master’s degrees in these fields. They’d all have their connections to professionals to refer to outside their area expertise.

Our first day together would consist of flowcharts, organizational charts, comparison charts, graphs, schedules, calendars, timelines, and diagrams. It was very overwhelming for one day. But, by the end of the day they had the work divided up between them, and their week planned out.

Although they worked for me, *under me*, they’d report their data to Grant Parson’s people just the same. And I’m certain they also included reports on me as well. There was more to their plans than what they were saying. What I’ve already shared with you is probably more than you’d liked to know. Maybe even more than you’re willing to believe. As Alexandra would have said, “You’ll find out soon enough.”

[A Handful](#)

I did my time with the *Messenger*. We went all through their *Scriptures*. I was even given an audio to listen to while asleep. Thank God...thank *goodness* I was no longer susceptible to their subliminal madness.

It was November 2020. My new *team* was moving right along. They didn't waste any time either. They made my job a hell of a lot easier too. I wouldn't have gotten this far without them. With their background and work ethics, they made one very proficient team together. I learned a lot from them. They respected that I actually listened to them. The fact that I was learning something and had been an active participant in the process,

rather than just a *spokesman*, helped too.

There was already a culture on Logos before all this. Now what management wanted to do was change it. But, first they had to identify the problem areas within the system. At the same time they'd gradually introduce their *new religion*. Changes would be made pending our findings and recommendations. So they claimed.

They didn't want anyone challenging their authority, their decisions, their underling motives. Basically, part of my job was to find those who were defiant and have them *reassessed*, or reassigned. *They* were considered a negative influence on the rest of the group because they'd bring conflict. With an evangelical belief system in place to impose their values, there would be less conflict within the organization. Human Resources, from what Jo told me, created a new mission statement and a set of revised company values heavily influenced by the *Scriptures*.

With the information I had, such as the chains of command, hierarchies, and the way things processed through the system, everything was at my fingertips. I was able to target particular divisions that would be crucial to my mission. And I'd come up with a plan. Under the guise of team building with the *antagonists*, I set up a *card night*.

But, first I'd need a partner. There was one individual whom I felt I could trust the most from my list. That was Simon Stone. He is a satellite systems engineer. He's part of the crew that handles the Space Tracking and Surveillance System (STSS) launches and on-orbit operations, among other things. I invited him to my conapt for a game of chess. I figured I'd get a better sense of him without all the distractions.

We started out with small talk. Then I started to ask a few questions that would raise some flags, as far as *DEEP* was concerned. I heard all I needed to know. I quickly switched subjects in case we were being watched.

After our first game I brought out the hard liquor, and a virtual deck of cards. These were specially designed for zero-gravity. Each player would have a hand-held *card* that contains a screen. That was their *hand*. In the center of the table was another screen representing either the chips or cards depending on what game you were playing. However, I modified the *cards*. I added a *texting* feature to it, with an *ss-blocker*. This would allow us to communicate without any suspicion. We'd have to be very brief with our texts using abbreviations and acronyms. I had the first text preset that briefly explained what I had found out about *DEEP* and the *UN*. And that I needed his help to either expose them and/or to disable the system. I asked him if he was in. He responded with a big *YES*.

After going back and forth with some suspicions he already had about the recent chain of events, I offered up a few other names of people on my list to form an alliance with. He knew of them, of course. But, he hadn't know them well enough, with the exception of one. Pete Fisher. He's a computer scientist. He's responsible for the technical and administrative coordination between various collaborative research projects, among other

things.

“We can’t carry on like this, however,” Simon texted. “We’ll have to find a place to either *talk* or another means to communicate more effectively.”

I agreed. He said he see what he could do, then get back to me. And that we should continue to use this method when interviewing the others.

“What if one of the *others* aren’t interested in joining in,” he texted.

“We don’t get them involved then,” I replied.

“They might report us. We can't risk that,” he texted.

“Blackmail 'em,” I asked.

“Not good enough. We’d have to do more than that, my friend.”

I knew what he meant too. I had hoped that it wouldn’t come down to that. After all, I was careful with my selection of names. Besides, how would you have someone killed under the watchful eyes of the surveillance cameras?

To round out the evening, I preached some *Scripture rhetoric* to Simon. However, I only shared the proverbs that I believed in myself, as a humanist. The rest of the *gibberish* I’d share with the others. But, I would not subject my friends to this any more than I had to. I spent all of Saturday like a nomad, wandering from station to station.

My drink of preference switched from scotch to a *Zoom*, or any other caffeine enriched beverage. I needed to keep my head clear.

Sunday was spent at the *Temple*, followed by afternoon tea in the peristyle court. I had planned on spending the rest of the evening locked in my conapt in solitude. I was in the mood for some soothing music, so I went to my storage bin and located Herald’s green *Waund*. I loaded the player and selected some songs. I got comfy and lounged about in my boxers. Then I got a visitor at the door. It was Jo. I slipped on a bathrobe and welcomed her in.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you,” she said.

“Of course not,” I replied politely. “What um...what’s up?”

“I just wanted to see how you were. That’s all. I uh,” she started, then looked away. “So, how do you like living here?”

“It’s swell,” I said with a smile.

“*Swell,*” she giggled.

“Is there something on your mind, Jo?”

She faced me. Her eyes were welling up with tears. She then ran into my arms and held me tightly against her bosom.

“Gray, I... I.” She took a deep quivering breath and exhaled. “I want so much to be near you. I... I don’t know what it is, or why.”

“Jo, you do realize I’m married. And I...”

“You’re never going to see her, Gray,” she said with fervour, looking into my eyes.

“How can you say that? You don’t know this. Of course I’m going to see her again,” I exclaimed.

She held me tight again. I released her so that I could look her in the face.

“Is there something you know? Is there something you’re not telling me,” I asked.

She embraced me once again, this time kissing me passionately on the lips. She tasted sweet, like a summer's dream. It had been so long, and it felt so good. How could something that heavenly be so wrong? I drew her as close to my body as I could. She tiptoed up a bounce to wrap her legs around me. Her legs felt so strong, and her posterior firm. From behind, I reached under her shirt, feeling her warm flesh against my desperate hands. Her breast fit perfectly in my hand. But, then I pushed her away.

“This isn’t right,” I told her. “This just isn’t right.”

I readjusted my bathrobe, while she tucked in her blouse.

“I’m sorry Gray,” she said, as she headed towards the door. “I just don’t know what got into me.”

I held my hand on the door for a moment.

“Under different circumstances I...,” I started. Then I recited part of a *Passage* from the *Scriptures* to her. Part 2, Chapter 9, Passage 2. “*Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.*”

She turned and gently kissed me. Then silently left the room.

After a brief dissemination, I popped a couple pills to help relax my mind. Then I got to thinking again. Is there something she knows that I don’t about Phoebe? Or was she just trying to manipulate me to get me in bed? She is Hall’s mistress and certainly had access

to inside information. Or maybe it's their way of testing me. But for what? And how far would these *tests of temptation* go? It was conceivable that she had genuine feelings towards me. In any case, what I did was right, no matter which way you look at it. And I'm a better man for it.

But, I wouldn't be able to let go of what she said about me not seeing Phoebe again. Work should be interesting tomorrow. Working in the same area as Jo, we're bound to run into one another. "*Will she pretend this never even happened? Will she apologize again, following with an excuse,*" I wondered. Only time would tell.

Monday morning arrived without fail. I followed the usual routine. I even went down to the spa for a workout. Surprisingly there wasn't the usual crowd to wade through in the refectory.

I decided to head for the office early. There was a message waiting for me from Simon. He asked if I could schedule him in today. After sifting through the intranet for any news and updates, I reviewed my schedule. Eventually the team would arrive. Max was always early. She was surprised to see anyone there before her. Then the others followed suit. We had small talk. Then they withdrew to their computers. Our meeting together was scheduled for later. I hadn't seen Jo yet.

So I stopped by the aerospace systems division to see Simon. He waved me in to the room where he was. We shook hands, and he closed the door.

"We can talk in here for now. But, be aware that they still have *visuals*," he said.

He'd temporarily disabled the audio in the chamber we were in. This gave us an opportunity to discuss my findings in further detail. I fired off the important highlights to him. He was amazed that I had as much information as I did. I didn't tell him about Hallows. That I'd save for another time. Right now I just needed to provide him with the facts. He'd try to arrange for a way for all of us to meet to discuss our plans once we have the *team* in place. For now we'd interview the folks on my list over a game of poker. I had to ask him how he planned on *silencing* someone...if they didn't go for it. And, shouldn't we have some sort of warning or something?

He rationalized it this way; "Knowing what we know, do you think that for one *second* they'd keep us alive? And if they had an *inkling* that we'd try to tell anyone, let alone *stop* them, they wouldn't think twice about wasting us. We're not talking about controlling the minds of a space station, or a city, or even a country. We're talking about the entire *human race*, Gray. If we don't do something, and soon according to what you've told me, we *all* might as well be dead."

When I returned to the office, I still hadn't seen Jo around. Maybe she had scheduled appointments at *Beta* for the day. Who knows.

Back at my desk I went over the list again. I needed to be as certain as I possibly could

that these individuals had access to the means needed to carry out this mission. And even more importantly, I needed to be just as sure that their profile and personality type were a suitable match. Their lives would depend on it. So, I chose the top four *Listmen*, as I would come to refer them as. Over the rest of the week I'd stop by the divisions of my *Listmen*. I'd talk with them as much as I could.

By Wednesday, I'd arranged a poker game at my conapt for Friday night. I arranged for a *card table* to be set up in my conapt, and a stocked bar to boot.

