Contents

[Origins 2](#_Toc517829364)

[About 2000 Years Ago - Keepers of the Secret 3](#_Toc517829365)

[About 1040 Years Ago 3](#_Toc517829366)

[The Arks 3](#_Toc517829367)

[Max 4](#_Toc517829368)

[Mr. Bubbles 5](#_Toc517829369)

[Staging Area 5](#_Toc517829370)

[Mr. Bubbles Takes Form 6](#_Toc517829371)

[Navigation 7](#_Toc517829372)

[Panels 8](#_Toc517829373)

[Blinky, Inky, Pinky and Clyde 9](#_Toc517829374)

[Food and Water 9](#_Toc517829375)

[Armaments 10](#_Toc517829376)

[Power Supply 10](#_Toc517829377)

[Space Suit 10](#_Toc517829378)

[Stolen 11](#_Toc517829379)

[Testing 12](#_Toc517829380)

[Last Days 12](#_Toc517829381)

[Engineering Review Time 14](#_Toc517829382)

[Moving Day 17](#_Toc517829383)

[Space Port 17](#_Toc517829384)

[Embark 18](#_Toc517829385)

[Transit 18](#_Toc517829386)

[Survey Says 19](#_Toc517829387)

[Planetfall 19](#_Toc517829388)

[Docking 21](#_Toc517829389)

[Space-walk 23](#_Toc517829390)

[The Hyperspace Corridor 25](#_Toc517829391)

[The Promenade 26](#_Toc517829392)

[Tourists 26](#_Toc517829393)

[Space Forces Team 27](#_Toc517829394)

[The Fritz Mobile 27](#_Toc517829395)

## Origins

Eileen screamed in pain, then awoke abruptly from her dream. It had been particularly bad this time, usually she did not awaken. The intensity of the dream may have been brought about by solar flare activity reminding her body of intense heat all over. Her dream had remained the same over the years, a memory of events she could not forget. Even given her great age, the dream changed little. It was a memory that defined who she was. She remembered being immersed in a tank full of cooling fluid while bit by bit a molten metal called adamantium was grafted onto her bones. The government of the day was fixated on creating the ultimate survivor, an undefeatable immortal one. People who could live or even thrive in an apocalyptic world. Being bordered on either side by governments capable of creating a nuclear holocaust, the government feared for it’s people. And she had been blessed with super-healing. She had tried to keep it secret but over time and with advanced technology it became difficult to do. The government rounded up anyone with unusual abilities and handed them over to the army. The army then made recommendations as to career paths based on what they found out about a person’s special abilities. Some people were coerced into specific careers, the alternative being spending life caged up. She was one of those people. She never wanted to be a lab rat but that’s what she ended up being. At least for a while. Until she got lost and forgotten by the government over time. She had one keepsake from that time of her origins, a mechanical watch made out of adamantium.

She had lived so long that she was sure she’d done everything for an occupation. She would find an occupation and be happy with it for 40 or 50 years then become really bored of it. She learned to seek a new occupation then that kept her busy for the next 40 to 50 years. She’d had so many occupations that she became the ultimate generalist. She’d been a scholar, warrior, leader, and follower.

Her first occupation was as a medical practitioner studying mutation. She became interested in mutation as a child once she found out she had a super-healing ability. Her next occupation was as a mechanic. It was an outgrowth from working regularly with medical prosthetics.

## About 2000 Years Ago - Keepers of the Secret

Her friend had encouraged her to attend a meeting of a secret cult like organization. The organization was fixated on the idea of the end of the world, due to increased solar activity.

It wasn’t news to her. She had known about it all along. She had studied astronomy during one of the great technological ages of the planet. She knew all about stars, in particular their star which was slowly expanding into a red giant. She decided not to tell what she knew to the keepers of the secret but allow them to find out more on their own. Keepers of the secret knew that one day in the foreseeable future their people would have to find a way to live elsewhere. Eileen decided to contribute funds to the organization. She knew that one day they would be funding space exploration. Her early funding of the organization meant she would “inherit” a lot of leverage over it in the years to come.

## About 1040 Years Ago

She was busy watching TV thinking that maybe it was time for a new TV set like one of the LCD monitors on the ark versus her current vacuum tube variety. A lot had changed in the previous 1,000 years, technology going from medieval to modern. Internet and a world wide web weren’t available yet, but she knew they would be soon enough. They usually were available before the world destroyed itself. LCD TV technology had just been discovered and the design of the ark revised to include it. On TV the Christening ceremony for the first ark just finished. The first shuttle-rocket full of pioneers was about to leave the planet for the ark. The first ark was available in orbit for transit. A series of arks would eventually be built to transfer people from the inner planet to a more outer one. The arks existed to secure the future of the people before the star expanded into a red-giant and consumed the inner planet. Given that this people could build a space-ark she could plan accordingly. She intended to one day get off this planet.

She began preparing for a long flight. The escape pod would have to be packed full of supplies for up to 300 years of flight. She would have preferred more but that’s all that would fit in the pod. If she didn’t find a planet within 300 years she would be in trouble.

## The Arks

The arks were massive space vehicles; they had to be in order to move people and supplies efficiently and safely between planets. The arks travelled in a ten-year path between the two planets transferring people from one planet to the next. They spent about a year in orbit around each planet uploading and offloading people and supplies. That left about eight years flight time between planets. There were multiple ark ships working like a conveyor belt. The arks themselves never directly reached the surface of the planets. Instead supplies and people were rocketed to the ark at the inner planet and dropped from the ark when the next planet was reached. There were three ways one could get to travel on an ark: being specially selected by a committee, winning a lottery seat, or by paying a fee. It was estimated that as much as 80% of the population could afford to pay for a seat on an ark. It was not prohibitively expensive for many people. Not everyone chose to travel to the next planet. Exactly when their home planet would become completely uninhabitable was not known so some people chose to stay on, betting that the planet would outlast them.

For $50k they will get you onto the ark in orbit, transport you to the next planet, then drop you off in a drop-ship. No frills travel. So, it’s an affordable thing to do for many people. If you have more financial resources available, you can travel in better style. For instance, you can have your own private drop-ship or escape pod (that ideal appealed to Eileen) and better accommodations on the ark. Eileen began to ponder what she could get for some small tens of millions of dollars.

If you paid enough money you could have access to the whole ark including the command deck. Access to the ark’s facilities was allowed with appropriate access encoded onto a card-key. Cell telephones with suitable software installed on them could also be used as card-keys.

## Max

Max was Eileen’s most recent property manager, a clever fellow. He liked his booze and was occasionally drunk, but never drunk on the job. He came with good recommendations. Max’s list of responsibilities seemed short when listed on paper, but he did just about everything either directly or via subcontractor. He had to make sure the property was in good shape all the time. As compensation for his work Eileen gave him free rent in an apartment and access to a property management account. Max did a good job.

