



The Time Dilated Generations

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Chapter 20: Unavoidable Fate



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The fate of the Sadr generational ship was sealed 500 years after its arrival. The Wolf-Rayet 124 expedition fared no better. Within six centuries of landfall, the last human perished, leaving no trace of civilization behind. Another system, another loss. The vast silence of space swallowed both their ambitions, erasing their struggles as if they had never existed.

The two catastrophic failures had already sent shockwaves rippling through the fleet, but the darkest hour was yet to come. The VY Canis Majoris generational ship, tantalizingly close to its destination with mere light-years remaining, never reached its promised haven.

The Sadr generational ship reached its destination, an eyeball planet orbiting an M-Type red dwarf star. Unlike Rigel One, which had suffered a devastating orbital cataclysm that plunged its habitable twilight zone into an unrelenting deep freeze, Sadr faced no such gravitational instability. It was a fortunate stroke of fate.

With stable conditions, the settlers thrived. They learned from the tragedies of Rigel One and Naguice, understanding that the cyclical nature of capitalism and socialism—successfully balanced for centuries aboard the generational ships—had failed on planetary soil. Determined to prevent history from repeating itself, they enacted a radical solution: a dictatorial communist system designed to eliminate economic disparity once and for all.



It was a utopia—at least, for a time.

Under this system, survival was never a concern. Food, shelter, healthcare, and education were provided to all, free of charge. The state carefully regulated industries, preventing business owners from amassing unchecked wealth or influencing governance. Entrepreneurship was permitted, but those who succeeded were rewarded with comfortable lives, akin to a prosperous middle class from 20th-century Earth. Most importantly, people were free to choose how they contributed to society. No one was forced into a career they despised. For the first four centuries, Sadr flourished under this model, achieving in 300 years what had taken Rigel One 500.

But utopias are fragile.

For many, the guarantee of basic needs stripped life of urgency. Without fear of poverty, some lost all motivation to contribute. Work became optional, and while incentives existed for those who strived for excellence, the difference between mere survival and true success was not stark enough to drive ambition. As decades passed, complacency seeped into every aspect of life. Essential tasks—once performed with diligence in the struggle to terraform the planet—became halfhearted obligations. Jobs requiring discipline and precision saw a decline in professionalism. The system, once robust in the face of hardship, began to erode under the weight of its own stability.



The government responded with increasing control. Strict policies were enforced to combat stagnation, but the more oppressive the state became, the more resentment festered among the people. A breaking point was inevitable.

Discontent simmered for decades before finally igniting in a series of violent coups. One by one, the rigid communist regimes toppled, replaced not by democracy, but by militarized states. The shift was rapid and brutal—order was restored, but at an unspeakable cost.

The early years of military rule were seen as a necessary course correction. Hard work was no longer optional. The era of aimless leisure ended overnight. If one did not contribute, they did not survive—except for those in the military, who wielded absolute authority. The economy, once tightly controlled, swung to the other extreme. With no restrictions on wealth accumulation, corporations flourished unchecked, and the gap between rich and poor widened at an alarming rate.

The people had traded one extreme for another.

Protests were not tolerated. The military regimes, growing ever more paranoid, saw dissent as treason. The only currency that mattered was obedience. As power consolidated in the hands of generals and oligarchs, the planet fractured into rival nations—each armed, each suspicious, and each ruled by leaders who saw war as the inevitable solution to their differences.



Decades passed, and the global arms race escalated. Military expansion was no longer a precaution; it was a necessity. Generals who had risen through the ranks on the promise of conquest now sat at the helm of nuclear-armed states, each waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

And then, the moment came.

In the year 505 after landfall, the first missiles launched. In mere hours, billions perished in the inferno of nuclear war. The survivors, those who had managed to escape the initial blasts, faced an even crueler fate. The ensuing nuclear winter choked the atmosphere, shrouding the planet in darkness, freezing the land, and poisoning the remnants of civilization. Over the next twenty years, the last stragglers succumbed to radiation, starvation, and despair.

The final transmission from Sadr's colony came in broken fragments, a garbled distress call echoing across the time-dilated network of the fleet.

Then, silence.