Friday night, I greeted the *Listmen* as they came in. I introduced everyone. Simon came in with Pete. Next there was Jim Silverman who works in the Logistics and Maintenance division, whom we refer to as *Spacewalkers*. Then there was John Passetto who works in the Communications division. And then Diane Belgrave from Engineering, Operations & Technology.

I switched roles from greeter to bartender, then to card dealer. I presented everyone with their *cards*. After the first hand I sent everyone the text message. Simon had slightly modified it to make it more brief and to the point. Out of the lot, only Diane had maintained a *poker face*. She also won that hand. And I had gained five allies.

In The Wash

After not running into Jo at the office the past week I got concerned. So, I buzzed her on the vidphone to leave her a message.

“Jo, I just wanted to see how things were. I haven't seen you at the office the past week. I know it's been a bit hectic this week for me. Maybe it was for you too. I just hope that this isn't because of what...”

Just then she picked up.

“Gray,” she said, while adjusting her hair. “How you been?”

“Fine...just fine. I was just calling to see how you are. I was hoping that our last...”

“Gray, honey,” she interrupted. “Didn't you know? Weren't you contacted?”

“Why...no. About what? Where did you send the message?”

“Not by me. By *ES&H*. I caught that nasty virus that's been going around. And I had to tell them everyone I had contact with over the past 48 hours,” she said.

That was the protocol set by the *Environment, Safety and Health Division*. However, I

was not contacted. I even checked my past messages in the *PiP* screen while she was telling me this. Nothing.

“You been feeling all right,” she asked. “No fever, nausea or anything?”

“I’ve been feeling fine. I just...” I switched off the other screen. “I just can’t believe I wasn’t notified. Especially when they know that I come into contact with lots of people.”

I tapped a note in my *Geni* to contact *ES&H* Monday morning. This could have been disastrous had I contracted and spread the virus.

We chatted for a while. She brought up our last *impassioned* encounter. She apologized profusely. She said she couldn’t explain what got into her. “*Maybe it was the virus kicking in,*” she suggested. She said she doesn’t usually act on impulse like that. And she was truly embarrassed over the whole incident. I told her not to worry about it, and that it wouldn’t effect our *friendship*. That put a smile on her face. She thanked me for calling. We both felt better about our relations.

However, maybe this wasn’t a virus she had. Maybe they were conducting one of their experiments. Perhaps they programmed her to seduce me. But, why? This was starting to make me paranoid. Maybe that was their plan. But, again, why?

The following week I paid a visit to *ES&H*. This was one of the last divisions I had yet to visit. So, I introduced myself to everyone in the department. Then I made a point of going straight to the top to meet with the administrator. His name is Daniel Lieber. After introductions, I brought up the virus incident. I asked him why I wasn’t contacted. He, of course, couldn’t answer that. He paged one of the department managers to come in to his office. Lieber conveyed my story to him. He didn’t have an answer either. He looked up the records at the computer. He located Jo’s file, and said my name wasn’t on the contact list. I told him that couldn’t be right. “*Was Jo was lying to me,*” I wondered. But, why?

I had to get to the bottom of this. Right then and there I contacted my *team* and asked them to send the surveillance camera feed of the corridor showing my conapt door from November 15th, between the hours of 8-10 PM, to Lieber’s office. While we waited I had a tour of their department and interviewed everyone available.

About an hour later we had the feed. I scanned through the feed once. Nothing. I noted the date-stamp, then scanned it again slowly. Still nothing. I apologized to Lieber for this misunderstanding. And then headed back to my office.

This obviously was something out of my control. At least for now. Without knowing their motives as to why the cover-up, I’d not know who or which department would be responsible for this. Are they onto me? Have they found that I’m not responding to their mind control tactics, and are trying to figure out why and how? Or maybe this was the result of *not* being controlled.

“My ordering of the surveillance feed might not have been such a good idea,” I thought to myself. Now they know I know the feed had been altered. Had I been programmed to forget that Jo was even there at my conapt, then I wouldn't have had a need to view the feed. But, Jo recalled being there. Maybe it was just me who was suppose to forget. But, why? Had she... Then it dawned on me. If she had the virus and was suppose to pass it on to me, then I wouldn't have gone to work Monday morning. However, when they saw I wasn't infected they had to cover their tracks. But, what were they trying to cover up? Was it to dilapidate me? I was getting caught up in the paranoia created in my head. In the meantime, I had a job to do. Simon said he'd be able to disable some of the surveillance cameras in certain rooms throughout the facility to hold our meetings in. But, this would require extra help from others. But, their roles would be minimal. It would be more like doing someone a favor, and not telling anyone.

We had our first briefing in one of the laundry facilities. I told them about Jo and the virus incident. They agreed that we had to move fast. And also that I should meet with Jo in private to question her. They didn't think she'd be a high risk, despite being Hall's mistress. Diane seemed to think that maybe Jo had feelings towards me. And that she may *suspect* that she's being used. Why else the slip up of her telling me that I'd never see Phoebe again? It just didn't make sense. And Jo would be a good informant, if on our side. Someone on the inside with easy access to Parsons. I agreed. Simon said he'd set up a time and a place. He'd also *wire me up* so he could provide feedback, if needed.

There was just one catch. If I couldn't trust her, and if Simon sensed something phony, I'd have to kill her. He handed me a vial. Inside it contained a lethal dose of the same virus that's been going around. All I'd have to do is slip it into her drink. He also gave me one in spray form, which I could spray into her eyes, as a last resort.

“How did you get this,” I asked.

“I've got a girl in *ES&H*,” he replied. “Don't worry. She doesn't know, and I had the surveillance off. That was my *test*,” he smiled. “And, here.” He handed me a device to scan Jo with for *bugs*.

“How long will it take,” asked Jim. “She won't just pass out on the spot, will she?”

“No. I'm told it'll first knock someone unconscious anywhere from between twenty to forty-five minutes from exposure. Then...,” Simon responded with a cut-throat gesture.

“What if she tries to contact someone before then,” Jim asked.

“He'll have to escort Ms. Larkin back to her conapt,” interjected John.

“Can you block any outgoing communications from her room,” Jim asked Simon.

“Yes. But, Gray,” Simon started, “try to time it so that it won't be long before she's out. We can't take any risks if she has another device in her conapt to communicate with that

I don't know about. ”

“That's if I even need to use it on her,” I replied.

“Will you be able to go through with this? If she doesn't cooperate,” asked Simon.

“I'll take it one step at a time. I'll initially tell her that I'm questioning her as part of an investigation my team is conducting into the ES&H virus incident. That should seem convincing, don't you think?” I asked. “After all, they already know I checked out the surveillance feed. This would then only follow that line of logic. If I proceed with telling her anything that would put our mission at risk, and she doesn't go for it, then of course I'll have no choice.”

“Good then,” Simon agreed. “The best thing then, under the circumstances, is for you to meet with her in your conapt. I'll scan your room and find out where and what they're using for surveillance. I'll then disable it for the brief time she's there. And it'll have to be brief so as not to raise any suspicions. That means no *hanky-panky*,” he jested.

I was glad he could keep a sense of humor under these conditions. But, we did need to move on this. We had a deadline to meet, and we couldn't afford the risk knowing that they just maybe on to us.

Meanwhile, Diane and Jim were coordinating efforts to determine the status of the *Messenger* missions, and when and where the next one is planned. Simon, Pete, and John worked on the methods and means to manipulate the frequencies, and learn the coordinates of the satellites and pods.

Life for Phoebe back on Earth had been too much for her to handle. She took her maternity leave earlier than anticipated to get away from the spotlight. She first went to her aunts in Rhode Island. But was soon discovered by the paparazzi. Her next move was out to the country with my aunt and uncle in the Berkshires. That is where she remained for the time being.

“Look at me! I'm like a *puffer fish*!” Phoebe exclaimed, as she blew up her cheeks and crossed her eyes.

“I've never seen you look more beautiful,” I told her.

“Well, you better have a talk with your daughter,” she said. “I was at the dinner table last night when all of a sudden I felt a swift kick to the pelvis. It sent me shrieking out of my chair! And nearly gave your aunt a heart attack!”

“Pretty active, aye?”

“I'd say! Pokes me in the ribs, stretches, kicks. There's simply not enough room in here anymore. Look!”

She lifted her blouse and did her best to focus the cam on her belly. I could see what looked to be a foot pushing out from within her belly.

“It’s alive!” I screamed.

“Ain’t that the truth,” she responded with a laugh.

“Well, it won’t be too much longer, darling.”

“How have you been doing, Gray?”

“Me? Just fine. I mean, I miss you of course. But, I’ve really been busy. Keeps my mind occupied until the day we can be together again.”

“You know, I realize that it’s been...what,” she counted in her mind, “seven months since you had any. I mean...it’s just. What I’m trying to say is, I’d understand if you wanted a little...”

“Phoebe,” I interrupted. “No. I haven’t screwed around on you. And I have no intention to. When we got married we made a commitment to one another. Together our love is, as our wedding rings symbolize, never ending. We are one. We are...”

“Human,” she finished. “I will never question the love we have for each other, Gray. But I also realize that you’ve been under a lot of pressure too. I just wouldn’t want you to feel you’d have to...” She stopped talking. Tears started to roll down her cheeks as her chin quivered.

“Darling...darling,” I said. “Listen. I understand your concerns. But, believe me, my *libido* is the last thing we need to be concerned about. Besides, I’ve got little *jack handy* here to take care of such matters.”