What’s the most bizarre thing you’ve seen in recent history? Max’s bar friend asked him after purchasing a round of drinks.

Max replied, “Well earlier this month I managed to jimmy the lock on my boss’s gymnasium. I got overly curious what she did in the gym. Having a gym all to yourself seemed kinda selfish to me. While it looks like she’s building some sort of hot-tub, if I didn’t know any better I’d say it was a spacecraft of some kind.” Max burped then said: “Shit! I shouldn’t have said that. Keep it a secret, will you?” Max was drunk, he just realized he revealed what his boss likely wanted kept secret.

## Mr. Bubbles

Mr. Bubbles was the code name for Eileen’s spacecraft project. Eileen had never undertaken the task of designing and building a spacecraft before. For Eileen it was a project that would occupy her time for the better part of a thousand years. Almost from the start she had decided to try and design and build her own spacecraft. While she could have had a lot of the work done by independent contractors there were parts of the project that she wanted to keep secret. It would be more difficult to do if there were more people involved. It might also be prohibitively expensive for what she wanted to accomplish. On the other hand, she was stuck with many man years of work to do by herself.

She was pleased with her work. There were a lot of different principles and disciplines involved. Nobody would believe that it was possible for a single person to do. Her spacecraft wasn’t going to be something that just crashed down from orbit; it was going to travel the stars.

Part way through the design of the spacecraft Eileen finally came up with a name, based on one of the major features of the craft. She decided to call it Mr. Bubbles for all the bubble works used. Mr. Bubbles would be a lander within a spacecraft within a spacecraft. There were layers to Mr. Bubbles.

### Staging Area

Eileen knew what the project would require. She knew she would need a big work area for her project. It also had to be enclosed so as not to attract the curious. She also intended to live comfortably while working nearby. She searched for the better part of two years for just the right location. One day she found it; a location that was less than ideal but workable. It was a larger site than she needed and too visible for her liking. It was a small school that was being decommissioned as a site too inefficient and therefore costly to educate children at. Building the school in the first place had been a poor decision by the government of the day and now they were looking to unload the property. The school was only about 30 years old. She got a deal on the property which was in a good part of the town. Mainly a residential area.

The school was located on a corner lot and ‘L’ shaped and had several acres of clear land attached for a playground / sports field. The school had about a dozen classrooms and a small gymnasium. She converted it into a 10 unit rental property; keeping part of the school beside the gym for her own apartment. She had most of the school grounds severed from the property and sold it. Eventually more housing went up around the school partially obscuring it from sight.

She wasn’t sure just what she’d be able to afford in the long run. So, she estimated roughly the resources she’d have available to complete her project. She was sure she could at least manage producing her own escape pod for travel. She reviewed the requirements for the escape pod. Other than dimensions most of the requirements had to do with docking to an ark. She designed the interface point of the escape pod to the ark around something called the ‘elite interface’. An elite interface supported all the lower level interfaces. By supporting the elite interface she’d be able to dock her escape pod at any pod docking point on the ark. Every point from those available only to the ultra-rich down to a “standard” pod interface point.

### Layers Within Layers

Mr. Bubbles was organized into several layers with the innermost layer being the most protected and containing the pilot’s seat. The piloting seat was inside of a helio-dropper, which was inside of an escape pod. The escape pod was inside of an antenna array / shielding layer.

The escape pod was surrounded by multiple layers of carefully shaped balloons. The balloons were all shaped like pie pieces and made of a mono-atomic polymer foil. The foil was only one atom thick allowing many balloons to be packed into a small surface area. Yet the foil was strong and stable. Fortunately, it did not have to last permanently, only long enough to assemble the spacecraft. Before inflation, the balloons would be folded up and packed against the side of the escape pod. When the spacecraft was being assembled the balloons would be filled with a carbon foam. Once the foam solidified the shape of the spacecraft would be fixed even if micro-meteorites were to penetrate the balloons. The foam was also made from neon gas. By charging the balloons electrically they could be made to glow eerily. The entire spacecraft was like a giant neon light.

While Eileen had gotten several hundred panels manufactured mainly for the antenna array, she decided to build the central escape pod entirely herself. She would build the pod in a simple fashion by coating a balloon with adamantium alloy spray paint. Then cut the resulting stiff balloon apart using a torch. It would be sliced into four wedge shaped pieces so that it could be shipped to the launch site by truck. The pieces would be resembled into the original balloon form in a hanger at the launch site.

Most of the technology she was using was “off the shelf” components some of which was assembled and integrated into the escape capsule in novel ways. The less stuff she had to develop herself the better.

A total of sixty panels would be placed around the circumference of the escape pod. Each panel covered six degrees of arc. One special panel containing the airlock door was already in place. The panels around the circumference of the spacecraft were full panels. On the rows above and below there were further rows of sixty panels tapered towards a pole of the spacecraft. The panels at higher and lower latitudes of the spacecraft needed to be smaller. They would have to be trimmed down to trapezoidal shapes.

One of the most time-consuming aspects of the build was coming up with all the balloons that would inflate to determine the final shape of the spacecraft. There were literally thousands of balloons that had to be manufactured.

### Navigation

Eileen wasn’t sure the idea would work. The navigation system was all theoretical and untested when she left, and it was a key system for her voyage. But it was based around a known technology. The navigation system seemed to work in computer simulations, but simulations weren’t real life. She had built a 1/10 scale model of it in her gymnasium and used it to track the wildlife in the area.

The system consisted of a set of panels mounted on the surface of the Mr. Bubbles, a navigational computer that interpreted signals discovered by the panels, and a specially designed spacesuit helmet.

The panels had multiple purposes like many of the things required for the space voyage. They acted as a shade to block out intense radiation and help cool the escape pod at the core of the spacecraft. The panel system was also a giant mechanical filter for interstellar signals. She would be positioned at the centre monitoring for signals. It worked in a manner similar to Cerebax the famous telepathy filter / amplifier. At the centre of Cerebrax was a liquid cooled helmet which increased brain capacity. In the case of her spacecraft she was travelling primarily cryogenically so the necessary cooling equipment was already present. The navigation system would allow her to detect a planet with intelligent life on it, or rather life on it like her own. Once she detected a planet with life on it, she could focus in with the radio system and look for technology. She wanted to go to a planet that at least had radio technologies but would settle for anywhere supporting life like herself.

### Panels

Eileen decided to manufacture panels of the spacecraft from an adamantium alloy. Adamantium was little known outside of military circles, but she knew all to well about it from first-hand experiences. It was deemed not that useful a material in industrial circles because it was too difficult to work with.