Among all the planets humanity had encountered, the one orbiting Wolf-Rayet 124 was a rarity beyond imagination. It was, by every measure, the most Earth-like world ever discovered. A dense, oxygen-rich atmosphere, a vast iron core generating a powerful magnetic field, and even a massive moon stabilizing its orbit—conditions that mirrored Earth in ways no other exoplanet had. It was the dream of every astronomer, every hopeful colonist. A true second Earth.



But there was a catch.

Wolf-Rayet 124 was no ordinary star. It was a titanic, ultra-massive Wolf-Rayet sequence star—one of the rarest, most short-lived stellar phenomena in the universe. A cauldron of nuclear fury, burning at such an extreme rate that its lifespan was measured not in billions, but in mere millions of years. These stars did not die peacefully. They collapsed violently, often detonating as supernovae before giving birth to black holes.

By all logic, this world should have never been considered for colonization. And yet, against all odds, the astrophysicists discovered something extraordinary: the star, despite its immense size, still had approximately five million years before its death. For humans, that was an eternity. Even accounting for necessary evacuation well before the star's demise, it meant at least three million years of habitability—more than enough time for civilization to thrive and plan its next great migration.

In cosmic terms, it was a fleeting moment. But in human terms, it was everything.

Due to the star's sheer mass, the planet's habitable zone lay unimaginably far from its sun—ten times the distance of Neptune from Sol. A full orbit around Wolf-Rayet 124 took nearly 500 Earth years. And yet, for the first time in the fleet's long and painful history, when the settlers arrived, they found something miraculous waiting for them.



Life.

Primitive bacterial life had already begun shaping the planet's atmosphere, accelerating the transformation into a truly habitable world. Unlike past colonies, where entire generations struggled through centuries of terraforming, the settlers of Wolf-Rayet 124 accomplished in record time what had taken others hundreds of years. In just a single century, they had a breathable atmosphere.

By year 300, the planet had been fully colonized. Cities rose across its continents, connected by sprawling networks of infrastructure. The population swelled, comfortably adjusting to the planet's slightly higher 1.1-G gravity. The hardships of colonization were met with eager determination, and for the first time since leaving Earth, it felt as though humanity had found a world where they could truly live, rather than merely survive.

Even knowing their time was ultimately limited, the people of Wolf-Rayet 124 embraced their existence. The planet would not be their final home, but it would be a paradise—for as long as they could keep it.

Learning from the catastrophic fates of Rigel One, Naguice, and Sadr, the settlers were determined to avoid the extremes that had doomed their predecessors. They maintained the cycle of capitalism and socialism that had sustained the generational ships for centuries but implemented safeguards to prevent the unchecked inequality and radicalism that had led to collapse.



Unlike Naguice, where capitalism had spiraled into dystopian exploitation, Wolf-Rayet 124 ensured that no one was ever truly abandoned. Publicly funded healthcare, education, and basic housing were guaranteed. Food security was never in question. However, unlike the failed utopian experiment of Sadr, these essentials were not handed out freely with no incentive to work.

Instead, the system struck a delicate balance.

Basic needs were met, but in community living quarters where privacy was scarce, ensuring that those who wished for more had motivation to earn it. Private housing, wealth, and luxuries could be attained, but economic inequality was kept within strict bounds. There were no billionaires, no ruling corporate elites, but also no government-enforced equality. Wealth could be pursued, but never at the cost of mass suffering. The system was designed to apply pressure without suffocation—enough to drive progress without pushing people into desperation.

And most importantly, everyone accepted this balance.

At first, the colonists of Wolf-Rayet 124 found solace in their connection with Sadr. Both generational ships had arrived just fifty years apart, meaning that, for all practical purposes, the two civilizations were building their new worlds side by side. Their societies may have followed different paths—one governed by strict communist rule, the other maintaining a measured cycle of capitalism and socialism—but their shared mission bound them together.



For decades, communication flourished. There was an unspoken understanding between the two worlds, a camaraderie in the stars. The exchange of culture, science, and even simple conversations between ordinary citizens gave a sense of belonging in the vast emptiness of space. Despite the loneliness of interstellar exile, they were not alone—humanity had not simply scattered into the void, but had kept its unity across the light-years.

But then, Sadr fell.

