

Jacob stood in the doorway looking down at the two boxes on his bedroom floor. How in the world was he supposed to put all of the belongings he wanted to keep in two 3 foot by 2 foot boxes? He began to wonder if his dad had been thinking straight when he accepted a free relocation to Phaedra and a year's salary signing bonus.

"Might as well start somewhere," he said. He smiled to himself as he began going through his desk drawer. Memories of previous birthdays surrounded him as he was reminded of when he wanted to buy everything in the local toy store for his fifth birthday. It always seems like when you don't have very much money, you want everything and when you have money to spend, you can't decide what to buy. If only he could buy another box.

"How ya doin', champ?" asked Jacob's father as his tall frame filled the doorway. At 6'5", he towered over his 13-year-old son, now debating whether to take or throw his third-grade softball throw trophy. Jacob threw it up and into the trash can by the door. Swish. "That good, eh?"

Jacob didn't look up. His dad shifted his weight to the other foot and Jacob braced himself for another lecture about how it was a great opportunity. It didn't come. Instead, his dad produced another trash can from the hallway and placed it beside the half-filled one already in the room. After an

uncomfortable silence, he too went to go through his own belongings.

Jacob worked in his room for another hour until both of the trash cans in his room were overflowing. Carefully, one-by-one, he managed to drag each of the cans out the front door, down the elevator, and to the apartment's trash receptacle. After opening the steel gate, he emptied the contents of the trash cans into shallow pit, closed the door, and pressed the button. In an instant, two giant flames ignited from the sides of the container and completely burned and melted the contents of the cans, leaving a pool of molten metal and ash that was quickly vacuumed away to the recycling plant.

Jacob placed one of the trash can inside the other as he sighed and went back up the elevator to continue throwing away everything important to him. As he made his way around the outside of the room, finally he came to his floor-ceiling bookcase. Now this was going to be a hard one. Jacob had always been an avid reader, and many of the books were presents from his friends, his dad, and even his mom. He knew each of the books in the bookcase were really not necessary to have in hard-copy form since he could simply call it up on a terminal, but having real books in his room always made it special. Jacob began going through the books on the bottom shelf, tossing one after another painfully into the trash can. He paused for a

moment when he came an oversized hard-back book called "How to paint baby animals." He opened the cover and read the inscription: "To Jacob on your sixth birthday. Love always, Mom."

Jacob ran his fingers over the word "mom" a few times and closed his eyes. It had been almost six years since she died, and it was becoming more and more difficult to hear her voice. He could still see her in his mind, though. He remembered how his dad came home from work that day in July and explained that mommy was hurt at work and wouldn't be coming home. Even though he was older now, Jacob still heard those words as a frightened, sad six-year-old. *Mommy isn't coming home.* Later, Jacob learned his mom was killed in an accident testing the new C6 drive engines for interplanetary travel. She and his father had met on the job fifteen years ago while working at Global Mechanics. At 13, Jacob could finally understand that his father was hurt by her death too. It's funny how your view of the world around you changes as you get older. One minute you are devastated at all the things that have happened to you, and then one day you wake up to realize what you are going through is just a small fraction of what those around you are experiencing.

Jacob closed the cover of the book and placed it in the trash can. Gulping down a cry, he continued to empty the bottom

shelf and then the next one until the intercom rang. Jacob looked over at the vid panel and saw it was Chris, one of his best friends at school. Jacob reached up and touched the answer button on the vid and Chris appeared on the monitor. Upside-down.

Chris was always playing some kind of a joke on the vid. Sometimes, like now, he would be standing on his head when he placed the call, while other times he would be wearing a mask, disguising his voice, or even using a hologram of this years Sports Illustrated Super Model around himself. Chris had been his best friend since kindergarten and was always there to cheer him up. "Hi, Chris." Jacob said, craning his neck so he could almost see his friend right-side up. "Does the extra blood running to your head make you smarter?"

"Ha, Ha Ha." Chris laughed sarcastically as he broke his hand-stand and thumped to the floor. "How's it going? You saving me any good stuff?" Chris pulled out a chair from his desk and sat down.

"Sorry, dad wants all of this done tonight so I've been doing more throwing than saving." Jacob turned from the monitor for a second and grabbed a stack of small paperback books from the top shelf. "I can save you the Asimov books, though." Jacob set the stack of books from his favorite author on the floor at the point furthest away from the trash bins. He

wanted there to be no question as to whether they were to be thrown out or saved. "That cool?"

"Yeah," Chris said. "Hey, can you come over for pizza tonight? My mom and dad said I could invite a few friends over to help celebrate." Celebrate. That's one word for it, Jacob guessed. He knew what Chris meant, but there was something about saying it out loud that almost made Jacob break down crying. Chris wanted to get the guys together to celebrate. Celebrate him leaving. Celebrate him not only moving away from the school, the city, the province, the world but the solar system. Yeah, celebrate was not the right word.

"I'll have to ask my dad. He really wants me to finish my room tonight." Looking around his room, Chris knew he would be able to finish quickly if he wanted to. Everything and anything was going into the trash bins. "Can you hang on, I'll go ask." Chris nodded ok and then promptly started spinning around in his desk chair while looking up at the ceiling. Jacob shook his head and bounded down the hallway to his dad's room. "Dad? Can I go over to Chris's and have dinner with the guys? You know, one last time?"

Jacob's dad turned around and saw his son in the doorway. He could tell by the look in Jacob's eyes that he really needed to go, to say his goodbyes on his own terms. "Sure, champ. Be back by eight thirty. You need a ride?" Jacob smiled,

obviously surprised his dad gave him the green light to go goof off for a couple of hours. Jacob bit his lip.

“Uhhhhhhhhhhhh, I’ll go ask!” Jacob ran down the hallway and came back to his room and asked Chris if he could get a ride with one of the other guys or if his dad needed to bring him. Chris stopped twirling around in the chair and took a moment for his eyes to focus on the vid.

“Can you take the jet?” The jet was the fastest way to get around the city. Privately owned and operated, there was never any down time since being inoperable for construction or repair would mean huge financial loss. The system was designed so that if one track was out of commission for repair, the system would re-route all the traffic to a nearby section. Jacob had seen pictures of earlier versions of the jet that were called Subways in one of his classes at school.

Jacob ran once again down the hall and asked his dad if he could take the jet over to Chris’s house. His dad nodded and said he would pick him up though, at eight thirty sharp. Chris jumped up in the air for joy, and as he did so looked a little embarrassed at behaving so childlike. Then he sprinted back to his room. “Yeah, dad says its ok. I’ll be there quick.” Chris gave a peace sign with his hand and Jacob grabbed his identification badge, the stack of Asimov books, and a jet token off his dresser door. He stopped once again at his dad’s

room. "Thanks, dad. See you in a bit." Then he was off again, bounding out the door, down the elevator and across the street to the jet station.

Jacob's dad stopped working in his own room and went to check on his son's. He looked around and saw the bare walls and half-emptied bookshelf. He knew the location of every book on the shelf it seemed. Glancing at the trash can, he spied a hardbound book with a green cover. He pulled it up from under the other books and opened the front cover. *Love, Mom*. He knew moving the Phaedra was going to be hard for Jacob. What he didn't realize was how hard it was going to be to leave almost everything behind. He ran his fingers over the indentation the pen left in the book's page. He traced the word Mom and closed the cover. He walked back to his own room, opened up his moving box and gently placed the book in the bottom. A surprise for when they reach their new home.

Jacob reached the jet station entrance and scanned his identification badge and dropped in a token. This was the first year Jacob had been allowed to take the jet by himself, and it always made him feel cool to stroll in through the doors by himself. Once he made it through the identification doors, he stepped on the moving sidewalk and almost dropped the books he was carrying for Chris. After a few seconds, a jet car matched his speed and he stepped in and scooted to the middle of the

seat. The car showed him a list of his most recent destinations and prompted Jacob to either choose one of the routes on the screen or enter a new destination. He clicked on Chris's name and instantly the doors clicked and pressurized. Jacob always held his breath when the jet car was about to start. Nothing, nothing then *whooooosh!*

The jet car has no windows, and Jacob acknowledged that was a good thing. Moving over 200 miles-per-hour, the jet cars were completely computer controlled and independent. They zigged and zagged among a series of 10 separate tracks throughout the city. It took a lot of computer power to keep track of hundreds of cars going that fast without any accidents. The cars themselves could withstand an impact with another car or object with each going 300 miles-per-hour, so they were very safe, and if something did happen, the worst would be a dozen or so cars being thrown off the track and the mild inconvenience of their passengers.

Within a minute Jacob arrived across town at the jet station down the street from Chris's house. He liked going to Chris's house because it was so big. All Jacob had ever known was a small two bedroom apartment building, but Chris had one of the biggest houses on the south side of town. Chris didn't talk much about what his parents did, but Jacob's dad told him they worked for the government. They were nice, but sometimes almost

too nice. Jacob reached the door and pressed his finger on the vid screen. Chris's face popped on the vid again. "Hey, man. Come on up." The door buzzed and opened and Jacob walked in.

Jacob was halfway up the stairs to Chris's room when Chris's mom yelled hello from beneath him. Jacob leaned over the railing. "Hi Mrs. Kasperall." Jacob did one of his make-parents-think-I'm-cute smiles and waved to her from the staircase.

"Good to see you, Chris. We're going to miss you. You'll have to let us know how you are doing when you get settled." She smiled back at him.

"Yeah, I will. Thanks again for having me over." Jacob ran up the rest of the stairs and almost laid himself flat when he took a turn too fast when he reached the top. "Chris?" Jacob didn't see Chris in his room. Of course, with as messy as it was, Chris could be standing in the middle of the room waving both arms and Jacob might have missed him.

"In here!" Chris yelled from the playroom down the hall. Jacob stopped for a minute to catch his breath then walked down the hall to the play room, swaggering to look cool as he entered. "About time." Chris smiled went up to Jacob and took the books from under his arm. "Thanks again for the books - I'll save them for you so you can have them back when you come back to Earth." Chris was always the optimist of the group.

Jacob said hi to Ralph and JT who were already engrossed in a video game. They managed a couple of "Heys" and "Cools" in conversation and then Jacob plopped down onto part of the sectional sofa near a window. "Bill and Aaron are coming too. You want anything?" Jacob shrugged and Chris left the room for a second and came back with a cold Strite, his favorite drink. Jacob took a sip and let all the little bubbles burst on his tongue before swallowing.

"Thanks." All the boys rotated between playing video games and looking through Chris's latest comic book acquisitions. When Bill and Aaron arrived, Chris's mom and dad emerged from the hallway with three giant pizzas. The smell of the pizzas instantly made all of the guys stop whatever they were doing and almost line up in anticipation.

"Here you go, guys," Chris's dad said. "We're going to miss you, Jacob. The only time I can get Chris to clean his room is when you are coming over, don't know what I'm going to do now." Chris's mom and dad laughed but Chris did not look amused. "We've got one sausage, one cheese and one of your favorite, Jacob - pepperoni." His parents set the pizzas down on the hobby table near some cabinets in the back of the room and left the kids to be alone. Jacob ripped into the pepperoni, taking three slices for his plate and sat down with his Strite in one hand and pizza plate in the other.

The next ten minutes were almost silent, except the occasional cough of someone trying to gulp down too much soda at once. One by one each of the boys slowed down until they were finally just staring at the last few bites on their plate and willing themselves to finish it. Jacob looked over at Chris's plate and saw five crusts neatly placed in a circle around the plate. If Jacob didn't eat the crust on pizza at home, his dad would kill him. But it kind of fit in with Chris's lifestyle. It didn't take a genius to realize Chris was spoiled, heck, Chris even knew it himself.

"So, how long does it take to get to Phaedra?" Aaron asked. Aaron was the smart one in the group, always asking for extra credit at school and always learning. When Jacob was reading *I, Robot*, Aaron was reading *Principles of Instellar Drive Mechanics*.

Jacob took another gulp of his drink. "Well, technically about 4 months. We spend 2 weeks getting far enough away to turn on the C6's, then go into cryo for over 3 months."

"That sounds... cool." Replied Bill. "Get it? Cool?" Bill was always trying to turn every conversation into a joke or a pun. The rest of the group simply rolled their eyes. "I heard when you go into cryo, they stick this long tube up your—"

"Aw man, shut UP, Bill!" Chris came to Jacob's rescue. "Geez, he's going to have a hard enough time leaving everything

without worrying about THAT." Chris paused for just a moment. "Besides, they would have to *find* it first." The room burst out laughing and Jacob punched Chris in the arm then laughed too. If there was anybody you could count on to make crude comments - it was Chris.

The friends managed to completely obliterate the rest of the pizza and then stopped for a minute or two, drowning their last bites with a few gulps of soda pop. Chris watched Jacob stare out of the window, staring blankly at the park in the backyard where they had grown up. "It won't be so bad, man." said Chris. "Besides, you're like, colonizing the entire planet!"

"Yeah," said Jacob. "Sorry, guys - I just can't help thinking about what I'm leaving here instead of 'the great adventure'" Chris emphasized his last words, mocking his father's voice when he came home that Friday night and told Jacob about the program to colonize Phaedra.

It was a Friday like any other, and Jacob had just returned home after attending the football game at his main school. No sooner had he walked in the front door did he know that something was going on. Instead of the smell of burnt lasagna in the air from his father's failed meals, there was the seldom-smelled odor of Chinese takeout. Jacob found his father in the main room of their apartment, using the coffee table as his own

personal buffet. "Got some news for you, champ," his father said while tearing apart one of the "wings" on a crab rangoon. "You won't believe where they are reassigning me."

And that's how it all began. His dad did his best to make it at least sound like Jacob had a choice in the relocation, of course, but he knew his dad had already made up his mind. The company promised him all sorts of bonuses to go to Phaedra, plus the chance to "be a part of history." It wasn't until the next week that his dad's decision really started to hit home. That's when all the medical tests started.

"So how long does it take to get to Phaedra, anyway?" asked Bill. Jacob broke out of his reminiscence and turned towards his friend, taking one of the pillows from the side of the couch and hugging it to his chest as he crossed his legs Indian-style.

"Well," Chris explained. "First we take a shuttle up to the ship and we just kind of sit there for a day making sure everything is all ready. When everything checks out then we sit back and do nothing for about 3 weeks until we are ready to turn on the C6 drives. After those are on and running, that's when everybody enters their cryo chamber and we just sleep for four months. Then we wake up, coast to Phaedra for a couple more weeks and then wait until we go down. At least, that's what my dad told me."

"Four months? Dang!" said Aaron. Jacob looked around and felt the stared of all of his friends upon him - a feeling that made him just a little uneasy. "So, like, what are you going to do until you can make the drive jump?"

"Schoolwork, duh." Jacob said with a sigh. "Just because I'm not here doesn't mean I don't have to go to school, which kind of sucks because I will have to take summer school to catch up with everything I missed when I was in cryo." Jacob looked down at the floor and then the ceiling, hoping somebody would change the subject. Fast.

Just as Bill was about to say something else, Chris's parents came into the room with a decorated box. "Hey guys," Chris's mom said as she walked into the room. "We brought Jacob a little going away present. Don't worry, we'll leave as soon as he opens it up."

Chris's dad stepped forward and gave Jacob the gift and then crossed his arms and leaned against the door frame. Chris's mom sat down beside Jacob, causing Jacob to scoot over just a little to make more room between them. "We hope you like it," said Chris's mom. "It took 13 years to put together."

Jacob untied the bow that went across all four sides of the box, and then carefully lifted the cover. Inside he saw a thin, notebook sized computer-screen with buttons on the front. He lifted the device from out of the box and gave the box back to

Chris's mom. He turned the device over, examining it thoroughly, and then turned it right side up and pushed the large blue button on the front.

The screen lit up and showed a picture of Chris and Jacob at Chris's tenth birthday party. Then the image faded and showed Jacob sliding down a waterslide when they all went to Raging WhiteRiver last summer. The images continued to blend into each another, over and over, and then sometimes a short video would play. "This is me and my best friend, Jacob," said an eight-year-old Chris. "We'll always be friends." The video gave way to another picture and then another. Jacob couldn't turn his eyes away from the screen.

"Many people go through life not knowing how many times they are in other's photo albums, or what they mean to their friends growing up," Chris's dad broke the silence. "Those are all of the pictures and videos we have of you and Chris and the rest of your friends since you and Chris were born."

Chris wanted to watch all of the images and videos, but he finally managed to push the blue button again to turn off the display. "I..." Chris stumbled, looking for the words in his friends' faces. "Thank-you." He looked up at Chris's dad and smiled, only to have his head grasped by Chris's mom and then have her kiss him on the top of his head. He was too happy - or sad - to be embarrassed. For that split second he found that

special feeling of love and acceptance he had been missing. That one moment, now over, of having a mom again.

"Will you have enough room in your moving boxes to take that along with you?" Jacob could tell by the sound in Chris's mom's voice that she would be utterly devastated if he said no. She look at him, waiting for an answer.

"I'll make room. Thanks again." Jacob gave Chris's mom a small hug and then got off the couch and went to shake Chris's dad's hand. He stuck his hand out and shook it, and then was pulled towards Chris's dad in a fatherly hug - followed by three pats on the back.

"We'll miss you kid." Chris's dad wasn't terribly big on ceremony, so to have Chris's dad express himself like this was unexpected. The two parents walked out of the room and gently closed the door behind them, leaving Chris standing and staring down at the black video screen. He looked up and saw all of his friends just looking at the floor.

"I call next game." Chris ran for the video game and gently placed the video screen on the floor in front of him. The other guys all broke out of their solemnness and jumped in, and they all found themselves playing each other head-to-head. While they were playing, Jacob looked around at each of his friends as they tried so intently to blow each other up. He was all too aware that once he left, it will never be the same. For

the first time he really looked at his friends, burning their faces into his memory. *Never forget, Jacob. Never.*

The door bell downstairs rang before any of them knew it, and it was time to go home. Jacob said goodbye to everybody, telling everybody he would see them again and would keep in touch... all the stuff you say but never do. Chris walked him downstairs where the parents were talking in the entryway.

"Ready, champ?"

"I guess." Jacob shrugged and readjusted his grip on the video screen. "Mr. And Mrs. Castillo gave me this." He showed the video screen to his dad who knew right away how to turn it on. "It has every picture and video they ever took of me and Chris - isn't it cool?"

"Wow, thanks Jim and Carol. That was really nice of you. We'll have to make sure to send some pictures and vids back and forth once we get settled, won't we?" He handed the vid screen back to Chris who looked at the current photo and then turned it back off. "Thanks again for everything." Jacob's dad gave both of Chris's parents a hug and then turned to Chris and gave him the same kind of hug that Chris's dad gave Jacob earlier. "It has been a pleasure watching you grow up, Chris."

Chris blushed. He hated to be the center of attention even more than Jacob did. What was worse he didn't quite know what to say to his best friend as he was about to leave for another

planet. What can you possibly say to someone who has been there ever since you can remember. Instead, an uncomfortable silence permeated the entryway - nobody knew what to say next. Finally, Chris knew he had to say something, even if it sounded weird. "I'll miss you." So far so good. "You're my brother, no matter where you are in the universe, OK?"

Jacob smiled. "Ok." Both sets of parents watched as the fear of "not being cool" melted away and both kids embraced each other in a silent merging of thoughts and feelings. They released their grips and instantly hit each other on the upper arm. Jacob's dad put his arm around his son. "Let's go." They waved goodbye to Chris and his parents, walked down the street one last time and entered the jet station.

Jacob and his dad both swiped their identification badges and entered the inside of the jet station, carefully stepping onto the moving sidewalk. A two-person car came up to match their speed and they both jumped in side-by-side and waited for a moment until the doors slid closed. Jacob's dad stopped for a moment when the destination screen lit up the word "Home." He pushed tapped the screen and waited for the initial jet launch.

"Did you have fun?" He looked over to his son who was sitting with his eyes closed, clutching the memories of the past 13 years. He opened his eyes and looked forwarding, avoiding the direct gaze of his father.

"Yeah, I guess." Jacob twitched a little and resettled himself into the jet car's seat. "How's things at home?"

"Ok... I guess." His dad smirked like he always did after he imitated his son's short answers. "It's amazing how much stuff we keep we don't really need, huh?"

Jacob bit his lower lip and just looked down at his feet and then back to the video screen he was given. "Some of it is nice to keep, though." Jacob's dad stretched out his right arm across the seat and landed it Jacob's right shoulder. He gave it a squeeze and then ruffled Jacob's hair.

"People move from place to place, and there's really only two things they can always take with them. Their memories and their morals. No matter where you go, they are always with you." Jacob managed a half-smile and looked up at his dad. "Ok, enough preaching - we still have work to do, ya know." The jet slowed down and slid its doors open, prompting the two to exit. As they walked from the jet to the apartment building, Jacob allowed his dad to walk with his arm on Jacob's shoulders. Just this once.

Jacob spent the next two hours finishing his room. The bookshelf was now empty, his walls were void of any certificates of accomplishment, posters, baseball cards - everything. The empty room felt harsh and cold, and whenever he talked he could hear the echo of his voice against the walls. Jacob made two

trips down to the incinerator and then got ready for bed and went to sleep.

The next day, Jacob got up at seven o'clock and went downstairs to make his usual breakfast of cereal and bagel half. Luckily, his dad hadn't gotten to packing up the kitchen yet, but Jacob knew that only meant he would have to help do it later. He wiped the sleep from his eyes and grabbed a bowl, the cereal and some milk and then dropped a bagel half into the toaster. He was halfway through his breakfast when his dad came in from outside.

"Hey champ," his dad said in an all-too cheerful tone. "I've been finishing up stuff in the living room, ready for another big day?" Jacob managed to exert a muffled sound with his mouth full of cereal. Oh yeah, he was ready. Normally he would be thrilled with not having to go to the telepresence station for school today, but instead of a vacation, it was more work. He wouldn't have any school work for about six months, but then he would have to have summer school - and Mr. Burstein would be there on the other end of the vid waiting for him.

Jacob's dad took the bagel half out of the toaster as it popped up and put the other half in while sliding the now toasted bagel to Jacob - all in one swift swoop. Jacob took a drink of milk and then chomped down on the toasted half. He wasn't a big fan of cream cheese. Just the bagel, plain - and toasted.

"So," his dad got right to the business at hand. "It's going to be a long day, hope you got enough sleep." He picked up the bagel half from the toaster as before, this time spreading a good serving of butter all around the edges.

"What kind of things are they going to do?" Jacob had been dreading today more than cleaning out his room. Today was the big physical day where he would have to spend most of the day being poked and prodded by doctors, going from one room to another with his backside showing from between the slits in the medical gown.

"Well," his dad began. "I guess it's a bit like joining the army." His dad sat down on a barstool next to his son and poured a glass of milk for himself. "You'll do a regular physical, like you had when you tried out for basketball last year. And then some other tests on your blood and stuff. And, you'll probably have to have quite a few shots."

Jacob's chin fell to his chest as he let a sigh escape his lips. With all of the technological advancements over the years, sticking a needle through your skin to get a shot was still the most direct method of immunization. Sure, when he had a headache or a cold, you got a skin patch you had to leave on for an hour or two, but shots ... he wished doctors would find a better way to make it so he didn't get sick.

"I know, I know..." Jacob's dad noticed the mood change in his son. "But we are going to a new world, remember, and they don't want one small Earth disease to infect the whole planet. I had to get them all when I started working on the C6 drives and I'll probably have to get them all again, too." Jacob finished his cereal and went to the sink to rinse it out and place it in the bottom of the basin. He wondered if his dad would actually wash the dishes or throw them out today.

"Bill said when you go into cryo they stick a tube up your... thing." Jacob looked to his dad. "Do they?" His dad stopped midway through a bite on his bagel then cleared his throat. He sat the bagel down on a napkin and started to laugh.

"That's Bill for ya." He said. "Well, champ. When you go into cryo your body doesn't stop working, ya know. You still breathe, you get nutritional supplements through the IV... your body slows down but it still keeps going. So, you still need to pee." He cleared his throat. "So yeah, you are asleep when it goes in and comes out, but ... yeah. Just gotta do it. Better than waking up and be swimming in your own stuff."

"Anything else I should know?" Jacob ran a dish cloth under the faucet and wiped off the counter where he had been eating. He then took the milk off the counter and placed it back into the refrigerator and leaned against it, arms folded in front of him.

"Well, there's the vacuum suction cup that goes on the other end..." Jacob's eyes got wide and his jaw dropped. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding." Jacob's dad burst out laughing and after the initial shock wore off, Jacob managed to laugh about it too. "They will explain everything this afternoon after the physicals and everything. Don't worry, the tube is the worst of it." Jacob's dad took his bagel plate and placed it in the sink and grabbed the wet dish cloth from the sink faucet and wiped his half of the counter.

They left the apartment and took the jet to the medical facility nearby the C6 plant where Jacob's father worked. It was a giant building with hardly any windows, except a small ring of windows around the top of the building, which Jacob assumed were all offices. They entered through the main automatic doors and followed the signs through the hallways and to the registration area. There was a line getting to the registration desks, so they both waited patiently while watching the flurry of activity around them. Eventually they got to a desk and swiped both of their ID cards. The computer beeped and printed out two labels, which the desk attendant stuck onto two orange folders and handed them both to Jacob's dad. She then pointed in the direction of another line to go into the waiting area.

Jacob stepped through the double doors behind his father and blinked at the bright fluorescent lights that adorned the low ceiling. In front of him he saw more chairs in one place than he has ever seen. He tried to count the number of chairs and rows but since the line was moving he never could get an accurate count. He guessed there must be 500 chairs on this floor alone, and the other 20 floors of the building are probably the same. At the other end of the floor were raised chairs with people being examined sitting in them and doctors running back and forth. Jacob and his dad were led into a side room where they changed into a pair of white paper-like pants and a shirt of the same material. *At least there wasn't a slit down the back,* Jacob thought. They placed their normal clothes in a small storage bin, entered a security code then followed the rest of the new arrivals out to the waiting area.

Jacob followed his dad and the other prospective colonizers out single-file to the rows of chairs they saw when they came in. One-by-one everybody in the line stopped in front of their chair and sat down. It took a few minutes for all of the chairs to fill in the room to fill up, leaving those coming from the lockers lined up along the sides. The lights slowly dimmed and a temporary wall closed, cutting them off from the examination and immunization area.