Pure adamantium was virtually indestructible when once cooled from its molten form. For her purposes it wasn’t a usable material. She needed to be able to cut and weld pieces of sheet metal for her project. Fortunately, she knew of an adamantium alloy that was extremely strong that could still be manipulated using a high-powered laser welding torch.

She contacted a steel panel fabricator and worked out a deal with them to fabricate panels made of a custom alloy.

“Add this bag of “magic sauce” to the alloy mix and don’t let the mix cool down.” Were her instructions. The magic sauce was refined adamantium ore.

The panels were very thin. Each panel had two paper thin surfaces made of an adamantium alloy. The two surfaces were waffled together. The panels looked like a piece of cardboard, but they were very strong and durable.

The panels were about 3 meters by 4 meters in size. The panels were only about 6 milli-meters thick. She ordered the panels all the same size from the manufacturer, so she could get a quantity discount. They could have come pre-cut but that would make storing and transferring the panels more difficult. Eventually, she would have to cut the panels to the correct shape. Given the adamantium alloy the panels were made of they were a pleasant tan color.

The first thing she did with a few of panels was make several boxes to use as shipping containers including a box for the space capsule. When boxed the capsule was non-descript; just a big rectangular box. That’s all that people would see.

### Blinky, Inky, Pinky and Clyde

Each of the probes were about the size of a basketball. Eileen had managed to assemble four of them in time for expedition and decided to color them and name them after the ghosts in Ms. Pacman. Blinky, Inky, Pinky, and Clyde. The color of the paint could be made to vary depending on an electric charge and they could be made to flash slowly just like the ghosts in pacman. At the core of a probe was a three-dimensional iron cross which could be charged to allow a magnetic field in different directions. The probes moved via magnetics or small thrusters using pressurized gas. The probes onboard computer had some intelligence allowing to some capacity to manoeuvre autonomously. The probe had a high-resolution camera and communications equipment onboard and were powered by a small nuclear battery. The probes could pick up audio signals and had speakers allowing two-way audio communications. Finally, the probes had a compartment allowing them to transport small items.

The probes were a multi-purpose tool like many parts of the spacecraft and formed part of the arsenal for the spacecraft. They could be made to explode if need be, by overloading the nuclear batteries.

Eileen had heard about so called quantum entanglement transceivers, but they weren’t a building block available in her toy box. She would have to make do with regular radio equipment.

Although quantum computers hadn’t been invented yet, transceivers based on quantum entanglement effects had been. Such transceivers allowed instant communications over any distance. The problem with the transceivers was that they only operated in matched pairs.

### Food and Water

Eileen knew it wouldn’t be comfort cuisine, but it would work. It would keep her alive and hopefully in good health. She planned her food supply as a bunch of small pills. She needed a supply of food for up to 300 years and at the same time it had to occupy a minimal amount of area on the spacecraft. After a while of recycling waste it would lose its nutritional value. Since she planned to travel sleeping cryogenically most of the time she really needed only about 1/30 the food. Or enough for 10 years. With luck she would find a new home long before 300 years passed. In theory she didn’t have to eat. Her super-healing would keep her alive. She had starved at some points in the past but never for such a long time. So, she didn’t want to find out the hard way how good her healing factor was.

Water was heavy, but also necessary. Eileen’s water supply would be contained in adamantium alloy flasks, allowing it to be under high pressure. She planned on cycling the water supply several times during the trip. Because it was impractical to transport all the water needed for a 300-year flight Eileen decided to build a waste-water recycler. The waste water recycler consisted of a couple of compartments to contain the waste and a modified microwave oven to purify the water.

### Armaments

Eileen wasn’t anticipating encountering anybody else during her long voyage, but she knew to prepare for the worst while hoping for the best. That’s why she decided to incorporate a laser cannon as part of the spacecraft.

### Power Supply

Primary power for the spacecraft was from a miniature nuclear reactor. The reactor was about the size of a small bookcase and located in the floor of the escape pod. Above the reactor was a lead plate designed to reduce the amount of radiation entering the escape pod.

### Space Suit

The suit was a standard average priced space suit from one of the manufacturers. She had modified the helmet by adding a heads-up-display (HUD). The Hud was a miniature projection TV with an image focused a few inches in front of the helmet. The projector could be wired into the capsules systems. She needed to be suited up in the escape pod. She was travelling in the escape pod to the ark. This was not recommended. But she didn’t want the expense of using a separate seat on the rocket.

One was responsible for one’s own well being if travelling in an escape pod. It took a couple of days to mount the escape pods on the rocket and make sure all the safety procedures had been followed.

Super-pressurized air. Adamantium based materials made all sorts of interesting gadgets possible. Since the materials were virtually indestructible it could be used for a flask to contain air pressurized to many atmospheres.

She used as king’s fortune worth of adamantium. Her escape pod may just be the most expensive object on the planet. It was a good thing she’d had the better part of a thousand years to prepare. Most of the pod was disguised as other innocuous materials. She did not want people asking questions about the makeup of the pod, or worse yet trying to steal parts of it.

This is my midnight email for today.

I think making something go wrong is another way of saying add events to the story. The events could be either good or bad. I’m no good at coming up with events. I can come up with plots but am no good at weaving a fabric of detailed intertwined events. For the most part everything goes okay for my character. Although I am having them locked outside during a spacewalk a result of a mix up as to which port the capsule should be docked to. There is a basic sequence of events that has to happen for the character to get from A to B. I suppose I could have someone steal the escape pod under construction. I guess bad events cause the reader to worry more about what’s going to happen, then they are relieved when everything works out okay. I forget what the theory of the readers feelings is called?

I have done a lot of my “research” by osmosis as opposed to explicit research. I’ve read a lot of different things over time. Discover magazine had a lot of info in it usually at higher levels, but I’ve found it started to repeat after a while. I think it would become too much of a chore for me if I had to research everything. Researching everything and making sure it’s accurate is call “hard fiction” I think as opposed to soft fiction. I try to be somewhere in-between.

I did a lot of research on computer architecture.

## Stolen

She couldn’t believe it. When she opened the door to the gymnasium it was gone. Gone. Just like that. Someone had stolen her escape pod. She looked at the empty work area in dismay. Now that she thought about it she realized that the theft had been easy to do. She’d setup the work area for the escape pod to make it easy to offload onto a truck. Everything had been organized to so that a single person could perform the job. Parts could be hoisted off the workbench then dragged via a track mounted on the ceiling outside to a flatbed truck. The flatbed truck could be parked directly outside of the gymnasium and the driveway led directly to the street. There was no fencing or other outdoor security. She was feeling naïve now.

She hoped the new owners of the escape pod knew what they were doing. You couldn’t simply fasten the pieces of the pod together using ordinary materials or it wouldn’t retain its structural strength.