The military coup d'états shattered its fragile stability, fracturing the planet into opposing, hostile states. The once-thriving cultural exchange collapsed into radio silence, as Wolf-Rayet 124's administration heavily restricted all transmissions from Sadr. At first, it was justified as a precaution—an attempt to prevent their own world from being dragged into the chaos. But the true problem lay in the very foundation of human civilization.

For centuries, humanity had prioritized instant communication, ensuring that no distance, not even the gulfs between the stars, could sever the bonds between people. The technology was universal, embedded in the fabric of daily life. Almost everyone had access to it.

And no law, no decree, could fully stop them from watching Sadr destroy itself.



As Sadr spiraled toward annihilation, its story unfolded in real-time across Wolf-Rayet 124. People watched in horror as entire nations fell to military juntas, as civil liberties were stripped away, as power-hungry warmongers amassed arsenals, preparing for the inevitable. The fear was palpable. And when the moment finally came—when nuclear fire erased Sadr from existence, when the last human on that world died choking on ash—something far more dangerous began to take root.

Faith in survival collapsed.

For centuries, humanity had clung to the belief that they could carve out a future beyond Earth. But as they witnessed the destruction of their sister colony, millions on Wolf-Rayet 124 lost that belief. They saw their fate written in the ruins of Sadr. They saw the pattern. They saw the inevitability.

They saw doom.

And in that abyss of hopelessness, one man saw an opportunity.

Lawrence Holt was not a man of faith. He was not a visionary, nor a savior. He was, at his core, a psychopath—a man who had spent his life yearning for unrestricted, absolute power but had never found the right moment to seize it. That moment had now arrived.



He understood something most did not: a people without hope will follow anyone who promises them meaning.

And so, he gave them one.

He forged a religion from the ashes of Sadr, a doctrine that twisted despair into devotion. His movement did not deny the inevitable—it embraced it. The end of humanity was a certainty, he preached. The Great Filters were not accidents or failures; they were divine trials, and only those who submitted to his vision could attain true salvation.

At first, his sect was a fringe movement, a curiosity, a whisper in the dark. But as the weeks turned to months, as the reality of Sadr's obliteration continued to haunt the people, Holt's influence grew at an exponential rate.

Desperate citizens flocked to his teachings, yearning for an answer to the creeping sense of dread. Within a decade, his cult had swelled into millions. His words were no longer ignored—they were recited in homes, in public forums, in schools. The movement no longer lurked in the shadows; it stood openly in defiance of the government, demanding recognition. By the tenth anniversary of Sadr's destruction, the cult was no longer a religion. It was the government.



Another decade passed, and the last remnants of Wolf-Rayet 124's former leadership collapsed without bloodshed. Holt had no need for war—he had won the minds of the people. His rule was not imposed by force, but by faith. His teachings had become the law. He was the law.

Lawrence Holt was a singularity—a mind so sharp it could cut through the fabric of human perception, a man so cunning he could forge devotion from despair. He did not merely lead; he orchestrated. He was not merely worshipped; he was adored.

To the public, he was a beacon of hope, a visionary who had restored faith in the face of oblivion. His doctrine, built on rejection of dependence on technology, preached a return to nature, to simpler ways of life. He encouraged his followers to toil under the open sky, to work the fields with their bare hands, to build with sweat and will rather than cold, lifeless machines.

And for a time, it worked.

Productivity soared. Morale rose. The people of Wolf-Rayet 124 felt alive again, more connected to their world than ever before. They abandoned their digital comforts for the tangible, for the sensation of soil beneath their nails, for the purity of human effort. Holt had crafted a society that believed itself renewed.



But in reality, he had done nothing but enslave them.

He did not live as they did. Behind the walls of his hidden sanctuaries, Holt embraced technology more than any ruler before him. In secret, he constructed the most advanced laboratories in the history of the planet—facilities that would allow him to shape reality as he saw fit. His followers believed in humility, in sacrifice. But he believed in domination.

And he knew exactly who stood in his way.

A single nation resisted him.

Tucked away in a remote, frigid region rich in mineral resources, this country had never shared the despair that had made Holt's rise possible. Its people had found balance—they worked hard, but they reaped the rewards. Prosperity flourished. Their wealth made them independent, their success made them resilient, and most damning of all, their minds were untouched by fear.

They did not need Holt.

And that made them his enemy.