"Welcome to the Phaedra colonization program." A disembodied voice beckoned over some hidden speakers. A Phaedra logo was projected onto the screen and then faded away as the presentation continued, introducing the source of the voice. The man who appeared smiling on the screen was an older man in his fifties Jacob guessed. He looked like a politician, but had a sincerity about him that most politicians lost after their first election. "You have been selected to participate in a great adventure: the colonization of Phaedra."

Jacob looked around. He knew there was no way everybody coming to this center worked with his dad at C6. So where did all of these people come from? He started to look around at those sitting nearby trying to find somebody he knew. Jacob's dad reached around and put his hand on the back of Jacob's neck, forcing him to look forward, and then relaxed so his hand was on Jacob's far shoulder.

"As the head of Department of Colonization, I am committed to helping you make the transition from the center of our world - to a planet just waiting to become your new home. Over the years we have colonized many planets. From Hierolysse to Beckersfont to our small, orbital colonies around Jupiter, Uehlae and Syron. Each of these colonization took the combined efforts of scientists, engineers and people like you - colonists, to become a reality."

For the first time Jacob truly realized the enormity of the colonization efforts. This wasn't a scientific mission where everybody had an important job to do. Not everybody was directly involved in the intricacies of the project like his dad was. The majority of the people were ordinary citizens. Many bankrupt, many just looking for adventure. Some even to escape their pasts, Jacob guessed. He shifted in his seat and leaned back, feeling his father's warm arm across his shoulders.

"Today starts in motion a series of events leading up to boarding your ship, The Constitution, in three days. In just a few moments you will go one-by-one through an examination and immunization process that will eradicate any diseases you may already carry, as well as protect you against all known diseases. Following today's procedures, you will be given a manual with important information about boarding The Constitution, as well as any travel-specific laws and regulations you need to comply with on your journey. Additional instructions will be given to you in the weeks prior to your cryo-sleep."

*Even more homework,* thought Jacob. Not only was he going to have to take summer school once he reached Phaedra, now he was going to have to undergo a crash-course in colonization, laws, regulations, government, and who knows what other nonsense on his trip outside the solar system. He didn't quite know what

he would find to do in those few weeks leading up to cryo, but he certainly didn't think he would be stuck reading manuals and attending classes on how to colonize a world. That was for the adults.

"In just a few moments," the voice added, "the partition you are watching this video on will part, and you will be directed into the examination area. Families will be allowed to stay together in one area, so please tell the greeter at the entrance how many are in your group. Each member must undergo a full scan physical, as well as receive the proper immunizations. A full blood workup will be started at the beginning of your examination, and the results will be provided to you as you exit. On half of the Department of Colonization, I thank you for your continued service and devotion to the preservation and expansion of Earth."

The logo appeared on the screen again and the partition slid into the walls, providing a now near-empty view of the examination area. A recorded female voice announced, "Please stand and continue forward to the examination area." Jacob and his dad obeyed and made their way to the greeter. After finding out it was only two in their party, they were directed towards room 38.

Calling the examination area a "room" was quite a stretch. All of the examination tables were open, without walls, and

within clear view of one another. Room 38 was against the back of the far wall, and Jacob sat down in a chair while his father stood nearby, waiting for the next physician to come to their room. Jacob looked out among the sea of white paper shirts and pants. Even the doctors were dressed in white - the only color in the place coming from people's color of skin. It was a sterile, efficient operation. Jacob would learn first hand of this efficiency in later days to come.

It took only a few minutes before a side door opened and the physicians came out. There were a few stragglers who had not yet finished when Jacob's group came into the area, but those were quickly finished up and the doctor's exited into the same room the others just came out of. The doctor instructed Jacob and his dad to swipe their identification badges on a tablet he held, as well as push their finger on a depression on the front of the tablet. In a swift "ssst" sound, the tablet pricked their finger for a drop of blood and began analyzing the results. The doctor pressed another button on the back of the tablet, causing the drops of blood to be vaporized and released in a brief puff of smoke.

Jacob was examined before his father. The doctor did the usual eye checks, ear checks, open up and say ahhh routine medical checks that had remained unchanged for the last hundred or so years. The doctor looked down at his tablet and told

Jacob to stand up and drop his pants to the floor. Jacob got up and looked at this dad who simply nodded and Jacob let the paper pants fall to the floor. Jacob looked up at the ceiling, embarrassed that he was now exposed for the entire world to see. The doctor checked off some items on the tablet and told Jacob to pull the pants back up. "Any recent sexual activity?" the doctor asked.

Jacob looked horrified. "Uh, no." Jacob looked towards his dad but couldn't tell if he was just uncomfortable or laughing. Jacob craned his neck trying to see what the doctor was writing down on the tablet. The doctor quickly turned away and towards Jacob's father.

"We show the estimated age of puberty as... 14, that correct?" Jacob's dad nodded. Now this managed to turn Jacob's face bright red. It was standard as a child to have different stages of life plotted out from your family history. When Jacob had gone to the doctor in the past, this included his father being asked about family history of measles or risk of heart attack and so forth. He had no idea that his maturity was being plotted and guessed at by some computer. The doctor could sense Jacob's uneasiness. "Don't worry pal, it's only a year away."

Jacob's dad walked over to the examination chair and went through the same series of questions. Jacob leaned a little

closer when his father's turn to answer the sexual activity question had come. Jacob always wondered if his dad was entertaining women at the apartment after he went to bed, but when his father said "18 months," he knew right away whom he was referring to.

Jacob's dad brought home Sheila for the first time on a Friday. Jacob remembered the day vividly because Friday nights were supposed to be scary movie nights, but that night his dad brought home Chinese take-out and Sheila. She was pretty, but Jacob felt uneasy whenever she was around. Eventually they broke the ice, and after four months of dating, Jacob was sure that Sheila was going to be his new mom. Things never turn out the way you think, though, and Sheila and his dad broke up shortly after Valentine's Day. Jacob still got a birthday card that year, but this year he didn't hear from her. His dad told him Sheila transferred out of the C6 project and took a job on the Jupiter station as a bio-systems engineer.

Since Sheila, Jacob could only remember one or two other dates the last year, and he didn't remember any of them spend the night. Not that he was in charge of his dad's sex life of course, but he hopes his dad finds somebody - someday. "Ok, guys, now both of you stand up, drop your pants and put your hands on the back of the chair, please." Jacob knew it was time for the immunization part of the physical and was somewhat

relieved when he saw the doctor had two hypodermics and not several for each of them. "Lucky for you guys we are able to combine everything into one good inoculation, huh?" Jacob's dad began to say something and then both were stuck in the cheeks within seconds of each other. Jacob winced as he felt the fluid being pushed into the muscle. It was over quickly, and the needle slipped out without requiring a bandage.

The doctor checked off some things on the tablet and continued checking some of the test results. Jacob and his dad stood nearby uncomfortably, both of them afraid to take the chair. "Everything looks fine," the doctor said. "Remember, you are to go straight home after you leave here and observe a quarantine for 48 hours. On Tuesday, report to the boarding shuttle at the time indicating in your manual. Everything for pre-boarding and boarding is in the manual, so read it - you definitely have time over the next couple of days."

Jacob reached down to pick up both of their manuals off the ground and winced as he straightened up. He looked around and saw they were one of the first groups to be done with the process - most were still leaning on the backs of the chairs waiting for the stick of a needle. Jacob looked to his dad and they thanked the doctor and began walking down the side of the room and to the exit.

Before they were allowed to leave the building, they swiped their identification cards and wrote their name on a pad below a screen. A female worker reminded them yet again to read the manual, and wished them luck, again thanking them for helping preserve the way of life on Earth on other planets.

It was an extremely bright day when the two emerged from the confines of the processing center. They made their way into the jet and headed for home. Jacob looked down at the manuals he was holding and turned them over. "Immunizations may cause drowsiness" he read. That explained why his eyes were starting to feel really, really heavy. They arrived at the jet and it was all Jacob could do to not collapse in an exhausted heap in the street outside their apartment building. He leaned on his dad who helped him inside, sat down on a couch in the living room and instantly went to sleep.

Most people go through their lives not remembering any of their dreams, and if they do it's only for a day or two and then they are quickly forgotten. This dream was different. Jacob found himself on The Constitution, in an open area filled with other kids, each having the same school lesson. He looked around but didn't see anybody he knew and went back to his work in front of him. He guessed it was a math test, due to all the numbers and diagrams, but it was way beyond his ability to understand. He wondered why he didn't study more and how he was

going to pass this test. After staring at the piece of paper for a few minutes, an older boy approached where he was sitting. "You don't belong here," he muttered threateningly. "You should go."

Jacob looked up at the boy then back down to his paper, which now had impossible theorems and proofs. He looked back up towards the older kid and found that his father was now standing over him, and he was in some sort of lab. "You got that figured out yet, champ?" His dad asked with a worried look on his face. "We're all kind of waiting, it's up to you." He looked around and saw the room full of adults in scientific gear all looking toward him.

"Figured what out?" Jacob asked. Jacob could feel everybody in the room closing in on him as his father stepped closer. The room was getting darker and darker as they all took one step, then another, and another.

"How to save us. All of us. It's all up to you, champ." Jacob stood up, and looked around at the room still closing in on him. He took one step back and stepped on something. He looked down and saw a clear tube - one end hooked up to a machine and another end that went up his pants leg and into his groin area. Jacob reached down and grabbed a hold of the tube and started pulling, trying to remove the catheter himself. He knew something would go wrong with cryo, he knew it. He kept

pulling and pulling, feeling the plastic tube slip inside of him, but never coming out. He increased the speed, pulling out more and more. By now there were hundreds of feet of clear tube in a pile around his feet.

*Oh God, please make it stop,* thought Jacob as he started to cry. And it did. Jacob woke up panting, and immediately pulled the waistband on his paper pants and checked for any sign of tubage. Jacob usually doesn't have nightmares, that he can remember, anyway. It was still light out and Jacob had no interest in falling back asleep to that dream - so he got up and went down the hall and found his dad still going through his things. "Hey guy," his dad greeted him as he came into view. "Have a nice nap?"

Jacob leaned against the door frame. "Yeah... swell." He said sarcastically. Jacob's dad laughed and continued putting things in the trash cans. Jacob looked around the room and saw it was nearly empty, the only piece of decoration on the walls or on shelves was a picture of the two of them last year on vacation in Colorado. Jacob looked at the picture from across the room and then only at the frame. He recognized it, but remembered it with a different picture. "Where's the picture of us and mom?" he asked his dad.

"It's there," he said. "I managed to put five pictures inside the frame so they don't get bent up in the move." His dad

stopped sorting and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. I can put it back in the front if you want."

Jacob looked down at his feet and kicked the wooden molding of the doorframe. "Nah, it's ok." Jacob said, avoiding his father's gaze. "Just wondering." Jacob's father went back to work and Jacob left to check out his room as well. His dad had helped take most of the trash to the living room, where it was left in plastic bags by the doorway. The quarantine meant they couldn't even take the trash out, so the living room was the next choice - at least it was out of the way. Jacob went to the dresser and took out a pair of real pants and a t-shirt from the second drawer. He tossed the paper clothes into the trash can he had in the room and secretly harbored a feeling of anticipation to watch them burn in the incinerator.

It was then he realized there wasn't anything to do in his room. All his books were gone, games - gone, journals to write in - packed away. Nothing but white walls, empty furniture and the eerie sound of your own breathing echoing back to you from an empty room. Jacob got up off the bed and went back out to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. At least they still had food.

Jacob fixed himself a sandwich and a glass of milk and sat down on a bar stool at the kitchen counter. The two manuals they brought home from the processing center were there, so he

took one of them and opened it up. He took a bit out of his sandwich and read the table of contents. Welcome to the Phaedra Project, pre-processing, quarantine, shuttle boarding. Jacob figured he could skip straight to shuttle boarding since he had already experienced everything before that.

Jacob's eyes were glued to the page as he continued to finish his sandwich. He learned about priority boarding for members of the project, and figured he and his dad would be among the first to get up to the ship. For the first few weeks of the journey, everybody would be sharing a common sleeping area with bunks, and then they would be escorted to their cryo area. Jacob wondered if they would have any sleep inducers available for the first few weeks. One time he went to a summer camp and couldn't sleep because of all the noise coming from other campers staying in the cabin. With hundreds of other people staying on just that level of the ship, the noise will be intolerable. At the very least, Jacob hoped, they will provide earplugs.

Jacob's dad came into the kitchen just as he was about to start reading the section on rules and conduct while on board the ship. "Dad," Jacob said. "Is there going to be any privacy on Phaedra at all?"

Jacob's dad laughed as he opened the refrigerator to get himself some of his own sandwich making materials. "What makes you ask that?" he wondered.

"Well, it just seems like everything is so... open. I mean, our physicals were in a giant room, we dropped our pants in a room of hundreds of people, and now I read that we will be sleeping in bunks in a room of hundreds more. I hope the bathrooms at least have walls in them."

"Well, they are just being efficient, champ." Once we get to Phaedra, it will be just like living here in our apartment. We'll have our area and everybody else will have their own home." Jacob's dad reached under the counter for a bottle of Scotch. He pulled a glass from the cupboard and poured a drink, no ice. "There's one thing you have to keep in mind, kiddo. To the government, we're all just numbers. Each of us on that ship are there for a specific purpose, to colonize a new planet. Some of the people, like me, actually work on the project and will be helping build a new C6 factory on the planet. Others are there simply to live and work to build an economy. And some of them are there to grow up and..." he looked at his son. "maybe, reproduce."

Jacob rolled his eyes while gulping down the last of his glass of milk. He placed it on the counter with a loud thud then looked straight at his dad. "Yeah. Right. Not for a

while, Dad. Not for a while." His dad laughed and Jacob wondered if his dad was just playing with him, or if they had been selected to go to Phaedra for the future possibilities of reproduction. How weird would that be? What if they were selected to colonize Phaedra, not because of his dad's work on the C6, but because he had a healthy son about to come into full, all-out reproductive bliss? Jacob laughed at the thought of him being a sex god and placed his dirty dishes in the sink, pushing his father aside who was still laughing.

"so what do we do for two days?" Jacob asked as he made his way back out to the couch and plopped down." Jacob's dad pushed the last piece of his sandwich into his mouth with his little finger. He downed a shot of Scotch and then placed the bottle back under the sink.

"Well, we still have to go through the rest of the manual. I also need to finish some paperwork on the apartment so the company can take over the rent. As for you - not sure. You can watch the vid, play some games - hey you can call up Chris and play that game with him online you like so much." Jacob's dad grabbed the manuals off of the kitchen counter and brought them into the living room where he placed them on the coffee table. He then sat down in one of the side chairs and leaned back to get comfortable. "Or we can just sit back and sleep through the next couple of days."

"Dad," Jacob said. "We will be sleeping for *months* on the ship!" Jacob sighed and clasped his hands together while looking around the empty room. There was the video game console near the vid screen, but other than that the walls in here were empty too. "I guess I'll call Chris on the vid and see if he can play."

Jacob's dad got up, ruffled Jacob's hair again, and then went back to cleaning out the master bedroom. Jacob shook his head to get his hair put back into place and then leaned forward to pick up the vid controller. He entered in Chris's number and waited, throwing the vid controller onto the cushion beside him. In a few moments, Chris's image appeared on the vid. Jacob could tell he was in his playroom.

"Hey man, how did it go?" Jacob spent the next few minutes telling Chris about the lines, the paper clothes and dropping trou in front of hundreds of people. He even told Chris about the nightmare he had when he got home and Chris burst out laughing. "I'm sorry, man - it's just too funny." Jacob started to laugh too. They both shook their heads after a few minutes and Jacob asked if he wanted to play games over the vid. "Sure, what you wanna play?"

There had been so many good games that came out recently, it was always hard to pick one on the spur of the moment. "How about... jet racer?" Jacob liked racing games. For Christmas one

year his dad even bought him an old-fashioned racing wheel you could hook up to the vid and pretend to drive the jet, cars, and other things. The novelty wore off quickly, however, and soon the wheel broke and Jacob got used to using the hand-held controller and not even preferred it.

"That's cool," Chris said. "I'll link." Jacob got off the couch and took the game console off the bottom shelf and placed it in front of the vid. He sat a few feet behind the console and took one of the controllers off the front plate of the unit and pushed the button marked "link." The console immediately connected to Chris's host computer, and soon Jacob saw the image of Jet Racer on the screen, with a smaller photo of Chris in the lower right hand side of the vid.

They played for close to two hours until Jacob saw Chris's mom come into the room on the vid screen. They exchanged hellos and then Chris was told it was time to go to bed. "Call you tomorrow?" Jacob asked? Jet Racer faded from the screen placing Chris's image back, filling the entire viewing area.

"Sure, after 11. Mom's making us go to church tomorrow. Everybody is going, she says they are all going to pray for The Constitution's safe flight or some crap like that." Jacob saw Chris's mom clicking her fingernails on the door molding, waiting for Chris to end the call. "I gotta go, talk to you tomorrow." Chris ended the vid call from his side, causing the

screen to go dark. Jacob palced the controller back onto the console unit and put it carefully back on the shelf. He looked at the clock on the wall: 10 o'clock. He went into the kitchen and poured himself another glass of milk and went to bed. This time, there were no dreams, just the silent, quick passing of time until morning.

Jacob slept in but still woke up before his dad. He didn't bother putting on a shirt and walked to the kitchen in only the sweatpants he wore to bed the night before. He sleepily went about his customary breakfast and afterwards thought about what he was going to do with the rest of his day. He supposed he would have to help his dad with packing up the rest of the apartment and bringing everything for the incinerator to the living room, but that shouldn't take two days. Chris would be home in the afternoon after his family got back from church and group meetings, which left only a few hours where he had absolutely nothing to do.

He walked over the living room and sat on the couch while picking up a copy of the Phaedra manual off the coffee table where he had placed it the night before. He opened the cover again and flipped through to the first few pages until he came to the first real substance in the manual - government. He read through a detailed explanation of the government structure on Phaera, which to him just said the same government that is on

Earth will apply to the new planet. There will be a local government of course, with city and provincial officials. In addition, a Colonization Affairs office reported directly to the President of Earth.

Government was never Jacob's favorite class in school, so the whole thing bored him. Nothing in this section of the manual seemed to apply to him - after all, he couldn't vote so why should he care what the local government was like and what they could do? He turned a few more pages until he found the planetary laws and rules of behavior chapter. *Now this, Jacob thought, could be important.*

First and foremost, Jacob read, all laws of common order established on Earth apply in its colonies and off-world observation stations. Fair enough. Jacob learned the police force on Phaedra were only permitted non-lethal means of force, with special stun-guns used instead of the lethal guns that have been the favorite of law enforcement for the last several hundred years. "In the interest of public safety," Jacob read. "The duly elected governor of Phaedra has accepted and instituted the off-world constitution amendment banning any and all lethal weapons from entering the planet."

There has always been the debate on Earth whether or not people had the right to hide weapons in their house. The right to bear arms has been upheld in the Earth constitution ever

since the global governments of the world converged into one ruling body in 2156. Now 50 years later, as more and more planets are being colonized, it was not uncommon to completely ban weapons rather than take the chance of somebody taking advantage of the closed-communities and wreaking havoc on their neighbors and terrorizing the colony. Such a thing happened on the previous colonization of Jurdurr, resulting in the planet being locked down for six months until the colonists with guns surrendered and were sent back to Earth.

It was a good choice, Jacob thought. Phaedra was the furthest planet Earth had every colonized - getting help in the case of a national emergency and terrorist activity would take months. In a way he wished the police would at least have ways to take down the criminals if they ever popped up on the planet. With the background checks and screenings everybody had to go through in order to get on the list to go to Phaedra, however, Jacob didn't know how anybody with questionable motives could have gotten through the screening process.

Jacob continued reading the manual, stretching and repositioning his body and placing his feet up on the coffee table and the bottom of the manual resting on his chest. A curfew of 10pm would be strictly enforced for all colonists regardless of age. Well that's different. Jacob guessed the curfew wa going to be in effect for a short amount of time while

the planet became self-sufficient. That's what happened on one of the other colonized planets. The curfew forced everybody to be back in their homes early to finish unpacking (although how long does it take to unpack two boxes?) and it also had the unintended effect of increasing the population dramatically nine-months after the colonists arrived.

It was the next section Jacob read that really piqued his interest. All colonists will be issued standardized clothing. The color of Phaedra citizens is dark blue. Clothing will be issued upon arrival and replacement clothing will be available at any of the supply stations throughout the colony. It was the next section Jacob read that really piqued his interest. *All colonists will be issued standardized clothing. The color of Phaedra citizens is dark blue. Clothing will be issued upon arrival and replacement clothing will be available at any of the supply stations throughout the colony.* Jacob immediately thought of the immunization center and was relieved that the official uniform of Phaedra was at least not white. It would be a little strange to see everybody on the planet wearing the exact same style of clothes in exactly the same color. Jacob guessed the clothes would be those one-piece jumpsuits he had seen on the vid. They all seemed like the footy-pajamas he wore as a little kid, and wasn't sure he was going to like this part of the program.

Jacob flipped the manual over onto its face, spread open on his chest. In just these few pages he had learned there would be no guns, a 10PM curfew, and everybody would have the same style and color clothes to wear at all times. This was beginning to sound like a military base instead of a colonization, Jacob thought. He rubbed his eyes and scratched the top of his head. He wondered just how many other kids were going to be going to Phaedra. He had seen some of them at the immunization clinic drop their drawers the same as he had to do, but he never thought to ask how many there would be. He wasn't good at making friends, probably because he knew he always had Chris to talk to so he didn't need anybody else. At least Chris would be available to call up on the vid once in a while.

He stretched and yawned again, rubbing his hand across his chest and felt his cold fingers touch his skin. He shivered, placed the manual on the couch and then went to his room and got out a t-shirt and put it on. He looked on his desk and saw the picture tablet Chris's parents had given him. He grabbed it, plopped down on the bed on his stomach and held the screen out in front of him, legs up in the air. He pushed the button twice, indicating to only show pictures and not the videos. He didn't want to wake his dad up.

The images on the screen went by far too quickly for him to study each one, so he turned a dial on the side that increased

the wait time for each image on the screen. He lay there watching himself go from a skinny, awkward little boy to the teenager he had now become. He watched intently as he relived the memories of him and Chris at their different birthday parties - always together. And then he almost cried as he realized that nothing would ever quite be the same again. He was destined to grow up on another world, far away from his friends and his life so far. He was going to be, incredibly, alone.

Jacob turned off the vid when he realized it was looping through images he had already seen. He placed it beside his torso on the bed and brought his arms up behind his head and his pillow. He closed his eyes and tried to picture life on Phaedra. From what he read it was a lot like Earth but with slightly less gravity. He had heard horror stories from colonization attempts using giant domes, and wondered how the small colony of scientists living on Earth's moon survive without going stir crazy. Having the gravity almost the same as Earth is a major plus as well. Jacob remembered the images of a lunar colonist coming back to Earth after three years on the moon and having to undergo tremendous physical therapy to retrain his muscles - and bodily functions - here on Earth.

Jacob heard his dad finally wake up in the next room and continued staring up at the ceiling until his father walked by and stopped in the doorway. "Morning." He said. "Sleep OK?"

"Yeah, I guess." Jacob said. "So what are we going to do today?" Jacob's dad came in the room and sat down at the foot of the bed. He noticed the vid screen near his son and knew he had been watching it, missing his friends already.

"Well, we still need to go through the rest of the manual. Then I guess we need to rearrange the living room and move as much furniture from our rooms into there so they can move it out easily when we are gone." Jacob groaned at the thought of moving all the furniture. It would be one thing if they were going to let them take it with them, but since everything on Phaedra was furnished, the furniture was being donated to a children's shelter down the street.

"Where are we going to sleep?" Jacob knew the answer but wanted to hear his dad say it anyway. He wasn't trying to be difficult, but sometimes his dad overlook the obvious things once he got on a tangent of getting things done. Jacob turned onto his side and rested his head on his hand as he curved his body so he could look at his dad.

"We can leave the beds where they are," his dad said. "We just need to try to get everything we can into one place so when they come to pack everything out it goes quickly." Jacob rolled

his eyes and then flopped back onto his back, his hands once again behind his head. He stared up at the ceiling for a few moments until his dad broke the silence. "I'll be downstairs."

Jacob's dad shook one of Jacob's feet goodbye as he left the room, leaving the door to the hallway open. Jacob stayed in his room for a few more minutes and then grabbed the vid screen from the bed and placed it once again on the desk in the corner. Jacob grabbed the desk chair and took it with him into the living room, where he placed it along the wall with some of the other assorted furniture from the other rooms in the apartment.

Jacob's dad was making himself some breakfast, so Jacob plopped down on the couch, sending one of the manuals flying into the air about 6 inches from the leverage exerted on the cushion. Jacob grabbed it spine down in mid-flight and then set it atop the other one on the coffee table. Jacob's dad didn't blink an eye at the miraculous stunt performed by his son in the other room. He just kept eating his breakfast and took a drink of milk.

"This planet sounds kind of like a prison," Jacob said. "There's curfews and uniforms. The manual doesn't say anything about fun - is there going to be anything fun to do?" Jacob rearranged himself so his feet were alongside his body on the sofa cushion, turned towards the kitchen to see his dad. He leaned on the armrest of the couch, waiting for a response.

"It's a new planet, Jacob." He said. "You have to have rules and then later you can be a little less strict. It's kind of like the first day of sixth grade when your presence teacher put the fear of God into you. Remember?"

Did he ever. Jacob remembered going to the presence building and jacking in, only to find Mrs. Black staring there, waiting for each child to jack in and replying only with a "There!" and directing them to their seat in the virtual classroom. That was the first time he had ever attended a virtual classroom, and the experience with Mrs. Black still haunted him. Halfway through the school year she called his dad in for a conference about his "attitude problem." As far as Jacob was concerned, there was no problem, but Mrs. Black couldn't see why a boy Jacob's age would need to jack-out and use the restroom so often. Evidently nobody had told his new teacher that Jacob was going through rehabilitation from suffering dehydration the previous summer, and needed to drink more liquids during the day than the other kids. And more liquids meant more trips to the rest room.

She never gave up, though. Jacob had a hard time in math, so every day Mrs. Black would call on him first, and if it was a problem that was more difficult than usual, she never passed up the opportunity to make Jacob struggle in front of the entire

class. Jacob hadn't met many people whom he could honestly say he really didn't like - but he hated Mrs. Black. Hated.