Eileen tried to think of how someone would know what she was up to. As far as she knew, nobody knew what she was working on. Her work wasn’t visible from the outside. There were some windows in the gym, but they were about 15 feet off the ground. You couldn’t see into them from the outside without a ladder. She had been stealthy during the construction of Mr. Bubbles. Never using inordinate amounts of energy.

## Testing

Eileen carefully crafted and tested components for the spacecraft.

She decided to test one of the panels. She got out her trusty shotgun, aimed carefully and opened fire. The shot ricocheted off the panel. When she examined the panel, there was not a scratch or dent on it. Test passed. She decided not to paint the panels. Painting the panels would add extra weight to them, which meant consuming extra fuel maneuvering. Instead she got a handful of decals made to decorate the panels with information where needed.

## Last Days

She awoke to see a flashing time display on the alarm clock. That meant that the power had failed. She had no idea what time it was. The last solar flare had been particularly hard on planetary systems. Satellite systems had failed. Watching the news if you kept track you’d think it was an ordinary occurrence, but she decided it was time to leave. The solar flare had disrupted power to the whole eastern seaboard. Everything would be more difficult to accomplish from this point forward; things weren’t going to get better. This was the first time in her long life that she had ever done something like this. In all her long life she had never been to space, at least not that she could remember. She guessed there was a first time for everything.

She set her finances in order and sold her house. She’d been living in a forested area in a largish house. It had been a beautiful home to her, but now it was time to move on. Everything she could take with her had been loaded into an escape pod.

She was somewhat unsure of herself. She questioned her timing. Was she leaving too soon? Or should she have left already? She had to leave during this technological cycle; there wouldn’t be another one before the planet was consumed. She wanted to leave before there was a rush of humanity all trying to leave at the same time. Everything was ready to go, she was fully prepared, and a seat was available for her on the next ark leaving the planet. That their world would one day be absorbed by the sun was a fact that had been known for thousands of years. For the better part of a thousand years the arks had been available. Of course, she had known long before that that this day would come. She had lived through the rise and fall of many technological civilizations. Each one knowing about the stellar expansion. She was so old that she had lost almost all memory of her life. She was far older than what her brain had the capacity to remember. From time to time she kept mementos from her life but they never lasted. They got either lost or destroyed over time. Her favorite memento was a watch made almost entirely from adamantium. It made a good conversation piece as it was off by several minutes every day. When she first got it, it had been 100% accurate, but as she aged, the planet’s rotation slowed down as well. So now the watch was off by several minutes. Of course, the date system of the watch didn’t match the current standard.

The rocket ported six or seven custom escape pods, about 30 to 40 people and supplies to the ark. The rockets were small enough to limit losses if problems occurred, but also large enough to move a useful amount of material to the ark. Escape pods transferred by rocket detached and automatically docked to the ark on arrival. Traveling with one’s own escaped pod ran into the millions of dollars of investment, outside of the price range for most people travelling on the arks. She’d had just enough time to build up the resources required for her own escape pod.

Rather than drop down to the next planet she decided to leave the ark behind midway through it’s 10 year flight path. That gave her the best path for leaving the solar system.

Sitting inside a helio-dropper inside of an escape-pod for an estimated 40 years was not her idea of fun. But it was the best solution she had the time and resources to come up with. She had escaped a dying world by the narrowest of margins. Being roasted for an eternity inside an expanding star would be a lot less fun. On the world she left behind they only had the tech to move people to the next outer planet in the solar system. But she had developed the tech to move to another star system. This included micro-hyperdrive and food and environmental recyclers. The star was turning into a red-giant, expanding, and making the orbit of the planet uninhabitable. Moving to the next planet out was only a stop-gap measure. One day the star would expand to make that planet un-habitable as well. So She decided to go with a longer term solution; a move to a different solar system that was habitable for a longer period of time.

She knew in theory that she might be able to survive the trip on nothing at all. She had been made virtually immortal and indestructible, the result of a weapons program on the planet. She planned to do better than survive on nothing. If she would’ve had the time and resource she’d of made herself a space-yacht and travelled in style and comfort. However, that was out of the question in her current situation. She would be travelling for the most part in semi-suspended animation in a high-tech escape pod. The dropper cooled to just above the freezing point of water. Once a month an alarm would awaken her, and she could consume some food and check the systems before going back to sleep.

A build-your-own escape pod was an option for travelling onboard the ark for people who had the resources. The escape pods were all uniform in size and shape, but other than that one could design anything they wanted to.

One component of the helio-dropper was a multi-band radio transceiver. Also built into the dropper was a DVD player and game system; something to keep her entertained during her flight.

She snuck the micro-hyperdrive onboard by claiming it was an advanced navigational computer and sensor array. It certainly had the semblance of one. The hyperdrive was what allowed a fast transit from one star system to the next via hyper transit corridors between stars. Even given hyperdrive her voyage was bound to be a long one.

## Engineering Review Time

Eileen was anxious about Mr. Bubbles status as a viable spacecraft. She had been planning and building much of it over the years. If the spacecraft didn’t come off as acceptable to the ark organization she didn’t know what she’d do next.

Many escape pods were like quarters on a ship. They had a bed, desk and closet, a view of space and a small area to move around in. They were a private space to live in on the ark. Space on the ark was at a premium. Being able to supply your own living space on the ark was a sign of substantial wealth. The escape pods were meant to be useable as temporary housing once landed on the planet’s surface. Her escape pod was completely different. Having little more than a single seat available in the centre. It was packed with electronic equipment and storage flasks.

Eileen had invited Monte the ark agency’s engineer over a couple of times for coffee and to discuss her escape pod project. Eileen didn’t want any last-minute surprises that would prevent her from achieving her goal.

The ark agency wouldn’t simply allow one to put anything on the shuttle rocket. There were general engineering specs that had to be met. And an engineer would go over every aspect of the pod. For the most part they didn’t care how you met the specs as long as they were met. Mr. Bubbles had to pass review by the agency’s engineers or he would never fly. The agency wasn’t in the business of engineering the pods, only ensuring that they were safe. They allowed people developing their own pods to make their own stupid and sometimes costly “mistakes” without correcting them. Escape pods had to be safely mounted within the shuttle rocket with heavy duty bolts. The pods docking port had to interface properly with that on the shuttle rocket.

Monte was an older pod engineer who for decades had inspected the pods loaded onto shuttle rockets. Monte was a good engineer who had a wide background including understanding the illegals things that people sometimes attempt to do. Having looked at the specs for Eileen’s escape pod she became overly curious about some of it. For one thing a lot of the documentation was hand-drafted and dated up to the hundreds of years ago. It struck her as strange that one would build such an old escape pod, and she was after more recent drawings preferably done by a CAD system.