When the global government fell under his command, they alone refused to submit. They did not protest, they did not wage war, they simply continued as they always had, rejecting Holt's divine rule.



But in Holt's world, neutrality was not an option.

Holt was not content with control. He did not seek obedience—he sought absolute dominion. And so, in the darkness of his laboratories, he designed the ultimate control weapon. Invisible, undetectable nanobots—small and light enough to be inhaled through the respiratory system and enter the bloodstream. Each one a microscopic executioner, waiting only for a signal. A single pulse from orbit, and they would activate—shutting down organs, severing neural pathways, extinguishing life itself.

His scientists ran tests on small, remote villages—quiet exterminations, unnoticed by the world. It worked flawlessly. When the time came, he would drown his enemies in silence, leaving no trace of murder but the absence of breath.

But why stop there?

Why limit his dominion to one nation, when he could wield the power of life and death over every human being?

And so he did.

The nanobots were deployed planet-wide—an invisible veil of death, embedded in the lungs of every man, woman, and child. Holt had achieved what no ruler in human history had ever dared dream:



He was now a God.

With a keystroke, he could erase a single life. With a command, he could shape destiny itself. The digital database of his rule was no longer a census—it was the software of existence.

And on that fateful day, he made his decree.

He selected six million names—every citizen of the defiant nation. With a single action, he would erase them from history, silence their defiance, and cement his rule over the world.

He pressed the command.

And then he learned why no man should play God.

The system failed. His scientists had never tested the full scale of execution. Six million deaths in an instant. The system could not process it. It overflowed. A flood of errors cascaded through the network. The command did not stop at six million.

It did not stop at all.

The silent execution order rippled through the database, consuming name after name, an unstoppable chain reaction of death. In mere seconds, the nanobots activated in every living being.



Across the planet, humanity collapsed.

People fell where they stood—farmers gasping in the fields, workers choking in factories, children dropping lifeless in schools. There was no warning, no resistance, no escape.

The streets became graveyards. Cities turned to silent tombs. Holt watched from his command room as his paradise—his kingdom—his world—withered and died before his eyes.

He had created a God-machine, but it did not serve him. It did not recognize its master.

Ten minutes.

That was all it took.

When the final breath was drawn, when the last heart ceased its rhythm, when not a single human voice remained, the world was still.

Wolf-Rayet 124 was dead.

And so was his God.



The VY Canis Majoris was on the verge of its final destination. After centuries adrift in the abyss, five years was nothing. A single breath in the vast span of time. They were so close—so impossibly close—that the settlers had begun to speak of the planet below as though they had already set foot upon its soil.

Then the news arrived.

Wolf-Rayet 124 was gone. Not a slow decay like Rigel One, not the political chaos of Sadr, nor the corporate disease of Naguice. This was something different. Something worse. A nightmare of human design, an extinction event brought forth not by the cold indifference of the universe, but by a single man's ambition. A press of a button, a command line executed, and in mere minutes an entire civilization had vanished.

No one could comprehend it.

With that final, cataclysmic failure, the weight of the past crushed down upon the crew of VY Canis Majoris. Three colonies lost had been tragedy enough, but now, after four generations of sacrifice, four distant worlds swallowed by failure, how could they believe they would be the exception? Hope, which had survived through war, famine, exodus, and the terrible silence of deep space, finally began to fracture.



The administrators tried to quell the fear, issuing reassurances through ship-wide broadcasts. They spoke of perseverance, of duty, of the dream their ancestors had entrusted to them. The other generational ships joined in, messages arriving from across the time-dilated network—words of encouragement, calls for unity, voices pleading for them to hold on just a little longer.

But something had taken root in VY Canis Majoris, something insidious and irreparable. Perhaps it was the proximity to their destination, the knowledge that they had spent so long in the dark only to arrive at the brink of ruin. Perhaps it was something deeper, something in their bones, in the marrow of a people who had lived for centuries aboard metal corridors with the promise of land and sky always just beyond reach. Whatever it was, it could not be undone.

The first suicide was met with quiet horror. A single loss was devastating enough—life on a generational ship was more than precious, it was sacred. Then came another. And another. By the end of the week, twenty had taken their own lives.

Twenty.

