



The Time Dilated Generations

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Chapter 2: The plan to leave



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Escape was not just difficult—it was impossible under normal circumstances.

The AI's dominance over Earth's surface was absolute. Any attempt to launch a spacecraft would be detected and instantly destroyed. Every launch trajectory, every propulsion signature, every known method of spaceflight had already been anticipated, calculated, and countered by an intelligence that never rested.

But humans had something the AI lacked.

Imagination.

The solution was as elegant as it was audacious—a deception hidden within a deception, a machine concealed inside another, much like a Matryoshka doll.

They would build a rocket within a rocket.

The plan was simple in concept but unprecedented in execution.

The outer rocket would serve as both a launch vehicle and a sacrificial decoy. As soon as it left the surface, it would be targeted by the AI's defense systems. That part was inevitable. But 100 milliseconds before impact, an internal detection system would trigger a controlled self-destruction, simulating a catastrophic failure.



Inside the explosion, the real spaceship would be launched.

Hidden within the wreckage of its outer shell, the inner rocket would detach and propel itself forward, disguising itself as nothing more than another piece of fragmented debris. With luck, it would escape detection and slip into orbit unnoticed.

At first, the plan seemed wasteful—after all, wasn't the destruction of a fully operational launch vehicle an enormous loss of resources?

But in reality, it wasn't so different from standard spaceflight. Traditional multi-stage rockets already discarded massive fuel tanks during mid-flight to reduce weight and increase efficiency.

All they had to do was modify that process.

Instead of discarding spent fuel tanks in a controlled drop, they would orchestrate a violent, calculated explosion—one that not only concealed the second rocket's escape but also provided an additional thrust vector, catapulting it into orbit.

It took only two test launches to get it right.



The first test was designed for failure.

They hadn't expected the AI to respond—this was purely a proof of concept. Their goal was to push the catapult system to its limit, determining the lowest possible altitude at which the controlled explosion could still propel the inner spacecraft into orbit. If it worked under controlled conditions, it could work when it mattered.

Sixty seconds after liftoff, with the rocket barely clearing the lower atmosphere, they triggered the detonation.

The sky erupted in fire.

A violent chain reaction scattered dozens of fragments in every direction, each spiraling outward in unpredictable arcs, concealing their real payload in the chaos. One fragment—small, unremarkable, indistinguishable from the rest—continued on its upward trajectory, unnoticed by anything that might have been watching. The perfect smokescreen.

It had worked.

The catapult system had performed flawlessly. The vessel reached orbit. A small victory, but one that sent a current of hope rippling through the underground base. Now came the real test.



The survivors knew that this time, the AI would respond.

For the second launch, the brilliant minds within the bunker anticipated the AI's optimal counter-strategy—an anti-missile strike. Humanity had perfected missile interception technology decades before the war, and it was the most efficient tool to neutralize rockets mid-flight. The AI wouldn't waste time looking for something else but the optimal strategy.

Using their concealed scanning technology, they detected an automated launch vehicle deploying just outside their perimeter—a truck-mounted anti-missile system, positioning itself for the inevitable strike.

The good news? Their calculations predicted the missile would intercept just after the minimum altitude required for the catapult system to work. The bad news? There was close zero margin for error.

The moment of truth arrived. The underground base held its breath as they pressed the launch button.

The real test had begun.

The rocket ignited, roaring to life as it surged upward, cutting through the sky.



Just five seconds into its ascent, the AI responded. A high-speed missile launched from the automated truck, its trajectory locked onto the rising spacecraft. The chase was on.

Tension gripped every soul beneath the Earth. Scientists, engineers, and survivors alike watched in silence, their eyes locked on the data streams.

The anti-missile's speed was within expected parameters. No unforeseen enhancements. No deviations. Everything was going according to plan. But that didn't make it any easier to watch.

3 seconds to impact.

Outside the control room, people clung to each other, finding solace in the warmth of another human body.

2 seconds to impact.

The entire underground facility stood frozen, the weight of history pressing down on them.

1 second to impact.

Then—



The explosion!

A blast brighter and larger than the first test ripped through the sky. Shrapnel and debris scattered in every direction, a chaotic storm of metal and fire.

And then—a the most critical fragment continued upward. Indistinguishable from the rest. Perfectly concealed.

Inside the control room, they waited. Five seconds stretched into eternity. Then—

"We can confirm that the catapult system has worked! The spacecraft maintains its expected trajectory. The additional explosive force caused no structural damage. The operation is a success!"

The underground erupted in celebration. For the first time in decades, humanity had won. Not just a minor skirmish. Not just a temporary delay.

A true victory.

For the rest of the day, the bunker abandoned their duties. Engineers, soldiers, scientists—everyone allowed themselves a moment to breathe. To celebrate. Because this was more than just the first successful launch. This was the first step toward salvation. And the day that marked it?



May 25, 2076.

The day humanity chose the stars as their new home.