“The first big structure is this thing here. It seems to be at the core of the escape pod, so we’ll discuss it first. Is it an electro-magnet? Because if it is it’s probably not required.” Monte pointed to a pair of 7.5 cm diameter iron pipes capped at both ends with an iron plate. The pipes were about 2.5 m long and spaced far enough apart that an occupant wearing a spacesuit could just squeeze in-between them. “I assume it’s for magnetic shielding from radiation. The ark’s docking ports don’t require a powered magnetic lock. Eileen responded: “Yes, it is a big magnet, I wanted to be extra safe from radiation.” She left out the fact that it would be one system used to manoeuvre the pod.

“That looks almost like a cryogenic chamber to me.” Monte commented. “It is.” Eileen responded. Monte said: “It’s redundant and a waste of money. You don’t really need a cryogenic chamber of your own. It would be less expensive and likely safer to use one of the available chambers on the ark if you were planning to sleep for the trip. You’re also reducing the amount of materials you can transport in the pod by including that chamber. I’m assuming you won’t need the chamber once the pod hits the ground?” Monte partially hinted for more information. “The chamber stays. Let me worry about the costs.”. Was all Eileen could say. After a brief pause Monte continued. “This inflatable antenna array, it’s quite sophisticated. Are you sure it’s not gross overkill for the pod? Have you had a look at some of the other designs? The pods almost don’t need an antenna at all. They are hooked up to the ark’s systems for communications. Again, it’s something that’s redundant and costly.” Eileen replied again “It stays.” Monte’s response was: “It’s your money.”

“Okay, what’s this thing here?” Monte queried. “It’s radiation decay (nuclear) battery.” Eileen stretched the truth. It was really a small nuclear reactor, but it was made to look like a battery. “Woah.” Was Monte’s response. “Is money no object? I can’t think of a reason you’d need that much battery power for the short trip the escape pod makes under its own power.”. A little worried Monte asked: “Are you sure some engineer didn’t pass along an older long-distance spacecraft off to you as an escape pod? You may have been ripped off on engineering fees. Many of the pod systems seem to be gross overkill. I notice a lot of these documents are from hundreds of years ago. Some of this looks almost like the spacecraft parts used to travel to the outer planets hundreds of years ago.”

“Finally, that piece looks like a heavy-duty laser. It’ll have to be disconnected and locked in the armoury on the ark until you’re ready to disembark. I’m not going to ask why you think you need such a thing. There’s armoury storage fees.”.

Later that evening Monte reported back to the agency. “Poor gal. She was likely ripped off by a million bucks or more in engineering fees. All kinds of unnecessary components to the pod. But she’s still willing to pay, as far as I can tell it should be safe and work fine.” Mr. Bubbles had passed the engineering inspection, not with flying colors, but as a useable escape pod.

I heard your plan was to travel onboard the escape pod to the ark. That’s highly unusual. We can’t provide any guarantee of safety at all. Escape pods and other cargo are loaded days before lift-off. On an escape pod you would have to provide for yourself for several days. People are loaded onto the shuttle rocket at the last moment. It’s typically less than a days wait before lift-off.

## Moving Day

It was time to take some risk. Eileen did not want to waste the time moving all the equipment herself, so she decided to hire a number flatbed trucks and truckers to assist her. There were about five truckloads of materials to move. She planned on driving the first truckload of materials herself and acting as a guide to the spaceport. On the first truckload she placed all the materials that could be considered hazardous. That included the miniature nuclear reactor and fuel rod materials. She also had a number of flasks of various substances under high pressure. She enclosed everything within the escape pod casing which was made of adamantium alloy.

Everything was encased in non-descript boxes made from 3m x 4m adamantium alloy panels. From the outside there was no telling what was being shipped. The boxes were chained down on the flatbed trucks.

The gymnasium was full of equipment. We’re moving the contents of this gymnasium to hanger 3A at the spaceport. The spaceport was a two-hour drive from her home.

## Space Port

The space-port was similar in arrangement to an air-port except that the rockets were located further apart than airplanes would be. There were a locker rooms where people could put on their space-suits. Space suits were mandatory for the flight to the ark. Even though people would be travelling in a pressurized passenger compartment, wearing a space-suit was an extra safety precaution.

She rented a hanger for two weeks for the capsule at the space-port. She figured it might take a few days to put finishing touches on and load up the escape pod. Since it took a couple of days to load the pod onto the rocket plus a day to get into orbit plus perhaps another day to transfer the pod to the ark, she anticipated having to spend the better part of the week onboard the pod. The last item loaded onto the pod would be herself in a space-suit.

## Embark

About half of the cargo area was loaded with her gear. In a sense this was her rocket, she was the one who paid the most to get into space on this rocket.

She arrived at the hanger early in the morning, as soon as she could get in. She didn’t have a moment to spare in her plans. This day was different. It was the day that she boarded the escape pod and it left for the rocket.

Five more years to go then I’m out-ta here was what she thought as she stepped onboard the ark.

## Transit

There was something approaching from behind travelling much faster than she was travelling. She could make out several of what appeared to be the same type of object on the long range scanner. If they weren’t careful there could be a collision. Finally, close enough to view, the first object appeared to be pyramidally shaped. Someone else had built their own hyperdrive ship. Looking past the pyramid, following objects looked like a giant chocolate burr. They were generally spherical in shape. If she didn’t know any better, she’d say it was a wrecking yard collapsed into a spherical shape due to it’s presence in space. Either it was debris from the planet or several people had built their own hyperdrive ships based on the same theme.

Apparently, she had the slowest hyper-drive ship of the group. She carefully manoeuvred her space-craft towards the edge of the hyper-space transit corridor. She didn’t want to exit the corridor, or her journey would be long indeed. The pyramidally shaped vehicle went whizzing past. Strangely the wrecking yard ships slowed down and began following her. Were they aliens or the last refugees from the planet she wondered.

Eileen spent some time studying numerous radio signals. Bundles of energy coming from different directions in the hyperspace corridor. One day she found what she thought was a T.V. signal. It was a signal containing two different sync pulses, one much faster than the other.

As she slept she wasn’t entirely unaware.

## Survey Says

As the spacecraft approached Earth Eileen could learn more about the planet. She’d been watching T.V. from the planet for several weeks now and learned a lot. It was amazingly similar to the world she left behind.

It was time for her to plan her approach to the planet. She wanted to orbit the planet several times to gather information on the best landing location before attempting a landing.

As the spacecraft orbited, photographs of the Earth’s surface were being taken. Eileen studied the photos using her brain, rather than a computer analysis. She noted that the atmospheric cloud patterns didn’t correspond to the rotation of the planet. That was a bit unusual. She checked the rotation of the planet and confirmed that coming out of the hyperspace corridor the spacecraft was orbiting in the direction of the planet’s rotation. That would make things a little easier. Had she lucked out, or had things been engineered that way she wondered?

