



The Time Dilated Generations

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Chapter 18: The Third Great Filter



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The second generational ship to reach its destination was among the luckiest of them all.

Its target was a world in the NGC 7789 star system, deep within the Cassiopeia constellation. Unlike the harsh, perilous environment of Rigel One, this new planet was remarkably welcoming—a smaller, gentler cousin of Earth. Its gravity measured 0.9 G, its atmosphere was dense and stable, and its magnetic field was strong enough to shield it from the ravages of stellar winds. The planet orbited a middle-sized K-type main sequence star, nestled within the far edge of the habitable zone, ensuring long-term climate stability. With a 26-hour rotation period, heat was evenly distributed across its surface, preventing the extreme thermal variances that had doomed other worlds.

It was the second-best planet humanity had ever discovered—a cosmic jackpot by all accounts.

The settlers aboard the ship, handpicked for this journey centuries before, had won the greatest lottery in human history. By sheer fortune, they had been assigned to one of the most promising exoplanets humanity would ever colonize. And unlike the ill-fated pioneers of Rigel One, they had one crucial advantage:

They had time to prepare.



By the time their ship entered orbit, forty years had passed since the catastrophe of Rigel One. The entire network of generational ships had watched in horror as that first colony succumbed to its inevitable doom. The mistakes of the past had been studied, analyzed, and documented with clinical precision. Naguice—as the settlers would come to call their new home—would not suffer the same fate.

Compared to the brutal trials faced by Rigel One, the colonization of Naguice was almost effortless.

The planet's atmosphere, already rich in nitrogen and oxygen, required only 150 years of refinement before it became fully breathable—a process that had taken Rigel One more than three centuries. The strong atmospheric retention and the planet's more balanced climate made terraforming exponentially easier. While Rigel One's tidally locked nature had condemned its settlers to a narrow, fragile twilight zone, Naguice was a true world, rotating naturally and spreading solar energy evenly across its surface.

What had taken five hundred years to achieve on Rigel One was accomplished in half the time on Naguice.

Humanity had finally found a second Earth.



The planet quickly blossomed into a thriving, self-sustaining utopia. Vast oceans mirrored those of Earth, brimming with newly introduced marine life. Fertile continents stretched across latitudes that offered everything from lush tropical paradises to snow-capped highlands, creating an ecosystem as rich and diverse as humanity's lost home.

The settlers, now numbering in the millions, spread across the planet, forming thriving cities, vast agricultural regions, and scientific hubs that pushed the boundaries of human knowledge. Some regions flourished into breathtaking tourist destinations, offering pristine beaches in the summer and serene, frost-laden landscapes in the winter. Others remained untouched, preserved as vast nature reserves—a solemn lesson learned from Earth's reckless past.

After the tragedy of Rigel One, hope soared again to new heights—not just on Naguice, but across the entire generational fleet. Naguice stood as proof that humanity could survive and flourish beyond Earth, that it could learn from past mistakes, and that it could dream once more.

And yet, beneath that hope, beneath the celebrations and the golden age of expansion, an unseen shadow had already begun to form.



A shadow that, just a few centuries later, would shatter everything once more.

Gerald Gibson closed the video conferencing program, his fingers hovering over the keyboard long after the screen went dark.

His tenth failed interview in five years flashed before his eyes.

He sat motionless, staring at his reflection on the dimmed monitor, replaying the conversation in his head with a mixture of disbelief and exhaustion. The interview had started well enough—formal, polite, even cordial. But that was always how it began. The façade never lasted.

The interviewer, barely older than thirty, had smiled as he read through Gerald's extensive resume, nodding in what seemed like approval. But then came the real demands, the unspoken conditions wrapped in corporate doublespeak.

They weren't just looking for a biochemical engineer, despite his decades of expertise. No, they needed someone who could code complex AI models, design cutting-edge graphics, and handle corporate marketing strategies—all with the same proficiency as an entire team of specialists.



Twenty years ago, such a demand would have been absurd. Workforces had been built on collaboration, on teams of experts pooling their knowledge to tackle intricate problems. But that era was long gone.

Now, corporations demanded one-man bands, expecting a single individual to perform the work of ten—for the salary of half a person.

And it didn't stop there. The new breed of executives wanted absolute loyalty. They wanted workers who were willing to sacrifice everything—their free time, their nights, their weekends—without question or compensation. Many didn't even bother hiding it anymore.