"Yeah but Mrs. Black was awful. She hated me. These people don't even know me, they just make rules for everybody because they are scared that one person will want to stay up past ten o'clock." Jacob was getting worked up and his dad knew this wasn't a good sign. When Jacob got angry, soon there was yelling and frustration, followed by guilt and embarrassment. Jacob's dad took a couple more bites of his cereal and waited for Jacob's deep, quickened breaths to calm down.

"Look champ, even though we are all from Earth, and we all know what the laws are, this is a brand new planet. People have been over there for five years building houses, places to work, making sure it will sustain a colony - heck even making sure the toilets work. They don't want anything to go wrong. So yeah, there are going to be rules, but there's nothing we can do about it." He lifted his cereal bowl to his lips and sipped the remaining milk from the bowl. Picking up his glass of milk, he went to the sink, gulped the last bit of it down and placed the dirty dishes in the sink.

Jacob's dad came walked over to the couch and picked up one of the manuals off of the coffee table. He used his other hand to pick up Jacob's feet off the couch and sat down next to him, Jacob's feet in his lap. He stretched out, now leaning back in

the sofa with his feet up on the coffee table. He propped the manual up on Jacob's ankles and flipped through it to the table of contents.

"I've already read some of it." Jacob said. Jacob twisted his body to the right so now he was laying up against the armrest of the sofa and looking down his legs at his dad. He stretched his neck back and looked behind him at the clock on the wall and reasoned it was nearly 11am. The morning was almost over, but they would still have a long time to do absolutely nothing. They could probably read the manual cover to cover 10 times or more by the time they had to report to the shuttle in two days.

"I noticed you've been reading, I just want to read it for myself." Jacob's dad flipped through the next few pages, reading about the curfews and laws, and all the things Jacob had already managed to bring up in their conversation this morning. "How far did you get?" he asked.

"Just to the part where we all have to wear the same clothes," Jacob said. "that should be interesting. Hey you!" Jacob yelled. "No, you in the blue jumpsuit. No, not you... YOU!" Jacob laughed. He still had a hard time picturing everybody on the entire planet wearing exactly the same shade of blue every day. "I guess it will save time trying to figure out what to

wear to school and what to wear to church." Jacob was trying to make the best of it. Trying. Miserably.

His dad laughed. "Well, it will probably be better than those paper ones we had to wear yesterday." His dad flipped through to the next page. "Here we go, the section on adolescent schooling - that's you!" Jacob scrunched up his face and stuck out his tongue as his dad began reading. "All school age children in the colony will attend classes at a central location to be determined by the headmaster upon arrival. Instructors will be brought up to speed on each student's level of education and attend to fulfill the remaining requirements of the original school's grade program for that year."

"No Presence?" Jacob asked.

"Doesn't look like it. They want you present and accounted for." Jacob's dad skimmed down the page some more. "All students will be required to attend regularly scheduled after-school functions designed to promote making new acquaintances and strengthening bonds between classmates. Due to the wide backgrounds of the young people colonizing Phaedra, we encourage children to make friends as soon as possible on the ship prior to cryo."

The silence between father and son proved they were both thinking the same thing. Making friends wasn't Jacob's strong suit, but it wasn't going to be a challenge to just him.

Jacob's dad would need to make acquaintances and get along with people too, but it was a little easier for him. Being a part of the C6 project was a blessing since he would be working alongside friends and colleagues he already knew when he got there. And while he was on the ship waiting for cryo, he would be doing last-minute spot-checks on the C6 engines themselves to make sure they didn't end up in a giant fireball somewhere between Saturn and Jupiter.

The next few pages of the manual detailed the actual living conditions. The teams that had gone to Phaedra had built housing complexes around a central common area. There were no single-family houses on the planet to encourage the new residents to get to know each other. Each family's finances would remain the same on Phaedra as they are on Earth, but most of the day-to-day living supplies and food would be provided by the government.

Jacob's dad put down the manual after a few minutes and looked at Jacob. "You're right... it's pretty boring, huh?" Jacob nodded and his dad smiled. Well, how about we move some furniture and tackle the rest of this later. Jacob hopped up off the couch and started walking into his room with his dad lose behind. He felt the squeeze of his father's hand on the base of his neck and then two short pats on the back. "We'll be ok," his dad said. "We'll be ok."

They carried his desk and bookshelves out into the living room, placing the vid screen that Chris's parents had given him on the kitchen counter on their way through. The living room was starting to become very claustrophobic with all the furniture and trash piling up, and they had to rearrange the sofa and set the coffee table on its edge near a wall to make room for Jacob's dresser and another chair he had in the corner of the room.

Jacob's dad got each of them a glass of water as they took a break from the chore of moving all of the furniture from place to place. He gulped the water down with matching satisfying "ahhhhs" and placed the dishes in the sink, which had now grown to almost over-capacity. Jacob's dad fished in the bottom of the sink for the stopper, placed it in the base of the sink and filled it up. Jacob grabbed a hold of the corner of the sofa and pivoted it out so he could sit on it and see the vid screen on the wall. He turned on the game console and began playing one of his favorite games.

Jacob's dad finished doing the dishes in the sink and drained the dirty water. He opened one cupboard after another trying to find something for lunch but wasn't satisfied with what he was seeing. "Guess we probably should have gotten some food before the quarantine, huh?" He looked at Jacob who was too engrossed in killing off all the aliens invading Earth to

care about something as mundane as lunch. Jacob's dad opened the refrigerator and got out some meat, slices of cheese and butter. He reached on top of the refrigerator and took down a half-load of bread and turned the stove on.

Jacob's dad never professed to being a good cook, in fact he took great pride in the fact that he could burn water if he put his mind to it. If there was one thing he had come to know how to cook it was grilled ham and cheese. He buttered both sides of the bread and put one slice down on the now-hot pan that had been warming up on the stove. Carefully he put down the slice of cheese, ham and then the other piece of bread. He listened to it sizzle and crack as the butter on the outside of the bread browned and heated the cheese. He flipped it over in the pan by stabbing it with a fork and was pleased by how perfectly golden brown the bread was. He grabbed a plate from a cabinet tipped the pan, letting the sandwich slide off the pan and onto the plate.

He took the plate over to Jacob and, careful not to disturb the game, placed it beside Jacob's right knee on the couch. Jacob didn't blink a word of acknowledgement, for he was too busy making sure the mothership was dismantled or destroyed. Jacob's dad looked up at the vid for a second and then smelled something burning. He ran back over to the pan and hastily buttered another two slices of bread, repeating the process for

himself. When he was done he turned the stove off and let the pan cool before placing it into the sink. The dishes are never done, he thought.

Jacob managed to still deter the aliens from taking over the world while eating his lunch with his right hand. A feat not to be taken lightly. Jacob's dad returned to his own room and managed to get his dresser halfway into the living room by pivoting it on one edge and then another - basically walking it in like a two year old. Jacob put the game on pause and helped his dad move the piece of furniture into the corner with everything else. He went back to the game but was instantly killed with a laser rifle from the vile alien queen. He made a face at the vid screen and set the controller down.

The rest of the day was filled with periods of playing games on the vid and taking short naps on the couch. It was much more convenient to sleep on the couch than to go into his own room, since his clothes for the next few days were spread out across his bed. When it was time for dinner, both of them didn't feel very hungry so they just sat and watched the evening vid shows, including the news.

It must have been a slow news day, as the reporters on the number one newscast were all laughing and talking about the woman in Minnesota who collected stone goose statues. Jacob's dad flipped through the channels and caught a small story about

the upcoming mission to Phaedra and the preparations that were taking place on the ship in drydock high above the Earth. He recognized some of the workers he saw on the news segment. They were the ones who still worked on the project, but who were not picked to make the journey. It was then Jacob's dad finally saw the commander of the ship, and the governor of the new colony.

She was younger than Jacob's dad thought, but had that sparkle in her presence that only a seasoned politician could project. The news footage showed her walking around the C6 planet where Jacob's father worked, smiling, pointing a finger to something on the side of an engine, causing three or four technicians to nod in agreement then hurry off in different directions. The footage cut to her closeup and looking directly at the camera.

"I am excited at the opportunity to help start the Phaedra colony and to pilot The Constitution on its journey. I have a very talented crew, and we hope to make the journey comfortable and enjoyable for all off our passengers." The name "Donna Howe" flash on the screen across her chest. "I am especially proud of the entire C6 team, whose efforts have allowed us to venture to this new frontier faster and safer than ever before." The video of her continued to play even as the news announcer kept reading the news story.

Jacob's dad was inbetween states of pride and fear after hearing the future governor talk about his project in such a good light. As one of the main designers of the C6, he had every right to be proud of what he and his team had accomplished over the years. He just hoped he didn't end up like the designer of the Titanic - dead in space instead of the bottom of the ocean.

Jacob turned the vid off with the remote control, waking his dad from his self indulgence. He turned to Jacob and smiled. "What?" he shrugged at his son. "She's cute." Jacob rolled his eyes and the two got up off the couch and went into their respective rooms. Jacob moved the clothes on his bed to a neat pile on the floor and then crawled between the covers, stretching his toes all the way down to the cool spot just barely before the end of the mattress. He turned onto his side and before he knew it, he was fast asleep.

Jacob's dad wasn't as lucky. The anxiety he was feeling was easy to hide from his son, but there was no hiding it from himself. He hadn't slept well the past few days in anticipation for the departure from Earth. He even shared his son's nervousness about the cryo process. He tried to find something to keep his mind off the journey to Phaedra, but he kept coming back to the same thought of "what if" disasters. The only thing

that seemed to cure the doubts in his mind was the image of the governor turning towards the camera and looking at him.

"Oh, Donna," he thought. He struggled to remember the lyrics to the song bearing her name. He just kept humming to himself. "Oh... Donnnnn-aaaaa." What was he thinking? He tried to shrug off the image of the governor and ship commander, but her face just kept appearing in his mind. Oh great, he thought. Here we go again.

He knew an infatuation when he had one. They always seemed to end in pain. And now, here he was leaving the planet to help colonize a new world and he found himself falling in love with the new ruler of the planet. Like that's going to happen. Jacob's dad didn't know how long he had been laying there with his eyes closed, but eventually he too fell asleep and dreamed of a certain red-head he saw on the news.

The next day was filled of more of the same. Jacob and his father played a few vid games together and moved the rest of the furniture into the living room, leaving only their two beds. They moved Jacob's twin bed into his father's room for the final. Jacob sat down on the couch and decided to give Chris a call. The vid screen fizzled into Chris's image, this time right-side up. Jacob noticed Chris had a sweater on - something Chris had always complained about having to wear on special occasions. "Hey man," Jacob said. "What's going on?"

Jacob could tell Chris was in the living room this time, and could see his parents criss-crossing in back of him. "Are you kidding?" Chris asked. "What, have you been under a rock the last few days?" Chris laughed and Jacob could only manage a weak smile. Yes, he might as well have been under a rock the last few days. "Everybody is going to church to pray for you guys. More people are going to church tonight than go at Christmas."

Now this time Jacob did laugh. That was the reason for Chris's wooly attire - church. Jacob imagined church after church being filled to capacity, all to wish him and his dad - well, and the thousands of other passengers - a good journey. Chris's mom came up to the vid when she saw it was Jacob. "Hi Jacob!" she said while putting on one of her black shoes. "We are so proud of you and your father - we hope tomorrow goes good. I don't know what Chris is going to do without you calling for seven months." She smiled that nice, friendly, friend's mother smile which immediately put Jacob into polite mode.

"Thank you Mrs. Kasperall," Jacob said while straightening his back so as not to slouch. She gave the vid screen back to Chris and went about getting ready. "So I guess I won't talk to you before I go, huh?" The reality of not talking to Chris for seven months now hit him, thanks to Chris's mom mentioning it.

To Jacob it would only be three weeks but Chris's life could completely change between now and the next time they talked.

"Yeah, I guess." Jacob could tell Chris really didn't want to talk about it. "But I'll make vids every so often that you can watch when you get to Phaedra, so you know what's all going on. The guys said they want your new comaddress when you have it too."

"Sounds good." Jacob felt something in his throat and knew he had better say goodbye to Chris before he totally broke down in tears. "You better get going, you have to go pray for me, you know?" Jacob smiled and Chris laughed. Jacob heard Chris's mom yell from the other room that they had to leave, so it was good timing.

"Ok," Chris said. What came next would be the hardest thing either boy had ever said to each other. A short, complete silence followed by Chris looking up at the vid with his eyes glistening from a rogue tear. "I'll miss you." Jacob nodded and felt his own eyes filling up with tears. Jacob gave Chris a fake smile through his clenched lips.

"Me too. You'll always be my best friend." Before he totally broke down, Jacob pushed the off button on the vid. He wiped his eyes with his arm and then let his head fall forward, resting on his hands which were now on his knees. He started to cry and didn't even see or hear his dad who had listened to the

whole thing. As he sat there, his dad went back to his own room and went to bed.

Jacob managed a good cry and then got up off the couch and turned off the lights in the living room. "Tomorrow is the big day," he thought to himself as he walked back to his dad's room and got into his bed along the opposite wall of his dad's. "The BIG day. The day." Jacob fell asleep among thought of space ships, battling aliens and the thought of never seeing his friends again.

Jacob's dad woke him up early, as the quarantine was now lifted. Jacob wondered how many of the other colonists had been ejected from the program due to an allergy or something else that went wrong with their immunizations or physicals. He halfway hoped he had at least gotten a little sick from the injections - maybe then he could stay here on Earth.

Jacob and his dad made several trips to the incinerator, which freed up a lot of space from the living room. They moved the mattresses from his dad's room and placed the bed rails along the wall next to the door to the apartment. Jacob was surprised they had gotten so much done even before breakfast. His dad poured their customary breakfast cereal into two bowls, with milk, and then poured one glass of milk for Jacob, effectively draining the last bit from the container.

The two ate their breakfasts in near silence except for the crunching of the cereal flaked and the occasional inhaling sound as they lifted the spoons to their mouths. Jacob's dad grabbed the last piece of fruit, a banana, from the counter and threw the peel away in the trash can. "Want half?" he asked Jacob.

Jacob shook his head no. "No thanks." He continued eating his cereal while watching the morning news on the vid. There was a buzz at the door before he finished, and a team of four men came in the apartment and talked to Jacob's father. Jacob guessed they were the movers, even though they technically weren't moving - they were taking. They eventually emptied everything in the room, waiting for Jacob to rise off the bar stool at the counter and then they took that too. Jacob's dad thanked them and Jacob looked around the empty living room.

"Pretty weird, huh?" Jacob's dad asked. Jacob nodded with agreement. They had taken everything, and that meant everything. Even his vid game console was gone. The only thing left in the living room were four boxes, two for his dad and two for Jacob. A wave of panic overcame Jacob as he struggled to remember what he had done with the vid screen Chris's parents had given him as a going away present.

"The minivid - they took the minivid Chris gave me!" Jacob threw his arms up in a panic and ran through the other rooms, hoping to see it on the floor or on the bathroom countertop.

His dad finally yelled at him from the living room. He sulked back in and looked at his dad.

"I already packed it for you." He said. "Everything has to be in the boxes." Jacob was relieved. The minivid was the one thing that was going to keep him sane on the new world. When you are in a strange, new place - the only thing you have to remind you of home are memories. The vid Chris's parents gave him was very important to him. Maybe even the most important. Jacob opened his dad's box to verify it was really inside then put the lid back on. Jacob's dad picked up both his and his son's clothes from the day before. "They'll be here any minute. Better put on what you want to keep." His dad walked over to the last trash can now sitting in the center of the room and dumped the load of clothes into the can.

Jacob looked down and picked up his dirty clothes from yesterday and threw them across the room and directly into the trash can. He looked down at the remaining clothes and picked them up, unfolding them as he looked at them. He first thought about the sweatshirt. It had the name of his main school's basketball team on it, "The Huskies." He tossed it over into the can. Next he looked at a pair of pants, which soon followed the same trajectory into the trash can as the previous article of clothing.

"Will we get new clothes on the ship?" asked Jacob. His father nodded.

"Probably some nice white clothes made of paper - I'm sure they will be all the rage." He smirked and Jacob managed to smile as well.

Jacob walked over to his boxes and managed to stuff his pajama bottoms and a tshirt into the top of his box and put the lid on. His dad grabbed a roll of packing tape and taped the lid on all four boxes. "Well, that just about does it," Jacob's dad oftentimes had a knack for stating the obvious. In a couple of minutes there was a buzz at the door and the building supervisor was there to check out the building. Jacob's dad told the man to just throw everything in the refrigerator out and to charge the company for any cleaning fees.

"That won't be necessary," said the man. "You are doing something for the good of the country. Go ahead and do your best. We're all rooting for you. And for you too, kiddo." The man shook both Jacob's hand and that of his fathers. Jacob smiled and then went to pick up his 2 boxes. He was glad the jet station was so close, carrying the boxes a longer distance could have been tough.

Jacob and his dad left the apartment building and started towards the jet station. They both looked back only for a second and then continued to the station. After swiping their

Ids in the jet car, a new destination appeared on the navigational computer. "Shuttle Departure" it said.

"That must be the place. Do you want to do the honors?" Jacob shrugged his eyebrows then pushed the line, selecting the shuttle departure location. The jet zoomed ahead and within minutes they were out of the city and almost to the shuttle facility. As they got near to the facility, they could see the shuttles taking off and arriving through the clear windows in the top of the jet car.

The car entered one of the buildings on the side of the facility and took them through an intricate maze of tunnels until it stopped and the doors automatically opened. They were greeted by a worker in a blue jumpsuit, who beckoned them to hurry up and grab their boxes so they can be processed. Jacob and his dad grabbed the boxes and proceeded on the moving sidewalk to one of the processing buildings.

They came to a desk set inside a small room along the walk. They swept their identification cards on the desk and handed the man behind the desk their boxes. The clerk tagged each box with a label that printed out after their Ids were swiped, then pushed a button on his desk, sending Jacob and his father further down the hallway. They stopped outside of another building and were instructed to get off the sidewalk and stand on a series of black circles on the floor.

Jacob stepped forward so he took the first circle in one of the lines, his dad right behind him. They were facing a set of metal doors that looked like they slid up to open rather than opening outwards. Jacob looked to his left and right and guessed there were a total of 20 or so similar lines, all holding about 10 people. Others began to trickle in, filling in the spaces behind Jacob's dad and to the side. Soon every circle was full and they were asking if there was anybody going alone. Finally every single black circle had someone standing on it, and everybody was waiting in anticipation for the doors to open.

There was a loud sound of engines roaring in the room ahead and the metal floor beneath them shook with vibrations. The wall finally rose into the ceiling and they saw the shuttle for the first time. To the passengers, it just looked like rows of seats. Jacob walked forward and took his corresponding seat at the far wall of the shuttle. He sat down and his dad helped him to work the seatbelt. Once Jacob was fastened in and ready to go, he did his own seatbelt and they both sat there nervously waiting for the shuttle door to come down and the takeoff.

Their waiting was interrupted by a recording that told them their seatbelts were now electronically controlled and locked, and they would begin the journey to the drydock momentarily. After the recording stopped, the shuttle moved forward until

the side of the shuttle could close, effectively sealing off the shuttle and making the inside a little more cozy. Jacob had hoped the shuttle would have some kind of windows, but to appearances, they were just sitting in a room with comfy chairs. Jacob could feel the shuttle moving horizontally again and then the sound of the engines started to get louder and louder. The sound got higher and higher in pitch until they launched forward and upward and were on their way through the Earth's atmosphere and the ship they would soon call home.

Jacob clenched the armrest of his chair as their angle of approach increased. He felt his dad's hand grasp his knee and he eased up a little and readjusted in his chair. His dad immediately withdrew his hand, thinking it was too embarrassing for his son. Instead, Jacob reached out and took his dad's hand and held it the entire way.

Jacob could tell they were slowing down and suddenly the sound of the engines changed their pitch. The shuttle turned and set down inside one of the giant shuttle bays in the Constitution, and both walls of the shuttle opened up, revealing the shuttle bay to the colonists. Suddenly the enormity of the task ahead of them was realized by everybody in that shuttle.

The shuttle bay was full of at least twenty of the shuttles exactly like the one they just arrived on. They were greeted by a single person who told them to quickly disembark from the

shuttle so they could be shown to their quarters. The shuttle passengers all unbuckled their belts and not one second after the last had left the shuttle, it was moving already back to the airlock to return to Earth for another trip.

The 100 or so passengers were huddled into a central group that had assembled in the center of the arrival area. They were told to proceed to the right-hand side of the arrival area and to use the elevators along the wall directly outside of the room. The massive huddle of people made their way to the elevators and gathered inside, each swiping their Identification cards as they walked in. There was only room to stand single file in the elevator car, and once everybody was inside that would fit, the doors swept close and took off to the first destination.

The car went throughout the ship and spoke the name of the first person in line to exit. The young lady got off the elevator and the door closed behind him, and was immediately off to the next stop. After three people had gotten off of the elevator, it was time for Jacob and his father to get off the elevator lift. They waited until their named were announced and got off the lift.

After the doors swished closed behind them, another voice becomed them to come forward to a vid screen in the hallway. It displayed their name and said in a pleasant voice, "Welcome to

the Constitution Mark and Jacob Hawker. Please proceed to your quarters in Section 32, letter C. Follow the vid screen notices on the right hand side of the hallway. And again, welcome aboard." The computer voice stopped and they looked up to see the vid screens with moving arrows on them, pointing their way down the hallway. They followed them and came to their quarters. Jacob's dad swiped his identification badge and the doors opened.

The accommodations were nothing to be impressed with, in fact they were fairly tight. Inside the room was a small desk, two chairs and a bunk bed set against the wall. Jacob saw their two boxes placed against the wall nearest the desk. Jacob stopped down to pick up his two boxes and put them on the table. There was a vid screen on the wall and it lit up, showing the itinerary for the rest of the day.

Jacob's dad sat down in the chair while Jacob looked over the schedule. They had about an hour to get familiar with their surroundings and to look around the ship, then they were to meet with the rest of the passengers staying on the same deck in the central area. Dinner was in the mess hall anytime between 7 and 9 PM, with lights out and curfew at 10pm. To Jake it sounded like they were already on the planet with all the rules put into effect so soon.

“Well, it certainly is comfy, isn't it?” Jacobs dad got up and laid down on the bottom bunk, fluffing the almost flat pillow that was neatly placed. At the head of the bed. Jacob had always wanted a bunk bed as a kid but now it seemed like more of a nuisance than something fun. He took a running jump and caught the mattress in the middle of his stomach and couldn't pull himself up. He fell to his feet back on the floor, causing his dad to crack up laughing.

Jacob took another go, this time deciding to step first onto the mattress of his dad's bunk, and then jumped while pulling himself up onto the top bunk. He made it this time and leaned over the edge so his head was hanging over the side. “Ha ha! I am victorious - feel the power! Muahahahaaaa” Jacob started laughing then laid down on the bunk the right way, trying to feel how hard - or easy - it was going to be to fall asleep on this thing.

The mattress and the pillow were thin but comfortable, and the room had an adjustable environment so they would be able to adjust the temperature to whatever they wanted. “Want to go check things out?” Jacob's dad asked from the lower bunk. Jacob's answer was to jump eagerly down with a loud thump to the floor. Jacob's dad took that as a yes and rolled off the bunk with a loud grunt. They swiped their ID badges on the console outside the door and pressed the out button.

There was a little more activity in the hallway now, with other colonists coming out from the elevator and finding their quarters. They made their way down a hallway and found an exercise area filled with treadmills and exercise bicycles. A sign on the door read "Admittance at your scheduled recreation time only." Jacob tried to peer in through the glass but found it completely empty. They continued down the hallway and followed the sound of laughter into the commons area.

The commons area was already filling up with the inhabitants of the floor when Jacob and his father made their way through the double doors. The room was filled with tables and comfortable chairs, along with an area for watching a large-screen vid and a section set aside for drinks and other refreshments. Jacob's dad told his son that the Constitution was used once to colonize a planet near Phaedra, and then a few years later used to send military troops to the planet to stop the planet from self-destructing because of rampant crime and discontent. The remnants of the military recommission were evident in the small quarters they were provided, but the common area had been once again furnished with all the comforts of home.

"Mark!" yelled someone inside and to the right. Jacob and his father both looked towards the source of the sound and found a blonde woman waving her arms frantically to get their

attention. Jacob recognized her from his dad's work, Mary he thought her name was. They walked over to her and his dad gave her a hug. "Hey, good to see ya. Ready for three weeks of hell?" She laughed, not realizing Jacob was absolutely mortified. "Oh, don't worry, kiddo. Your dad and I have a lot of work today before we jump is all. I'm sure for you and the rest of the passengers it will be nothing but fun. Think about it... no cooking, no cleaning - it's going to be a paradise." Jacob shrugged and looked around the room for someone he knew. No such luck.

"Three weeks of work for six months of sleep - sounds good to me," said Jacob's dad. Jacob laughed. Jacob sat down in a chair and made himself comfortable, then decided to get up and get something to drink from the cafeteria in the corner. It didn't even occur to him until he got up to the counter that he didn't have any money.

"It's ok, man - it's all on the house." The guy behind the counter helped put Jacob at ease. He couldn't have been much older than Jacob, maybe 18 or 19. Jacob looked over the menu and decided on a Trite and got one for his dad as well. He swiped his ID card on the terminal, recording in the computer which colonist had taken the drink. Jacob thanked the guy behind the counter, who threw Jacob a plastic-wrapped cookie. Jacob managed to catch the cookie despite carrying the two

bottles in his hands. Jacob smiled and started to walk back to his dad and the woman, and looked back over his shoulder again and mouthed the words "thank you."

Jacob had endure a half hour of "shop talk" between his dad and the woman from work before the briefing began. The room by now was fairly crowded and there were other kids around laughing and playing. When the giant vid screen presented the Phaedra logo and the lights dimmed a bit, most of the kids went and sat on the floor immediately in front of the vid, while the adults settled into the now vacant chairs and started to quiet.

The image of the Captain/governor appeared on the screen. She was smiling and looked out through the vid screen to those watching like a proud mother. "Hello. This is your Captain and Governor speaking. On behalf of the entire crew of The Constitution and the Department of Colonization - welcome." The room erupted into mass applause and the Governor paused every so briefly. Jacob knew this same message was being transmitted to every deck of the ship, and probably on every newsvid channel back on Earth, but it seemed like she was talking only to them.