Eileen did not want to land in a highly populated area. It would cause to many problems for her. At the same time she didn’t want to land in a resource poor area of the planet. Landing in the middle of a large desert or ocean wouldn’t be very comfortable. She decided to try landing a significant number of degrees of latitude above or below the equator. A quick review of the planet’s surface indicated it would be much easier to land above the equator as that’s where most of the landmass was located. She picked her landing point on the edge of a large body of fresh water, the worked backwards from the landing point to determine what flight path’s she would need.

## Planetfall

The timing had to be just right. Eileen knew she couldn’t just leave the spacecraft in orbit; doing so would reveal her presence. A 30 m ball in orbit would be easily spotted. She decided to have the spacecraft loop past the Earth and then end up somewhere in the asteroid belt. She was going to park Mr. Bubbles at a spot where it might be possible to retrieve him from in the future. Mr. Bubbles would not be simply abandoned to space. It would be treated as a near-Earth flyby asteroid. She had to program the flight plan of the spacecraft accordingly. At the same time dropping in the helio-dropper from the spacecraft as it passed the Earth wasn’t going to be easy. She had to plan the flight so that the Earth’s gravity would capture the helio-dropper or she would be left in space in only the helio-dropper.

She would try to splashdown in Lake Huron close to the eastern shore. Given all the fresh-water resources in the area, the local inhabitants might be more accustomed to visitors from space.

The escape pod was painted to look like an asteroid. It had the visual and radio profile of an asteroid. It could be tracked by radar and cameras, but the evidence would point to simply a space-rock. The objective was to not get shot down by local authorities when the spacecraft appeared in orbit. A hunk of space-rock falling to the ground didn’t get near as much attention as a foreign space-craft would.

The escape pod was travelling 300 kilometers per hour laterally when it split in two revealing the helio-dropper. While splitting in two the escape pod looked like a fireball exploding. The heat was taken away by the escape pod casing. The escape pod was designed to burn up in the atmosphere and crash on the ground as an unrecognizable chunk of metal. At 300 kph lateral movement, the helio-dropper wasn’t functioning very well. 150 kph would have made things much easier.

The helio-dropper looked somewhat like a large bullet hanging downwards with a fan blade on top. It was a specialized space suit specifically designed for dropping down to the surface of a planet from space.

The helio-dropper wasn’t really designed for lateral flight. It was designed to replace a parachute in most circumstances. It had better flight characteristics that a parachute. It could operate properly at higher altitudes. The helio-dropper had a smaller profile than a parachute, making it less of a target. The helio-dropper was somewhat like a gyrocopter.

Oh, yes, hamburger joints and other fast food places.

One of the thoughts passing through her mind was how well she would fare selling technology. This world seemed advanced already meaning the financial resources she could generate by selling technological secrets might be limited.

The skin of the helio-dropper was made from a fibre-glass like material and covered with an extremely durable metallic foil.

## Docking

“We’re not doing that one there.” The captain pointed to a docking manifest. “Give her an elite docking port instead; they’re not all in use and they have wider clearances.” He spoke to the first officer. Elite docking ports were an order of magnitude or more expensive than regular ones. They were meant to rake in more money for the agency from people who could afford it.

“Docking to port R7K2” displayed in the status bar of the command screen for her escape pod. That meant the command module had received instructions to dock to ring 7 port K2. It was originally planned for her to dock two rings less privileged, on ring R9. But it turned out that there was no more room for escape pods on less privileged docking rings. The agency had overbooked, counting on a few cancellations which never occurred. Since her escape pod was elite capable it could be docked on any ring. There wasn’t anything for her to do besides send back an acknowledge signal. All she had to do was sit and wait for the automated systems to perform the docking. The automatic system consists of a crane or “arm” that grabbed the escape pod off the shuttle rocket moved it to the proper position then attached the pod to the ark. Moving the escape pod around took the better part of a day. It was somewhat of a boring day for her. She could watch via camera what was going on. The crane was moving the pod slowly across space. Finally, with a thud and a click the docking port of the pod was properly engaged with that of the ark. That had gone well. She’d spent a lot of time designing and testing the interface to the ark.

She signalled the ark’s command centre with a confirmation that docking was okay. A few minutes later she could feel the crane detach from the pod and begin to move away. She needed permission now to proceed to unfold the “antenna array”. Having got permission from ark command, she pressed a button. Explosive bolts holding the casing onto the escape pod detonated. The casing unfolded slightly. Next, she activated the valves to generate the carbon foam mix that would fill the balloons surrounding the pod. The escape pod began expanding. That was all she could do at the moment, it was a matter of waiting until the pod had fully expanded before doing anything else. Even though the foam expanded rapidly, it still took the better part of a day for the escape pod to expand to it’s full shape. Once the pod reached its final shape she decided to charge the pod up and activate the pod’s systems from the external power source supplied by the ark. The pod’s internal power source wouldn’t be activated until she was ready to leave the ark. Charging the pod up would cause it to light up and provide some measure of EM shielding. She decided to wait another 12 hours for the foam to harden before leaving the escape pod.

Eileen’s next task was to pressurize the spacecraft at a low psi with air from one of the flasks stored onboard, and check for leaks.

She decided to exit the escape pod and have a look around the ark. Looking in front of her, the escape pod door was now about 12 m further away, at the end of a hallway lit with eerie blue neon light.

She turned the handle on the door of the escape pod to open it and pushed the door to the side. She could see the airlock door of the ark directly ahead. She climbed towards the airlock and swiped her pass key on the keypad. The light on the keypad flashed red. Her pass key wouldn’t open the airlock. It was valid only for ring 9 or above and she was docked on ring 7. Idiots. They hadn’t given her clearance to enter the ark at ring 7. Eileen checked the air gauge on her suit. She’d been suited up for the better part of a week now, and the air gauge was reading over three-quarters empty.

Her first thought was to dial up the command bridge for the ark on her phone. She pulled out her cell telephone, turned it on and it promptly displayed “no signal”. Her cell telephone didn’t work. Of course, the cell telephone was ground based and this was taking place in orbit. Cell telephones were supposed to be available for use on the ark. But apparently something was wrong with the system, or her phone.

Her next thought was to use the system associated with the docking ports. She had to clamber back into the pod to use the comm system. She hoped somebody was monitoring the comm system. Eileen had to connect the comm port on her space-suit to one of the input ports for the docking system. With that done she tried dialing the command centre.

The comm systems phone rang and rang without answer. Eileen did not know what to expect in terms of service. She decided to keep ringing the phone until someone answered, while she tried to think of alternative ways out of her situation. She had plenty of air and food in the capsule, she could last a long time. She supposed she could try breaking in, but she wasn’t that desperate yet.

The call centre guy was worried as he explained the situation. “The phone for R7K2 keeps ringing. There isn’t supposed to be anybody docked to R7K2. When I try and answer the phone I don’t get a proper response. I’m assuming it’s a glitch of some sort, but what if there’s somebody trapped outside there? So, I decided to transfer the problem over to engineering.”