Seeing her only made me miss her more. But, we had a nice chat. Caught up on life on Earth. She actually expressed an interest in a little *cybersex*. But, after telling her the possibility of someone hacking through and posting it somewhere on the interplanetary internet, she withdrew her desire.

“I’ll see what I can do,” I told her, half-jokingly. “I’ll have to see if someone can set up a secure connection for us.”

I typed a note in my *Geni* to contact Simon in the morning. “Seeking secure interplanetary connection for honeymooning couple.”

Lights, Camera, Action!

I was in the breakroom selecting a beverage, when all of a sudden, in the corner of my eye, I saw sparks! Bruce had selected a meal, and the control board short-circuited. It was sparkling like the fourth of July!

It reminded me of fireworks back home, on Earth. In my youth, we were usually in Maine on the fourth. We'd watch the fireworks in the harbor. I remember being more fascinated with the lights from all the boats, and listening to their horns and people's *oos* and *aws*. Then later in August, we'd see more fireworks at Tanglewood.

As I grew older, however, I'd lose the enthusiasm for fireworks. I was much more thrilled with *thunderstorms*, and *windy days*, or just staring up at the night sky at the *stars*.

"Gray, you left your *Geni* on the table. You've got call coming in," said Eric.

"Oh, thanks. I'll be right in."

It was John. He left a *coded* message. Having someone working in the communications division has certainly paid off. He rigged our *Genis* so that we could send each other text messages that only ours could decode. We're also on our own band. It's been a tremendous help with coordinating efforts and keeping everyone aware and involved. The Listmen completed their assigned tasks. It appears the *UN* wanted to start their campaign during the year-end holidays. It was part of an operation that had become bigger than any of us could have imagined. The mind control tactics via satellite technology was only one of their objectives. Other operations included staging holographic imagery strategically placed from *UN affiliates* based in the Earth-Moon System, and the creation of natural disasters from *UN affiliates* based on Earth.

While we still moved ahead with our plans, we realized that this would be but one small battle in a much larger war. They'd know - if they hadn't already - that there was a resistance forming from within. With their technologies they'd easily detect and eradicate any such formations aboard *Logos* in an instant. But, they'd have to act fast to prevent word from spreading off-world and back to Earth. You'd think they'd have a protocol in place for such incidents. We'd soon find out.

The *UN* had control or influence over all the major news media too. Any independent news media outlets, what's left of them, would be discredited as conspiracy theorists. They're seen as menaces to society, spreading their godless unpatriotic sin upon the world.

The Listmen needed only to confirm their data before committing to the next stage. That being, the actual reprogramming of the frequencies. The next steps would then be to program a massive viral destruction in the system, and lastly, orchestrate the physical destruction of the satellites and pods.

I arranged the meeting with Jo at my conapt. I told her I just had a few questions to ask her about the virus incident, and that it shouldn't take long. Simon and I went over the protocols before the meeting. He scanned my room for any additional surveillance devices, and placed a *jammer* in the room in case Jo came in with one. Then he wired me up to keep communications with me while he monitored the surveillance system.

Although everyone had been vaccinated against the virus, there were still some cases showing up. If I had to administer this lethal dose of the viral strain on her, it wouldn't raise any red flags. Her death would only be added among the other fatalities.

Simon left the room just as Jo was coming in. They exchanged greetings. I thanked her for coming over, and apologized for holding it in my conapt. "*I scheduled this between two other meetings,*" I told her. I offered her a drink. She sat down as I paced around the room gathering my thoughts and calming my nerves. We had small talk. I told her about my week. She told me about her being sick and how she's all well now.

Then I finally sat down directly across from her, on the arm of a chair, until the awkward silence invaded the room. To break the silence, I started with the reason why I asked her there in the first place. I told her I was leading an investigation about the virus incident. I wanted to know who she spoke to, and who's names she reported to have had contact with. All this information I already had, of course, but I wanted to see if they matched up. And I was biding time, waiting for a signal from Simon. Then he finally announced in my earpiece that all was clear. The surveillance system was off.

I stood up and walked around the room again, and started my inquisition.

"Jo, the last time you were here, who put you up to it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Who *told* you to come here?"

"Why...nobody," she said.

I could see in her eyes that she was hiding something. Something she wasn't telling me. I stood beside her as she remained weighted in her seat like a statue, facing forward.

"I wanted to see you, that's all," she continued. "I told you that. Don't you remember?"

She turned her head to look at me, to see my reaction. Then she quickly faced forward again.

"Yes, Jo. I remember it very well. But, something just doesn't jive."

"*Jive,*" she giggled.

"Yes. Something in the way you turned away just then. Like you're trying

to *protect* something. It's in your body language. The tone of your voice. It's okay, Jo. You can talk to me. No one's listening. And no one's watching."

"*Watching?* Who'd be watching? And why?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Do you remember the comment you made about Phoebe?"

She turned her upper body sharply at me, and stared up at me with her piercing blue eyes. Then withdrew back to her comfort zone.

"I really didn't mean to say that. That must have been when I was coming down with that virus. I would never..."

"So you've said," I interrupted. "You know what I think? They sent you here to find out something about me. Maybe something I've learned. Something they *think* I know. And they wanted you to *fuck* it out of me. I think that you were told to say what you did, like a..."

"I told you it was a *slip-up*," she snarled.

"A *slip-up*. Then you *weren't* suppose to say that?"

"Right," she sneered.

"What did they have to say when you told them you couldn't get me in the sack?"

She sat there saying nothing. Her face was tense, concealing her anger the best she could.

"Must have been quite a blow to your reputation. What, being the company *whore*."

She abruptly stood up. It must have taken all she had to keep from slapping my face. Her facial expression and body language alone was enough to send any man to the depths of Hell.

"I am *not* the company whore! I told you I..."

"*And I'm telling you*," I yelled back, as I had never yelled before, "*this isn't some god-damned game!*"

She dropped back into her seat as I towered over her.

"I want some answers from you. And I want them now!"

She looked up towards the ceiling at where the surveillance camera was hidden. Then over to the door.

"*See!?* There's no one coming in to rescue you! What have I got to do to prove to you

that they're not watching or listening to us," I screamed.

I took three swift giant steps over to the other side of the room and reached in a cubby for my necktie, then back again.

"Still not convinced?" I yelled.

I took the tie and wrapped it around her neck, simulating choking her to death. She screamed an ear piercing shriek, as she gripped my hands. Then, releasing the pressure, holding the necktie loosely around her neck, we both remained silently still for a moment. Our breaths were deep and filled with emotion. We stared into each other, hers with fear, mine with anger. Waiting. Listening. She looked toward the door again, anticipating someone from security to bust in.

"See?" I said calmly. I got off of her, then put the tie back in it's cubby. I paced the floor as I combed my fingers through my hair, settling my nerves.

"So. *Questions*," I said with a sigh. "What was the purpose of your visit here last week?"

"To seduce you."

"For what purpose?"

"I don't know. He didn't tell me."

"Who? Who didn't tell you?"

"Walter."

"He didn't tell you to say or ask anything?"

"No. Just to have *sex* with you."

"And you told him?"

"I didn't have to tell him *anything*. He was watching," she gestured with her eyes up toward the surveillance camera.

"Is this...have you been asked to do this with anyone else before?"
She nodded yes.

"But, not by Walter," she offered.

"Who then?"

"Grant. Mr. Parsons. He asked me to seduce *Walter*."

“Why”

“He didn’t say. But, I’m to report certain activities back to him, and perform other assignments as needed.”

I was starting to think that this was Wally’s way of getting his *rocks* off. But, I was wrong. Jo didn’t have a clue what Walter’s motives were. But, she had a feeling it wasn’t for the *act* itself. She’s seen signs of jealousy from Walter in the past. The idea of her being with another man enrages him. She, of course, reported the *seduction malfunction* to Parson’s as well. Although, she didn’t receive any reaction from either of them.

“What about Phoebe?”

“That was a slip-up on my part. I...” She looked down. Tears started rolling down her cheeks. “Gray, I...” She cried.

I put my arm around her to comfort her. Was this all part of an act? What was she upset about? I was confused. I was spent.

“When I started working here, it was like I was the center of attention. Every guy wanted to...*be with me*. At first it was fun. But, then I found that they didn’t really want to know me. All they wanted me for was sex. That’s when I closed up. You know? Shut down. Then, one day, Grant calls me into his office. He really knows how to treat a lady. You never met a more kinder, gentler man. He helped me to break out of my shell. Gave me a new lease on life, as they say.”

She stood up and wiped her tears and blew her nose.

“Then one day he asked me if I’d mind doing him a favor. He said I didn’t have to. But, the only way that I could know what it was is if I agreed to do it before hand. After all he’d done for me I figured, how bad could it be? Right? So I said *sure*. Then, when he told me he wanted me to seduce Walter, I was shattered! I just, couldn’t get over it. But, at that point, I had no choice. I agreed to do it. At the time Walter was a new employee. After that *favor*, Grant then tells me to become Walter’s mistress. Then he wanted to know things about him, and for me to tell him things, saying that I overheard them or something.”

She showed signs of calm now.

“It wasn’t all so bad. Then, when Walter asked me to seduce *you*. All those feelings from the past came rushing back. I just couldn’t ...I didn’t know what to do! Then, after meeting you, it was like,” she looked away, embarrassed. “Like a dream. I don’t know what it was...or what it *is* about you.” She stroked my cheek with the back of her hand. “I said what I said about Phoebe because I wanted you to *myself*.” She turned and sat back down. “And, I overheard Walter talking to someone on the vidphone as I walked into his

office one day. He was talking about you and Phoebe. About the *wedding*, I guess.”

