

THE ILLUSTRATED GEEK

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Preface

I wrote this as a final project for my creative writing class over the course of 2-3 weeks. I wanted to write a series of hard science fiction short stories, and this is the result.

Space Truckers

I listen to the familiar creaks and groans of my ship as I relax and settle down for another solitary dinner. Its been a long five months since I have talked my family back on Earth. We normally send video messages back and forth to each other, but the latency this far out from Earth sadly makes video calls impossible.

I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is William, but most of my friends, the few that I have anyway, call me Bill. Im a space trucker. I ship cargo to and from Mars, Earth, and Luna. Whenever anyone on Mars breaks a water filter or needs new equipment they cant make themselves, they have to order it from Earth. If they need it right away or if its urgent, then it can be shipped faster, but then you need to slow it down when it gets to Mars orbit, and that uses a *lot* more fuel, and therefore costs many times more per kilo than it would if it was sent at normal speed. As a result, people like me still have to make the long 9-month journey each way to Mars to drop off supplies and pick up exports from the colony. I read that Elon Musk and his company was working on automating the shipment of goods to and from Mars using some kind of electromagnetic launcher system in Earth orbit, but his company hasnt produced anything yet, so we still have to use inefficient and dirty chemical rockets to get stuff around in space.

Dont get me wrong though, I like my job. I like that I dont have to deal with the hustle and bustle of Earth or worry about being fired. I just wish that someone would get around to doing something about that stupid “No faster-than-light communication” problem. Depending on where I am in the trip, it can take anywhere from seconds to hours for a radio message to travel from my ship to Earth and back. People in the 10s thought that a three second ping was bad, but they clearly have never tried browsing the web or chatting with friends or relatives with a one hour ping.

Thankfully, there are other people making this journey too. Like the Earth truckers in the 20th century, before their entire industry was automated by self-driving trucks, us space truckers have ways of talking to each other. While were still hundreds of thousands of kilometers apart, the latency is good enough that we can talk using video chat. Since were so isolated from the rest of civilization, weve kinda developed our own little culture. We talk about our lives, discuss books weve read or TV shows weve watched, and gamble. We do a lot of gambling. While most of us prefer old school Texas holdem, some of us prefer

to play video games.

During the brief few weeks we spend on Earth or Mars when we drop off a shipment, it can be difficult to adjust back to civilized society. It's easy to forget sometimes that ordinary people are obligated make small talk instead of just saying what they mean. Personal hygiene is similarly easy to forget. Because people cant smell you over a radio link, and deodorant is a consumable resource, us space truckers usually go without. I cant even count the amount of dinner parties Ive been kicked out of because of that.

I don't mind though. The job's not for everyone. When I get kicked out or judged, I just remember that I can return back to my ship and become the master of my own little universe, floating above the stars.

Outbreak

AUDIO LOG TRANSCRIPT 1: SOL 24 MTC 11:26

CREW ENGINEER JONES : Hey! Christine! Come check out this weird rock!

CREW BIOLOGIST MORRISON : Coming. What is it Harry?

CREW ENGINEER JONES : I don't know. Shit! That's sharp. It poked a hole in my glove! I think it cut my finger, too.

COMMANDER RAMSEY : Dammit Harry! You know that we only have so many of these suits, right? Head back to base. Alice, you go with him. Everyone else, continue gathering samples.

CREW ENGINEER JONES : Roger that, Commander. Heading back to base.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER LEWIS : Got it Paul. I'll accompany him and patch him up.

AUDIO LOG TRANSCRIPT 2: SOL 24 MTC 12:36

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER LEWIS : How the hell did you cut yourself up that bad, Harry? This cut is deep.

CREW ENGINEER JONES : I don't know, Alice. I just picked up that rock, and next thing I know my glove is punctured and my finger is cut.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER LEWIS : The cut's all sandy. I'm gonna need to wash it out. This will sting a bit.

CREW ENGINEER JONES : Aghh!

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER LEWIS : Sorry. I'm gonna bandage it up now. Try not to do this again, please?

CREW ENGINEER JONES : I'll try.

LEWIS PERSONAL LOG SOL 24

Today was a interesting day. After a long morning of collecting samples to look for potential life in the soil, Harry picked up a strangely organic-looking rock and somehow managed to cut through his glove and into his finger. I didn't

even know that was possible. I will have to check back periodically on his finger as it heals.

AUDIO LOG TRANSCRIPT 3: SOL 24 MTC 14:36

CREW ENGINEER JONES : Alice, I'm not feeling so well. My head is killing me, my finger is sending stabbing pains down my arms, and I feel super nauseous.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER LEWIS : Oh my God your face! You're deathly pale! Come over here quickly! You've got an insane fever!

COMMANDER RAMSEY : It must be from the cut on his finger. He's infected. We can't take any risks. Harry, we're going to have to put you in quarantine.

Arrival On Europa

Mind Hacker

Last note