The problem finally reached the work list for the chief engineer. He swore. It should have been dealt with sooner. He assigned an engineer to trace the circuit going to docking port R7K2, while he went directly to the docking port to see if he could figure out what was going on.

## Space-walk

One of the things she ensured that she’d be able to do is assemble the navigational antenna array using a number of space-walks. She needed permission from the ark people to perform space-walks. She got permission prior to even constructing the escape pod.

The sprayer was red-hot. Wearing gloves while using the sprayer was mandatory. In fact, a hazardous substances suit needed to be worn. Adamantium was indestructible; you didn’t want to get any on you by accident.

A spherical balloon was used as the framework for the escape pod. It was inflated to a high-psi then spray painted with an adamantium alloy. When the adamantium cooled it left a virtually indestructible surface. She intended to spray multiple layers of the adamantium paint just to be safe. The result would be a surface only a fraction of an inch thick.

The surface of the balloon was positively charged with a Van de Graaff generator and the adamantium alloy spray was negatively charged so that it would be attracted to the surface of the balloon. That way there would be less drifting of the adamantium spray onto unintended surfaces.

I have her spacecraft being followed by seven smaller spacecraft in the hyperspace corridor. Since her spacecraft looks like a small white planetoid, I’m calling the event “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”. The dwarfs switch from following a pyramidally shaped spacecraft to following hers and they follow her all the way to Earth where everyone crashes down.

Chose a small school with a gymnasium for her abode, in part so I could draw analogies to Xavier’s school for the gifted. There’s a distant connection for the reader and I’m trying to use the idea of some synchronicity in the plot. Similar events happening on different worlds.

Hey look. It’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. She had to admit she could understand the analogy.

She checked the frequency spectrum analyzer. There was a bundle of energy around the 2.4 GHz bandwidth. She thought about it for a moment then laughed. She realized they were just using standard 2.4 GHz wireless telephones to communicate. Then she frowned. She didn’t have an easy way to hack into the communications. She hadn’t planned on anyone she might encounter on using a standard technology. She figured she needed generic communications devices, so she decided on a multiband AM/FM radio transceiver. She had it connected to a computer that could decode or encode messages as needed.

There were 12 remote camera assemblies to install. While there only needed to be four to be able to see around the entire spacecraft she planned some redundancy in anticipating failures over time.

Each panel was to have a small cylindrical electromagnet attached to it that looked like an oversized hockey puck. The core of the magnet was an iron carbon polymer.

There were also 12 thruster assemblies to install, the number chosen with the same reasoning as the cameras. The thrusters were simply driven by compressed gas. They were meant only for fine-tuning movements occasionally.

The first officer wanted to know what in the hell she was doing? She had obtained permission to install an antenna array on her escape pod. The first officer knew that, but it seemed that she had stretched the definition of “antenna array” far outside of what was expected. The first officer had anticipated that it would be a job accomplished with minimal fuss over the course of one or two spacewalks. There were no plans for a prolonged series of spacewalks.

You’ll die from radiation exposure. No, I won’t is what she said.

Where did it come from? Several people had seen the 30 m sphere that seemingly just appeared one day.

I would like to know what in the hell you are doing?

The pod extended about 15 m to either side of the docking port. To ensure that she had room to manoeuvre around she had allowed for 20 m. It meant she had to rent three consecutive pod ports for the trip.

“What is that?” She wondered. She didn’t think there would be anything visible except the planet. However, she could just make out a rectangular shape in the distance. She could train one of the long-range cameras on it to both get a better image and test the camera equipment. It looked like a bridge with spacecraft hanging beneath it. Obviously, it was a construction dock of some sort.

While she’s travelling through space:

“She checked the frequency spectrum analyzer. There was a bundle of energy around the 2.4 GHz bandwidth. She thought about it for a moment then laughed. She realized they were just using standard 2.4 GHz wireless telephones to communicate. Then she frowned. She didn’t have an easy way to hack into the communications. She hadn’t planned on anyone she might encounter on using a standard technology. She figured she needed generic communications devices.”

## The Hyperspace Corridor

It didn’t show up using ordinary sensors, but it did show up quite clearly like lightning bolts on the newly discovered quantum radar. It was there then not there. But it was a consistent path, like a stream.

“There’s some sort of space anomality right about here.” The researcher pointed to an area above the earth on a large map. The government did not want it generally known that they had the use of quantum radar; at the same time, they might need to mobilize a significant number of people to work on the space anomality.

Officially, the first thing that happened resulting in the discovery of the hyper-space corridor was that a wrench that had been magnetically charged was let go accidently by an astronaut. Unofficially, releasing the wrench was intentional; it was part of a secret mission. The wrench drifted in space a few yards. The astronaut claimed that the wrench then took off at high-speed before it could be retrieved. To validate the unusual claim the same thing was tried with a camera instead of a wrench. Of course, the proper type and makeup of camera just happened to be available during the space mission. The camera went flying off at high speed when it reached the same point of space that the wrench had been at. Only a few seconds of imagery from the camera were retrieved, but it showed the camera flying out past several planets. The camera was travelling far faster than what the speed of light should allow.

Eileen found out about the hyper-space corridor from a friend in the space agency. She also knew of the hyper-space corridor because of the destruction and disappearance of a space station during a previous technological age of the planet. It had been one of the triggers for a nuclear holocaust that followed. One state claimed that another state blew up their space station. Part of the propaganda that eventually led into war. Visual footage from the station showed that the station sheered in half with one half disappearing rapidly into the distance. The claim was that some sort of magnetic weaponry was in use.

## The Promenade

Eileen now had access to ring 7 and above and she intended to use it. On ring 8 was the promenade deck of the ark. It was a bit like a space-station. The deck had among other things a bar, an observation area, and a games room. It was the entertainment section of the ark. Given that people were trapped on the ark for the better part of a decade some form of entertainment needed to be present.

Playing pool on the ark was interesting. The balls would roll in a slight arc when aimed straight due to the ark’s motion and artificial gravity. It took a few games of pool to master shots on the ark.

In one corner of the games room where several older stand-up style video games including one of Eileen’s favorites Ms. Pacman.

## Tourists

The older man remarked that the spacecraft wasn’t there the day before. His friend responded that it was, it was just a small box though. It had been fastened to a docking port just the day before. Several people gathered at the promenade observation area to view. Mr. Bubbles was now visible from the promenade. It was a surprise to some people as the outer panels weren’t installed yet Mr. Bubbles glowed visibly with an eerie blue light.

The captain was a clever fellow. It seems he’d chosen the docking port so that her work could be easily monitored.

Eileen’s work on her spacecraft would become a topic of daily conversation.