“What did he say, exactly?”

“Something like, *Locke won't be seeing Phoebe anytime soon.*”

“That's it?”

“I'm *so* sorry Gray. I didn't mean to hurt you. Do you understand,” she asked, leaning over the arm of the chair towards me.

“Yes. Yes I understand.”

Right. I understood it about as much as I understand contemporary art.

“Gray? You've got to move this along,” said Simon.

“Jo, I've just got to ask you a few more questions, okay? What do you know about *DEEP Enterprises?*”

“Well, we're the leading...”

“No. No,” I interrupted. “I mean, with the satellites. Their partnering with the *UN* with a *mind control* program? Do you know *anything* about that?”

“I only hear bits and pieces of things, Gray. I was told the less I know the better.”

“By whom?”

“By Grant.”

“Okay. Listen. I'm sorry I had to put you through all this. It looks like we only have each other to depend on, doesn't? As you probably can *sense*, there are things going on around here that aren't right. I have found a way to fix a few things. But, I'll need your help. Can we work together?”

She nodded her head yes, with a smile. I briefly explained the protocol for communicating to one another. She was already accustomed to this way of life. If anything, I'd be learning a lot from her. We wrapped up the conversation with apologies.

Then Simon sounded over my earpiece that the surveillance system was back on.

The Taste of Bile

It was only a few short weeks before the showdown. And everything was in place. The *Listmen* had their confirmations and coordinates all in check. All they had to do was plug their devices into the system then press play. The frequencies would be modified to my specifications, then after the commands worked their way through their processors, the virus would destroy all the data and computers associated with the commands.

Jim handled the explosives for the satellites and pods. They would be mixed in with supplies that the *Satellite Runners* would bring to the satellites. The detonation would be set via a specific code that would be relayed using one of our *Geni-Minds*. It looked like everything was going as smooth as silk. Too smooth.

Jo stopped by the conapt. She asked if I got the invite to Grant's dinner party. And she wanted to update me on things. Seems that things did not go too smoothly on her end. Jo said she wanted to help, so she said she asked Hall why he wanted her to have sex with me. She told him she had a right to know. So, he told her. He said so I'd contract the virus. She said she became furious. Because, that meant he'd given her the virus first, without her knowledge.

She apologized profusely for not thinking ahead. But, her anger got the better of her. She said she wanted to break up with him right then and there. Walter pleaded, saying he'd do anything. She said, then tell her why he wanted to get me sick. He couldn't tell her. Then she told him that she had feelings for me. And he hit the roof. As she turned and started to leave the room, Walter gave in.

She had a big smile on her face, like a proud little housewife. She continued with her story, saying that he was told to have her do it so that I'd be placed in the infirmary. To run some tests on me.

"I asked why? Is he an alien or something," she said. "He said he couldn't tell me anymore. That he told me too much already."

"So," I asked. "Did you break it off with him?"

"I told him I'd have to think about it," she smiled. Then she gave me a great big hug. "So, how did I do on my first assignment, chief?"

"Well," I said. "That really wasn't an assignment. That was more like an extracurricular activity. But, you did good."

"Good. Now we can get Walter jealous at the dinner party. You'll accompany me."

"Sounds like a plan to me," I smiled.

At the dinner party we were greeted by Grant and his wife Felicia. Jo snapped up a drink

from a passing waiter. I could taste the gin on her breath. I went up to the bar and ordered myself a gin and tonic. As soon as Walter and his wife Brenda entered, Jo swooped us over to greet them. The first time I met Brenda was at the dinner we had the time Jo gave me the *grand tour* of Alpha. She looked lovely then. But, this night she was stunningly beautiful. She was a giant, compared to Jo. She was dark complected, and had strawberry blonde hair, with gorgeous amber eyes. She must have stood at least six feet tall. And she was built to last. I'm not knocking Jo, but, I didn't understand why Walter would be seeing anyone else on the side. She was a knock-out. Maybe she's too much woman for him. Who knows.

After *mingling*, we ate dinner. By the time desert rolled around, I was on my fourth or fifth drink. I noticed Walter watching us too. So, I put my arm around Jo's seat. I'd occasionally rub her back when I was speaking to her. He'd cringe with jealousy. Brenda just sat there talking to the gal across the table from them, as if it were nothing. Like she didn't even notice. She must be use to it by now. But, is that something you get use to? Or is it just something you tolerate.

Afterwards, Brenda approached me. I was at the punchbowl. Walter had left for the lavatory, and Jo was talking with some of her girlfriends.

"Mr. Locke," she said.

"Please. Call me Gray."

"I see you've been *passed the torch*," she said.

"The *torch*? What do you mean," I chuckled.

"You know exactly what I mean," she said with indignation.

"If you're referring to Miss Larkin, I have not..."

"Listen," she interrupted. "It's none of my business what you do behind closed doors, Gray. You could be a flaming faggot for all I care. But, you know what you're doing don't you? You're making poor Walter jealous. He's starting to think that you're having an affair with her. And this is *killing* him. And, quite frankly, there's no telling what he'll do."

"Pardon me for asking but, shouldn't you be more concerned about your own marriage?"

"Walter is my husband. His *happiness* means the world to me."

"You don't care that he's having an affair with another woman?"

"We've been married for twenty-two years. It's not like he's sleeping around with everybody. It's just her. And if it makes him happy, so be it. *I'm* the one he comes home to. Besides, who's to say that I'm not seeing someone on the side," she said as her eyes

scrolled down to my crotch, then to her drink which she swallowed with passion. Then Jo came over.

“Hello Mrs. Hall,” she said in her girlie voice.

“Jo,” she replied disheartened. “Have you seen my husband? He’s been looking for you.” Just then, Walter appeared in the room, searching for...us?

“There you are,” he said to Brenda.

“Honey,” Brenda said to Walter. “I have a terrible headache. I’m going back to the conapt. I hope it’s not that flu going around.”

“I’ll see you home then,” Walter said glumly.

“No-no. You stay. Gray here will see me back. You and Jo have a good time. I’ll see you when you get home,” she kissed Walter on the cheek. “Come on,” she said to me.

I escorted Mrs. Hall to her conapt. We had the typical small talk. Asked how I like living in *Alpha*, compared to *Beta*. Asked me how her husband was treating me on the job. I told her I couldn’t complain.

When we finally arrived I told her that I hoped she felt better. And that I’d return to the dinner party.

“Where you going? Come in,” she said without pause.

Their conapt was luxurious.

“Make yourself a drink. I’m going to change into something more comfortable,” she told me.

She started talking to me from the other room.

“How long you plan on staying here? On *Logos*, I mean?”

“Oh, as long as it takes,” I said cleverly.

“As long as what takes,” she asked as she entered the room.

She had on only a bathrobe. The front was partly open, revealing the space between her breasts. She’s the kind of woman who likes to get down to business. You see something - you want it - take it.

“As long as they’ll have me. I do have a wife that I’d like to see again before the end of the millennium,” I said.

“Life’s full of pain and heartache. Don’t you agree Gray? So, why not take the pleasures that life has to offer while you can. They may come just once.”

She sat down and started rubbing the back of her neck, trying to work out a knot.

“Do me a favor will you and rub my neck,” she said. “I need a pair of strong hands.”

As I approached her from behind, she opened and dropped the top portion of her robe.

“And my shoulders too. That’s it,” she moaned.

I massaged her neck and shoulders. They were rock hard. Had her husband spent more time with her, she wouldn’t need the touch of a stranger’s hands.

“You’re a man who knows how to satisfy a woman. I can tell. This Phoebe of yours is one lucky dame,” she said.

She stood up and turned to face me. Her robe slipped off revealing all her glory. She wrapped her arms around me, and started to kiss me on the lips. I could taste the bile in her mouth.

“Listen,” I said. “I’m not accustomed to your culture here on *Logos*. I was brought up differently. You see, when I make commitments, I abide by them. And I have a commitment to my wife. I’m sticking to it,” I told her.

“You’re quite the gentleman,” she said. “I like that in a man.”

She pulled me in passionately against her body, locking me in an open-mouthed kiss, while swiftly reaching her hand down my pants.

“Brenda,” I gasped. “Didn’t you just hear what I said?”

“You must be joking. Right?” she retorted.

“*A wise man has nothing to do with lust. Lust is nothing but death, and lack of it is serenity,*” I quoted from the *Scriptures*.

“Don’t you give me that line of shit,” she said with spite. “You’re not actually falling for that new religion mumbo-jumbo, are you?”

“Maybe that’s what this company needs. Some morals. I’m starting to think that *Logos* is just one big floating orgy of sin,” I replied.

She laughed.

“You could have this company eating right out of your hands, Gray. You save your *preaching* for the little people. You’re among the elite now. You keep talking this shit, you’ll be nothing! And you’ll never see that sweet little wife of yours either.”

My sobering heart began to pound as adrenaline soared through my intoxicated veins.

“What’s that suppose to mean,” I demanded.

“You’ve got to play the game, Gray. Think you’d learn that by now.”

“Believe me, I’ve learned a lot out here.”

“You said a mouthful,” she mumbled to herself.

She wrapped her bathrobe around her body. Then reached over to a consol that was hidden within a bookshelf. “How original,” I thought to myself.

“You’re an intelligent man, Gray,” she started. “We can talk freely now. There are no cameras. No hidden microphones. They’re all off. Walter had this *thing* installed so that no one could watch when he and Jo would *go at it*.”