"In just under two hours we will be leaving the drydock and starting the journey towards our new home - Phaedra." Although there were a series of smaller cheers, this time she didn't pause. "This is an exciting time for me, the crew, the government, and most importantly you - our colonists. Please be

assured we are doing everything we can to make your journey to Phaedra, and your new life on Phaedra, comfortable and rewarding." Jacob looked over at his dad who was listening intently to the vid screen. Jacob raised the Trite bottle to his lips and took the last drink from the bottle and then set it down on the table nearby.

Her screen presence on the vid was amazing. She was calm, beautiful, and totally confident in her presentation. Jacob looked around at the rest of the room and found the adults, and even the children, were transfixed on her image being displayed on the wall. Jacob turned back to the vid to watch the rest of her address.

"Until we reach Phaedra, there will be a communications black out in which you will not be able to contact those on Earth or the other colonies. This is done to save energy and communications space for vital transmissions while we are in transit." The thought of no communication with the people back on Earth brought a low grumbling among those gathered. "rest assured your new quarters on Phaedra will offer a complete communications system capable of near-instantaneous linking with friends and family back on Earth."

Jacob was glad more than ever to have received the vid screen from Chris's parents. Three weeks without talking to Chris was going to be brutal. At least with the videos stored

on the tablet vid he could somehow imagine he was talking to Chris. He wondered what it was going to be like for those on Earth to try contacting the Phaedra, though. They would get a transmission denied message and probably go into a state of panic wondering if the people they know are alive or dead.

"The core C6 designers and engineers will meet in the commons area on Deck 22 in two hours. To the rest of the colonists, please take the time to familiarize yourself with the ship. It offers an extensive online library, physical exercise facilities, excellent dining facilities, and of course the finest crew I have ever commanded." She smiled. "On behalf of The Constitution crew, welcome aboard. As the old saying goes, 'may the wind be at our backs.'" The image of the Governor faded once again into the Phaedra colony logo.

Jacob's dad went back to talking to the woman from work, so Jacob walked around the commons area. Many of the colonists went back to their quarters or started to walk around the ship to familiarize themselves with "all it has to offer." Jacob spied about six vidgame consoles in a row along the wall, most of them not in use. He went over and sat down on one of the chairs near the consoles and grabbed a controller for one of the vids that wasn't being used. He pressed the connect button and saw more games listed in the vidgame computer than he even knew existed. He scrolled through the list until he came to a title

that had just came out. The game loaded and he started reading the instructions that came on the screen.

"Hey, is that the new Star Traveler game?" A boy a couple of years younger than Jacob has snuck up on him when Jacob was engrossed in choosing a game to play. Jacob looked at the kid and could tell by the worn-out clothes the boy was wearing that his family was one of the true colonists, and probably one of the laborer families. Not that Jacob was prejudice against other classes in society, mind you - its just up until now he thought everybody on the ship had the same lifestyle as he did.

"Yeah, I've never played it before." Jacob went back to reading the instructions on how to play. He read where jump, fire, and what all the other buttons on the vid controller did. The boy asked if he could play too and Jacob reluctantly agreed. Who knows, he might make a friend. It would be good to have a friend on board and then on Phaedra, even if this kid was so much younger than he was. Jacob guessed the years remaining to maturity blank on this kid's physical was in the double digits.

The two played on the vid console for half an hour until Jacob's father came over and said they needed to go back to their quarters until he had the meeting with the rest of the C6 engineers. Jacob switched the game to one-player mode and said goodbye to the kid. "I'm Jeremy, by the way." Jacob got up off the chair.

"Jacob," he said. "We're in 32 C." The kid smiled and went right back to the video game. Jacob and his dad walked back down the hallway and to their quarters, swiping their ID badge and entering their quarters. Jacob sat down at the table and noticed the vid screen was blinking so he leaned over to take a closer look. It was a reminder of his dad's appointment in an hour with the Governor.

"She does run a tight ship, doesn't she?" Jacob's dad had lay down on the bottom bunk again, taking off his shoes while he took a small rest. "So, did you make a friend today? Who were you playing with?"

Playing. That word always sounds so childish to Jacob. It had been years since he uttered the words "Can Chris come and play." Now whenever he wanted to do something with his friends he just said "Wanna do somethin?" Play. What a strange word for a teenager. "I dunno," Chris said, tipping the chair back onto its back legs. "Maybe. He's just a kid, though."

His dad laughed. "And you are... what?"

Jacob laughed. "Older!" Jacob said as the other two legs fell to the ground, leveling out the chair so that all four feet were now solidly on the ground. Even though he was emotionally mature for his age, he knew he was still only thirteen-years-old. The opportunity for others to put him in his place and say "he's just a kid" came regularly and annoyed Jacob to no end.

He had grown up fast not having a mother and a father who worked all the time. Sometimes it was nice to try and be a regular kid, but usually he just didn't fit in. He remembered going to the rec center two years ago and after shooting baskets, decided to sit down at a table with thousands of little plastic building blocks on it. Other kids his age were building massive buildings and constructions that could never have 'really' been built. It looked like fun, but as Jacob started building, he found himself sorting out the multicolored blocks before he would build anything. Before long he had most of the blocks in front of him sorted into their various colors. He built a car and put wheels on it, and called it quits. No sooner did he walk away than the other kids took a swipe of their arm and completely integrated his nicely sorted piles into the rest of the blocks. He hadn't played with those building blocks again.

Jacob looked at the itinerary for the next two days on the vid and saw that he was scheduled from 9 to 4 pm for school. Nice, they certainly don't miss anything. He clicked on the button marked Map which caused the vid to display an overhead view of their deck of the ship. Jacob found where their quarters were on the map and traced it through to the commons area and the mess hall. Most of the deck were other quarters. He eventually found several areas and determined they were shared restrooms and shower facilities. Jacob wasn't too keep

on that aspect of the trip, but figured he could survive for a few weeks.

After a few minutes, Jacob's dad swung his legs off the bed and put his shoes on. He put the lanyard holding his ID badge over his neck and grabbed a pen from one of his boxes, breaking the taped seal. "Gotta go. Go get some dinner in the mess hall when you are hungry, I might be late." He ruffled Jacob's hair like he always did when he left and swiped his ID card on the outside terminal so the computer would know he was no longer there. The door whisked shut and Jacob was now in the cramped quarters alone. He jumped back up on the top bunk and tried to get some sleep. His dad had told him most people can't sleep the first night after the ship leaves drydock because they aren't used to the sound of the engines and the motion of movement through space. Jacob closed his eyes and found the image of the Governor staring back at him in his mind. That forced, politician smile that seemed to defy every law of natural appearance. A calming - motherly - smile. He fell asleep.

Jacob's dad arrived for the C6 meeting in the main engineering bay of the ship and greeted his co-workers from Earth. They exchanged pleasantries and told short stories about their arrival and how small their quarters were. One man told him that his old partner, Phillip, had developed a high fever

after the immunizations and had been ejected from the program. Phillip was down on his luck and had taken the Phaedra assignment to help pay medical bills he incurred after his wife was hurt on a skiing trip. She slid down the slope and right into the ski rack, , ,breaking her jaw. It was still wired shut, and the doctor bills were still adding up.

Mary entered the room, causing another round of hellos and cheers. Mark waved one of his hands above his head, beckoning her to join him. They both looked around the room. "Can you believe it?" he said. "I didn't know we had this many people in the entire company." The entire engineering department was full with people. The engineering room was at least 50 yards across and looked like it spanned the space of four or five separate decks. Every ladder and deck was occupied with by somebody - even this wide open area seemed cramped.

The doors to engineering opened again and the Governor walked in, briskly. Almost immediately the idle chatter ceased and everybody straightened up a little and turned their attention to the Governor. She deserved every single ounce of respect she gleaned from the crew. "Thank you all for coming and being part of this historic colonization. We have a lot of work to do. I'm sure you all recognize the core of the C6 engines." She motioned to the middle of the engineering deck which housed the C6 engines and the readout panels and controls.

Time is of the essence. I want to be able to get underway at half power in two hours. We have a long journey a head of us, and you will all be very busy in the three weeks that are to come. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people than what we have right here. Thank you."

The engineering bay broke up in to applause and cheers as the Governor strode across the room and up a platform where she put her hands on a railing and spoke again, the microphone on her lapel amplifying her voice. "Well, what are you waiting for? Status reports in one hour by department heads. Get to it." The workers looked at each other and then scampered off to do their part in making sure the engines were ready to be engaged. Even though they had never been on the ship itself before, they knew the engine they had designed by heart and knew right where their console was located.

Mark scaled a ladder up to a platform near the middle of the C6 engines themselves and took a chair next to a series of vid panels. He made himself comfortable in the chair, noting it had a lot more bounce to it than the uncomfortable chair he had back on Earth. He went about checking fuel intakes, mixture and overall integrity of the engines. He pushed a couple of buttons on the vid screen and a series of pre-flight checks appeared on the screen along with the corresponding department. He touched the line marked "Drive Management" and watched as the vid

displayed the required system checks from the entire team. One by one the system checks turned from red to green as the other workers verified their calculations and the functionality of their particular part of the engine. Mark envied the other works in a way. As the project manager, the success of the C6 engines rested squarely on his shoulders. The rest of the team at least had an out. If something was wrong with the internal wiring, the guys in charge of fuel were off the hook - and vice versa. Even though they were all a closely knit team, they were very proud of their own department's work, and sometimes that meant pointing fingers at others.

Mary walked by carrying a portable vid screen and stopped by Mark's readout station. "Are we having fun yet?" she asked sarcastically. She pushed a few buttons on her vid screen and continued walking down the scaffolding, stopping at several stations along the way. Mark watched her stop and talk to the other workers as she checked off items on the report list. He was watching her when he heard footsteps come up behind him and stop.

"Good afternoon Mr. Hawker." Mark turned around and saw the Captain standing near him with her hand outstretched. He got up in a hurry, which sent his chair flying in the other direction and banging into the scaffolding guard rail.

"Hello Captain. Governor. Sir. Ma'am." Mark was sure he had made the worst first impression of his life, but was relieved when she shook his hand and laughed.

"That's alright," she said. "Half the time I don't know who or what I am either." She smiled and set Mark a little bit more at ease. "How are the checks going?" She leaned closer to the vid screens, hypnotized by the lights changing colors from red to green. Now there were a lot more green but also some yellows.

"Going well, sir." Mark replied. "They are identifying some problem areas - those are the yellow ones - but overall the checks are going smoothly and quickly. I don't think there will be any problem launching in two hours, but we'll have to wait until everything has been checked." Mark still had a hard time not only believing he was talking to the new Governor of Phaedra, but also that a politician was able to understand all the technospeak the C6 designers and engineers were throwing at her.

"Make sure everything goes smoothly, Mr. Hawker. And we only have one hour, forty-five minutes." She continued walking down the scaffolding, stopping to talk to some of the other engineers along the way. Her assistants trailed behind her, just in case she needed them to run an errand or something. She

stopped and talked to Mary, Mark watched them for a minute or two and turned his gaze back to his vid screens.

The next hour was filled with small fixes and software patches on various systems, which turned the vid status from yellow to green. Mark stretched and yawned after staring at the vid panels for over an hour. He got up and looked around and found there were a few less people in the area, but still too many to fully count. He sat back down and reconfigured his vid screen to only show him the red and yellow areas so he knew what he had to focus on. One by one even the reds disappeared off the screen, leaving five yellows then three then one.

The remaining yellow item was with Mary's main section. He got up from his chair and walked the scaffold to a ladder and went up a flight of stairs. He found Mary hunched over a vid panel with a team of five engineers all looking at the vid. He walked over to them, careful not to interrupt for he knew they were working as hard as they could. Mary looked up at him and the others in the group did the same in unison. "Working on it." She said.

"What's the problem?" Mark asked. He took a step towards the vid, parting the other members of the team so he could have a look. BREAK

Mark pushed another button on his console, which instantly displayed all the system checks as red on his screen again, once

again going one-by-one and making sure everything was ready for leaving drydock. He noticed the captain coming his way but kept his eyes on the vid panel in front of him. Soon the checks were almost done again, until finally the only one that was left was the very one that gave him problems just moments before.

Finally, that one too went green and "All Systems Go" display prominently on the vid. "Good job. I will prepare for departure. Go be with your kid. She placed a hand on his shoulder from behind him. He didn't quite know what to say.

"Thank you, Sir." Mark got up from his chair and shook her hand. His supervisor, mostly by name only, came and took his seat. Mark walked towards the entry doors to the engine bay, stopped, and looked behind him, taking in the enormity of what he had accomplished, and the legacy of his late wife. He nodded in approval than headed back to his quarters.

Along the way back down the twisting corridors, the vid screens activated with the captain's logo and was followed by her image appearing on the vid, smiling as always. "Good evening. We are making final preparations for leaving drydock. All systems are go and we are excited to finally get under way. Following this notification, there will be a countdown timer displayed on your vid screen. If you are not used to space travel, please stay off your feet and sit down in your quarters or lay down on your bed. Please remain in your quarters until

further notice and we are underway. Thank you. We will initiate dry dock procedures in ten minutes.

Mark picked up the pace and reached his quarters. He swiped his ID badge and entered to find Jacob laying on his bed on his stomach watching the vidscreen Chris's parents had given him. He dropped his hands, kicked his feet up and hugged his pillow. He looked over at this dad. "This is it, huh?" Mark slipped into the bottom bunk and swept his shows off in two short moves and lay down, facing the bunk on top of him.

"Yep, the first big hurdle. Nervous?"

"Kinda. You?"

"Nah. It's just everything me and your mom worked for, that's all." He didn't hear as much as a laugh coming from his son. Nothing. "Sorry, sport. Yeah, I'm nervous. Everything checks out and that's about all I can do, still I wish I was there in case something goes wrong."

"I'm glad your here," said Jacob. "but in a way Mom is here too."

Mark smiled. Jacob didn't mention his mom very often, and in that one sentence he manage he not only mentioned his mom, but also said he was glad he was with him. It wasn't very often his son showed moments of affection like this any more. He looked over at the vid screen and saw four minutes continued to count down. "You wanna come down here?"

No sooner had he said the word "down" did Jacob's feet thump down on the floor. Mark slid over as far he could next to the wall. Jacob recovered from the jump, reached up and grabbed the pillow off of his bunk and slid in next to his father. It was kind of a tight squeeze getting both of them in the bunk together, so the two ended up laying down on their sides facing each other, one hand under their respective pillows. Mark could see the countdown on the vid now break three minutes.

"How much time?" Jacob asked.

"Three minutes, almost there." Mark sighed and tried to take his mind off off the impending launch from drydock. "The first few minutes are the worst they say," he tried to console his son while also trying to put his own mind at ease as well.

"Did you read that in the manual?" Chris asked sarcastically. Jacob knew his dad had read even less of the manual than he did. He might have helped designed the engines, but he had never actually been on a space ship before, much less an inter-stellar transport. He rolled onto his other side so he could watch the countdown too.

"Drydock separation in one minute" the captain's voice said just as the vid screen showed the countdown entering the last minute. Mark could feel his heart beating fast and faster. Jacob scooted backwards so he was laying right next to his dad. His dad reached up and put his hand on Jacob's shoulders. This

was it, the first big challenge on the journey. The captain's voice was now replaced by that of another female voice. "Five, four, three, two one. Drydock separation sequence activated."

Mark closed his eyes and listened. He could hear his own breathing and his sons, and then there was a new sound. The sound of the ship itself changed. Before, the sound of the lights and the artificial gravity systems produced a low hum, this new sound was just a slightly higher pitch. The sound of the engines getting fed their fuel, and being engaged for the first time since their initial testing.

There were a few muffled thumping noises coming from the outside of the hull, which Mark guessed were the drydock sections being retracted. The vid screen changed from the countdown to a view from the bridge of the ship looking forward and then an overhead view from a nearby news ship. Mark and Jacob looked at the vid screen, realizing they were inside that little ship on the screen. The drydock arms swung backwards until the ship was still inside the enclosure, but was free of any connection to the drydock structure.

The voice of the captain came over the vid, synchronized with what they were seeing on the outside. "Engaging engines." The ship started to move. Jacob jumped a little as the ship began to move for the first time. The feeling was awkward. It reminded Jacob of being spun around and around on a merry-go-

round and then suddenly getting off and trying to walk. Not really dizzy, but rather light. Like he could either faint or float at any time.

The sound of the ship changed again. "Here we go, champ." Mark knew that sound. He had worked so closely with those engines he knew every sound they made, at all speeds. The ship had cleared the drydock and was beginning to get ready to achieve its velocity for the next three weeks. The view on the vid changed to that of what the captain is seeing from the bridge. The moon was off to the left of the screen, and was suddenly gone from view as the ship achieved its cruising speed. "That's it."

Jacob and his dad lay there for a few minutes, watching the vid screen until it changed to that of the current Earth time. Jacob sighed and finally rolled his legs off the bed. He took a step towards the chair at the table and immediately stumbled and fell to the floor. Mark laughed. "One small step for man, eh buddy?" Jacob laughed and got back to his feet, taking tiny steps until he was used to the change in gravity and vibration under his feet. It wasn't too much of a difference, but it made a big difference in the way he expected to walk.

"Now what?" Jacob asked, sitting down in the chair beside the vid.

"Well, I don't know about you, but I am going to try and get some sleep. I'm beat. Don't forget you have school tomorrow."

Jacob touched the itinerary button on the vid screen and it showed the schedule for tomorrow. Everything was exact - down to both of them eating in the mess hall at 7:30, sharp, and then Jacob at school at 8, and his dad in the engineering room at the same time. Suddenly Jacob realized didn't have anything clean to wear tomorrow. He knew they would receive their clothes when they reached Phaedra, but what about on the way? "Dad," he asked in definite concern. "Dad!" Jacob yelled to wake up his dad who had already fallen half-asleep. "What about clothes?"

"What?" his dad asked, still groggy from almost getting to sleep."

"Clothes? Tomorrow? What am I supposed to wear to school?" Jacob was getting mildly upset. He couldn't wear the same thing for the next three weeks.

"Tomorrow. Showers. Manual." He slipped back into sleep, annoying his son.

Jacob picked up the manual and flipped through to the chapter on post-drydock procedures. He skimmed down to the part on clothing. He managed to decode what his father had mumbled. Clothes for the day would be provided in the shower and bathrooms. Pajamas pants were also provided for the men, and

pajama sets for the women. Jacob decided to check it out. He put his shoes on and left the quarters, swiping his ID badge on his way out.

It was then he realized he hadn't even found out where the bathrooms were. He went to the vid in the hallway and pushed the directory button and pushed the button marked restrooms. He was shown a map on the screen. Just to be sure he didn't get lost, he pushed the "guide me" icon on the screen, causing the moving arrows to once again appear. He followed the arrows to the restroom and made sure to use them while he was there. He went to the shower part of the restrooms and saw a wall full of clothing cubicles, just like the stores back home. He found a bin marked for his size, took a pair of pajama bottoms and then walked a little further down to take a peek at what he would be wearing tomorrow.

The standard issue clothing was different than was described for when they arrived at Phaedra. It was still a jumpsuit, but was multi-colored: black on pants portion and royal blue for the top. There were also white t-shirts to wear underneath. Jacob saw the bins for underwear and was relieved to see the ones for kids didn't have little dinosaurs all over them. He grabbed one of the T-shirts to wear tonight since the entire shipped seems a little colder than he was used to. He made his way back to his quarters and put on the pajama bottoms

and hopped up into his bunk. There as a button for the lights on the wall which made it easy to finally try to get some sleep.

Jacob lay there for a few minutes, listening to his dad's deep breaths from the bunk below him. After a few minutes he too managed to fall asleep, letting the hum of the ship's engines providing a constant, reassuring sound.

The morning came and raised both father and son with loud klaxon that made both take immediate notice. Jacob stretched and looked at the vid screen, seeing the time as 6:00am. He couldn't remember the last time he was up at 6:00, he thought he would be able to sleep in much later, but the itinerary was solid and couldn't be reasoned with. They needed to be in the showers at 6:15 and done by 6:30. Mark got out of his bunk and put his shoes up then shook his son awake had to physically grab him and lower him to the floor to get him to wake up.

They stumbled along to the showers, Jacob leading the way in a daze. They first stopped by the clothing area, grabbing a towel, along with underwear and a jumpsuit in their size. They also grabbed a small shower kit containing soap, shampoo, toothbrush, deodorant, and an electric razor. The razor had a big metal plate fastened to the back. "Do Not Discard." Jacob took out his razor and placed it in a tub on the counter marked "Please return un-needed items." They entered separate shower stalls and put their clothes in the chute located directly

inside the shower door. Inside the small entry way was the actual shower room.

Jacob and his dad got in and finished nearly at the same time. Jacob dried off and stepped into the jump suit, and gave himself the once-over. The jumpsuit fit ok, but managed to emphasize just how skinny he was. He was used to much baggier clothes, and the jumpsuit made him feel like he really was as young as his true age. He always felt he was more mature than he looked, but now he definitely a child in the land of adults.

Mark stepped up to the tiny mirror in the entry to the shower stall and turned on the electric shaved. He carefully finished and used the towel to dry his hair. He placed everything back in the toiletry bag they came in and stepped into his jumpsuit. He slid the door open and stepped out, looking for Jacob. Jacob emerged slightly after his father, pulling at the collar of his jumpsuit. Mark walked up to his son and zipped the zipper down a little so it wasn't fastened completely to the collar. "It doesn't have to be all the way." Mark looked at his son, dressed in a smaller version of the jumpsuit he was also wearing. "Looking good, champ."

"Right. Like father, like everybody else on the ship." Jacob laughed. He and his father took their shower kits back to their quarters in the little time they still had, then made their way to one of the mess halls located near the common room.

The mess hall looked just like Jacob pictured it. There were long tables that filled up most of the room, with a small room to the side where people could pick up their meals. On the opposite wall was an identical room where trays and trash were to be deposited. It looked a lot like one of the cafeterias at a live-in school Jacob had visited once on a field trip. They called it a school exchange for a day program, but everybody knew it was really designed to show the kids at their school how much freedom they have compared to the boarding school. Jacob and his dad went through the breakfast line and grabbed a tray, scrambled eggs, bacon, something that looked remotely like round sausage, and a glass of orange juice that looked like it was made from a powder. Yep, they were definitely on a government ship.

They sat down at the table with another family who had two boys around Jacob's age, and a girl that looked to be about sixteen. Jacob was suddenly self-conscious about how he was eating and slowed down his chewing, watching her every move. His dad, however, had no such fears about other people, and immediately struck up a conversation with the two parents.

Jacob found out that, unlike he and his father, this family was strictly a colonist in every sense of the word. They were moving to Phaedra for the monetary bonus the government was giving to families to help persuade more of them, especially

those with children, to move to the new planet and start their new lives. The father was in construction, so he would definitely be employed for quite a long time. The mother worked at home, writing articles for a local news outlet. Her new job would be writing articles for the new vid-paper, overseen by the government.

"So, you stash anything good in your boxes from Earth?" Jacob looked up from his eggs to the boy sitting across from him.

"Not really." said Jacob. "You?"

"I packed a whole box of my favorite shirts, I didn't realize they would be thrown out. These uniforms are itching like crazy!" The boy pulled at his collar as Jacob had done earlier. Jacob wasn't as sensitive to the material as this kid seemed to be, and he wondered if the uniforms issued on Phadera would be made of the same material.

Jacob and his dad finished their meal and said goodbye to the family they had just met. Jacob didn't even get the kids' names, but waved goodbye anyway. They took their trays and threw everything but the tray itself into the trash.

"Well, time for school." Jacob said. "I have a few minutes to get there at least." Jacob went to the vid screen in the hallway and looked up the location for the school area. He found it was just down the hall. "Have fun at work, dad."

"Oh yeah, going to be a great time, I can see it." Mark said, laughing. "Good luck, kiddo." He reached out and patted his son on the back then went in the opposite direction down the hall and to the elevator.

Jacob rounded the corner down the hall and then another one until he came to a room that said "Briefing Room" he swiped his card on the outside of the door and the word "access granted" appeared on the vid and the door opened. The school was indeed a converted briefing room from The Constitution's last mission. It looked a lot like the mess hall he was just in, with long tables filling the room, with an aisle down the center breaking the room into two. There was a small desk at the front of the room and a table at the back with stacks of small boxes.

Jacob went and took a seat on the side of the center aisle, which proved to be a mistake as his chair was kicked by every kid trying to get into his row because the tables used for desks were so close together. Eventually there were only a few slots left. The teacher showed up at exactly 8am and walked from the front of the room towards the back. He looked over the small boxes, opening one and counting, then carried one of the boxes back towards the front.

"Good morning, class. I will be your teacher for the next three weeks. My name is Mr. Mosely. You are all in this class because you are all at basically the same point in your

education, so we decided to teach you all as a whole. Some of what we talk about this week will be a review for many of you, but some will be seeing the material for the first time. Don't worry, the grades you receive in the next three weeks will not go on your permanent record."

The class erupted into whispered conversations amongst the kids, obviously relieved at the teacher's remarks. "When you get to Phaedra, that's where your education will truly begin. Remember, you will have a lot of catching up to do, as your Earth counterparts will have completed six more months of schooling than you have." The teacher smiled and opened the box in front of him. "In the back of the room are boxes, just like this, that have your course materials in them. You will find a mechanical pencil, a workbook, a notebook, a ruler, a textbook, a bookmark, and a printed copy of a book we are going to read over the next couple of weeks, Oliver Twist. Now if I can have the first row get up, take a box, and return to their seats, please."

One by one, each row got out of their seats and took a box from the back of the room. Everybody opened the box when they got back to their desk, and placed the contents on the table in front of them. The kid to Jacob's left raised his hand. "Mr. Mosely, what do we do with the boxes?" The teacher looked at him and walked over.

"Keep the boxes to store your supplies. We'll take care of them on the last day of class." Jacob slid the box under his chair and rearranged his supplies so he was ready for class to begin. Mr. Mosely took a few more minutes to answer questions, then when everybody was more or less settled, he continued. "Please take out your textbooks and turn to page ten. Let's begin."

Mark arrived at his station in the engineering deck and sat down, checking all the status indicators for signs of trouble. He turned to the vid screen on his left and began reading the notes from the night before. There was a light blinking on the vid screen indicating a message was store in memory. He pushed the retrieval icon.