## Space Forces Team

Armed forces speculative hyperspace corridor drive ships.

The general conceded that there was the possibility that it was an actual construct and not a natural phenomenon. As a construct they would have to determine its purpose. For instance, was it an invasion route? If it was just a natural phenomenon they still had to investigate it more closely.

Senior members from all forces argued for the presence of members from their respective force. A mixed crew including members of all the different forces was agreed upon.

The armed forces needed a solution now, not five years from now. The fastest route to an exploratory vehicle was to modify an existing one. Space force decided upon modified stratospheric bombers as a base vehicle. The bombers already had the capacity to be flown to orbital heights as one or two accidents had shown. They could not reach orbital velocity however. With suitable modifications they could be made space-worthy. They were to be modified on the ground then flown to orbit. The modifications would allow the bombers to achieve orbit. Once in orbit final modifications would take place and the bombers would be refuelled.

## The Fritz Mobile

Fritz was a genius who liked to think long term. Fritz knew that in the long term a liveable place had to be found around another star. He also knew that other people would be thinking the same way, especially the immortals. He intended to follow other folks out of the star system. The system of arks built to transfer people outwards was a great idea, but it did not provide the solution that Fritz desired. Fritz decided to travel on his own terms.

Fritz’s spacecraft would be composed primarily of junk. Looks like a pile of junk because it is essentially a pile of junk. He wanted the spacecraft to have the appearance of being just a dense field of debris. It was his method for a stealthy spacecraft.

Mithaven military base was home to about 3,500 ground troops located in South-Central Ontario. Allied forces were always wondering why there were so many troops stationed in the area in a state of readiness where military conflict was unlikely to occur. The government’s response was simply that it was in the interest of national security; no detailed explanations were given. What was kept secret was the discovery of a crashed space capsule in the early 1930’s. After a space capsule was discovered landing in 1928 the government realized what a potential security risk was, and what a valuable resource they had to protect. It was the fresh-water in the area. It was realized that fresh-water was highly valuable for spacecraft and the largest reservoirs of fresh water on the planet were all located around Southern Ontario. Southern Ontario was potentially a target for extra-terrestrial landings.

Wire was commonly made from a gold alloy. An alloy was used rather than pure gold in order to make it harder and more durable. Although wire was sometimes composed of other substances for instance aluminum, it was not commonly done. Making wire out of copper was prohibitively expensive. Copper was a rarely found in mineral deposits. Gold was much more common.

Eileen decided to stay in orbit for a while to try and learn some things about the planet.

Now to head down to the ground.

I’m not sure what to do with Eileen’s spacecraft arriving at Earth’s orbit. I was going to have it burn up in the atmosphere but that doesn’t make sense. The spacecraft can’t be very easily destroyed because it’s made of adamantium alloy. It’s also 30 m diameter so it’d be noticeable not too long after it entered orbit. I don’t think it can just be left sitting in orbit, or everybody would know about it.

I suppose I could have it treated like an asteroid, and zooming past the Earth back out of orbit again while Eileen (the main character) jettisons in the helio-dropper down to Earth.

It just seems like such a shame to waste a good spacecraft by having it abandoned to space. It needs a good parking space / ending.

Another alternative is to have the 30 m spacecraft crashing all the way down to Earth. But that makes the helio-dropper part of the story unnecessary.

Tick. Tick tick. The radiation monitor was counting off ticks slowly, but it had grown more rapid recently. The more ticks there were the more intense the radiation must be. She had to locate the source of the ticks soon and steer away from it. She decided to launch a space probe in the direction of the radiation source. Cylde had the best optics and she wanted a good look at the source, so she decided to assign Clyde to the task.

Blink, Pinky, Inky, and Clyde.

Oh my God! She said to herself, “I know what that is. It’s incredible”. She had to get on the horn to her comrades immediately and warn them. “You’ll want to steer clear of that one.”.

“How do you know that?”

“It says so on the side of the object, spelled out in plain English.” “I know you guys might be interested in it, but it’s got warning labels all over it and it’s a little bit out of our league I think.”

It was massive, the size of a small planetoid. And spelled out carefully in easily readable text in a number of different languages was a warning. “This is a galaxy building bomb. Do not approach.” It was a device large enough to create an entire galaxy if it was set off. It was somewhat awe-inspiring and she took a moment to appreciate. How would they know to write the message in English? She wondered of the bomb’s builders. They must have been surveying surrounding star systems.

She ordered Clyde to return back to the space capsule.

It seemed like a really stupid idea at first, but once she had worked out the details, she was quite pleased with herself. The space capsule’s movement could be \*manually\* controlled with a set of levers and cranks. The craft did not have to manoeuvre rapidly in the vastness of space. It should need only fine-tuning. Changes in the flight path had to take place well in advance of a target location and small incremental changes in the flight could cause large differences in the final destination because of the distances travelled.

When I was a boy, I discovered that thoughts themselves have mass. Thus, someone trapped in a gravity well may experience the cumulative thoughts of those on the outside. Thoughts are measurable with the proper equipment.

Very few people understood it; the junk collector’s religion.

## Alarms on Earth

The alarm had sounded. Astronomers had discovered a 30+ meter meteorite was on a collision course with Earth. It wasn’t threatening a global catastrophe, but it could very well destroy an entire city if it crashed in the wrong place. The meteorite was first spotted in the vicinity of Mercury.

It appeared the meteor had broken up somewhat, on radar it showed the main mass followed by a number of smaller pieces.

The plan was for Mr. Bubbles to lead the way into the atmosphere. Mr. Bubbles could take the heat and blaze a trail for the others to follow.

Mr. Bubbles was glowing blue white, being heated by atmospheric friction. Mr. Bubbles being made largely of adamantium could probably survive the heat of re-entry, but Eileen wasn’t sure that she could. Although significantly shielded from the outside, eventually the interior of the space-craft would heat up. She decided to let Mr. Bubbles absorb as much of the re-entry heat as he could, then depart Mr. Bubbles via the helio-dropper.

She watched in dismay as Mr. Bubbles zoomed overhead. Large arcs of electricity formed between Mr. Bubbles and the ground. She hadn’t anticipated that. The arcs were starting small fires all over the place. Mr. Bubble was charged with enormous amounts of static electricity. He hadn’t been grounded to same charge level as the Earth.

It was like rats jumping off a sinking ship only in slow motion.

The outer skin of the modified stratospheric bombers was burning off. They had used an ablative armour on the aircraft. It was dissipating the heat of re-entry well. Something that Mr. Bubbles being made of adamantium couldn’t do.

Eileen radioed her collegues, “Head for the third planet out. There’s life there.”.

“How do you know that?” was the response she received back.

The vehicles had all been redirected in that general direction.

Mr. Bubbles looked like some kind of giant grenade.