She seemed to lavish in the imagery of them *going at it*. Or maybe it was the men she seduced using Walter’s very own discretionary method that brought her such elation.

“It’s no secret that you’ve discovered a few discrepancies with the company.”

“I’m listening,” I said.

She tapped the glass of bourbon she was holding with her nails while staring at me, like she was trying to read me.

“You’ve got people wondering about you, Gray. Wondering what you know. They’ll find out sooner or later. It’s just, they’d like to find out the easy way.”

“I was simply doing my job,” I started. “When Jo told me that I was on the contact list when she...”

“Gray,” she interrupted. “It goes way beyond that little charade. That was a foiled scheme. Don’t you see? She was suppose to give you the virus so that you’d fall ill. Then, you’d have to be taken to the infirmary. You must have one strong immune system,” she said with a devilish smile.

“What’s the point in that?”

“So they can perform tests on you,” she replied.

“Tests?”

“There’s no sense in fooling me, Gray. Just as there’s no sense in me fooling you. They had their suspicions about you when you were out there on that little satellite of yours. But, they weren’t sure if you were having a breakdown of sorts, or if you were suffering from some new rare *mental illness*. But, then they figured it out,” she said while fondling the belt of her bathrobe. “Well...not *exactly* figured it out. That’s why they need to run some comprehensive tests on you. But, they know what you can *do*.”

“What I can *do*? What, they figured out that I can fly like *Superman*,” I asked sarcastically.

“That your not susceptible to their mind control methods,” she said bluntly.

She had me. I stood there speechless. Motionless for a moment. How did they figure it out? What gave it away? Why was she telling me this? What does she want from me?

“They figured out that little trick of yours when you first met with my husband in his office on day one. They were sending some sort of signals to your brain. Some subliminal crap. But, it didn’t work on you.”

I tried thinking back to the meeting. What was even said? The only thing that stood out in my mind was that Walter had arranged where my wedding was to be held.

“I don’t get it. I agreed to getting married in their *Temple*. What else was there? Did I say something wrong,” I asked her.

“Yeah,” she bugged.

“Like?”

“Everything! You didn’t tell them what they wanted you to!”

I must have had a very confused look on my face. Because, I was.

“Your plans for the future, *dumb fuck*,” she said. “This what happens when you don’t get laid?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I told her. “I’m heading back to the party now.”

I headed to the door.

“Fine. Go right ahead,” she said. “My advice to you, Mr. I-am-so-Righteous, would be to fuck every god-damned woman you can at that *orgy-of-a-party* down there. Because, within forty-eight hours, you won’t know your toe from your cock!”

“Why are you telling me all this? You want to be the first to *fuck my brains* out before they do?” I asked her.

“No,” she chuckled. “That was just the hors d'oeuvre.”

I sat down in the chair directly in front of her. Listening to what she had to say.

“You’ve become bigger than anyone had anticipated. You did your job so well. And the *Messenger* business? Powerful stuff there, Gray. You are a very *passionate* man. But, they have only one problem with you.”

“That being...”

“They have no way to control you! To control what you say. What you think. You’ve really, truly baffled them.”

“You keep saying *them* and *they*. Who are *they*?”

“Walter, Grant, the UN. Take your pick. You’ve got them *all* frightened, Gray. And fear is not something they take lightly. Fear is something they instill upon others. Not the other way around. And they were hoping not to have to resort to the old *barbaric ways* of getting what they want. They’ve made so many careless mistakes that way. And it’s always heartbreaking to learn that they had to involve innocent people, like your wife, when it could have all been avoided.”

“My wife doesn’t need to be involved with this. Besides, if I had such a *gift*, what makes you think I’d tell you under any set of circumstances,” I toyed.

“Whoa, Gray,” she started. “I’m not the one who wants you. At least, not in the way they do. Don’t you think I would have turned you over to them by now? I just wanted to tell you that they’re *onto* you. And it won’t be long before they’ve found out more about what you’re doing.”

“About what I’m doing?”

“You know, about *fixing* the satellite transmissions. You plan on stopping the experiments, no?”

“Where did you hear such rumors,” I fished.

“How do you think?”

I thought long and hard. I certainly didn’t want to mention any names. That’s probably what she was after. They’re onto me. And they probably realize that I couldn’t possibly pull this off on my own.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said.

“Gray, darling,” she said, firmly holding my head up to hers with both hands. “You are the purist man I had ever met. The noblest. This *gift* of yours, of repelling their mind control, is *special*. It may be the missing link in the chain that will determine the fate of the human race. I find this attractive in a man. *Other* women will find this attractive in you, too. But, not all can be trusted.”

“How do I know I can trust you,” I asked,

“You don’t.”

“What would you do in my position, Brenda?”

“First, I’d make mad passionate love to the one *closest* to me,” she said with a great big smile.

“Then, after that?”

“I’d call Phoebe. Tell her to stay put. *Wherever* she is. And to trust no one. Then get back to me,” she said.

“What, for *sex* again?”

“Not a bad idea,” she replied. “But, no. I’ll see what I can find out about their *plans* for you. Maybe there is a way to stall them, or something. Maybe try *blackmail!*”

“Okay,” I said. “So, what’s in it for you?”

“Let’s just say that I’ve seen the menu, and I don’t like what they’re serving,” she smiled.

I thanked her for the information, and told her I’d get back to her.

“Oh, just *one* more thing,” she said. “I’d be careful what I say around Jo if I were you,” Brenda said.

“Oh?”

“She’s not as sweet and innocent as you may think. She’s one of them.”

My face went pale as my stomach turned.

“Walter and Jo deserve each other,” she commented.

Nothing Out of the Ordinary

That *Jo and Brenda fanatical* reeked of deception and lies. I could still taste the bile from Brenda's lips. She wanted me to contact Phoebe to confirm where she is. She'd been moving around trying to avoid the media. By me contacting her and telling her to *stay put*, they'd know exactly where she was when and if they needed her.

Instead of going back to the dinner party, I headed back to my conapt. I knew that I was being watched like a hawk. I changed into my sweats and took out my *Geni*. I pretended to be playing a game. As if it mattered what I wanted them to think. I contacted Simon over our protected connection. But, just to be on the safe side, I asked if he could change the band and codes periodically. Then I told him what I could of the events that unfolded that evening. I was still trying to make sense of it all in my mind. Seemed like they were still *fishing* for details.

I asked Simon if there was anyway I could send communications to Phoebe on Earth without detection? He thought for a moment, then said that there just might be a way. During the routine satellite communications between here and Earth he could patch in a frequency band between the layers. It wouldn't be the best reception. But, it'd work.

I told Simon that I've got to make a run for it. It's no longer safe for me to be here. I don't want to risk the lives of him or the other *Listmen*. I would pass all my communications to Simon. Then he would disperse the responsibilities accordingly. What I wanted from Jim was to get me back to *Satellite 2* without detection, and with enough supplies for at least a couple weeks. We'd keep communications just between Simon and I while I'm at *Satellite 2*.

I also needed to be sure that all the explosives would be in place on the pods and satellites by the holidays.

"What about *Satellite 2*?" texted Simon.

"There's probably going to be a lot of movement going on once they realize the system's been hijacked. Try and have Jim send out more than the necessary amount of *Satellite Runners* to distract them. And have Alan Fleming transport *me* to another location."

"Like, where?" Simon texted. "Everything will be heavily guarded, I'm sure."

"We'll worry about that when the time comes then," I texted him back. "Just be sure that the *Satellite Runners* are nowhere near the explosions."

I awaited his reply after his communications with the rest of the *Listmen*. Just then I got a *visitor*. It was Jo.

“Can I come in,” she asked in her *innocent sounding* voice.

“Who’s stopping you,” I replied as I opened the door.

“I was waiting for you, Gray. You didn’t come back to the party.”

“I’m sorry. I’m wiped,” I said.

“*Wiped*,” she giggled.

“Yeah. I just *banged* Hall’s wife. She gave me quite a workout!”

You should have seen the look on her face. She didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“Was there something you wanted, Jo?”

“I...I. Well, I guess not. I’ll just be leaving now,” she said with a confused look.

“*Toodle-loo*,” I waved.

Simon paged me back. He wanted to know if tomorrow, between six and seven AM, worked for me to call Phoebe. I told him we’d give it a try. As long as I’m not abducted by then. In which case, I asked if he’d warn her in my place. He agreed and took down the information.

As exhausted as I was I couldn’t sleep a wink. At first, my eyes would open at every little sound. Eventually, I’d just keep them open, hanging in my sleeping bag like a marionette waiting for it’s puppet master.

The alarm sounded. My heart jumped a beat. I did my stretches and exercises in my conapt. Cleaned up. Then headed straight to the office. I grabbed a coffee and muffin in the cafeteria. I pretended to work as I waited for six. I sent my *team* a note that I wasn’t feeling good and was heading to the *infirmary*. I set it so it they wouldn’t receive the message until 9AM.

Just then I got a call from Brenda. “*Shit*,” I said to myself.

“Gray, darling,” she greeted. “I see you’re up early. Poor Walter here has a bit of a *hangover*. How you feeling, darling? Oh, that backrub you gave me last night felt absolutely *sensuous*. I’ve never felt more alive. We must do that again. ”

“What can I do for you,” I asked her.

“Hmm, hmm,” she snickered. “We can discuss that over lunch. Say...12:30?”

“Gosh, I’m not sure. Let me see what I...”

“I have something *really* important to share with you,” she insisted.

“Actually, you know what? I’m really not feeling very well.”