"Good morning, Mark." It was the captain. Mark scrunched his eyebrows and tried to think of whether or not the captain had ever called him by his first name or not. He didn't think so - this was definitely a first. "I just wanted to record a small message congratulation you on the first success of the C6 engine. I've piloted quite a few ships in my time and this is one smooth ride. You should be proud of you and your wife's work."

He didn't remember mentioning his wife to the captain before, but then again she had detailed files on every member of

the C6 team, its colony and the crew. Mark wondered how detailed those reports really were.

“Please join me for lunch with the senior staff in the Captain's Mess. I have cleared your ID for entry. See you then.” The image blinked out and was replaced by The Constitution logo again. Mark didn't quite know how to handle the captain's invitation. In the back of his mind he already felt like he was getting a bit of a “teacher's pet” reputation by other members of the engineering team. On the other hand, it was a great honor, and he did help design the technology that made this voyage possible in this short length of time.

He finished checking everything on the console in front of him and proceeded to walk around the engineering bay to visually inspect the C6 engines and its team. He walked up the outside of the engine wall and accessed the vid panel mounted on the side. From here he could see more intricate readings than he could at his station. He checked the fuel mixture levels and the heat being produced and vented into space - all at their expected levels.

Before Mark knew it, it was time to take the captain up on the lunch invitation. He went back to his station and informed one of his assistants he was going to lunch. He checked out of his station and exited the engineering bay, headed for the elevators. He swiped his ID badge on the terminal outside the

elevators and pushed the new destination shown: Captain's Mess. The elevator took off and then shortly slowed down, the doors opening on the command level.

Mark exited the elevator and found the vid panel facing him was already directing him to the right. He followed the pulsing arrows until he arrived at a pair of double doors with round window cut into them at eye-level. Swiped his ID card again on the outside and they opened, revealing the officer's hangout. The room was much more elaborate than the mess halls on the other levels of the ship, and much more comfortable. While the mess halls he had seen were made to get people in and out in a hurry, the Captain's Mess had comfortable chairs surrounding small round tables. There were couch's around the outside of the room, and the floor was carpeted . Painting adorned the walls. The captain rose from her table and came to greet him at the door.

"Thank you for coming," she said. "Follow me." She led him back to her table where she introduced him to the rest of the command crew. He shook everybody's hand and then took a seat immediately to the right of the captain. Instead of going through the line buffet style, the meal was brought to them at their table by one of the kitchen staff. Mark guessed that there wasn't that much of a choice when it came to lunch and dinner meals.

Mark waited for the captain to start eating her lunch before he started in on his. It appeared to be some kind of breaded chicken or similar type of meat, with mashed potatoes and half an apple on the side. "So, Mark. How are you and your son doing? What did you think of our departure from the drydock?"

Mark swallowed a bite of chicken. "It was certainly an event to remember," he said. "Jacob took one step after we were underway and fell right on his face." The entire table laughed in acknowledgment. Mark guessed this was a common first reaction the first time on a ship. "He's not too keen on the dress code on the ship and on the planet either." He took another bite, looking at the captain for a response.

"Well," she said. "Things will relax a bit once the economy starts going on Phaedra. But for a while, we need to make sure everybody is on as level of a playing field as we can. We don't need any fights in our schools or on the streets because somebody has a better named brand of clothes than somebody else." The rest of the command crew nodded in agreement. "Besides, I think everybody looks cute in those jumpsuits." The command crew laughed again, Mark managed to let a few giggles escape before he started on the apple.

"The captain tells us you and your wife designed most of the C6, very good job." The first officer complimented Mark while

waving a piece of bread at him. "If we didn't have the C6, the journey would take what - 6 years instead of 6 months?"

"Twelve," said Mark. "And it was my late wife." No sooner had he corrected the first officer did he realize he made a mistake. He had managed, in a single sentence, to not only make the first officer look bad, but also to drag down the mood of the entire table. "I apologize, Sir. I meant no disrespect. I'm... I'm very proud of my wife."

"None taken - and you should be." The first officer smiled and continued eating, putting the rest of the table at ease. The remainder of the lunch period was filled with idle chatter over their mutual experiences in dealing with Earth government to the wonderful opportunities that were now only a few months away. Mark was getting a little antsy to leave the table, since the lunch hour was already creeping towards an hour and fifteen minutes. The captain reassured him, however, that as long as he is eating with her, he could stay as long as she did. So he did.

On another part of the ship, Jacob had found out that some of the subject he would be learning over the next few weeks were old hat, and some were new. For instance, he had never read Oliver Twist before, but he did have a good grasp on calculus. This afternoon he would find out what the technology assignments would be the next few weeks, as well as what sports they would

play for physical education. Judging from the only facilities he had seen so far, Jacob gathered he would be doing a lot of running on the treadmill.

The class ate lunch later than he was used to, and judging by the number of adults vacating the mess hall as they entered, he gathered they were the last ones on the deck to eat. They lined up and noisily made their way through the line, grabbing one of everything and a carton of milk on the way. Jacob sat down at a table near the front of the room and started picking at the chicken with a fork. Soon a couple of other kids that were in his small group came over and sat beside and across from him.

"Hey," Jacob said, acknowledging their presence but yet not fully inviting any small talk. They all said hi and went right to the business at hand - food. They were silent for a good ten minutes until they began to finish and started talking about their assignments the rest of the three weeks.

"I can't believe we have homework on the first day. What's up with that?" Jacob barely knew the kid's name, Jason he thought. Jason was one of the louder ones in the class and was always making some kind of a joke or some kind of noise when the teacher wasn't looking. Jacob found it incredibly distracting and even turned around and told him to be quiet once, earning the wrath of the teacher for disturbing the

classroom. Of course the turnabout mad Jason laugh that much more.

"Can you imagine what it's going to be like in summer school when we get to Phaedra? Now THAT'S coming to be a drag." The other kids groaned at the thought of all that homework piling up over the next six months. If the technology exists to place them in suspended animation, then why can't they just implant the answer to all of the questions on any exam into their brains so they don't have to go to school ever again? Seems simple.

"It's not too hard," a girl with dark skin replied. "Most of the things we already know - he's teaching to the lowest common denominator so we don't get too bored - or learn too much." Jacob found himself agreeing with the girl as well. Yes, he thought there was a lot of homework over the next three weeks, but he also knew a lot of the things he would be expected to recite were things he had already learned once. Once they got to Phaedra and they were placed in their real classes - that's when things will get rough.

"So did anybody see a basketball court or anything around here?" asked Jason.

"I haven't," replied Jacob who had now started on his half of an apple, saving it for last the same as his father. "All I saw were those treadmill things. I hope there's something else

somewhere." Jacob finished the apple half and pushed his tray slightly forward on the table so he could rest his elbows on the surface in front of him. "I'd take a swimming pool or basketball court - anything but just a treadmill." The six or so kids around him nodded in agreement.

Jacob found himself immediately accepted by this group, and also accepting of all of them. Perhaps there was something to this common uniform thing after all - it immediately made every person feel like they belonged to a greater whole. Jacob felt like he had gone to school with everybody since the beginning of the school year. A loud bell sounded signaling the end of the kids' lunch. Jacob took his tray to the other side of the mess hall and emptied the contents in the trash, stacking his tray neatly on top of another one, and flinging his fork into the receptacle.

The group of new friends then headed back to the classroom to begin their technology class. To nobody's surprise, they were being taught about the C6 drive engines and how they operate. Today's class was a trip to the engineering deck to see the engines first hand and meet the engineers keeping them safe and tuned. Jacob held up the rear of the line as it snaked its way through the corridors and to the engineering bay entrance on their level.

They all gathered in an open area just inside the doors. Mr. Mosely motioned for all of them to come close so they could hear what he was saying. "Class, this is the heart of The Constitution, the engine room. Beyond all that plating you see are the very engines that are now guiding us out of the solar system, and which will ignite sending us straight to Phaedra in record time. I would like to introduce you to one of the inventors of the C6 Engines, Mark Hawker.

Jacob tried to look cool and hoped none of his new friends made the connection between him and his dad. His dad was the inventor of the C6 engines, which was cool, but he was still his dad - which was not. "Hello, class," he began. "My name is Mark Hawker, and my wife and I came up with the idea of the C6 engine many years ago. I was probably more excited than all of you were when we left drydock last night - it was like my life was flashing before my eyes." The class laughed.

"I'm going to show you around the engineering bay and then give some materials to your teacher to help your studies for the next few weeks. The C6 engines are going to be an important part in the colonization of other planets, including Phaedra. The more you know about them, the farther you will go. Pun intended." He smiled and Jacob rolled his eyes. His dad made brief eye contact with him and then they both quickly looked away.

Jacob's dad led the class around the engineering bay, up three levels around the scaffolding, to his main console then back around so they could touch the plating on the outside of the C6 engines themselves. They ended back up downstairs after a good 45 minute tour. Mark passed out handbooks on the history and the inner working of the C6 engine to all the kids and walked them back out into the hallway, thanking them for coming. Jacob was one of the last ones, taking a handbook from his father then running to keep up with the rest of the class. Jacob's dad shook his head. "Hot and cold," he thought. He went back into the engineering back and to his console.

They arrived back in the classroom only to be told they would soon be leaving for their physical education class. After putting down the C6 handbooks on the desks, they once again left with Mr. Mosel and proceeded to walk to a part of the ship most hadn't ventured to yet. They entered the doors and saw the main gym - and yes, it has basketball hoops. Mr. Mosel called everybody together again and told them the next class will be a bit more structured, but for now they should simply go and shoot baskets, play kickball, or walk on the treadmill for this class period.

Jacob and the other boys he ate lunch with ran immediately to a metal bin that housed worn-out basketballs. Jacob picked up one of the balls and tried to dribble it, noticing the effect

the slightly different weight had on the bounce of the ball. "Hey cool, it's like.. different." He and the other boys started shooting around, knocking each other's basketballs away with their own. The girls they ate with eventually came over too, all trying to shoot free throws rather than getting into a serious game of one-on-one. Before any of them knew it, Mr. Mosel blew a whistle signaling the end of physical education and they all gathered up and walked back to the classroom.

"Physical education will be twice a week, and in the future there will be ample time to shower and clean up after a workout. For all of our sake." The boys laughed while the girls made the familiar "ew" face. "Since I know the last day has been an exciting one, and you have a lot of homework to do, I am going to dismiss early today. DO NOT count on this happening ever again in the next three weeks - we do have a lot of work to do. Remember, read chapters 1-3 of Oliver Twist, and the introduction to C6 engines. I will be checking your calculus problems tomorrow during class, page 7, even numbers only. Have a good night."

Jacob gathered up all of the handouts and materials Mr. Mosel had distributed over the course of the day. It was quite a handful, and Jacob wished they would have provided some kind of a backpack in the clothing area along with the jumpsuits. Jacob was the last one out of the classroom besides Mr. Mosel,

who followed right behind him and locked the door with a swipe of his ID card.

Jacob arrived back at his quarters and dropped the books and materials down on the table with a large thump. He unzipped the collar of his jumpsuit down his chest and wiggled his arms out of their sleeves so he was bare from the waist up. He tied the arms of the jumpsuit around his waist like a belt and then hopped up onto his bunk and closed his eyes. Mr. Mosel was right - it had been a long 24 hours. With all of the excitement he barely had enough time to just stop and think about what was happening to him. Here he was, traveling through the solar system with his dad and thousands of other people. They were strangers but yet the same.

He must have fallen asleep because the next thing he heard was the sound of the door opening and his dad coming through from the hallway. "Hey, Sport," he said. "Learn anything today?" Jacob's dad sat down on the bottom bunk and took his shoes off, which was becoming the standard routine.

"Oh, definitely," Jacob said. "I met this really famous guy who invented the C6 engine. I didn't realize he was so ... old." Jacob cracked up. He was still laughing when he felt his dad hit the bottom of his bunk with his hand, causing it to go up in the air slightly and bounce on the springs.

"Smart ass," his dad mumbled then laughed. Mark and Jacob spent the next several minutes talking about their respective days. They shared a commonality in their daily routine besides the engineering visit - the chicken. Mark thought it tasted like chicken but Jacob could have sworn it tasted more like pork. Either way they both agreed it was probably better not to find out what it really was. "Make any friends today?" his dad asked.

"Yeah, a couple," Jacob remarked. "There's this one kid named Jason who is really funny, but he got in trouble already for not being serious in class. He reminds me a lot of Chris. Oh, and there's this other guy who is awesome in basketball. Oh, and this one girl, she--"

"Girl?" his dad asked, suddenly more interested than he was just a moment ago. "Girrrrrrl?"

"Dad, relax. She's just a girl. Holly. She is a calculus wiz. She can do all these calculations just in her head while the rest of us are trying to write them out. It's amazing." Jacob went on about some of the other kids in his class. Which ones were smart, which ones were funny, which ones smelled, which ones had parents on the crew, etc.

Jacob jumped down off the top bunk and went over to the vid screen to check their schedule. They were scheduled to eat dinner in one hour, twenty minutes. He grabbed the hard copy of

Oliver Twist off the table then returned to his bunk. Jacob put his pillow at the end of the bunk by the wall and placed it on its small edge so he could double it over when he lay back to read. After a couple minutes of twisting and adjusting he found a comfortable spot and began to read.

"So, what are you reading?" his dad asked. Jacob sighed. Sometimes he just wish his dad didn't have to know everything about what he was doing, what he was studying in school, what girl he liked...

"Oliver Twist," Jacob said. "Half the class has read it already so I'm kind of stuck - I probably need to read it twice just so I don't look stupid when it's time to discuss it." He turned to page two.

"Ah... a classic. Interesting choice your teacher made. Mosel isn't it? A young boy who leaves the life he has always known in search of bigger things in a strange city. Sounds a little familiar." The bunk shook as his dad readjusted his weight below. "Wake me up when it's time for dinner, will ya?"

Jacob grunted out an acknowledgment than didn't hear anything else from his dad except the precise, monotonous breathing coming from the lower bunk. Jacob finished chapter one, then chapter two and had a good handle on chapter three when he looked at the vid and saw that their window for dinner was coming up in a couple of minutes. He jumped down to the

floor, put the book back on the table and woke up his dad. "Dad," he said shaking his father's shoulders. "Time for dinner. Dad. DAD!" Mark woke up from his nap and took a second or two to remember where he was. Jacob could tell his dad was in the middle of a dream. Both of them had always shared a common trait when they slept - vivid dreams. Jacob learned in school most people don't dream in color, or do so very rarely. But he couldn't imagine dreaming in anything but color. Sometimes the dreams were so intense and real he would rather sleep the whole day just to be in that world instead of the real one.

Mark swung his legs off the bunk and put his shoes on. He rose off the bunk and pulled down the parts of the jumpsuit that had bunched up and rode up on him. The two exited their quarters and took off towards the mess hall. The mess hall was less crowded than it was at breakfast, and Jacob guessed it either meant the food was worse than lunch, or that they simply spaced out the meal periods a bit more than they had in the morning. He and his dad made their way through the line, grabbing more mashed potatoes, another apple, and another piece of meat that was familiar yet unidentifiable. They stopped at a small table immediately outside the serving area, and picked up a slice of cheese and a small French bread loaf and vegetables to make a sandwich.

The two sat down in the same spot as they did for breakfast and quietly ate their lunch. Mark got up from the table to get them something to drink. Lemonade wasn't one of their usual drinks back on Earth, but it sure tasted good compared to the recycled water they had both tried during the day today. After dinner they returned to their quarters, Mark sitting down on his bunk and Jacob at the table.

"Well, at least we're not going to starve," said Mark. He kicked his shoes off and contemplated going back to bed.

"What're you going to do the rest of the night?" he asked. He lay down on the bunk so his head was resting on his hand as he lay on his side facing his son.

"I still have to do my calculus and read a little more," said Jacob. He picked up the calculus book from the bottom of a stack of papers and books, and opened it up while turning it to the first chapter of problems. "Dad, why won't they let us talk to anybody on Earth?"

Mark struggled for a moment to find an answer to the question. He had wondered the same thing and even brought it up in one of the pre-screening sessions for the project. "Well, from what they tell me, it's so the people on the ship, and on Phaedra, come to rely on each other more and not on their relationships back on Earth. You need to trust those around you if you want to make any progress in colonizing a new world."

Mark thought about the load of crap he was feeding his son. It did make sense, in an odd sort of way. But both he and the other scientists knew that couldn't be the only reason they aren't allowed to communicate with Earth. Mark imagined it had something to do with the news media, gossiping about unrest, the food, etc. He wanted to believe the official line about relying on others, but it was just too far-fetched. If you are traveling to a new, strange world - forcing your new colonists to abandon the relationships on Earth as well seemed irresponsible - and dangerous.

Jacob thought about what his Dad said and accepted it with an "I guess." That was more of an acknowledgment of receiving an answer than the acceptance of the answer itself. After a couple of minutes, Jacob looked up from his calculus again. "It's just... I want to talk to Chris. I want to tell him about leaving drydock, about the food, about school, everything. And - I can't." Mark looked over at his son who was still looking at the textbook but his fingers were tightly clenched around his pencil as if grasping a knife.

Mark knew that look, even from the back. He got up off the bunk and walked over to his son, pulling the pencil out of his son's hand from the top and placing it in the open book on the table. "It's OK, Jake. Hey." He turned Jacob's chair to face him while Jacob kept staring at the floor. He tilted Jacob's head

up to meet his gaze. "It's O..K." Mark reached out under Jacob's arms and brought his son to his chest as he sat back on the bed. Finally, Jacob let loose, all the frustration and sadness he had been feeling the past few weeks and days suddenly poured out and formed a puddle on his dad's shoulder. Jacob wiped his nose and tried to stop, but he just couldn't stop crying. Leaving Earth, leaving his friends - leaving Mom. Leaving everything. For what? He didn't want to go to Phaedra, he didn't want to be alone. Alone. That's what it was. Alone. He would be sitting at home while his dad worked. Alone. No friends to talk to, nobody to play vidgames with, just alone. Just him and nobody else. Totally, completely alone.

Mark could do nothing except just hold on to his son. He was able to understand a few of the words such as "alone" and the one that really stabbed into his heart - "mom." Mark knew this was all going to come out sooner or later, either the way it is happening now, or in a fight at school, or some teenage rebellion drama once they reached Phaedra. He reached one hand up behind his son's neck, cradling the back of his head. In the back of his mind, he knew that true father-son moments like these were going to become non-existent soon. Jacob was growing up. But right now, Jacob needed his dad. He needed him for comfort, for companionship - to make everything OK.

"I love you, kiddo." Jacob stopped crying for a second and sniffled. Mark thought maybe he shouldn't have said anything, but then Jacob pulled him in even closer than before. Mark could hear he wasn't crying anymore, there was only the silence between them, the kind of silence that exists between father and son, and complete unspoken volumes of understanding that flowed between them.

Jacob eventually loosened his grip and stood up, looking down at his dad who had too been crying. "Thanks." He placed a grip on his dad's shoulder, suddenly more mature now that he had recovered himself.

"Anytime, bud. Anytime." He reached up and patted his son's hand with his own, then Jacob returned to the table to work on his calculus home work. He grabbed the pencil from the inside of the book and went right to work, scribbling out an equation in the notebook. Mark sat there for a moment and watched his son. "Let me know if you need help." Jacob raised his pencil in a gesture that said "sure thing" and went back to work.

A few minutes passed, and then an hour. Jacob got up and stretched, closing his books proclaiming his victory over x's and y's and derivitatives. As he was clenching all thee muscles in his body upward, there was an unfamiliar buzz at the door that made him jump. He looked at his dad who laughed, telling

him it was a visitor and to push the vid button to see who it was. Jacob pushed the "intercom" button on the vid and it changed from the itinerary to that of the captain. He thought he had pushed the wrong button and somehow turned on the news, so he pushed it again and got the same result. He looked at his dad again.

"It's the captain, Jake. She's outside." Jacob looked panicked and straightened up his jumpsuit, pulling the zipper a little higher on the collar. He opened the door to find the captain of the ship and the new governor standing there outside their quarters.

"May I come in?" she said. Jacob stumbled for the words but could only manage a gesture, she walked in the room and Mark stood up to greet her. "Mr. Hawker, good to see you." They shook hands. "And this must be Jacob. Nice to meet you as well." She shook his hand and smiled, putting him a little more at ease. "Wow, these quarters are a lot smaller than I remember. You'd think they would have put families on the officer's deck to give them a little more space, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I guess it's for only three weeks, so who's to complain? And who would listen?" His dad spoke to the captain like he would an old friend. Jacob was relieved. He had seen her on the vid so many times and thought she was just a stuffy, rigid politician. Here she was in their quarters being nice and

friendly. "I'd offer you a seat, but it's a little cramped in here," said Mark. "Was there something I could help you with tonight, Captain?"

Jacob managed to maneuver his way to the chair to sit down. If she wasn't going to use it, he might as well be comfortable. "I was wondering if you would like to take a walk, actually. I want to be with people as much as I can since I will be here with a skeleton crew when you are all in cryo." She turned to Jacob. "You are free to join us as well, uh -" she snapped her fingers a couple of times, trying to remember if she had been told his name.

"Jacob," he said.

"Right, Jacob." She turned back to Mark. "What do you say?" Mark knew better than to turn down the captain's request for a walk. He turned to his son and asked if he would like to see a little more of the ship. "Nah," Jacob said. "I'm kind of tired - first day of school and all. I'll be ok." Mark nodded and then escorted the captain out of the quarters.

"I'll be back soon," said Mark. Jacob waved and the doors shut behind his dad and the captain. He left a couple of seconds pass and then he opened the door again to see if any of the kids at school saw his dad take off with the captain of the ship. The hallways were empty. He ducked back inside the quarters and took off the jumpsuit, putting on a pair of sweat

pants he had packed away in the top of one of his boxes. He'd wash them by hand if he had to - just to keep them from being thrown away. He turned off the light and climbed into his bunk and went to sleep.

Mark and the captain walked down the hallway, past the mess area and towards the engineering area. "So, Captain," he said. "To what do I owe the honor of this personal audience?" He smiled, to which she returned it strode into engineering with her hands behind her back.

"First," she pulled rank on him. "I am officially off the clock, so you can call me Catherine." She kept smiling as they made their way across the engineering deck to the door on the opposite side of the room. "And secondly, I just thought maybe we could talk. I like to find out what the crew is thinking whenever I start a new mission."

Marked looked around, halfway embarrassed at being led around by the captain. He had this irrational feeling like he used to have being led around the mall by his mother when he was sixteen. He looked behind him and saw people looking his way and then quickly diverting their gaze. "Guess they're not used to seeing you off-duty, huh?" he asked.

"You get used to it," she said as they strode down yet another one of the endless hallways. "It's not easy being captain and soon to be governor. Although my first-officer is

quite keen on the fact he will be piloting The Constitution back to Earth as her captain. He made me promise not to get any scratches on her. I told him to shove it or he'll be spending the rest of the voyage in the brig." She smiled. Mark couldn't quite make out if she was joking or serious. Perhaps it was best not to know.

They continued walking down the hallway and entered one of the elevators. She swiped her ID card and chose the officer deck as their destination. Mark swiped his ID as well to log in with the computer that he was going to be entering the officer deck. The elevator stopped after a minute and the doors opened, revealing the officer's deck to Mark for the first time.

Mark was severely disappointed when he walked out of the elevator and saw the deck. It looked the same as any of the other hallways he had seen, other than the blue stripe along the bottom of the wall. They continued walking until they came to a decorated double door. She swiped her ID card and they both entered.

The officer's lounge was definitely an improvement from the non-impressive hallway he just came from. The room was decorated with plush furniture and large vid screens. There were various other officers milling about, and they all seemed to straighten up with the captain entered. She motioned towards an empty table on the side of the room and they made their way

over to that area. Mark instinctively pulled the chair out and pushed it back in as the captain sat back down. Chivalry wasn't dead yet, after all, especially for the captain. She smiled and he sat down, looking at one of the giant windows that decorated the room. He had never seen these kind of windows before, they certainly didn't have them in the mess hall or commons area on the deck he was staying on. He was transfixed on the stars in space just beyond that glass.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" He broke from his daydream and faced the captain.

"Sorry, sir. Yes, yes it is." He looked for a moment back out into space. "Catherine, I mean." She smiled. One of the bartenders in the area came over to their table and asked what they wanted to eat or drink. She ordered a lemonade-alcohol drink and he decided on a simple lemonade without the alcohol. He learned a long time ago that ordering something with a little extra kick near bedtime was not a good idea - it always kept him awake.

"How is your son, doing Mr. Hawker." Sure, he called her by her first name, but she was still going to call him by his last. Mark was about to answer when they were both interrupted by at the arrival of their drinks. Mark took a sip and then instinctively started playing with the straw that sat suspended in the sugary drink.

"Good, he's good. I think he had a kind of a breakthrough tonight actually. He's been holding all the anger and frustrating and nervousness inside, you know. Then.. blam! It's going to be tough on him. But he'll be ok." He took another sip of his lemonade and looked at Catherine. "What?" he asked, noting she just kept looking at him.

"How the children are coping with the colonization process is important," she said. "We want them to enjoy living on Phaedra so they will continue living there when they get older. Of course, I could always quarantine the planet for a hundred years to force people to stay." She laughed but Mark did not. Wielding executive privilege in that matter had always been one of the fears that Mark had about the project. She very well could make an executive order like that, effectively isolating the planet through several generations.

"Don't you think there are already too many restrictions?" Mark asked, taking another sip to his lips. "After all, the communications blackout is going to be hard enough as it is." Mark could feel the overall tone of the conversation changing from pleasant to almost confrontational and he didn't like it. "I'm sorry, I'm sure there's a reason for everything, it's just frustrating for the kids to go from an open environment like Earth to a feeling of lockdown."

"I understand," she said. "The colonization procedures weren't exactly my idea. The reasoning for them seems sound, though. I mean, when you think of it - the main reason people commit crimes is due to a difference between the haves and the have nots. If we eliminate at least the appearance of the haves, that should postpone crime, at least for a while."

"But people will still have more than others," Mark chimed in. "Even if they all wear the same uniform at all times, there are different social classes moving to Phaedra, so they will still have more money than others. They will only look like they are all the same. Once the economy picks up and there are choices in goods, housing, and things - soon we will be back to the way it is on Earth and crime will happen."