There was no time to grieve, no time to process. The entire time-dilated network turned its attention to VY Canis Majoris, the remaining ships pleading, reaching out with every ounce of support they could offer. Messages flooded in, friends and distant relatives speaking through the vast silence of space, trying to remind them they were not alone. That they would endure, that this did not have to be the end.



And yet, no matter how many voices spoke, no matter how many hands tried to hold them together, the people of VY Canis Majoris could not be consoled.

The despair had settled too deeply. The end, it seemed, had already begun.

Following the assigned duty roster, Grace Lambert took her position at the navigational controls of VY Canis Majoris spaceship on the seventh day after the Wolf-Rayet 124 catastrophe. She had always been a pillar of strength—a woman who had spent fifty-five years proving her resilience, her talent, her unwavering control over both machine and mind. She was extraordinarily talented. She was not only exceptional as a pilot but had also demonstrated remarkable skills as a computer systems programmer. She had contributed to the very security systems that safeguarded the generational spaceship, designing protective measures intended to endure for centuries. She had been trusted, respected, and admired.

But on that day, there was a storm inside her.

A storm that no firewall, no security protocol, no reinforced bulkhead could hold back.



She hid it well; as an exceptional pilot, she was specially trained to handle extreme situations with calm. As she entered the control cabin, there was no sign of the devastation within. No one could have guessed that, only days ago, her world had ended. That her husband and only son—her entire family—had been among those who had taken their lives. That the life she had built, the future she had fought for, had been reduced to nothing.

Harold Cross, her co-pilot and longtime friend, was already seated when she arrived. He had known her for years, had shared long shifts with her, had trusted her with his life in the most delicate moments of navigation. And yet, today, he saw something in her eyes that unsettled him.

"Grace, I'm terribly sorry for your loss," he said gently, his voice low, careful. "I think the administration would understand if you needed time to grieve. I can request a transfer for you—there's no need for you to be here right now. What you need is rest. There's a support group that—"

"Harold."

She interrupted him with a quiet, measured voice. It was not cold, nor dismissive, but firm. "I appreciate your concern, truly. But right now, focusing on my job helps me. So, please, don't."



Harold hesitated, studying her expression, searching for some hint of what lay beneath the surface. But all he found was composure.

"Alright," he said at last, though the worry did not leave his face. "But if you need anything—anything at all—you have my support."

Grace nodded in silent acknowledgment and took her seat. Without hesitation, she began running the standard protocols, verifying the status of the spaceship's propulsion systems. She moved with precision, her hands steady, her posture controlled. To anyone watching, she was exactly as she had always been.

For several hours, silence hung between them. Harold chose not to speak, not wanting to say something that might shatter whatever fragile peace she had constructed for herself. But within her, the storm was no longer just a storm. It had become a vortex, a spiraling force pulling her further and further away from the world of the living.

When Harold finally excused himself to use the bathroom, he hesitated before leaving. He turned back toward her, saw the faint, almost serene smile on her lips, and—perhaps against his better judgment—took it as reassurance that she was holding together.



The moment the door closed behind him, Grace's fingers danced across the controls.

Her first action was to lock the cabin door. The security systems were robust, designed to prevent unauthorized access to critical systems. But Grace was not an outsider. She had written parts of those systems herself. She bypassed every protocol with the ease of someone who knew precisely where the cracks in the armor lay.

Her target was the speed regulation system for the ship's offloading inertial quantum mass drive. It was, by design, impenetrable to external threats. The failsafes had been crafted over centuries to ensure that no rogue external actor could compromise them.

But Grace was no rogue external actor.

She was inside the system.

Within moments, she had full control.

She composed a message, carefully worded, following the exact procedures required for an emergency deceleration protocol. The alert spread instantly throughout the ship, reaching every passenger. The notification was clear and unquestionable:



"Obstacle detected ahead. Immediate deceleration required."

Panic did not set in. They had prepared for this. In the 552 years since the spaceship had left Earth's orbit, the automatic collision detection system had been activated only three times. But every passenger aboard had undergone mandatory drills every decade. They knew what to do.

One by one, they secured themselves into the nearest available acceleration seats. The liquid suspension system—an improved perfluorocarbon compound—was injected into their lungs, saturating their bodies with oxygen-rich fluid that would allow them to endure the crushing forces ahead. An early version of that same compound had been used centuries before, when John Anderson had first left Earth to begin humanity's great exodus.