Brenda stared closer to the vidphone screen.

“Move in closer, dear,” she said.

“Hmm...you’re right. You look like *death*. Why don’t you come on over here. I’ll take care of you, dear.”

“I don’t know,” I coughed. “I better not,” I coughed twice again. “Actually, I thought I’d better take a trip down to the *infirmary*. It *might* be that *virus* that’s been going around,” I coughed. “If I were you, I’d go there and get checked out too, before it gets like this,” I coughed again.

Then I disconnected, and headed straight over to Simons office. The surveillance was temporarily off in the corridors leading to his office, so that I could not be followed. When I got there he had everything all set up.

“It’s about time,” Simon said.

“Sorry. I ran into a some *shit*.”

He patched me through to Phoebe. It rang a few times.

“Come on, come on. Pick-up the...Phoebe! Hello! How are you? Is everything alright?” The screen was very distorted, but we could still make each other out. I had to wait a moment for her response.

“Yes! I’m all right! I miss you!”

“I miss you so much. But, listen.”

“I got your wedding present the other day,” she said excitedly.

“Great...listen. I...”

“And, oh Gray, you should have see the look on...”

She just kept talking, not realizing the *delay*. The connection had finally been upgraded a couple months ago. But, now, because of this need to send this message without detection, I just had to wait. So, I waited until she stopped *rattling away*, and realize that

I haven't been able to say a word. She'd then see that we're back on the delay.

"*Honey?*" she asked.

"Phoebe, listen to me. This is very important. I cannot talk long. A matter of fact, I'm closing the connection as soon as I'm done talking. Go straight to Louis' place. Remember where I stayed for a short time? Have someone drop you off there. Don't leave your car there. Tell *no one* where you are, except Herald and Gloria. If you can, arrange for home-birthing. In the satellite sculpture there is a yellow *Waund*. Find it and watch it. I will get another message to you when I can. Please do *not* try to contact me. I will not be here. I will be with you and Alexandra soon. I love you."

I closed the connection. Watching her face on the screen...was insufferable. I could feel her pain. I could not hold back the tears, and started crying right there. That look on her face. Like, she wasn't ever going to see me again. Is there something she can see that I can't? Alexandra? Where are you when I need you?

"We have to get things rolling, Gray," Simon said. "Everything's arranged. Just as you planned."

I gave Simon the biggest hug. Even he had a tear in his eye.

"It's all in your *Geni*," he said. "You can read it on your way. Have you got everything you need?"

He was referring to my baggage. I just packed my pockets with my *Waunds* and harmonica. There was nothing else of importance here.

"I got all that I need right here," I replied.

I headed straight to the shipping area. Simon messed with the surveillance a bit so that no one could track me. A number of flights were heading out this hour. A cargo to Earth, shuttle's to the mining facilities, workers and engineers to the *Triple Helix*, *Spacewalkers* from maintenance off to do their routine operations on the space station, and *Satellite Runners* heading out to do their runs.

"*SpaceMan!*" yelled a familiar voice.

"*Shush*," I said. "Get me onboard and out of here," I instructed.

"Was it something I said," asked Alan.

Alan hadn't been told *anything*. As far as he was concerned, I was just going to do an observation of his job tasks.

"Is this scuttle bugged or anything," I asked.

“Not while I’m aboard it’s not. What’s up? You in some kind of trouble? They find you mentally unstable after all,” jested Alan.

We had a ways to travel. I told him to follow the usual flight path. *Nothing out of the ordinary*. Then I glanced down at my *Geni* to read what Simon had sent. There was an outline, a timetable, the targeted groups. *Everything*. Right down to the last detail. Except my destination *after* Satellite 2. That’d be worked out later.

I put the *Geni* back in it’s case, and sighed a breath of relief. Now, if only I could stop seeing Phoebe’s face.

“Alan,” I asked.

“Yes, Gray?”

“Well,” I said in astonishment. “Thank you, Alan.”

“Wha-what for?”

“That’s the first time that you ever called me by my *name*.”

“Well, looks like you got yourself into something serious. That’s all. But, don’t get use to it.”

“Do you want to know what’s going on?” I asked him straight out.

“I dunno. Do I?”

“I must warn you first. The information I have could put your job and *life* in jeopardy.”

“What’s life without a little *adventure*,” he smiled.

I told him the whole story. It was a hard pill for him to swallow at first. But, I believed I was able to convince him of the urgency of this battle. And he realized that this was just the beginning of a possibly long, maybe even hopeless, battle for humanity.

[Here I Am](#)

The ghostly ambiance was so still. Despite this eerie calm aboard Satellite 2, it was just how I left it. Untouched by time, yet nothing is the same. The hallow noises epitomizes my loneliness. And there’s a darkness outside that I’d never seen before. A condition I’ve come to know too well. Yet, nothing stays the same.

I’m living on borrowed time. There is barely enough oxygen to breath. And I’m floating about in this dimly lit shell. I mustn’t turn on anything, for fear my presence would be

detected. Any power fluctuations could raise a red flag.

Prior to my departure, I left a trail to send *Parsons & Co.* on a wild goose chase. They'd first look for me in the infirmary, only to find I'm not there, but have been placed under quarantine in my room, and to not be disturbed. They'd only be fooled two and a half days before they'd figure out I wasn't there either. Then they'd search the conapts and rooms of the people I was closest too, to see if I was staying with them. By the time they'd think to look at the flight schedules, there would have been at least two cargo ships on their way to Earth, and numerous shuttles to various locations off-world. Hiding out in one of their satellites would be among the last places they'd look.

But, I could not survive here for too long. My exercising would be limited. And the only mental stimulation I have, outside myself, is my *Geni*. And that I have to conserve as well.

The thoughts and images that ran through my mind was slowly tearing away at my heart and soul. Wondering if Phoebe made it to Louis'. And was she able to get a homebirth practitioner? For, if she were to go to a hospital they'd have both her and Alexandra. It's the not knowing that rips into my heart. The minutes seem like hours. The days... months. Weeks? Forget it. I'd never been so lonely in all my life.

Among the two crates of food rations and supplies were a pad of paper and a pencil. The only way I could maintain any level of sanity was to write. *Write anything*. The first thing that came to mind were the words I once heard that would change my life forever. "*Come, follow me.*"

But, was it all just a dream? I was beginning to pray that it was. Only then, by being here, could I have the hope that it'd stimulate the same senses to awaken the dream from its golden slumber. But, alas, no Alexandra. Her angelic whispers would be heard no more. They'd only be an echoing refrain, calling from within the crags of my cranium. Mere memories. Remnants of a moment seeded in my mind. And as they weave themselves into the tapestry of life, who's to say if they were indeed a dream or reality? And how different would it be if they weren't real? Would I really know what to believe? For, aren't they just as vulnerable as you and me?

When I started out on this journey, I thought that there was only me. I was divorced. I lost my job, and my home. The people that I thought were my friends, well...when you need them most they're not around. But, then out of nowhere *she* came to me.

Through Herald, of all people, I found myself. The years I worked at *Sax Tech* I saw this man everyday I worked. We'd have friendly chats on the shuttle bus. And that was it! It wasn't until my very last day working there that we had decided to become friends. Well, it wasn't a decision, per se. It just happened. Herald seemed to understand me. Like he could *read* me. He probably understood me better than I knew myself back then. He could see, through our conversations, that there was something - not missing - but, not *clicking*. Then, there was that *feeling*. I didn't know what it was at the time, but I'd

later learn that it was *intuition*. Now, I'm not one to believe in the *supernatural*. But, if one *did*, they'd say that this was my *destiny*. That there was a *purpose*, or *reason* for me coming way out here and going through all that I had. Who am I to argue? I simply don't know what to believe. Except that, I did what I did. And here I am.

The fact of the matter is, I'm okay with the fact that *I don't know*. Rather than make conjectures about something that is out of the ordinary, or interpret signs and symbols to find a hidden meaning, I'd rather just marvel at the idea, and simply say, *I don't know*. I don't have to know the answer. I don't feel *threatened* not knowing everything. If there is a method to figure out how something works, that's different. I'd find that an interesting challenge. But, to have to know if there is a *destiny*? To have to know if there is a *purpose*? To know if there is a *reason*? Or a *meaning*? I say, *it's just the way it is*, as far as I can see.

Through Herald, I met Phoebe. It was unlike anything I've ever felt before. It was like a scene from a movie. Or, something you'd read in a fairy tale. It just didn't happen in real life. But, it did for us. I even tried to block it out at one point. Only to find it was still there. And just before I'd come to accept that it was real, I was already committed to work for *DEEP*. I'd only be away for a few months, then I'd return to Earth. When I'd return, maybe I'd get a job at one of *DEEP's* plants on Earth, or something. So much for good intentions.

I'd only have a few correspondences with Simon over these last couple weeks. We couldn't risk them finding me. It would put both our mission and our lives at risk. It was at this point that I decided to write down all that I'd been through. Doing this helped me to put my life into perspective. Once I was at *Logos*, life had seemed to *pass me by*. I was always on the go. I barely had time to get adequate sleep. It was pretty much how it was when I worked for *Sax Tech*. That's why returning to *Satellite 2* was something I felt I had to do. It wasn't only to be used as a strategic safe haven, but also because this is where it all started for me. This was my *big bang*. I needed to follow a familiar path to lead me back to where I belong. And, it wasn't until I was here for this last time that I knew what I wanted out of life. And, for once, it was all I ever needed.

This coming New Year will mark the birth of my child. And not only that, but it would be the anniversary of the day I met her mother. So much like a fairy tale. So much like a dream. However, I know how very real, indeed, this is.