"Yes, but it's something that can be controlled for a while. Everybody on this ship will be in a nearly identical apartment complex on Phaedra - there is no single-family residences. None. Once people get settled and the businesses start running on their own, then naturally the expansion begins. People will start having children... children will grow to have children. The construction industry will be reborn. It's a process. But everything we can do to make it a productive environment without need for crime is worth it."

Mark traced the lip of his lemonade glass with his finger. "And the communications blackout?" He looked at her, expecting another government attempt at doublespeak.

She sighed and took another sip from her drink. "Self-reliance. I admit that one may be a little over-the-top. But in theory it teaches people to look for comfort and companionship from those on the planet instead of those on Earth. Plus it helps isolate the news media on Earth from the inner workings of the planet. This whole colonization is going to take time, patience, and understanding by everybody on this ship. I know it won't be easy, and it does seem like a lot of rules and regulations. But it will be worth it." She smiled and looked at him. "It has to be."

Mark smiled and took another drink of his lemonade, effectively emptying the glass except for some half-melted ice cubes in the bottom. He tipped the glass up and crunched the ice cubes in his mouth as they melted. "It's a very big job, I don't envy you at all." And that was the blunt truth. Being the captain was one thing, but being governor of a newly colonized planet was almost unthinkable. She would be dealing with complaints over policies she herself may not agree with, enforcing rules she too thought were a bad idea. With all of the power she would have on the planet, she was still the

equivalent of a puppet for the Earth government. Her successor might have a little bit more freedom, but not her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Maybe I've said too much. Like I said, I had kind of a situation this afternoon with Jacob, and it all kind of came out. I listened, and I guess I needed to vent just as much as he did. I didn't mean any disrespect."

"No, no no." she said. "I asked you to tell me what you were thinking, remember? It's good to know what people on the ship are thinking. We are only into day one, by the end of the first three weeks I bet other opinions will be made quite clear to me as well." She laughed. Mark gave a short chuckle, knowing she was definitely right on that one. "I really appreciate this, Mark." She reached out and touched his hand. "Tell you what, if you promise to keep me informed and be kind of my crew liaison, then I'll add the officer's deck as a destination on your ID card. Deal?"

"Is that allowed?" he asked. He suddenly had a vision of the elevators opening, him stepping out and then as soon as he entered the officer's common area being swarmed by security and thrown in the brig. That would be a hard one to explain to his son.

"Of course," she said. "I am the captain, after all." She smiled and Mark returned it in kind. Mark looked at her and for the first time didn't see the famous captain of The

Constitution, but a very beautiful woman who was genuinely interested in his opinion - and was giving him access to the comforts afforded only the officers. "What about Jacob?" he asked.

"I'm... not sure about that one. Giving one crew member access is one thing, but his entire family is quite another. I may be able to give him access for a day, maybe for dinner here and there, but an overall passkey on his ID badge? Don't think I can do that."

Mark thought for a moment. He reasoned the only time he would be able to get to the officer's deck would either be when Jacob was in school, or when Jacob had already gone to sleep. "Sure," he said. "Sounds like a deal." He smiled and instinctively put out his hand, which the captain laughed and shook.

"So formal, Mr. Hawker." she winked and made Mark blush. "Thank you again, and please keep letting me know what your son and the other passengers are thinking. It is very important." She put both both hands on the table. "shall we go?" They got up from the table and she waved and smiled to the bartender as they walked to the door. She walked him back to the elevator room and they stopped before he entered. "Have a good night, Mr. Hawker." She smiled as she gestured to the elevator room.

Mark looked at her and paused. "You can call me Mark. Catherine." He winked and entered the elevator area, swiping his ID card and choosing his quarters. The doors closed and the captain made her way back to her quarters. Mark stood restlessly in the elevator until it opened its doors again and he exited. He walked down the hallway and paused by the shower room. He thought for a moment and then went into the showers and took a nice, cold shower. He dried off and put on a new jumpsuit, throwing the old and a towel into the laundry chute near the door.

Mark made his way back to his quarters, swiped his ID badge and quietly entered the quarters. He took his shoes off and slowly tiptoed to the bottom bunk and swung in. Mark listened to see if Jacob heard him come in then closed his eyes and gradually drifted off to sleep.

The next thing he was aware of was the alarm klaxon sounding like it was on the pillow next to his head. Surely it can't be morning already, he thought. Jacob jumped down from the top bunk and turned off the alarm, rubbed his eyes, and then sat down at the table. "What time is it?" Mark asked his son.

"Uh, 5:30, sorry." Jacob opened up one of his textbooks and a notebook. "I had some homework to finish, so I thought I would get up early." Mark groaned and raised his arm so it was

covering his eyes. Jacob didn't pay him any attention, already finishing some calculus problems.

"From now on - homework done before you go to bed, please." Mark groaned again and then sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes. "I don't necessarily go to sleep when you do, ya know." He yawned and stretched. He grabbed the back of his son's neck. "OK?!" he raised his voice playfully. Jacob shrugged it off.

"C'mon Dad, I need to finish this." Mark yawned again and gave up.

"I'll be back in a bit," Mark said. "Going to go get ready for work." He swiped his card as he left the quarters and went once again to the shower room. As he threw another jumpsuit and towel in the chute, he was glad he didn't have to do the laundry. He made his way back to the quarters and found Jacob still doing the homework. "Need any help?" he asked. Jacob shook his head no, pencil moving frantically across the paper. "Take it easy, you'll get it." The pencil didn't let up.

Jacob sat at the table finishing his homework for an hour, then got up and went to the shower area and got ready. Jacob complained to his dad that the jumpsuit seemed a little tighter than it had yesterday. "Maybe you ate too much of that yummy chicken... thing yesterday," he joked. "My little boy is growing before my eyes!" He laughed.

Jacob wasn't amused. He rolled his eyes and unzipped the collar just a little more, giving some much needed relief from the tightness of the jumpsuit. He checked the itinerary and told his dad they needed to get going to breakfast. After the meal, Jacob gathered up his books and notebooks and took off for school while Jacob made his way to the engineering bay.

The next couple of weeks went by much like the first day. Jacob kept going to school while Mark worked on the final specifications for the jump engines to reach their full burn. Mark managed to see his son in the morning and for an hour or two at night, but it was nothing like it was on Earth. There was a certain independence Jacob was going through and embracing - he didn't seem to need his dad for anything.

Mark would have a meeting with Catherine twice a week, telling her what people were saying in the mess hall and how his son was feeling about the trip. The initial shock of the lifestyle change had worn off, which meant that overall, people were much more content with things going on with the journey. Things they found annoying were now just a fact of space travel. The mood was up an all-time high, but people were starting to get nervous about the impending cryo-storage procedure that would have them sleeping for the next part of the journey to Phaedra.

Mark and Jacob gathered in the commons area for a special message from the captain the night before the cryo sleep process was set to begin. By now they all knew the procedure - from the captain's seal displaying on the screen, to that of the Phaedra Government and the Constitution. Within minutes, the image of the captain appeared on the vid screens, the familiar cheers and applause sounding from all decks at the same time.

"Good evening." She smiled as she looked towards the vid screen up on the command deck of the starship. Jacob wondered how she could be addressing all of them on the ship, but yet it felt like she was speaking only to him. "On behalf of the entire command crew of The Constitution, thank you for your patience, and for your hard work over the past several weeks. It is greatly appreciated." Jacob could see smiles creep up on the faces of those around him.

"The next stage of our journey is close at hand. Tonight, an itinerary will be uploaded to the vid screen in your quarters that contains the schedule for tomorrow's cryo procedures. I know this is a very anxious time for all of you, but I urge you to get a good night's sleep. It may seem redundant since you will all be sleeping for the next several months, but believe me, it is very important everybody is well-rested when they begin the cryo procedure."

The very mention of the cryo procedure quickly wiped the smiles from the faces of the crew gathered in the commons area. Jacob could tell everybody was a little tense, and felt his own heartbeat race at the thought of what was going to happen tomorrow. Cryo sleep was safer than it used to be, but it still posed a risk to those who went under the procedure. With a crew the size of this one, Jacob guessed there would be at least five or six who would not survive the procedure.

"It is extremely important that the itineraries be followed as exactly as possible. Any deviation from the scheduled itineraries causes someone else's inconvenience. The cryo rooms are exact, and care must be taken to go through exact steps for each and every one of you." A smile returned to her face. "My command crew and myself will not be undergoing the procedure so that we may monitor our journey and make sure you are taken care of and the systems maintained. Tomorrow marks a great step in the colonization of Phaedra - please let your anxiety turn into excitement at the new opportunities that await you. My medical officer has some comments before you return to your quarters. Mr. Sawyer."

A middle-aged man stepped up from behind the Captain, obviously more comfortable speaking to people one-on-one than through a vid screen to a ship full of colonists. "As a preparation for the cryo procedure, all galleys have been

closed. Please observe the next few hours as a fasting period in preparation for the cryo procedure." The room erupted into separate, although loud mumblings of discontent. "Water supplies will remain on - liquids are acceptable." More grumblings, this time growing louder, the medical officer stepped back and the captain once again appeared on the vid.

"These procedures are standard for cryo sleep and your cooperation is appreciated and expected. In the shower facilities, you will now find wardrobe specifically designed for the cryo procedures. Please be dressed and in your cryo area tomorrow morning on time according to the itinerary. Before you know it, you will wake up and be one step closer to our new home. Thank you." The vid screen showed The Constitution logo and the conversations once again started brewing in the commons area.

Jacob and his dad had no interest in gossiping and voicing discontent with the rules for the cryo procedure, so they made their way back to their quarters and swiped their ID cards, Jacob sat down at the table near the vid screen and read the itinerary. "What's it say, kiddo?" his Dad asked, already taking his shoes and socks off and unzipping his jumpsuit halfway.

Jacob leaned a little closer to the vid to make sure he was reading it correctly. "It says... it says shower at 5:30am and

then be in the cryo area at 6:30am. Wow, that's early." Jacob gathered up the open books of his that were spread across the table, carefully lining up the edges so they were all aligned. "I better go take the books to the classroom, we're supposed to turn them in before the cryo-procedure." Jacob gathered them up and managed to swipe his ID card with an armload of books as he left the quarters. He made his way to the classroom, swiped his card again and entered. A table on the far side of the room had been setup to facilitate the returning of the textbooks.

"Hi guys," Jacob said to a bunch of his friend from school as he approached the table. "Ready for tomorrow?" he asked. They all shrugged and made a little small talk before being rushed out of the room by a strange, small woman who seemed to know only two word: "Out" and "Sleep." Jacob walked back to his quarters, stopping at one of the gyms where he saw a half-dozen adults all running on the treadmills. Jacob gathered they want to get in some last-minute exercise before they were lying down for 6 months. He ran his fingers along the wall until he got to his quarters, swiped his ID and went in.

His dad was already asleep, one leg off the bed , his foot square against the floor. He kicked off his shoes and went over and lifted his dad's leg and put it on his bed. He jumped up on the top bunk and hit his pillow a few times. He unzipped his jumpsuit and then threw it off the bunk, down on the ground.

That would be the last time he would have to wear that jumpsuit. Of course, he would have to wear it to the showers tomorrow, but for now he took pleasure in knowing he would never have to see that damn jumpsuit again once they were dressed for cryo.

Jacob awoke to the klaxon in their quarters, right on time at 5:15am, giving them enough time to walk to the showers before their scheduled time. It seemed colder on the ship this morning, Mark zipped up his jumpsuit collar to the top as he swung his legs over the side of the bed and onto the floor. Jacob jumped down onto the floor dressed in only his underwear, and was immediately sorry he didn't wear the jumpsuit to bed. Freezing, he put the jumpsuit back on in record time. His dad laughed. "Little cold?" he said - knowing the answer.

"Yeah," said Jacob. "Just a little."

The two exited their quarters and made their way to the shower room. They went to the wardrobe bins and were helped by someone in getting the right sized clothes for their cryo sleep. They entered their private stalls and made a big production about throwing their jumpsuits in the laundry chute one last time. Mark laughed as he heard his son in the stall next to him shout out "Woo hoo! So long! Yeah!" Mark started the shower, got in under the water and closed his eyes, feeling every drop of the water hit his body. The shower stopped exact two minutes

from the time it started. Mark stepped out of the stall and dried himself off.

Jacob finished shortly after his father and quickly dried off, starting with his hair and then the rest of him. He picked up the clothes he was given and started to examine them. They felt just like the paper examination clothes they had to wear back on Earth. Jacob wasn't very surprised at that, he wagered these clothes will just be burned when they are done being used. He looked closer at the clothes, starting with the pants.

The pants were made out of the paper material, and had elastic at the cuffs of the pants and at the waistband, similar to the sweat pants he had managed to save. What was new, however, was the front panel of the pants. The front of the pants were made to "break away" from the rest of the piece of clothing so that there was a front panel that unfastened starting at the waistband, going down to the inseam. It reminded Jacob of the pictures he had seen in old nursery rhyme books where young kids had flaps in the back of their pajamas. Only the flap was in the front.

Jacob was about to put on the pair of pants when he realized he wasn't given any underwear to wear under the pants. Suddenly the reason for the flap became clear to him - easy access for the tubing. He put on the pants and unfastened the panel a couple times to make sure it worked and had plenty of

room. He didn't want there to be a problem getting the tube in there if he could help it.

He picked up the shirt next, and found it had a similar break-away panel, but it was more like a zipper down the front of the shirt. He opened the shirt so he could put it on like a jacket instead of a sweater, then refastened the panel, making it whole again. It was a short-sleeve shirt and had elastic along the bottom near the waist. Jacob picked and pulled at the clothes and was surprised at how soft they were compared to the ones they were given on Earth. When he was satisfied he was ready, and had checked to make sure there weren't any other hidden breakaway panels that were left open, he made his way out of the shower stall, stepping onto the cold floor with only his bare feet.

His dad was outside waiting for him, dressed in the same white garb. He struck a "ta-da" pose but Jacob wasn't quite in the mood. "Hey, you're front panel's open!" His dad joked. Jacob didn't fall for it and they made their way into the hallway. He walked beside his dad back to their quarters, and double checked his front panel with his right hand. All was well.

The entered their quarters for the last time and had forty-five minutes until they had to report to their cryo facility. Jacob sat down at the empty table and drummed on the top of it

with his fingers. His dad was lying down on the bunk again, but was careful not to fall back asleep. "Dad," Jacob asked. "What about our stuff?" Jacob looked over to his two boxes, which were not stacked neatly against the wall next to the door. He didn't realize it, but it had been over a week since he looked at the vid Chris's parents had given him. He had been too busy with school and worrying about the cryo process to even think about turning it on.

"We'll take them with us," Mark said. He looked over at his son. "When we get to the cryo-bed, there is space underneath for the boxes. Just enough space, that's why they are the size that they are. That way when we wake up, we have everything we need right then and there. We just pick them up, walk to the shuttle bay, and head on down to the planet. After closing our flaps, that is."

Jacob laughed. He looked over at the vid screen and saw they still had another half an hour before they could report to their station. He and his dad talked for a good portion of that half hour. It was the first time they really had a chance to talk for the last couple of weeks. His dad was always busy with the C6 engines or meeting with the captain, and Jacob was usually either doing homework or in the commons area playing vid games with some of his new friends from school. The next time Jacob looked over at the vid screen, he saw they had fifteen

minutes to get to the cryo station. His dad saw it to. "Let's go, champ." Mark said as he grabbed his two boxes. "This is it."

Jacob picked up his two boxes and the two made their ways to the elevator area and swiped their ID badges. In a matter of seconds the doors opened and they got out and followed the pulsing arrows to their destination. There was a line in the hallway for people making their way into the cryo rooms. Normally this would bother and annoy Jacob, but he realized this meant the doctors were taking their time getting everybody ready, which was reassuring. He and his dad stood in silence, eventually putting their boxes on the ground and then kicking them a few feet whenever the line would move.

They made their way to just outside of the entrance and Jacob struggled to see past the rest of the people in line ahead of him. Finally they moved in far enough so that they were just inside the area and Jacob's eyes widened at the spectacle he saw before him. The room was gigantic, bigger than the shuttle bay. In front of him he saw a group of ten people being brought forward to a round platform of beds, evenly spaced apart. They all laid down into the coffin-like beds and then there was a bustle of activity as doctors took their time going from bed to bed. In just a few minutes, a giant arm lowered a clear top that fit over all of the beds and the doctors fastened it into

place. Then the arm picked up the "platter" of now-sleeping colonists and put them onto what Jacob could only think of was a "spool" so they were stacked on top of another platter of colonists. Jacob squinted and determined the sides of the room were made up of hundreds of these platters, which left the middle of the room free for the processing.

The line moved forward yet again and a voice in front of them called out "any parties of two? Two? Two? Any with only two, please?" Jacob's dad raised his hand and the two were beckoned to come forward, jumping entire families in line. They swiped their ID badges on the portable reader and were then led to a circle of cryo beds that was waiting for them. Jacob was helped into one just to the right of his father. He placed his boxes underneath the bed as his father said to do. He craned his neck forward and looked at his father, whose head was almost right next to his due to the way the beds were positioned in the circle.

"Relax, Jacob. See you ... in a few months. I love you." His dad relaxed and waited for the technicians to get to him.

"I love you too." Jacob tried to get comfortable. Despite being so close to his dad, they very rarely said those words to each other, usually after a fight. Now he just lay there, his heart racing. He heard the doctors make their way to his bed. He was almost immediately surrounded by three or four doctors

who simultaneously put a tube on his nostrils and ripped open the seam on his shirt to place diagnostic sensors.

"You'll start to feel sleepy very quickly. Have a good rest, and a safe journey, kid." Jacob felt his eyes getting heavy as the doctors re-fastened his shirt. He barely felt the doctor rip open the front flap on his pants as his eyes got heavier and heavier. The last thing he heard was the doctor saying "Number 1 tube, small."

"Small?" he thought. "Did he say..." And he drifted off to sleep. Once all of them on the platter were safely asleep, their platter was lifted high into the alcoves and docked along the wall. The process repeated itself over the next couple of hours. Platters taken down from the walls empty, filled, and placed again on the wall. Gradually the lines grew shorter and shorter until only the medical staff remained. When they did a final headcount, the medical officer called to the captain.

"It looks like we are all done here, captain. Request life sign scan of the ship to make sure." The captain nodded in agreement over the vid and pointed to one of her officers to initiate the scan. After a minute the scan returned its results.

"Scanners show life signs on the command deck, cryo deck, and engineering areas only," she replied. "Good work doctor." The doctor smiled and nodded as the vid screen changed to the

Constitution logo, and then reappeared with the face of the captain. "Attention all personnel, may I have your attention please." The medical staff on the cryo deck diverted their attention to the nearest vid monitor. "The cryo process has begun and our colonists are now in sleep until we reach our destination. I want to extend my thanks to each and every one of you for your fine work." There were cheers from the cryo deck and engineering.

"However," she said. "Our work is not done. Over the next six months we will be traveling faster than we ever have before, and our passengers' lives are our priceless cargo. Each one of you has an important role over the next months. Do not think that anybody else's role is more important than yours. Or vice versa. Those that oversee the C6 engines are no more important on this mission than the medical staff checking the vitals of our passengers. We are all in this together."

Smiles among the remaining crew were contagious. During the pause in the captain's speech, the whispers of the crew grew in volume until they were talking normally amongst themselves, seemingly oblivious to the fact their captain was still on the vid screen. She paused for a few more seconds and then straightened up to address the vid again. "Because we are a small crew now, and to reward all of you for a job well done, I am placing officer's deck access on all of your ID badges for

the remainder of the journey. There will be a special Captain's Mess dinner tonight at 7:00pm sharp in the officer's mess hall. I hope you will attend. All other mess halls and common areas will be off-limits to preserve energy and resources. See you then." The captain's image blinked off the screen and the medical staff assembled on the cryo deck patted each other on the back and started talking about how great it was to be allowed access to the command deck.

"Alright, alright... ALLRIGHT!" The medical officer interrupted them. "We all have work to do before the dinner tonight, so let's get to it. Every cryo platter needs to be checked and initialed on the vid pad it's connected to. And that means every one of them. You all know your sections so let's get to it so we have some time to relax before dinner. Let's go!"

The groups of people talking split up and went to their pre-designated parts of the cryo deck to make their inspections. Each level of the cryo deck had its own catwalk so the doctors and nurses could walk along and check the vid screen status displays attached at the point each platter was physically attached to the side of the deck. One-by-one they made their way down the catwalks, checking the status of every sleeper, and swiping their ID card for accountability. The entire process took two hours, from one side of the deck to the other.

The medical officer checked his own status panel mounted in a corner alcove on the ground level. When he was satisfied everything was green and good-to-go, he called everybody together and then dismissed them, reminding them of the captain's mess that evening, and how it would be wise not to miss the opportunity.

Catherine paused for a moment on the command deck and closed her eyes. She listened to the sound of her officers double-checking and triple-checking their instruments. She felt the hum of the deck through her shoes beneath her. She felt... tired. Mr. Jasper - you have command, I'll be in my quarters freshening up before dinner. I'll save you a doggie bag. She smiled and gave him a pat on the back as she left the command deck. Fortunately, the designers of the ship had the foresight to design the captain's quarters to be near the command center, although with its own life-support system. In the event of an attack or something gone wrong, the entire quarters could be sealed off and used as an escape pod if necessary. But as the doors swung open, thoughts such as these were not at all on her mind. Only sleep.

Catherine entered her quarters after swiping her ID card and set an alarm for two hours on the vid panel. She turned off the lights and made her way towards her salvation - her bed. She kicked off her shoes, fluffed up her two pillows (she WAS

the captain after all) and went to sleep. The last few days had been difficult for her, and would have been for anybody else in her position. So many things could go wrong with a new drive technology and the cryo process, not to mention general unrest and uneasiness among the crew. But now they were almost there, almost ready to engage the engines. It was time to sleep. And sleep she did.

She awoke to the sound of her alarm and could have sworn she had just gone to sleep. She put on her shoes, turned off the alarm and stretched before she exited her quarters. She went to the shower facility, grabbed a new jumpsuit and started the shower. She pushed the button again when it stopped two minutes later, and then a couple of more times. Captain's privilege, she thought. She toweled off and got dressed and then returned to her quarters to wrestle with her hair. Finally everything was right and she sat down at the vid screen monitors and checked on the status of their journey.

The ship had finally exited their solar system and was technically almost ready to initiate the jump engines. She had made a decision earlier in the day that they will wait until tomorrow to make turn on the engines so everybody is well-rested. This was against the objections of her engineering officer who pleaded with her to turn the engines to full power as soon as she could because of the anxiety building among the

engineering staff. She suggested some medication for the engineering crew if it was going to be a problem, but her decision was final. Everybody needed a good night's rest. He reluctantly agreed.

Catherine looked at the top of the vid screen and suddenly realized it was almost time for the captain's mess. She must have spent the last several hours going through all the reports and projections and didn't even notice the time whizzing by. She wondered if that is what it was going to be like for those in the cryo chambers - just a blink of time and its six-months later. She got up from her console, pulled down on the jumpsuit to get everything in the right place and left her quarters heading for the mess hall.

The kitchen staff had gone all out for the special occasion, placing white tablecloths on every table and a centerpiece of a small wooden Eagle, the official symbol of the Constitution. People were gathered in the mess hall both sitting and standing, talking amongst each other. She smiled as she greeted those on the way to her table. As she approached, the other officers stood up. She nodded to them. "Please, stay seated." She put her hand on the doctor's shoulder as she sat down. "Good to see you, doctor." She smiled and checked the time. She still had a few minutes before they would officially begin.

She listened to her officers talk about their particular jobs on the ship, the type of idle banter she guessed they usually had when they had some down time together. Even though she was the captain and soon to be governor, she hated crowds, and preferred speaking to a vid on the wall than giving a speech in front of her entire command crew and their guests. The crowds eventually settled and soon everybody was seated at a table. The conversations shrank to a whisper until all eyes were fixed on the captain's table in the center of the room.

"Thank you all for coming," she said, almost yelling so everybody could hear her. "Tomorrow will begin the next step of our journey as we engage the C6 engines to their full power. It is a time of celebration, for soon we will be fully on our way to Phaedra." The room erupted into applause, cheers and whistles. Catherine smiled and then gestured for them to stop. "All of you have been a tremendous help in colonizing this new world. I thank each and every one of you. I know some of you will be returning to Earth with the Constitution rather than stay on Phaedra - to those going back to Earth, I again say thank you for your service to Earth, and to the Phaedra colony. For those who will be staying on Phaedra, I promise you a great opportunity full of risks, rewards and excitement beyond anything you have ever experienced. It is going to be a challenge, but one worth while."

She paused, taking a drink from a glass of water in front of her. She smiled as she looked around her table at her command crew. "But that is tomorrow. Tonight, let us celebrate what we have achieved this far. Tonight, let us raise our glasses and enjoy the feast our kitchen staff have prepared for us. Because after tonight, its rations for the next six-months. Thank you again - let's eat." The room erupted once again into applause and cheers, and doubled in volume as the kitchen staff emerged from the cooking area with plates packed with a hearty helping of steak, vegetables, fruit and other garnishes. Another team of kitchen staff emerged with baskets of bread and a smaller dish containing a salad.

The crew not in cryo ate well that evening. The main course was followed by a desert that was the speciality of the head cook - some kind of a raspberry cheesecake. After it was clear the majority of the crew had finished eating, the kitchen staff cleared the tables and refilled everybody's water glasses. The crew sat there and digested, talking amongst the other members of the table. Finally the captain rose in her chair and the talking subsided. "I would now like to thank our kitchen staff - could you all come out here, please?" The kitchen staff emerged from the alcove and lined up around the walls of the mess hall. The captain was the first to begin the applause, but she was soon joined by the rest of those

assembled, and eventually the entire mess hall had stood up in thunderous applause. The kitchen staff bowed and went back into the prep area. Everybody took their seats, except for the captain who remained standing.

“So for the rest of tonight, relax and get a good night’s sleep. The commons area on the command deck will be open at all hours on our journey, so feel free to stop by to unwind. As I mentioned, after tonight we will be on rations, so the common room cafeterias will be closed, however water will be provided at the many stations in the common area. This concludes tonight’s dinner. Goodnite and good rest.” The room erupted into applause and they once again stood up as the captain excused herself from the table and the room. She made her way back to her quarters and immediately went to bed.