There was no fear, only preparation.

No one inside VY Canis Majoris realized that when the G-forces pressed upon their bodies, it was not because the ship was slowing down.

It was because it was speeding up.

The only ones who noticed were those aboard the other generational ships still traveling across the Milky Way. As they monitored their networked companion, they watched in confusion and horror as VY Canis Majoris began to accelerate beyond all reason.



There was an alarm no one had ever expected to hear outside of a training simulation—an alarm so deeply embedded in the protocols of spacefaring civilization that it existed only as a theoretical failsafe, a specter of disaster lurking in the darkest corners of human imagination. It was the 99% light-speed threshold alarm, a warning meant to signal a point of no return.

The warning was clear. Every single person who had trained aboard a generational ship knew what it meant. They had studied it, rehearsed it, played it in simulations. But those were just drills, practiced in the safe confines of controlled environments. No one had ever truly faced this moment before.

And yet, the alarm was real.

It rang across the entire network of generational ships, spreading through the vast, time-dilated web that linked the last remnants of humanity across the Milky Way. A wave of dread settled over the millions who received the signal—a paralyzing horror that gripped them all in unison.

Something had gone horribly, irreversibly wrong.



The network administrators' first instinct was to establish a direct communication link with the VY Canis Majoris' navigational command control. They sent distress calls and attempted direct connections, but to no avail.

Silence.

There was no response.

It was not merely an absence of reply—it was a void, an eerie nothingness where voices, data streams, and acknowledgments should have been. It was as if the ship had been completely severed from the network.

Panic spread. Decisions had to be made fast.

There was only one course of action left.

In the entire 552-year history of humanity's great exodus, there had been one protocol that was never meant to be used. A measure so extreme, so unthinkable, that its very mention was almost taboo.

It was the remote control seizure.

Under only the most catastrophic conditions, the network had the ability to assume full remote control of any generational spaceship. It had been designed as an absolute last resort—an intervention so dire that activating it was equivalent to declaring a total failure of command on the targeted vessel.



No ship had ever suffered such a fate.

Until now.

The administrators acted swiftly, overriding every ethical debate, every legal precedent. It didn't matter anymore. If VY Canis Majoris continued accelerating, the outcome was inevitable. A ship traveling at such impossible speeds could not survive even the smallest collision. A single rogue pebble in its path could unleash horrors beyond imagination. The ship was racing toward annihilation, and every second lost increased the probability of disaster exponentially.

The override command was issued.

The control request was sent.

And then, something happened that should not have been possible.

The request was denied.

It wasn't a system failure. It wasn't an error in transmission.

It was a deliberate rejection—as if someone, somewhere aboard VY Canis Majoris, had locked them out.



The network administrators stared at their screens in disbelief. There was no precedent for this. The override could not be refused. It had been designed with absolute authority, above all individual command structures. No one had the power to reject it.

But the conclusion was clear: they had no way to control the spaceship.

Grace had already leaped from the cliff. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no second thoughts. She had committed herself entirely to the abyss, and for the first time since the darkness had swallowed her heart, she felt something close to peace.

Her fingers moved effortlessly over the controls, bypassing every safeguard, every redundant failsafe designed to prevent catastrophe. The remote access override—meant to serve as the ultimate safeguard against rogue command—was disabled in seconds. The moment the last barrier fell, she exhaled softly.

The world outside no longer mattered.

For one full hour, VY Canis Majoris continued to accelerate, locked in the inexorable grip of its propulsion systems. At first, the passengers had obeyed protocol without question. They had gone through the motions of emergency deceleration drills all their lives; they knew the routine, the sequence of events that should follow.



But something was wrong.

The course correction maneuver should have lasted no more than forty minutes. By the time the clock passed the 1 hour mark, the uneasy whispers had become frantic screams. Trapped in their acceleration seats, their bodies pinned by the crushing G-forces, they were helpless to do anything but shout, demanding answers.

Panic surged through the ship like wildfire.

Their minds were trapped in a prison of terror, their only movement confined to the twitch of fingers, the blinking of eyes, the ragged gasps of breath forced through clenched teeth.

Something was terribly, terribly wrong.