Yet, like a dream, I can only conceive it in my mind. The moments to actually experience them in would be lost to me. Not being there to welcome my darling little girl into the world is the most precious moment I'd live to regret for the rest of my life.

This time of the year is when people come together to celebrate the birth of the new solar year and the beginning of winter, all thanks to the *cycle of life* and to the *earth's tilt on its axis*. It is commonly referred to as *Winter Solstice*. Many cultures all around the world have performed solstice ceremonies over the centuries. There are many roots to the origin of this ancient ritual. From the symbolic to the natural seasons of change, Mankind had

always found the time to come together to celebrate life.

This has also been the time of year when the *family* is celebrated. Family members and friends whom you haven't seen in what seemed like ages, come from other parts of the globe to reunite and share in the goodness that a family can bring. It sometimes isn't until then that you realize that the most important part of life is sharing it with family and friends.

In modern times there are still celebrations practiced that correlate with the winter solstice. Among them are Hanukkah, Yule, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and of course, the New Year. All this would change once the *New World Religion* establishes itself as the official world religion.

Once the holidays have gone by, as they inevitably do, that's when we fall back into the same old routines. We've become *too busy for life*. Our lives have become a *to-do list*; work, school, grocery shopping, errands, garage appointment, hair appointment, ball games, school plays, dance recitals, doctor appointments, company dinners, club meetings, and so forth, and so on. We're too busy getting there! We're even too busy to eat. So, we eat on the run!

And then, when we finally get there, we're not really *there*! We're on the cell phone, and fiddling with the Palm Pilot or iPod. We're thinking about where we've got to be next, and hoping that we won't be late! We let these things in our modern life consume us. We don't have time for our families. And we rarely have time for our friends.

When I was a child, I found it pretty awesome when we went to visit my aunt and uncle out in the *Berkshires*. We'd go downstreet to the market for something, and folks would come up to us and start talking. Uncle would introduce us. Then we'd head over to the drugstore and the same thing would happen! Everybody always saying hello and introducing themselves. I thought my uncle must have been the most popular man in town! Everybody knew him! But, the fact of the matter is, *everybody knew everybody*! Now, we're all a bunch of lonely people living amongst strangers.

Hanging out here does have it's advantages. It gives you *time to think*. Some people don't seem to do much of that anymore. Seems they've got to keep their minds active. But, the fact of the matter is they're not keeping their minds active. They're keeping their mind's *distracted*. There is a difference. The kinds of things you can think about may astound you, if given time. But, with all the artificial stimulation, and useless information bombarding your minds these days, it may take some time just to *quite the mind*. Only then would you begin to hear your *inner voice*.

When you listen, you start to see connections with events that have occurred over your life. One event leading to the next. Like, the paths in the woods behind my house growing up. Depending on which path you'd take, you'd end up in a different part of the garden. And each path would have branches leading off of *it* to guide you to yet another destination! Had I chosen a different path, I'd have a different set of circumstances on my

hands.

I have William Hallows to thank for this destination. Who knows where he is, or even if he's still alive. And, had Alan Fleming not provide me with *Hallows' drive*, then another set of circumstances would have occurred. And without Herald Farthing's motivation, I would not have even been on this journey to begin with! I'd be wallowing about in my *sorry-ass*, pathetic life. Soon to become a devout *New World* Religious fanatic.

If you want to believe that this was my destiny, that this was my purpose in life, that there was a reason for me to go through what I had, well...that is your privilege to believe. But, I can tell you this. You don't have to journey a million miles away to find the answers. The place to find is within yourself. It's in everyone of us.

Harmony

New Years Eve. 2020. Boston, Massachusetts. Louis McCarty's conapt.

The television set is on a local Boston television station. Two hosts, Cari and Kevin, are announcing what is being seen and of the events happening around the city.

Cari: We're looking at the clock tower here in Boston, where in just a few minutes we'll be counting down to the New Year! There are *First Night* activities throughout the entire city. On the face of the Custom Clock Tower there'll be a laser show. And then, right after that, the fireworks will go off!

Kevin: We also have some First Night activities going on right now. At the right here, is Government Center. And I believe *this* is a shot over at the library at Back Bay, where they're anticipating a big show on the rooftop there as well. So we have countdowns taking place all across the city. And then the fireworks, of course, over the harbor.

Cari: Everyone is very excited. The anticipation here at Government Center has really gotten intense, hasn't Kevin?

Kevin: Sure has Cari! And over at the City Hall Plaza, the folks here that you see cheering, are watching on the big screen, the Boston Pops. The mayor is here, and is addressing the crowd from on top of the city hall.

In the room we see Phoebe laying on the couch. She has a white dampened towel over her forehead. Looks like she's ready to give birth at any moment.

Also in the room are Herald and Gloria. The birthing practitioner, Livanna, is in the other room preparing some drinks. Gloria is holding Phoebe's hand.

On a big screen, we see people cheering, laughing, and having a good time. They are in

the auditorium aboard *Logos*. The *CEO*, Grant Parsons, had been delivering a speech to everyone there on the space station, and is now wrapping it up.

Grant Parsons: Tonight we are going to make history!

Crowd cheers .

Grant Parsons: Our first two *Messenger Missions* have brought us to our final mission. This, my fellow colleagues, has been what we've all been waiting for.

Crowd cheers.

Grant Parsons: And by morning all of North America will be *blessed* with a new generation of *Man*. Of a *civilized Man*. And after this? *The world*.

A grand roar of cheers breaks throughout the room. Parsons holds up his drink to everyone.

But, what *everyone* doesn't know is just how changed people will truly be. The supervisors and managers of the different divisions only know their pieces to this puzzle. But, they haven't seen the pieces all together. They think they have created a radio wave to help curb violence. And to encourage good judgments, morals, and good will among their fellow citizens. If only they knew the truth of the matter...it wouldn't have made a difference. Because, the *UN* controlled them. *Everyone* aboard that space station had been controlled by the *Men at the UN*.

The only one who knew the truth was Gray Locke. And after convincing a few of his colleagues, only then could this story be told. Gray is barely conscious on Satellite 2 at this point. The oxygen level is low, and the levels of CO2 are rising to dangerous levels. He is waiting for the signal from Simon. He needs to know when to start detonating the other satellites and pods. And he is anxious to find out where he's going to be stashed next.

Back at Louis' they are about to do the countdown.

Cari: Here we are at the Custom Clock Tower, here at McKinley Square. About to do the countdown!

The crowd: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Happy New Year!

Cari and Kevin: Happy 2021 everybody!

Aboard Satellite 2, Gray could barely keep his eyes open, and his head was spinning. He reached for another sip of water. Then a text message came through.

"Happy New Year!"

It was from Simon. Gray gave the *Geni* a quick shake. He wanted to know what was going on.

“I’m heading back to the office. To see first-hand how things are going. But, so far so good. How you holding out?”

“I’m hanging in there,” he replied. “Any word on when I’ll be picked up?”

It was a few moments before he replied.

“No Gray. Not just yet,” Simon replied. “Still working out a problem. Seems that...” Another moment passed before he finished his sentence. “I haven’t been able to reach Jim. But, don’t you worry. I’m working on it. Someone will be there.”

Gray placed the *Geni* back in its pouch. Then he free-floated in the module, with his arms extended out, like a doll slowly descending through a bottomless sea. His grey eyes stared off into the vacuous void of space. Or maybe he was teletransported back on Earth, to be at Phoebe’s side. To witness the birth of his baby girl.

The opened couch bed and floor were covered with waterproof table cloth and multi-colored sheets. With Gloria holding her hand, breathing together, Phoebe was ready for the time to arrive. At six AM, New Year’s Day, Alexandra Harmony Locke was born.

Afterwards, Herald opened the curtains. The sunlight came rushing in. He felt rejuvenated, and at peace. He dismissed it as probably the rush of events he had just witnessed. They all cleaned up the conapt. Then let *mother and baby* bond alone. Phoebe sang to her.

Herald and Gloria headed back home shortly after. They’d return later to check in on them. Louis returned home shortly thereafter. He *crashed* at a friend’s house after the New Year’s party. He came in all *wired*.

“Have you been out there!” he asked the room. He stopped and looked around. He saw Phoebe with a baby in her arms. Livanna entered the room from the kitchen. “I see we have a new roommate,” he said looking at Livanna, but referring to the baby.

“Hi there,” he said gently, from a distance.

“She doesn’t bite,” Phoebe said. “At least not yet.”

“Oh, she’s so sweet,” Louis said as he approached them.

“Say hello to Uncle Louis,” she said to Alexandra.

Alexandra burped up a little milk.

“That reminds me,” Louis said. “I need to go take a shower.”

Livanna headed out too. Now, it was just the two lying on the couch, cuddling. Phoebe thought something sounded odd. She tried to peek up to look out the window, but couldn't see anything. So, she decided to turn on the television. NECN was programmed on the dial. She watched the news for a bit. She looked to see if there were any news stories that might clue her in to her husband's whereabouts. She'd turn the television off and nap, on and off, throughout the day. Later in the day she'd be tipped-off by what one of the anchors said.

“That's right,” the anchor declared. “There have been nothing but good news to report here in New England. Actually, throughout the entire country. And, as you can see here...”

Phoebe switched the channel to another network. There, someone was interviewing one of the local sociology professors.

Professor: “This is an extraordinarily phenomena. Never before in the recorded history of Man has such an occurrence happen to such a degree. There've been villages and towns, perhaps. But, cities, states, and regions? Never. And, it's my understanding that it's not only the United States that is experiencing this phenomena. Canada and Mexico, and Cuba also.”