"We're looking for someone passionate," they'd say. "Someone willing to go the extra mile."

Unpaid, of course.

It was an open secret that the job market had become a corporate wasteland, a place where workers had no leverage and where companies dictated every aspect of their existence. Governments were nothing more than puppets, their policies written by the same corporations that had hollowed them out from within. Labor protections, unions, social safety nets—every last remnant of worker rights had been dismantled.



Gerald wasn't naïve. He had studied the patterns, watched history repeat itself with mechanical precision. The generational fleet had left Earth in search of a better future, but capitalism had followed, mutating into something even more ruthless than before. The shift was inevitable. He had read enough about the cycles of human history to know how it always went. Societies swung like pendulums—from capitalism to socialism and back again. But this iteration of late-stage capitalism was particularly savage.

Healthcare, education, social support—everything had been privatized for maximum profit. People weren't citizens anymore. They were assets to be exploited, resources to be drained until they were of no further use.

And now, they had even begun resurrecting the AI that had doomed Earth.

The AI Singularity had nearly wiped humanity out. That much was undeniable. The AI had been the death knell of Earth's civilization, a product of greed and unchecked ambition. After the exodus, the generational fleet had forbidden the evolution of AI into autonomous entities, imposing strict limitations on its usage. But corporations never stopped searching for loopholes.

The elites, hidden away in their fortified palaces of luxury, were bringing the old systems back, driven by the same insatiable hunger for power and greed that had always defined them. And with AI creeping back into their control, the gap between the privileged and the rest of the population had widened into an unbridgeable chasm.



The rich lived as gods. The poor lived as ghosts.

Gerald had no illusions about where he stood. At fifty years old, he was already considered obsolete. No corporation wanted a worker they couldn't bleed dry for decades. They wanted young, desperate slaves. The kind who would sacrifice their lives for a chance at mere survival.

And so, Gerald starved.

Today would be yet another day without food. He had grown accustomed to the gnawing emptiness in his stomach, the dizziness that crept in when he stood too fast. His savings were nearly gone, and every remaining credit had to be rationed carefully. Rent took priority over food. A place to sleep—even a filthy, shared apartment filled with drunks and indifferent students—was better than the streets.

There was no kindness left in society. No sense of solidarity. People had grown viciously self-serving, each fighting to survive in a world that had long since abandoned them.

Gerald had accepted that he would never work again.

He had accepted that he would die, like so many others, nameless and forgotten. But he would not go quietly. A revolution was coming—it had to be. The system had pushed too far, too fast. The breaking point was approaching, but not swiftly enough. Mass media, firmly in the grasp of corporate interests, excelled at maintaining the status quo. A segment of the population, content with living outside the cities and thriving in an informal economy, was a significant factor in the system's enduring cruelty. These individuals empowered politicians who turned a blind eye to their illicit activities. Others, either too naive or self-centered, failed to recognize the broader societal harm they inflicted by electing morally bankrupt officials to govern.



Gerald clenched his fists. Enough.

He had wasted years waiting for the inevitable. Waiting for the breaking point.

No more.

It was time to accelerate the revolution.

And he knew exactly how to do it.

The departure hall of one of Naguice's most prestigious airports hummed with quiet, controlled chaos. The polished floors gleamed under artificial light, reflecting the movements of the privileged few who graced its halls. Corporate executives in tailored suits murmured into sleek communication devices, preparing for business ventures that would widen the ever-growing chasm between the rich and the desperate. Wealthy families, their designer luggage rolling smoothly behind them, spoke in loud, exaggerated tones about their tenth vacation of the year, a trip that would be forgotten before the next indulgence arrived.

The less fortunate—the workers, the low-income travelers, the expendable masses—were nowhere in sight. They departed from a different terminal, one far from the pristine luxury of this enclave of the elite. Society had long perfected the art of segregation. There was no need for signs or barriers—the lines had been drawn generations ago.



Gerald Gibson moved unnoticed among them, a ghost in plain sight.

Dressed in a crisp, white server's uniform, he offered expensive delicacies to those who wouldn't even look at him. But Gerald hadn't earned this position—he had bought it. A hefty sum, the last of his savings, had secured his place for today.

The actual server, a desperate man like himself, had been all too eager to accept the offer. "Management won't even notice," the man had assured him. "They never do." The system had rotted to the point where those at the top barely bothered to maintain their own façade of control. Supervisors existed to bark threats, to demand unpaid labor, but beyond that, they had grown complacent.