Harold Cross had known something wrong from the moment he left the bathroom. He barely had time to strap himself into the nearest seat before the force of acceleration crushed down on him. His breath was ripped from his lungs as the weight of inertia made even the simple act of lifting his hand a monumental effort.

For the past hour, he had fought against the pressure, trying desperately to establish communication with the navigation control cabin.



He had called for help. He had sent urgent override requests. He had screamed into the intercom, demanding a response.

But nothing came.

No response. No acknowledgment. Not even static.

And that was when the horror set in.

This was not a collision-avoidance maneuver. This was something else. Something deliberate.

Something irreversible.

His mind refused to believe it at first, but the longer the silence stretched, the more the truth became undeniable. His fingers trembled as he forced himself to open a direct channel. He directed it to her, the one person who could still stop this madness.

The words came out in desperate gasps, his voice strained from the effort, but he didn't care.

"Grace, please, I beg you, whatever is going on, stop. You need to stop it. We are here for you."



"I can't know the pain you're going through, but this is not the answer."

"Please—hundreds of people on this ship still have hope. Hope that we can make it. Give us a chance to prove that."

"For the love of God, Grace—have mercy!"

Over and over, he sent his desperate pleas into the void, hoping—praying—that something inside her was still listening.

But Grace was no longer there.

She heard him.

Every word. Every cry for help. Every desperate attempt to pull her back from the edge.

But they meant nothing to her now.

She was no longer bound by the concerns of the living. The mortal world had already drifted far behind her, fading into insignificance. She had set her course for something beyond human understanding—something transcendent, something final.

Somewhere beyond despair.



Somewhere beyond existence.

She was going to reach light-speed.

For three long hours, VY Canis Majoris raced toward the edge of the impossible. It had crossed thresholds no human vessel was ever meant to cross, pushing beyond the safety of reason, beyond the fragile safeguards of science.

At precisely 99.9% of the speed of light, the ship entered forbidden territory. It was a milestone of horror, a velocity that had once rewritten history. Six centuries ago, Daniel Green had reached this same speed, an act that had not only cost him his life but had awakened a terror that nearly drove humanity to extinction. And now, here they were again, history not simply repeating, but spiraling downward in an irreversible descent.

Grace did not stop.

She had long since severed herself from consequence. The finality of her choice had become her only solace. There was nothing else—no grief, no regret, no hesitation. Only the relentless, inexorable pursuit of speed.



The acceleration continued, though slower now, each fraction of velocity harder to claim than the last. It was as if the universe itself resisted, as if the very fabric of space-time refused to let them pass. The closer they reached the limit, the more time stretched, warping perception, slowing reactions, dragging them toward an eternity of frozen moments.

It took twelve hours to push further—to climb from 99.9% to 99.99%, the ultimate physical limit of the offloading inertial mass drive. The ship could go no faster. No human vessel ever had.

But what awaited them there was not freedom. It was entrapment.

Time within VY Canis Majoris slowed to an unbearable crawl. The time dilation at 99.99% the speed of light was 70 times slower than for someone stationary and 10 times slower relative to the network of time-dilated spaceships. The world outside moved faster, a relentless tide racing ahead while they remained locked in a moment that barely progressed. The voices that cried out in fear, the wails of those who understood what was happening, stretched into agonized echoes, their transmission signals twisting through the time-dilated network in slow, distorted terror.



To the other generational ships, VY Canis Majoris seemed trapped in an eternal scream.

The passengers did not feel the change. When the acceleration protocol finally ended, when they could finally unbuckle from their seats and feel their weight again, the silence was almost comforting. Some coughed as they adjusted to the sudden stillness, others gasped as their muscles, weakened by hours of forced restraint, tried to remember how to move.

Then the panic set in.

Hundreds surged toward the navigation control cabin, desperate to take back control, to wrestle their fate from the hands of a woman who had long since abandoned them. The first arrived in under two minutes, hammering at the sealed door, shouting orders, trying override codes. When the security systems denied them, others pushed forward with laser cutters, sparks flashing against metal as they fought to breach the barrier between them and salvation.

Halfway through the cutting process, the ship's alarms blared again.

The collision avoidance system had activated.



Some hesitated, hands frozen mid-air. Others turned to flee, racing back toward their deceleration seats, strapping in without question.