She woke up far ahead of her 5:30am alarm and rose from her bed to check on her appearance. Other than a minor crease here and there, she looked just as she did the night before, even her hair was the same. Since she had taken a shower the night before, she contemplated whether or not to take another one this morning. She finally decided that as the captain, she needed to set the example, so she went and took another long, warm shower and went through the same motions as the day before in getting herself ready for the day ahead.

She arrived on the bridge and relieved her first officer from command. She asked if he wanted to get some sleep, to which he told her he wouldn't miss the engine's engaging for the world. She smiled at him and ordered him to go get some sleep once the engines were fully engaged and they were under way. He laughed and acknowledged her orders and then took a seat along the edge of the command center. She sat down at the command console and pushed a button next to the vid, her voice booming into every vid screen. "Status reports, all decks all divisions." The vid panels in front of her lit up with information and she looked over all of them satisfactorily.

"All systems are clear and ready to go," said her first officer. She turned towards him and smiled. She nodded at him then turned back to her console. "All command personnel, please be seated at your post and prepare for engaging the engines." The rest of the crew on the command deck followed the first officer's instructions and rushed to their individual chairs and consoles. The captain looked around the deck to make a visual inspection. Everything good.

"Medical bay, report." She said into the vid, and received an acknowledgment from the medical officer that his staff was all seated and ready to go. "Engineering, report." The engineering officer echoed the results of the other departments, with an all-clear. "Engine crew, report."

"Engines are good to go, captain. They are ready and waiting for your orders." The captain nodded at the image of Mark's supervisor on the vid. While Mark and his late wife laid the foundation for the engines and designed most of the components, Mr. Slattery was technically in charge of the project, and didn't miss an opportunity to let others know it.

The captain nodded at the vid screen and turned her gaze back out towards the giant vid screen at the front of the command center. This was the moment they had been waiting for. Getting to Phaedra in six months was a milestone, a genuine testament to the advancement of Earth's technology - and The Constitution was the flagship representing that progress. She tensed in her chair as she turned back to the vid screen.

"Engage the C6 engines, Mr. Slattery. Full power."

She braced herself and felt the rest of the command deck tense as well. She directed the vid screen on her console to show Mr. Slattery as he made the final motions to turn on the C6 engines. Everything rested on the last button, which was glowing now with a optimistic green. He pushed it and then settled back in his chair. The vid screen counted down from five, but felt like it was counting down from infinity. It reached 0 and then proudly displayed on the vid screen "Engines engaged"

There was a momentary jostle as the engines kicked in, before the ship's artificial gravity compensated. Catherine could feel the hum of the ship on the floor beneath her change to a more tight pattern, and the sound of the ship changed to a higher pitch. The stars outside didn't appear to move any faster around the ship, but Catherine knew they were far too distant to notice any difference in their movement. Closer things like comets and aurora's however would streak by much faster. Catherine released her tight grip from her chair and relaxed. The rest of the command crew were still transfixed on the vid screen at the front of the room when she got up from her chair.

Catherine took a couple steps forward and noticed the gravity was a little heavier, something the engineers had not told her to expect, but she deduced it was necessary to compensate for the velocity going forward. She walked along the side of the command center to the front of the room and then stood in front of the vid screen. "We are under way. Congratulations, everybody." Applause broke out in the command deck but was quickly silenced as the captain and first officer demanded status reports from all stations. The captain reminded the first officer of his orders to get some rest and he reluctantly left the command deck and went to his quarters.

She relinquished command of the ship to the third-in-command, the navigator, and went to the engine room to congratulate Mr. Slattery and his workers. She entered the bay and found Mr. Slattery at the main console looking over the graphs and pieces of data that were now flooding into the console. "Congratulations, Mr. Slattery." She said. He looked up, startled.

"Oh, why thank you captain. Sorry I didn't see you come up." She looked over his shoulder at the data coming in. "It's all normal, sir. Just as expected." She nodded and told him how good of a job his workers had done over the past year and half of preparation. She made sure to say it loud enough so anybody around them could hear her boasting.

"Well, I will leave you and your team alone. Carry on." She smiled and left the engine room, stopping at engineering along the way to echo her sentiments to that group of workers as well. She then returned to the command center and looked at the reports coming in. By now everybody had gotten accustomed to the change of gravity, and there were a few complaints of headaches resulting from the tone the engines were putting out. The medical officer administered some medications to help, and Catherine was glad she was unaffected.

The end of the first day with the engines on remained full of status reports and pouring over them looking for

abnormalities. The problem was, since the C6 engines were brand new, nobody really knew what was an abnormality and what was their expected behavior - besides Mr. Slattery of course. Eventually, Catherine had Mr. Slattery assigned to the command center and his vid screen re-routed to a small station near her. She ended up calling down to the engine room so often, she thought he would be better off where she could see him. His intuition was right - when she saw something that was suspect, he almost immediately saw it as well and was offering up an explanation before she had the chance to speak. While at first she found this annoying, she appreciated his efforts.

Things continued in most of the same way for the next week. She had become accustomed to both the new gravity, the sound of the engines, and the ship rations by now, and was in auto-pilot mode, much like the ship itself. She was sleeping in her quarters on the ninth day when she was suddenly flung off the bed by a change in velocity and gravity. As she gathered the information around her in a few seconds, she noticed the sound of the engines was different. In fact, there was no sound, and there weren't any vibrations on the deck as well, as she was acutely aware of since she was flat on the floor. She got up and put her shoes on and rushed to the command center.

"Status report!" she yelled as she rushed in, the first officer stepping aside as she took over the command console.

"Engines have stopped sir," said the first officer.

The captain shot him an angry glance. "I can see that, what the hell happened?" She pushed a few buttons on the vid screen then looked up to Mr. Slattery's console. "Where is Mr. Slattery?" she asked. "I got here, where the hell is he?"

"He's in the engine room, captain. He's -"

She cut him off by screaming "Mr. Slattery, report. Mr. Slattery - REPORT!" into the vid. Slattery finally came on the vid screen, an obvious panic in the engine room behind him. He shot off some orders to some of the workers and then returned his gaze towards the vid screen.

"Engines have stopped, Captain. We are trying to isolate the problem. I - we... are working on it. Sir." Catherine pushed the vid button off in disgust. She called over the first officer and told him she wanted a full briefing and all the data downloaded to her console in ten minutes. She went to the briefing room and paced until the officers entered the room one by one, wary of what was going to happen. She sat down at the head of the table and turned on the vid screens inlaid in the table top, looking over the data just before the engines stopped.

"First officer's report." She grunted, not averting her gaze from the vid screens.

The first officer leaned forward and clasped his hands while resting them on the table. "Everything was going fine, Captain, then all of a sudden the engines just stopped. It took a couple of seconds for the gravity to adjust, resulting in -"

"Resulting in me being thrown out of my bed and onto the deck of my quarters." She looked around the room and one by one everybody looked down at the floor.

"Yes, sir. The response time for the artificial gravity change was nominal and within the accepted range."

"I don't give a damn about the artificial gravity, Mr. Sellers, I want to know why the engines stopped. Where's Mr. Slattery?" She looked around and found her gaze meeting that of the engineering officer.

"He is with the engines, captain. I will fill you in on what has happened in his absence." The captain listened to the reports from his command crew and was able to get nothing more than "everything was normal" from them. She banged her fist on the table, demanding better answers and making them promise to double and triple check the reports prior to the engines stopping. She dismissed all of the officers except the engineering officer and Mr. Sellers.

"I take it the auxiliary engines are unaffected?" She looked at the engineering officer for confirmation.

"Yes, sir." He said. "We are able to hold our trajectory and keep the ship from rolling. Not that it would matter with the artificial gravity, of course." His attempt at lightening up the mood of the meeting was unsuccessful. "I have every confidence Mr. Slattery will find the problem soon, captain. He is a very accomplished engineer."

"He's a pencil pusher, Mr. Green. He didn't design the engines, he just took credit for the financing and direction of the project. I am giving you and Mr. Slattery four hours to diagnose and repair the problem to get us underway. If you do not have a solution in that time, I will have no other option that to revive Mark Hawker. Dismissed. You stay Mr. Sellers."

The rest of the room anxiously rushed out of the conference room, glad to be, even if momentarily, away from the captain's angry tongue lashing. "What do you think, Mr. Sellers?" She sighed and leaned back in her chair, indicating her first officer could lighten up - just a little. She closed her eyes and rubbed them with both hands, still a little groggy from the lack of sleep.

"They're doing their best, sir." He said, walking over to the chair directly next to the captain and sitting down. "From what I have seen in the reports so far, there was no indication of a problem. Even now everything says the engines are ready to

be engaged. But yet they just - don't." The captain looked at his first officer in the eyes.

"We need to keep it together, Harry." She said. "This is going to be tough. If we don't get the engines running, it will be over a month before another ship can meet us out here. And then what? Phaedra will be cut off, the colonists will have to be awakened as each rescue ship reaches us. If we do continue to Phaedra it will take, how long? Three years to get there? Our rations won't last that long."

"We could always put more of the crew into cryo, keep only a small number out to keep an eye on things, or go in shifts."

"You know as well as I do," she said, "that once you come out of cryo, you need to wait at least several months before your body has recuperated enough to go back under. We can't just bring our command crew in and out of stasis." She thought for a moment. "We could bring them out of it in shifts, I suppose. I really, really, don't want it to come to that Harry. We must find an answer." Harry nodded but didn't offer up any ideas to add to the captain's. "You're dismissed. I'll join you in a minute." He rose and exited the conference room, leaving her alone. She looked down at the status screen for the engines on the vid, which showed green. "Bull." She said as she turned off the vid and headed back towards the command center.

She entered the command center and took her station, noting everybody was busy going over the readouts from before the shut down and immediately after. She poured over them herself, but was lost in the sea of numbers and graphs. That's what she had staff for, to interpret the status reports into something she could understand and act upon. She got up from her console and gave command to Mr. Sellers. She would need to see how things were going first hand. And Mr. Slattery had better have an explanation.

The engine room was busy with a crew member at every vid screen going over every line of code and diagnosing every circuit in the engines. She went up to Mr. Slattery's console and looked over his shoulder at a three-dimensional representation of the engines on his vid screen. He rotated it around and zoomed in on certain section, noting which had been diagnosed and which haven't. "Any progress?" she asked.

Mr. Slattery didn't even look up to acknowledge her presence. "None, Captain." He said. "Until we know anything, I would consider this area unsafe, I would appreciate it if you would return to the bridge, we are working as fast as we can." He could sense the captain was taken back by his inferred command that she return to the command center. "Sir, it really is dangerous here," he told her as he turned around. "We don't know why the engines shut down, so we don't know if they will

explode in the next minute. Please, sir. For your own safety, return to the bridge. I will let you know if I find anything."

She looked at him square in the face and noted his genuine concern. She reluctantly told Slattery to carry on and to notify her immediately if he found anything out. Otherwise, she will continue with the other option in just under three hours. She returned to the bridge and sat down at her console, looking aimlessly at the vid screen at the front of the room, losing herself in thought about the failure of the mission. She was awakened from her daydream by her first officer, who offered her a bottle of water and small pastry. "Complements of the kitchen staff," he said. "I told them you wouldn't put them on report."

"Thanks." She took each item from her first officer and once again stared at the vid screen ahead. "So far, Mr. Sellers. So far from home, so far from Phaedra." Mr. Sellers knew better than to try and console his captain and simply nodded and returned to his station immediately to her right. She took a bite of the pastry and found it fluffy and fresh, a nice gesture from the kitchen staff.

Before long, the four hour deadline she had given Mr. Slattery was up and they reconvened in the conference room. Mr. Slattery was the most on edge as he explained he was no further in finding out the cause of the sudden shutdown than he was four hours ago. He told the captain his team had been over the

engines several times and simply could not find the problem. "There's only one person who knows these engines better than I do," he said. "Mark Hawker." Catherine knew what he was implying and for a minute felt sorry for Mr. Slattery. It took a strong man to both admit he was beat, and to offer a solution that included somebody more qualified than himself.

"Is that our only option? Are there any other suggestions?" Catherine looked around at the empty faces around the conference table. She sighed and stood up. "Ok, then. Everybody is dismissed. Doctor, report to the cryo bay and wait for my orders." She let the room empty and then sat back down, emotionally exhausted. Bringing Mark out of cryo would have several complications, the least of which meant he couldn't re-enter stasis once he - or if he - fixed the engines. She took a moment to collect herself and her thoughts, rose and entered the command center. Mr. Sellers, you have command. I'll be in the cryo bay."

Catherine walked briskly to the elevator and then selected the cryo deck as her destination. She entered the bay and found a team of five medical assistants talking with the medical officer. "As you all know, the success of this mission has now been entrusted to Mr. Hawker. It is my intention to bring him out of cryo to help with the repairs to the C6 engines and effected systems."

"With all due respect, sir, the cryo system was not designed for short-term sleep." Said her medical officer. "His body has just adjusted to the cryo process, bringing him out of stasis so soon is risky, and once he is out, he can't go back in." The medical officer looked at the captain for some sort of reassurance. "And there's his son. What about him? What if something goes wrong?" He looked at the captain and was still met with the unflinching nerve of the captain of the ship, with the lives of all her crew on her mind.

"It's a risk, I know, Doctor." She said. She then looked at everybody standing around her in turn. "It's a risk we have to take for the successful completion of the mission, and all of our lives. Surviving the rest of the journey to Phaedra under normal auxiliary power would be a miracle. THAT is a chance I will not take. I take full responsibility, including that of Mr. Hawker's son should the procedure cause irreparable harm to his father." She looked around the group. "Is that satisfactory."

The medical staff looked at each other, and then looked at the medical officer who nodded. "Lower Mr. Hawker's cryo platter and prepare for cryo rehabilitation." The team of medical staff split up, half going towards a control panel on the side of the room, and half of them waiting in the center of the cryo bay for the platter to be lowered. The team at the

control panel looked up Mark's platter ID and punched it into the control panel, initiating the giant arm to pick the platter from the wall and lower it gently to the ground. The assistants then joined the rest of the group who had immediately gone to the platter to identify which bed Hawker lay in.

Catherine stepped forward, looking through the transparent glass at the sleeping inhabitants of the platter. She looked in and saw Jacob sound asleep, smiling ever so slightly in stasis. She placed a hand on the top of his cryo bed, saying a silent prayer that his smile would continue and he would be reunited with his dad in several months. The team found Mark and went over the readings on his cryo bed. Everything looked normal. They all looked to the medical officer who nodded and then they began the sequence to wake him up.

Another giant arm came down from the side of the building, and locked onto the top of Mark's cryo bed, lifting off the transparent lid and placing it on a stack of unused lids in the storage area. The team quickly injected medication and withdrew Mark's catheter and oxygen tubes and monitored him closely as he regained consciousness. Slowly he began to shiver and opened his eyes to find five blurry figures standing over him. "They were right," he whispered, still under the effects of the cryo-sleep. "Seems like just yesterday."

The medical assistants looked at the monitors again as Mark's body went into minor convulsions, as was expected when the cryo-sleep was reversed so soon after being initiated. They held him down and the convulsions subsided quickly. The readings all returned to normal, and slowly Mark began to gain consciousness again. He blinked, and could make out the distinct features of the faces of the medical staff. He then looked to the left and saw the captain smiling at him. He smiled back.

"Wow, I must be someone special to get woken up by the captain herself." He said. "Hey Jake - you up?" No reply. "Jake?" he asked getting more and more concerned. He sat straight up in his cryo bed despite the efforts of the medical assistants to keep him laying down. "JAKE!" he yelled as he noticed Jake's cover was still on his cryo bed. "What the hell is going on - what's wrong with my son?" The instruments on the cryo bed were going crazy due to Mark's increased pulse and anxiety. The captain stepped forward and put a hand on his shoulder, pushing him back down to lie in the cryo bed.

"It's ok, Mark. It's ok. We have a ... situation we need your help with. We are not at Phaedra, we had to wake you up a little early. Jacob is fine. Rest now, when you are ready, please join me on the command deck. She squeezed his shoulder and he relaxed enough to catch his breath. Within a few minutes

he felt strong enough to get up but found he didn't have the strength he had just a few moments ago. He lay back down and fell into a genuine, instead of induced, sleep. He awoke a half hour later, the effects of cryo sleep almost completely removed from his body. He started to sit up and noticed the front flap of his pants was still down, and fastened the sides.

"Hello, Mr. Hawker, good to see you up and around. The captain is waiting for you on the command deck." The medical officer tried to get Mark's attention, but Mark had caught a glimpse of his son through the top of his cryo bed next to him. He stood there watching his son, oblivious to the doctor until he felt a hand on his shoulder. "Mr. Hawker, we must hurry. Now, the captain is waiting for you on the command deck, but I recommend you first shower and get some real clothes on. Don't worry about your son, he's in good hands and will stay asleep until - well, until we get to Phaedra or figure out what to do. I'm sure the captain will explain."

Mark nodded as he was given his ID badge and put the lanyard over his head and around his neck. He walked like a zombie to the showers on the command deck and put on a clean jumpsuit. He had never been to the actual command center before, so he had to swipe his ID badge on a vid and have it show him the directions. He paused for a moment outside the entrance and then swiped his ID, allowing the doors to open for

him. He took a moment or two and then entered, seeing the captain turn around to look at him from the center of the room.

As he approached she got up from her command console and met him halfway, holding her hand out. He shook her hand and then she led the way to the conference room. She motioned for the other officers to join her, including Mr. Slattery who had been sitting quietly at the engine console as Hawker came on the deck.

"So, the engines aren't running I take it." He said. He looked around at the startled look on everybody's faces. The medical staff was under orders not to discuss the situation with Hawker until the captain had filled him in. "I could tell by the sound - there is none. And the gravity is far different than it should be." The glances of the command crew made their way back towards the captain.

"There has been a problem, and as of yet we don't quite know what it is." She motioned to Mr. Slattery who got up from his chair and walked to the large vid at the front of the room. He pressed a few buttons and brought up the three dimensional view of the engines he had been studying nonstop since they shut down.

"According to the diagnostics, there is no problem." He said, obviously agitated. "We can't figure it out. You're the only one who knows the engines better than all of us combined.

We - we had no other choice, Mark." Mark could sense that Slattery was beaten both emotionally and physically. The sense of failure hung around him like a cloak, weighing him down. Mark felt almost sorry for Slattery, it wasn't his fault Slattery had been promoted to project manager and not himself. Slattery was a go-getter, with a knack for advancing in positions and taking opportunities for further advancement. Mark only wanted to make the C6 engines a reality to honor his wife. Different reasons, same goal.

Mark got up from his seat and went to the vid screen, taking in all the data that was blinking on and off. Slattery returned to his seat, sulking. Mark studied the vid for a good five minutes before he turned around to address the command crew. "I don't know. I'll have to go see." The command crew looked at each other and then to the captain who stood up.

"Everybody is dismissed. Mr. Sellers, you have command, Mr. Slattery, Mr. Hawker, let's go to the engine room." She escorted Mark out of the conference room and down the hallway. Mr. Slattery led the way with the captain and Mark following close behind. "Your son will be ok, you know." She whispered to Mark before they entered the elevator.

"I promised him I'd be there when he woke up," said Mark as they all swiped their ID badges.

"You will be. You will." The elevator doors closed and they were on their way to the engine deck. They made their way through the hallways and entered, causing the other engineers and crewmembers to look their way. Whispers came from the lips of many of the crew as they saw Mark with the captain and Slattery. He turned to the captain.

"I appreciate your concern over the ship and your mission, captain," he said. "But... this is really something I need to do alone. I can't work with others constantly looking over my shoulder. I'm sure you'll understand."

She smiled. "Of course," she said. "I will stay here with Mr. Slattery and continue monitoring the engines." Mark smiled and looked up at the bulkheads plastered with vid screens. Behind all of that steel were his babies - now he needed to find out why they were being fussy. He took the catwalk up to the main engine diagnostic computer and began pushing buttons, reading the results, and pushing more buttons. The other crewmembers in the engine room were dazzled at the speed his fingers danced across the vid data pad. When he was done with one panel, he rushed up the catwalk to the next level and repeated the procedure on the next data pad. And the next... and the next.

After about an hour of gathering his own data, he made his way back down to the main console where the captain and Mr.

Slattery had been watching their own versions of diagnostics come in. Mark approached them, half talking to himself. "Mr. Slattery," he said. "Have you scanned the engines?"

Slattery looked annoyed and snapped back, "Of course, we've gone through every diagnostic a hundred times, there simply isn't anything -"

"No, not the diagnostics," Mark said. "Have you scanned them? With the scanners? If there's something wrong the diagnostics aren't programmed to find, then there will never be anything wrong, will there? I mean, the diagnostic program can only find problems it has been programmed to find. Maybe the sensors will find something out of the ordinary. It's worth a shot, even if its just for more data."

He didn't need to ask the captain twice. She pressed a button on the vid console to call the command center. "This is the captain. Redirect sensors to scan the engines, re-route sensor readings to the main engine console."

"It will take ten minutes to reprogram the sensors, captain."

"I'll take it, captain out." She turned off the vid screen and motioned that Mark should take the chair Slattery was currently seated in. Mark walked over to a nearby console and took a chair from that area and brought it over, Slattery moved

aside. "Very diplomatic," she thought to herself as she watched Mark try to involve Slattery in the process.

"Here come the sensor readings," said Slattery, who was reduced into the role of giving the play-by-play.

Mark looked at the readings that were coming in. He took the three-dimensional view of the engines, rotated it, stretched it and zoomed in. He thought about what would cause the engines to simply shut down, both of them. Sure one might have a problem, but both, at the exact same time - that was nearly impossible. In order for both engines to shut down at the same time meant a fault somewhere where both engines were connected. A shared power supply, shared wiring, shared ... Mark's stomach growled and he wished he could take a break and run to the mess hall and grab something to eat. Then he remembered that they were all shut down and the crew was on rations the rest of the journey, with only water being supplied to..

Wait.

Mark pushed a few buttons on the vid screen and then instructed half of the view screen to show him a readout of the all the areas on the ship that were shut down. He selected the water reclamation systems and traced his fingers along the diagram of the water systems that were shut off and where they were connected to the rest of the systems in the ship. "There!"

exclaimed Mark, with genuine excitement in his voice. "It's right there."

A crowd gathered around the main console as Mark started to explain, Slattery leaning a little too close to the vid console. "The engines are tied into the ship's water reclamation system. As soon as the system was turned off on the uninhabited decks, it slowly drained the amount of water available to cool the engines until they finally couldn't keep cool enough and shut off."

"That doesn't make any sense," said Slattery. "All systems show the engines as normal, they aren't too hot and the water system shows fine."

"They aren't too hot because they aren't on." Said Mark. "The system is designed to shut the engines off when they become unstable. When the reclamation systems were shut off, that provided only a very small pipe from the command deck to cool the engines. Over the last week as people took more and more showers, the water available to the engines became less and less, until -"

"Until someone flushed a toilet and took us all offline." Said the captain.

"Well, basically, yes. You can't get the same amount of water you did from the other systems through a smaller pipe, it's just not possible."

"That still doesn't explain why it didn't show up on our diagnostics." Said Slattery, still annoyed. "Why does everything say normal? Shouldn't it know the water levels are too low?"

"The system was programmed to report any abnormalities," said Mark. "To the computer, the amount of water currently running through the engines - while they are off - is completely normal. Likewise, there is water running through them, which is normal. Since the engines can't fire up without overheating, they remain off, and according to all instruments, completely normal."

"Mr. Hawker, if I understand you correctly," said the captain. "All we have to do is turn on the water reclamation systems on the other decks and we will suddenly have enough cooling power for the engines to just switch on?" She looked at Slattery who was still dumbfounded.

"I believe so, yes." Mark said, almost laughing at the absurdity of it all. The captain called the command deck and instructed Mr. Sellers to initiate the procedure to turn on the water reclamation and services to all decks. When he told her it would take a half an hour to complete the process, she gave him 15 minutes.

"Well, Mr. Hawker, shall we go to the command center and wait there?" Mark nodded and left Mr. Slattery, who decided to witness Hawker's plan down in the engine room. The two left the

engine room and made their way to the elevator. When they were both inside, Catherine leaned closer. "I think Mr. Slattery is going to be sick." She laughed.

Mark smiled in turn. "Well, it's just a theory, captain. It may or may not work, but it is definitely a problem - that's the bad thing about computer diagnostics, they only find what you program them to find." The elevator stopped and the two got off and walked to the command center where they took their stations, waiting for Mr. Sellers's signal that everything was ready for them to try again.

After fifteen minutes had passes, the captain asked Sellers for another status report, to which he simply replied, "Still working on it, Sir." And went back to work. Sellers told them the mains had all been shut off manually, and now that most of the crew was in cryo, finding enough people to go deck to deck to reverse the main stops was a tedious process, but he was doing all he could. After a few more minutes, Sellers approached the captain's console. "We're ready, sir."

The captain nodded and Mr. Sellers went back to his station and sat down. She pushed a button on the vid. "Attention crew. We are going to re-initiate the C6 engine drive in five minutes. Please stand by." She turned to Mark, who was looking over the new sensor readings, he nodded at her. "Mr. Slattery, status

report." There was a slight pause and then the image of Slattery at his console appeared on the front screen vid.

"Everything looks good, captain. Of course, I have been saying that for the last several hours. What Mr. Hawker recommended makes sense and I back his decision one-hundred percent, sir. Engine room is ready and standing by." She smiled and nodded at him and looked again towards the vid at the front of the room, while keeping Slattery on the small vid on her console.

As the countdown hit one minute, the rest of the command crew took their seats in preparation for engaging the engines. If there was anxiety the first time, the second time was a thousand times as intense. The countdown hit 5 seconds and the captain counted down with the vid. "Five... four... three... two... one. Mr. Slattery - initiate C6 engine start."

Slattery cautiously pushed the engage button and closed his eyes. Mark's knuckles grew white from his solid hold on his console on the command deck. Everybody tensed up. Nothing. Mark looked over his console and made a few corrections to the coolant system mix. "Again, Mr. Slattery," he said with a new sense of urgency in his voice.

Slattery reached up and hit the engage button one more time. This time the engines started, then stopped, then started again, then stopped, fighting to rid themselves of the old,

inadequate water still in the pipes, to make way for the new pressurized feed coming from all of the decks. Finally the engines went full-force and the ship lunged forward, back on its correct velocity to Phaedra. The artificial gravity kicked up a notch as they had expected, and before they knew it - it was like there never was any problem. Except of course, that Hawker was out of cryo and had to stay that way. As Mark stood up from his console, a wave of applause went around the bridge. He looked at the captain who was also applauding. He looked down at her vid screen on her console and saw the image of Mr. Slattery, still pushing buttons and running diagnostics.