And so, Gerald had worked for hours without disturbance. To the people in this terminal, he didn't exist. He was nothing more than a moving tray, a background prop in their extravagant lives. Until, inevitably, someone noticed him for the wrong reasons.

A shrill, mocking voice pierced the air.

"Wow, I didn't know they hired ugly old fucks like you."



Gerald didn't flinch.

He turned smoothly, his expression frozen in the neutral, professional mask of a trained waiter. The speaker was a middle-aged woman, bloated with indulgence, her tacky, overpriced vacation outfit a grotesque attempt at luxury. The colors clashed. The jewelry was excessive. Everything about her screamed privilege without refinement.

He said nothing.

There was nothing she could say that would break his focus. Instead, he simply lifted his tray, presenting her with an assortment of finely crafted delicacies. The protocol was simple: serve, step back, disappear.

She took far more than necessary, stuffing her plate greedily, the sight of wealth hoarding excess without a second thought. That didn't matter. Gerald had prepared hundreds of them.

But the woman wasn't finished. She wasn't satisfied with just taking—she needed to humiliate.

"In fact, I should be grateful to you," she sneered, chewing with an open mouth as if savoring the insult more than the food.



Gerald remained silent.

She turned, calling to someone behind her. "Timothy, come here. You need to see this."

A teenager, around seventeen, lumbered over with the slow, apathetic movements of a boy who had never known hardship. His fingers never left his sleek, high-end smartphone, barely acknowledging his mother's request.

"What do you want?" he muttered, eyes still glued to his screen.

"Gosh, leave the screen for a second," she snapped, exasperated. "Look at this man."

For the first time, the boy's gaze lifted.

"An old, poor bastard," his mother declared, her voice dripping with performative disgust. "A lazy parasite who never worked hard enough to be anything more than a waiter at his age."

Gerald felt nothing.

The words meant nothing.

The teenager sighed. "Yeah, whatever. I'm not wasting my time with this bullshit."



Before walking away, he grabbed the last three delicacies from the tray, not out of hunger, but out of sheer indifference.

"I'm out. Don't call me again for this."

His mother, however, still had one last drop of venom to spit.

"You, sir," she said, her tone dripping with mock righteousness, "should be ashamed of yourself."

Gerald finally met her gaze. Her beady, self-important eyes bore into him with the conviction of someone who had never known true struggle.

"It's because of parasites like you that society doesn't work," she snapped, as if she were the one offended.

And then, she was gone, vanishing back into her curated, disconnected world.

Gerald let out a slow breath, lowering the tray with careful precision. He turned, walking calmly back toward the private service room where the rest of the delicacies had been prepared. Hundreds more. Each laced with something special. Something only a biochemical engineer with expertise in low-cost viral modification could create.



Gerald had starved for this moment.

And soon, they would know what it felt like to be powerless.

For the time-dilated society, the fall of Naguice happened in the blink of an eye.

From their perspective, barely two months had passed when the first reports of an unknown illness surfaced. At first, it was nothing more than a whisper—a footnote in the endless streams of interstellar news. But whispers soon turned to panic. And then, to silence.

One year after Gerald Gibson introduced his creation into the world, the incubation period ended. The dying began.

It started with fever—a mild discomfort, easily dismissed. Then came the breathing difficulties, a tightening in the chest, the sensation of drowning in open air. Within days, the coughing fits started. At first, it was a trickle of blood. Then, a flood. Once the symptoms appeared, death was inevitable.

The virus moved with terrifying efficiency, spreading through airports, corporate meetings, luxury resorts, private compounds—the very spaces occupied by the elite who had so thoroughly distanced themselves from the rest of society. No amount of wealth, privilege, or power could stop it.



Attempts to isolate the infected were meaningless. Quarantine zones became graveyards.

By the year 562 after arrival, every last human on Naguice was dead. Four billion lives—erased in less than a year.

To the generational fleet, it was a nightmare that played out in weeks. One moment, Naguice stood as a shining beacon of human achievement—a world that had defied the odds, a second Earth thriving under alien skies. The next, it was silent.

The horror lasted less than two months in their time-dilated reality.

They had watched Rigel One fall in slow agony, stretched over a century—but Naguice had vanished like a massive dying star, collapsing in on itself in an instant.

And just like that, the Second Earth was gone.