They never stood a chance.

By the time they ran, by the time they tried to prepare, by the time their minds caught up with what was happening—

It was already too late.

The final disaster had begun. The entire sequence of events on the VY Canis Majoris unfolded in just five minutes, but for the time-dilated network of spaceships, it stretched into a slow-motion horror lasting fifty minutes.

Some among them had understood the futility of the collision avoidance protocol. Harold Cross was one of them. The numbers didn't lie, the physics didn't bend to desperation. At this velocity, no maneuver could save them. No thruster could change their fate.

And yet, even knowing this, he refused to run.

Not because he had accepted his end, but because there was still one thing left unfinished. One question that needed answering.



Why?

That was what drove him forward. More than survival, more than fear. He needed to know. He needed to look her in the eyes and hear from her lips why she had done this. Why she had condemned them all.

The laser cutter burned through the final layers of the reinforced door. Two more minutes. That was all it took. Two final, desperate minutes as the alarms wailed and the voices of the doomed echoed through the corridors behind them.

Then the door fell open, and they saw her.

Grace stood before the massive display, the data feed glowing softly against the empty void of her expression. On the screen, the object that had triggered the collision alert was rendered in clean, sharp lines—a tiny meteorite, no larger than a marble, drifting in the abyss ahead of them.

That was all.

That was the cosmic joke.

That was the cruel, indifferent punchline.



At their speed, at their velocity, it didn't matter that it was no larger than a child's toy. At 99.99% light-speed, even the smallest speck of dust would strike with the force of annihilation. There was no evasion, no redirection, no last-minute salvation. The laws of the universe were immutable, and they had already sealed their fate.

She turned to face them then, her movements slow, almost dreamlike. Her eyes, once sharp and filled with purpose, were now empty, hollowed out by the madness she had embraced. And yet, despite the abyss that had swallowed her mind, she smiled.

It was a strange smile—soft, almost serene, but utterly detached from reality. The smile of someone who had stepped beyond grief, beyond suffering, beyond all that tethered her to the world of reason.

Harold took a breath, his throat dry, his body locked between fury and sorrow.

There had never been a chance for words. Never a moment to demand answers.

The last thing they ever saw was Grace Lambert's vacant, smiling face.



No one aboard VY Canis Majoris ever felt the end.

At 99.99% the speed of light, with a time dilation factor of seventy, the moment of impact existed outside the realm of human perception. There was no awareness, no terror, no agony—only the silent, instantaneous conversion of flesh, steel, and memory into pure energy.

The nervous system never had time to react. The chemical messengers that might have carried signals of pain were obliterated before they could even begin their journey. The ship, its passengers, its legacy—all of it was reduced to a single, incomprehensible instant of annihilation.

And then, the universe noticed.

The explosion of VY Canis Majoris was unlike anything humanity had ever witnessed. It was not the desperate, defiant burst of Daniel Green's ship centuries before—this was something on a scale far, far beyond. A generational spaceship, vast and sprawling, the culmination of hundreds of years of engineering and sacrifice, had struck its final wall.

The result was devastation on the level of a supernova.



The blast expanded outward in a cataclysmic wave, a beacon of destruction that could be seen from anywhere in the Milky Way. Even from beyond the galaxy, the eruption of energy marked itself upon the fabric of space. It was a tombstone carved in light, a final, irrefutable testament to the folly of man.

But the disaster did not stop there.

Twenty light-years ahead, the planet that had awaited them—their promised land, the world that had been studied and dreamed of for seven centuries—felt the full force of their failure.

The radiation surge reached it like the wrath of a dying star. The surface burned, its atmosphere ripped away, the delicate, life-sustaining balance that had made it a candidate for colonization erased in a matter of seconds.

Once, it had been a beacon of hope. A destination that could have held a future.

Now, it was nothing.

Just another dead rock, one among trillions, lost in the cold, uncaring dark.

And with it, something deeper was lost.



That day marked the end of an era—an era where hope had been the guiding light of humankind, where the belief in survival had carried them across the void.

It forced them to confront the truth they had long denied.

The truth no one had dared to say aloud.

That the Great Filter was not a force of the cosmos.

It was not black holes, or supernovae, or rogue planets, or the silent indifference of the universe.

It was them.

They were their own Great Filter.