Mark walked up to the captain and returned her smile. "Captain, sir. If I may request," he began to ask. "I would like to return to my quarters and get some sleep, some more real sleep I mean." He laughed. "Only, I don't think I have any quarters anymore." She laughed and nodded in acknowledgment. If she had the nerve, she would have asked him then and there to simply share her quarters with her. Not yet.

"Mr. Sellers," the captain commanded. "I'm sure you can help Mr. Hawker find adequate quarters here on the command deck, can't you? Might I suggest one of the ... ambassador suites?" Mark looked at the captain with astonishment and then genuine thanks. The ambassador suites on The Constitution were things of legend. She smiled as Sellers escorted Mark out of the

command center and to his new quarters. She knew he would be quite content to spend the next five months in the ambassador quarters. Plus, it was right next to hers.

Mr. Sellers led Mark to the ambassador quarters and motioned for him to swipe his ID card. "Invalid Entry code" appeared on the vid, and Mr. Sellers swiped his own ID card, pressed a few buttons, and then instructed Mark to try it again. The doors opened and Mark and Mr. Sellers stepped in. The room was ten times the size of the quarters he spent the first several weeks in. There was a real, full bed against the wall, furnished with three or four pillows, and enough blankets to keep him warm even if the environmental controls went out. There were two large vidscreens on the wall, which currently showed the vastness of space outside. A small vid console and office decorated one of the corners of the room, while a small garden of sorts was in the other.

"They're not real, of course, but it does help liven up the room, doesn't it?" Sellers added. Mark nodded in agreement, still taking in the expansive quarters. Yes, Mark could get quite used to this in the next several months, that you could be sure. He walked to what appeared to be another door near the far wall and found the quarters had its own shower system. He would still need to go to the common showers to pick up a fresh uniform, but he could take a shower anytime he wanted, right in

the privacy of his own quarters. This was fantastic. "I trust it meets with your approval."

"Yes. Yes, Mr. Sellers thank you. I don't quite know what to say. It's amazing." Mark sat down at the console in the office where he could overlook the entire quarters. "Thank you."

Sellers smiled. "Thank YOU, Mr. Hawker. The whole planet has you to thank. If you will excuse me, Mr. Hawker." Mr. Sellers excused himself and Mark was left alone. He went up to the bed, sat on it to check its firmness, then pulled back the covers and got in. He hadn't felt a bed this comfortable for a long time, and soon he was sleeping and dreaming of Phaedra.

The Captain patched into his vid panel controls and managed to override the alarm Hawker had placed for two hours. She would let him take as much time as he needed. She herself needed some rest too, having been worrying about the engines for the past several hours. Now that everything was under control, she could use a break as well. She looked down at the vid panel and noticed it was in fact time for her shift to end, but Mr. Sellers had been pulling a double shift to help out as well. Sellers entered the command center and went to his console, but was interrupted by the captain.

"Mr. Sellers," she said. "Would you agree that Mr. Abramson has performed remarkably during this time of crisis?"

Sellers looked up, as did Abramson, suddenly petrified. She winked at Sellers, and he was instantly in on it.

"Yes, sir. Absolutely." Said Sellers with a grin on his face that he was trying to hide.

The captain rose out of her command chair and walked around her console to where Mr. Abramson was sitting, stunned and pinned by the captain and Mr. Sellers who also had walked over to his console. He was surrounded. "Mr. Abramson. YOU have command." She smiled and then quickly turned her back and started to walk out of the command center.

"Um, Sir?" said Abramson, still in a sense of disbelief.

"Wouldn't you agree that the captain and the first officer have just been through a very stressful situation, pulling double shifts and are entitled to some rest?" Abramson fidgeted and then looked around at the other crew members on the command deck - who offered no advice. Abramson knew they were just looking busy, while he was out here being fried and served up.

"Y-y-y-y-yes, Sir." He sputtered out and then regained control of himself once he realized this was not a joke. "I'll take good care of her, sir." He snapped to a salute and the captain laughed and saluted back. He smiled, relieved that he wasn't the brunt of a joke, but rather the recipient of the

captain's trust. "I will have the reports ready for you when you return, sir." He said as he slid down into the captain's chair and console. "yeahhhhhhhhhhhhh," he thought. The captain and Mr. Sellers exited the command center and headed towards their quarters. Mr. Seller's quarters were first in the hallway, he slid his ID card and entered and waved goodnight to the captain.

Catherine continued down the hallway and paused at the ambassador quarters. She saw the word "occupied" on the vid screen, smiled, and then went to the next door and swiped her ID card and entered her quarters. She unzipped her collar part way and then collapsed on her bed, just on the opposite wall from Mark. Her sleep was interrupted several times with nightmares of other malfunctions and the demise of half of the crew from a cryo-bed system error. She woke up gasping, struggling to remember - or perhaps forget - Mark's face crying and pleading with her to help save his son. She sat up in her bed and shook it off, then returned her head to her pillow and tried once again to go to sleep. No such luck.

After half-an-hour of being unsuccessful at getting back to sleep, she finally stopped trying, got up and went to the office console in the corner of the room. She brought up the status reports Mr. Abramson had been collecting the last few hours - everything looked good. Normal. She wondered if Mark was

having any better luck getting to sleep on the other side of the wall. Should she knock on the wall? Hardly captain like. She pressed the vid screen intercom button and Mark's image instantly flickered on. "Can't sleep, either?" she asked.

He wiped his eyes with his hands. "I slept for what... a week? And yet I'm still too exhausted to get some real sleep. I keep thinking about what else could go wrong. How about you?"

Catherine leaned back in her chair. "Pretty much the same. I didn't exactly picture this to be a picture-perfect cruise, but it certainly has started off with a bang." She said, feeling totally at ease discussing the difficulties in being the captain with Mark. "Have you been looking over the reports?" she asked, almost a rhetorical question she knew, but now it was just small talk.

"Yes. Everything looks..."

"Normal." They said together.

Mark looked back up at the vid screen. "I'd like to be there when my son comes out of cryo," he said. "I promised him we'd be there together, so - I'd really like to be there and be the first person he sees." She nodded in agreement and promised he would be allowed in the cryo bay when his son was revived. "I don't see my two boxes I brought on board, either."

"It's safer if they stay under your cryo bed," she explained. "That way they won't get lost in your quarters and

end up back on Earth by the time everything is sorted out.”

This made sense and Mark nodded in agreement. “If there’s anything you need right away, let me know and I’ll see if I can get it for you.” She smiled again and Mark returned it. Again.

“Nothing I can think of, unless you happened to sneak in a beer or a very strong martini.” Mark joined her in her laugh, wondering if she realized he was halfway serious. He had heard the command crew and specifically the captain of ships like these could make special requests for the ship’s stores.

“Sorry,” she said. “No alcohol here and none on the planet. Not for a while anyway. Oh I’m sure somebody packed away a little bit here and there in their personal belongings, nothing we can really do there. But our screening procedure for the colonists helped us avoid any trouble from alcoholism and other chemical dependencies.” She realized she was talking shop-talk again and immediately stopped. “You want to go grab ... some rations with me?” she asked.

“Sure,” said Mark. “Um, I’d say I’ll meet you at your quarters but I’m not really sure where that is.” Catherine laughed and turned off the vid, leaving Mark with a blank screen and wondering what just happened. His door buzzer sounded a few seconds later and he went to open it and found the captain standing outside.

"Pretty hand, eh?" she said. "They like having the ambassador stay next to the captain - for diplomatic reasons I'm sure. Shall we?" She motioned his way and he swiped his card on the access panel , letting the doors close behind him. They walked down the corridor to the officer's mess hall, and went to the kitchen alcove for their rations. They were both surprised and thankful when they were each given a hard roll to eat with their meal.

Mark took a sip out of the water bottle he picked up with his rations. "Ahhhh," he said. "Just think, the water in this bottle was probably running around in all those pipes keeping the engines cool. And now its in this bottle, cold, and going to go through my digestive track. Life is good." He took a couple more swigs of water then sat it down on the table. "So, captain - what's your story?" She looked at him quizzically. "What I mean is... you are on the news all the time but they never mention if you have a ... significant other, kids - what. I was just curious, is all, I'm not trying to pry."

Catherine stopped chewing for a second and put her hands on the top of the table. "It's a fair question. You'll forgive me, sometimes I think because I have been on the news and in the public eye so often that people just know who I am. I have an ex-husband, back on Earth, who did not apply for the program thank goodness. We get along fine, just your usual little spats

- the kind that remind you of the reason you split up in the first place. And I have a daughter, Janel, she's eight. She lives with his father in Connecticut. She took a sip from her water bottle as well. It was... difficult to leave her back on Earth, but her father loves her, and she deserves to be with someone who will be there for her and not in press conferences all day."

Mark looked at her differently now than he ever had. Before he saw her as a captain, and the soon to be governor of the colony. Now he saw her as a mother, and maybe even a friend. And there was something else creeping into her personality as she spoke of the family she left behind - vulnerability. It was just a hint of course, and one she would definitely not ever admit to. But for that small second as she talked about her daughter, he saw through the years of government and military training and saw someone he could consider a friend. He must have been staring, for she suddenly looked up at him and he didn't say anything.

"Sorry, sometimes I talk to much about my family. It's hard to stop once you get going, I'm sure you would agree." She looked at Mark and then Mark snapped out of his thoughts. She smiled and took another drink from her bottle of water and then tore off a small piece of the hard roll they had given her.

"They probably gave these to us because the animals wouldn't eat them." She said.

"Animals? Really! You know I guess I never thought about animals. How many are on the ship - what are they... are they doing ok? I guess it never occurred to me that animals would have to be brought in too. Are there any native animals on Phaedra?" Mark asked, suddenly very interested in this topic. He and Jacob never had any pets since Jacob was allergic to dogs, and the apartment complexes frowned on pets anyway. But they had both always enjoyed going to the zoo and seeing some of the big cats and animals yo just never get to see anyplace else.

"Oh, there's a little bit of everything down there on that deck," she said. "Of course, they brought quite a few animals with the first ships that came to Phaedra, to seed the population. And yes, there are some wild animals that have evolved there. Most resemble birds, like chickens, eagles, things like that. Different, but along the same general characteristics. Most of the native animals naturally relocated as far away as they could get from our initial settlement, but there are still a few that are in the sky and wandering around the grassy areas. You are going to love, Phadera Mark. If you could go back to Earth in the 1800's in America, it's just like that. It's amazing no humanoid or intelligent life took hold there. It's beautiful."

She had lost him at the word of "chicken" which immediately reminded Mark he was eating rations, and that many of the foods he had enjoyed eating on Earth would simply not be an option on the new planet. He took some comfort in knowing there were starter species of animals from Earth, like chickens, pigs and horses, but he knew in the back of his mind they would be eating rations and whatever fruits the planet held for a long time. At least until there was an overabundance of food.

"Would you like to go visit the animal deck?" she asked. Mark jumped to his feet with part of his hard roll in his mouth, waving his water bottle. She laughed and took that as a yes. He finished the roll on their way to the elevator where she swiped her ID card and they were taken down to one of the very bottom decks of the ship.

As soon as the door opened, Mark knew this was definitely the place. The stench wasn't as bad as he had thought it would be, but it was definitely noticeable. Catherine led him down the hallway and to a set of double doors which opened with a swipe of her ID card. The animal deck was a huge open area that looked like a converted shuttle bay. There were animals in large pens filling up the deck and doing their own thing. Some were sleeping, others seating, and Mark was sure some of them were trying to find a way out.

"How do they deal with the gravity change?" Mark asked. He walked in behind her as the doors closed as they entered. Mark went over to a pen of chickens and saw freshly laid eggs, evidence that life continues to go on, even far away from home.

"Most have done exceptionally well," she said as she continued walking over to a long pen containing four dark-brown ponies. One of them came up and allowed Catherine to pet it. "We lost one pony here when the engines went out. Broke its leg." Mark reached his hand out and listened to Catherine as they both stroked the horse's head and then its side, their hands touching every so often as they overlapped each other. "And we had a few eggs break, but the kitchen staff managed to get down here in record time to collect what they could."

Mark couldn't help but laugh. He wasn't too keen on himself eating eggs that were broken open on the floor of the ship, but he supposed it beat eating rations, even if only for a small morsel of "normal" food. Catherine continued showing Mark around the animal bay, stopping every so often to pet one of them, or just to watch. They stopped and talked to one of the veterinarians who was keeping an eye on the animals. Mark listened intently as she described the trauma the animals were going through, and how many of them won't survive the first few weeks on Phaedra. Mark could understand and relate - being

displaced was hard enough when you could vocalize it. For a scared animal it must be a hundred times as bad.

They meandered there way from one side of the bay and then back to the entrance. Mark thanked the vet for taking the time to talk to them, and they left the bay and made their way to the elevator. "I DEFINITELY need to wash my hands," said Mark. They both laughed. They made their way back to the command deck and paused outside of Mark's quarters. "Want to come in?" Mark said it without thinking. He noticed a look he hadn't seen before wash over the captain's face. He wasn't sure if it was a look of uneasiness, blush, or disgust. "I'm sorry, I understand. See you later." He turned to go in his quarters and swiped his ID card. He entered and turned to throw his ID card on a chair next to the door and saw Catherine standing there.

"I'd love to." She said. Mark smiled. He went into his private bathroom and washed his hands and then returned to the lounge area of his quarters. Catherine then excused herself and went to the restroom to wash her hands. As he sat there twiddling his thumbs in the ambassador's quarters, waiting for the captain to come out of his restroom, he wondered what he was going to do next.

"So," he said. "Now this is a little more awkward. Maybe we should go back to the commons area where we both are

comfortable." He started to give up and Catherine motioned for him to sit back down.

"We're both adults, Mark. Can't we have a conversation amongst adults in private?" She smiled, and Mark sat back down, crossing his legs and putting both of his arms out on the back of the couch. "Sometimes it's good just to be an adult and not a captain or governor or crew member. Or father. Or mother. Isn't it?"

Mark thought for a moment. Even though his son was safely sleeping in the cryo chamber, he still found his thoughts returning to him every few minutes. He kept imagining something going wrong, or his son not waking up when they reached Phaedra. "Being a dad is something I don't think I can ever leave behind." Mark said, changing the mood of the conversation yet again. Catherine got up off the chair and sat on the cushion next to Mark.

"Of course, that's not quite what I meant. What I meant was that we all have expectations - of ourselves and of others. Sometimes we just need to break out and do something that we want to do, instead of what others expect. I know I do. Sometimes back on Earth when I would get shore leave, I would disappear for a week without making contact back at command or calling anybody. Just disappear into the countryside or a small town in Ohio - no cares, nobody to command, just me and my

thoughts. And I would always return on time, my uniform pressed and ready for duty. The one thing that kept me going some of those years - was the thought of shore leave again."

Mark looked at her sitting next to him and wished he could be hospitable and offer her a drink of - anything. They talked again for an hour or so, and then they both agreed they needed to get some more sleep before the next shift. They said their goodbyes, and Catherine returned to her quarters. Instead of a handshake, she offered Mark a hug, which he accepted and returned. He stood still facing the door as it closed, wondering where this relationship was leading.

Over the next several months, Mark and Catherine's relationship got closer, and was harder and harder to hide from the rest of the crew. They would often enjoy their meals at the mess hall with each other, pretending their rations were a four-course meal. One day the kitchen staff surprised everybody yet again with something that resembled real meat and gravy, then it was back to rations. Mark was beginning to hate going to the mess hall and seeing the same thing day after day. It was even worse when Catherine told him that once they got to Phaedra, it will take their bodies time to adjust to the slight difference in gravity, resulting in them having to endure a few more months of rations once they were on the planet as well.

The engines didn't have a single problem for the rest of the journey. Mr. Slattery continued to do the never-ending job of analyzing diagnostics, and even came up with a few diagnostic tests of his own, which always made him feel good. Mark spent a good deal of time with him in the engine room, but preferred staying in the command center where he could listen to what the rest of the command crew was doing and get an inside view of the little things that make a ship go.

Mark was early for his shift today for no apparent reason. As he was going through his checklist of reports to pour over, Catherine entered and went around to all of the stations saying good morning. As she went around, other officers were relieved of their positions by their replacements, and they all settled down into their daily tasks within fifteen minutes. Once she was sure everybody was there for their shift, she asked the usual question. "Status report, navigation."

The navigation officer on this shift couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old, fresh out of officer's school Mark guessed. He still had that air about him that projected to others that he had a fear of doing something wrong. He looked down at his instruments, pushed a few buttons and re-ran the checks. He looked up towards the captain with a giant grin on his face. "Estimate three days until Phaedra orbit, sir. On course and on schedule."

Catherine looked down at her own panels and punched up the same readings that the navigation officer saw. She received the same results. "Well then, it looks like we are in for a couple of busy days, aren't we." She pushed a few buttons on her vid screen, including the ship-wide intercom. Her face then flashed on every vid screen on the command deck and throughout the ship. She looked over at Mark, winked, and then returned back to the vid panel. Mark wondered if anybody else on the ship noticed.

"Attention all crew members. We are three days out from our destination - the planet Phaedra. We are almost to our new home. I want to thank each and every one of you for your service. For some of you, this is just the end of part of your journey. Many of you will be going back to Earth on the return ship to take The Constitution back to Earth. For those that won't be staying with us, your dedication to the colonization of Phaedra is appreciated. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you."

Mark looked around the command center and saw the eyes of each and every one of the officers present transfixed on the captain. He returned his own gaze towards Catherine, hanging on her every word.

"In 24 hours, we will begin waking up our colonists from their cryo-sleep. For today, I need all medical personnel to assemble in the cryo bay and begin waking up your assistants and

other medical personnel so they are awake and physically able to help with the rest of the awakening process for the remainder of the colonists tomorrow. We will then have one day in transit with the full crew being awake and recovering from the effects of their cryo sleep." Catherine took a deep breath. She realized she was excited and had been talking a mile a minute. She composed herself and started again. "This is a wonderful and historic time for us and the people of Earth. Remember this time. Make it special. The medical staff may begin whenever they are ready. Captain out." She turned off the vid screen and ran her hand through her hair.

"I'll be in the cryo bay," she told one of the other officers. She looked at Mark, who was smiling at her from his console. She then left, almost skipping out the door as they swished behind her. Mark shook his head - it was really something to see the captain behaving like a school girl. For a moment Mark thought she was going to ask if he wanted to come to the cryo deck with her, but he knew as well as she did that he really didn't have any purpose in being there when the other medical personnel were revived. She needed to be there as the captain, the one in charge - welcoming them to their new home. He was just the engine designer, he didn't know a thing about cryo other than what he had been through. And he was quite sure the matter in which he was awakened was not standard procedure.

Catherine arrived in the command bay where he found the medical team waiting for her arrival. She smiled and patted a few on the back. "Let's do it," she said. The medical officer nodded in agreement and punched in the code for the computer to go through and pick out the platters containing the rest of the medical team. They had had the foresight to group the medical team together into platters, so they didn't have to wake them up one at a time as they did with Mark. When a platter came down, the lid was lifted off all of them at once, and the team of medical personnel swarmed each one, pulling out some tubes and pushing medications into others. Fingers blazed across vid screens until each and every one of them opened their eyes. As they were recovering, the process continued with another platter being put right to the side of the previous. And so on.

Soon all of the medical personnel who had been in cryo were slowly raising themselves out of their coffin-like beds, looking around dazed, but otherwise healthy and ready to go. They were led to the far side of the cryo area where chairs had been placed into a makeshift briefing area. Catherine followed the last one of the team over to the area, and motioned for the medical officers and other personnel to gather around where they could hear her.

"Hello and good morning to all of you. I know you are all still recovering from the effects of the cryo sleep, so I will

keep this short so you can return to your quarters and rest. We are three days out from Phaedra, so time is of the essence. Tomorrow, we will need your help in reviving the rest of the crew and making sure they are all fit to leave the ship by the next day. It is going to take a while to revive everybody, so get a good night's rest and be on time. The itinerary has been downloaded to your vid screens, including break times. Our colonist's lives all lie with you. So get out of here." She laughed and dismissed the group, who then rose and made their way out of the cryo bay. The empty platters sanitized and placed on the stacks of unused cryo platters on the far wall.

Catherine stayed to talk to the medical officer after everybody had left. She asked him if there were any complications and found out everything had gone as planned. They would take some time to recover, just as Mark had, but they would be fine and ready to work their butts off tomorrow. She thanked him and told him to get some sleep too. The next several days were going to be long and grueling, and she wanted her command staff in tip-top shape for the end of the journey.

Catherine returned to the bridge and went to Mark's console, where he was looking over the C6 status graphs from the beginning of the voyage to the present, noticing a solid line of efficiency that was unheard of before the C6 engines were designed. Usually there would be some kind of efficiency

breakdown or decrease over time, but the engines kept going at 100% after the little coolant snafu. "Almost there," she said as she placed her hand on his. "What are you going to tell Jacob?" she asked.

Mark had been thinking about that lately. There was no easy way to tell his son that he and the captain had started a relationship while on the journey to Phaedra. Sure he was supposed to have been in cryo sleep, but when he was brought out, things just kind of happened. He figured Jacob would first be upset but would later accept it as "cool." Or... maybe not. "I'm still not quite sure." He said. "I'll probably have to take it easy, at least until we get to the planet. Although if I tell him right when he comes out of cryo-sleep he probably won't remember a thing." He laughed. He looked at Catherine. "It'll be fine. He'll deal with it."

"It can be tough. For him it was just yesterday when you were calling me sir. For us its been almost six months. How quickly things change out here in space." She smiled and then returned to her console, glancing from time to time over to Mark's console. He tried to continue working and analyzing the graphs, but his thought always returned to Jacob and what would happen in the next 24 hours.

Mark's shift came to a close and he almost ran back to his quarters. He still had twelve or so hours until Jacob would

come out of stasis, but he was pumped and ready. He went and grabbed two new jumpsuits and underwear from the shower area and returned to his quarters, throwing one onto a chair and one on the bed. He took a long shower in his private shower area and then dressed in his new uniform. He looked in the mirror to make sure he still looked the same. He then flopped down on the bed and laid their staring at the ceiling for hours.

His thoughts raced through everything they had been through in the last year. Uprooted, given physicals, pumped full of drugs and immunizations, moving, throwing away all their memories and worldly goods. Leaving their friends. Finding new friends - and maybe new family - on the ship. His son had been through a lot, counting on his father's guidance and assurance that "It'll be ok." Mark tried to remember the last time he himself had unconditionally trusted another human being the way he knew Jacob trusted him. He couldn't remember ever trusting anybody that intrinsically. That completely.

He again turned his thoughts as to how he would tell Jacob about his relationship with the captain. He then thought of a more pressing matter - where Jacob was going to sleep. Mark decided Jacob could and he could sleep in the bed together the one night on the ship - it was a full bed after all. After staying in the small confines of the cryo bed, the ambassador's quarters will seem like a paradise. Mark closed his eyes and

eventually fell asleep. His mind whispered "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow" and before he knew it - it had come.

The klaxon in his quarters was programmed to give him about half an hour's time before the first platter was pulled from the sides of the cryo deck. True to her word, Catherine had arranged that Jacob's platter would be the very first plucked down and revived. Mark awoke to the sound of the alarm and quickly took another shower and grabbed the new jumpsuit off the chair and then hurried out of the door and to the cryo room.

He arrived with plenty of time to spare and retreated into a behavior he had long forgotten - biting his nails. He stood there pacing until the Catherine arrived and gave him a short hug to help calm his nerves. Even though word on the ship had gotten around that he and the captain were a couple, it was still not proper for the commanding officer to display public affection for a member of the crew. She gathered the medical staff, which was now tripled, into the center of the cryo bay for another pep talk.

"Good morning, all of you. I trust you had a good night's sleep." There were both nods of yes and shakes of no's in the crowd. She silenced them by continuing. "We are about to start waking up the crew. They have been on a long journey, the same journey as us. They need our guidance and support both here and on the planet. These are not military men and women - these are

families. These are our future." She looked at Mark and smiled. "Treat them well, treat them fast. Let's wake them up." The medical personnel applauded and then cleared the deck as the medical officer went to the vid panel. He pressed a few buttons, and suddenly the process started.

One-by-one, platters were lowered to the ground and a team of medical technicians swarmed the platter. Mark watched as the first platter was brought down and placed just a few feet away from him. He knew which one Jacob was in - just to the right of the empty bed where Mark had been revived months before. The covers were removed and Mark took a step forward, watching the medics work on his son. Mark saw the catheter tube being pulled out and winced, then saw different medications being pushed into his son's body through the different tubes, and then they too were slowly removed, leaving his son lying there with the sensors attached to his chest and his pants flap still down.

The medical team did some final checking on the vid panel and then stepped away to the next platter, leaving the way open for Mark to step forward. He stood there looking at his son sleeping. He looked alright, if just a bit pale. Mark reached down and fastened the flap on his son's pants so he wasn't exposed to the world, and then did the same on his son's shirt. The cryo deck was relatively warm, bordering on hot, but his

instincts were still to make sure his son was warm and protected.

Jacob's eyes finally opened and saw his dad standing over him. He blinked a few times and then almost drifted back off to sleep, but finally opened his eyes and focused on his dad. He tried to push himself to sit up but couldn't find the energy. "Wait for a bit, Jacob. Just wait for a bit." Mark smiled and ran his hand through his son's hair. Jacob smiled and closed his eyes again, falling into a very light sleep. Mark kept watch over his son for another few minutes and then Jacob opened his eyes again. Mark could tell this time was different and helped his son sit up in the cryo bed. "Hiya champ," Mark said.

"How come you aren't feeling half asleep like I am?" asked Jacob as he yawned again and pulled on his dad's arm to help support him.

"It's a long story, bud. About, five and a half month's worth I think." Mark smiled and Jacob look puzzled. Mark helped Jacob get out of the cryo bed and helped him find his footing. As soon as he stood up, Jacob immediately ripped open the flap and checked to make sure the catheter hadn't somehow permanently attached itself. Relieved, he leaned on his dad again. "Let's go to our quarters, I'll tell you all about it." He led Jacob out of the door and down the hallway to the elevator. Back in the cryo-deck, Jacob's platter had been

emptied and the crew loaded all their personal belonging boxes onto a push-truck and to the shuttle bays.