Host: “Maybe all this “*Give Peace a Chance*” has really paid off?”

Professor: “A matter of fact, at the university, we set aside time in *April*, called the *Days Without Violence* where we present lectures and have discussions about conflict resolution, social justice, and so forth. But, to actually *experience* such a day as this is way beyond our wildest dreams, to say the very least.”

Louis came out of his room and saw that Phoebe was awake and alert. So, he sat down in the lounge chair and watched television with her. She switched the channel to another news network. There, a minister from a local church is being interviewed.

Minister: “You know what I see happening? Look at this. Besides the crime and violence we've seen right here in our city streets, we've had devastating earthquakes out in California. The worst in the history of our country! And horrific hurricanes down South. So many that we can't even keep up with their names! Flooding in the heartland, and fires out west. Tsunamis in Asia. And *now* we're seeing visions in the sky. Now what's that tell you?”

Host: “Sounds like an apocalyptic brewing up, to me. What do you attribute to all this?”

Minister: “Sin. Why else do we all of a sudden have this increase of natural disasters, conflict, disorder, and crime in the world? It's as simple as Sin. Right in Matthew 24:21,

Jesus describes this period of time on earth when he says "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*" When you read the entire 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus describes these very events that lead up to what is called the *Great Tribulation*. We've been seeing it. We've been living it! Now, you can't tell me that this isn't some kind a sign. And here's where it gets 'ya. *Today*, the first day of Year of Our Lord 2021, when we see all this chaos happening all around the world. War, genocide, murder, and crime being committed in other countries. And look at us, here in the United States of America, with *no crime, no murder*, not even a hold-up has been reported! You can't sit there and tell me this doesn't mean anything. This is a sign for sure. We are the chosen ones. *God is with us.*"

Phoebe changes the channel to an old black & white movie, called "*Holiday*," starring Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant. She lowers the volume.

"What do you make of all that," she asks Louis.

"Hepburn's character is falling in love with..."

"Not that," she interrupted. "The day of peace, harmony-wave happening around the country. You think it's really happening like they say it is?"

"Well...if you'd been outside at all today, you would have seen it for yourself. Walking from the bus top to Beth's you'd hear the usual screeching of brakes, automobile horns blowing, people yelling and cussing, well... you know. But, today? Not one horn! No one swore. People weren't cutting each other off in traffic. In Boston mind you! Ain't that a story!"

"Sorry I missed it."

"Take a walk outside tomorrow. You'll see," he said with confidence.

Chaos

"Word's out," Simon texted.

As soon as word got to the *UN*, they notified *DEEP*. Then they had a big meeting. The debate as to how to handle it would go on for hours. First, they weren't sure if there was a flaw in the system, or with the satellites. The thought had crossed their mind that Locke might have had something to do with it. But, that was eventually ruled out. They didn't feel he could have possibly come up with a way to change the program, let alone learn how to even read it.

The other dilemma was their new course of action. Do they just go with what they had

and take the credit? Or do they go back to square one and reprogram the system? This debate would be ruthless. Fingers were being pointed, and heads would soon roll. Parsons wanted accountability. The *UN* wanted action. However, there woes and troubles were about to get worse. But, at least some of the decisions would be made for them.

“It’s time,” Simon texted.

That meant it was time for Gray to initiate and detonate the explosives that have been planted on the satellites and pods. They were divided into five stages. They wouldn’t go off at the same time. His would be the last to go. Gray triggered the first set. He waited for a response from Simon to report the results.

“Hit!” Simon texted.

The technicians and engineers at *Logos* went into a frenzy. Parsons and all the executives and managers that were in the meeting were immediately notified. They were being updated on a big screen in the meeting room. Parsons slammed his fists on the table in rage. This side of Parsons had never before been seen by anyone. Everyone’s anxiety started to rise.

After the second set of satellites went up, there was actually talk of evacuating *Logos*. Parsons would have no such thing. He restricted all flights until further notice.

“This’ll be it, Gray,” Simon texted. “After the next stage, the computers here will be *fried*. That means we won’t have any communications.”

“Has transportation been arranged for me,” Gray asked.

“I haven’t been able to reach Jim. But, I believe he had everything arranged,” he replied.

“Gotcha.”

“Catch you on the next *wave*,” Simon texted.

Gray set off the third set. Some of the power at the space station went out in various sections. And some of the internal communication systems were affected as well. The virus had penetrated the mainframe and was working it’s way through system, disabling, destroying, and shutting down the *weapon of mind destruction*.

Back on Earth, life would return to it’s formal state. No more would we read of the good Samaritan. Network television would return to it’s crime-ridden filth. The lust for blood and vengeance would return to the minds of those who hate. And abuse would, once again, run rampant throughout the homes and streets of our communities. Violence will cast it’s darkened shadow over humanity, seizing control of our lives, using fear and ignorance to *keep us in the dark*.

When word got out of the destruction of the satellites, speculations and rumors would circulate throughout the media. Claims of alien invasions were the first to start. Then the claims of a foreign country used the Tesla particle beam weapon to destroy them started. Conspiracy theorists were having a field day. Some religious fanatics were claiming it was the *Hand of God* acting in a massive act of violence to wipe out Mankind and start anew. That the one day of peace was only the *calm before the storm*.

While all this is taking place on a planet that resembles a marble, in Gray's eyes when seen from afar, Gray is floating in his lonely satellite. His oxygen is nearly depleted. He gives his *Geni* one last look before programming it to detonate the last satellite. That, of course, being Satellite 2. But, then he heard a faint whisper.

"Come, follow me."

"At last," Gray thought to himself. A glimmer of hope filled his eyes. His face widened by the stretch of his smile. An extraordinary illumination filled the satellite. He could feel the warmth that it brought. And he'd take in one last deep breath of air before fulfilling the last stage of his mission. And as he held the *Geni* in his left-hand, his right-hand reached out for Alexandra. And then they danced and they danced and they danced.

And they had a grand time dancing, and singing, and laughing together again. Only in dreams could there be such bliss. If only there were a way to capture this moment to spread throughout humanity, we'd all be living in peace and harmony.

Could ever a thing more powerful than this exist?

[UNITED STATES LICENSE.](#)

PERMISSIONS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THIS LICENSE MAY BE AVAILABLE
AT <http://Satellite2Music.com/>

Original source to story: <http://graylocke.blogspot.com/>

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GLOSSARY

- [Cosmos](#)
- [D.E.E.P. Enterprises](#)
- [Philip K. Dick](#)
- [Encyclopedia Galactica](#)
- [Endymion](#)
- [Geni-Mind](#)
- [Halo orbit](#)
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- [Primordial Soup](#)
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- [Row, Row, Row Your Boat](#)
- [Carl Sagan](#)
- [Satellite Runner](#)
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- [Solar winds](#)
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- [The Star](#)
- [Nikola Tesla](#)
- [Tethers](#)
- [Triple-Helix Colony](#)
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- [Voyager 1](#)
- [Waund](#)
- [Zero-G Drinking Cup/Glass](#)
- [Zero gravity](#)

CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

- Gray Locke - Main Character
- Alexandra Locke - Gray's sister
- Alan Fleming - Satellite Runner
- Gwyn Locke - Gray's former wife
- Herald Farthing - Gray's friend
- Gloria Farthing - Herald's wife
- Rufus Reagan - Gray's former supervisor at the *Barmann Group*
- Dave Dunne - Friend of Gray's from former employer Sax Tech/Barmann
- Louis McCarty - Friend of Gray's from years ago
- Captain "Red" Thorson - Captain of the shuttle that takes Gray to Sun-Earth L2
- William Hallows - First Satellite Technician of Satellite 2 back in 2009
- Walter Hall - Gray's supervisor at Logos
- Phoebe Stowe - Mother of Alexandra Harmony
- Bryon Traske - Satellite Electrician
- Jayson Grant - Satellite Electrician
- Bob Lockenwitz - Co-worker of Gray's aboard Logos
- Larry Robinson - Co-worker from Cull D. Sax Technologies and Logos
- Joanne Larkin - Human Resource Manager at Logos
- Solomon Grashaw - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Cliff Scrivener - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Ignacio Canché - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Michael Goodell - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Roger Hartman - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Jonathan Sato - Satellite Technician at Logos
- Bruce Metis - Part of Gray's *Team*
- Eric Prendergast - Part of Gray's *Team*
- Maxine Butler - Part of Gray's *Team*
- Kiefer Shaw - Part of Gray's *Team*
- Simon Stone - Satellite Systems Engineer at Logos and member of the *Listmen*
- Pete Fisher - Computer Scientist at Logos, member of the *Listmen*
- Jim Silverman - Logistics & Maintenance Division @ Logos, and *Listmen*

- John Passetto - Communications Division @ Logos, and *Listmen*
- Diane Belgrave - Engineering, Operations & Technology @ Logos, and *Listmen*
- Livanna - Birthing Practitioner

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LINKS OF INTEREST

- [American Museum of Natural History](#)
- [The Berkshires](#)
- [The Boston Globe](#)
- [Faneuil Hall](#)
- [Goodwill](#)
- [Gravitational "Parking Lots"](#)
- [Johnson Space Center](#)
- [Moxie](#)
- [Murphy's Pub](#)
- [Museum of Science, Boston](#)
- [National Space Society](#)
- [NECN](#)

- [The Planetary Society](#)
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- [Tanglewood](#)
- [United Nations](#)